

# In and against the System. Research Conducted by the Chair of Slavic Ethnography of the Jagiellonian University in Spisz (Spiš) in the Light of Archival Documentation

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The limited research on the political involvement of ethnographers, ethnologists and anthropologists during the Polish People's Republic [PRL] makes it difficult to have a balanced and thoughtful discussion about the relationship between policy and our discipline during that period. This underscores the need for anthropologists to engage in systematic, archival studies into the post-war history of their discipline, shaped by the challenging circumstances of a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship. Such studies can help us better understand the context in which anthropologists worked, and how they positioned themselves both scientifically and politically within the system. The example of research conducted by the Chair of Slavic Ethnography of Jagiellonian University in Spisz (in Slovak Spiš) – region very important both to scholars and authorities – reveals the diversity among the anthropologists at that time. The academic biographies of Zbigniew Biały and Czesław Robotycki show how they balanced shifting ideological expectation, the rules of political life at the University, and a changing political situation. Their political differences shaped not only their choices of research topics and methods, but also led one of them to undergo a major shift in scientific interests in response to the political crises of the 1980s.

*Keywords:* anthropology, ethnography, politics, PRL, communism, archive, Spisz (Spiš)

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*For here, in the present, is immediately perceptible that vibrance of human life which only a great effort of the imagination can restore to the old texts. [...] whether consciously or no, it is always by borrowing from our daily experiences and by shading them, where necessary, with new tints that we derive the elements which help us to restore the past. (Bloch, 1964: 69)*

At the end of 2013, in a conversation with Czesław Robotycki – the former director of the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Jagiellonian University (1999-2008) – I asked him whether he had ever encountered censorship during his career. At the time, I was just preparing a seminar on the relationship between ethnography and politics in the era of the Polish People’s Republic [PRL] so the topic of censorship’s influence on the work of ethnologists was particularly important to me. I knew a little of Robotycki’s dissident experiences in the 1980s, and thus expected to hear much about this problem. To my surprise, the Professor stated that, barring one incident in 1981, when the censors withheld an issue of *Polska Sztuka Ludowa* with his article on the strike in the Gdańsk Shipyard organised in August 1980 (Robotycki, 1990), he had only personally felt the power of censorship once during his academic career. This was in the late 1970s, when his doctoral dissertation, based on research in Jurgów (Slov. Jurgov) – village in the Spisz (Slov. Spiš) region, was being prepared for publication (Robotycki, 1980). The censor I-II-1261 ordered him to rewrite a section referring to ethnic issues, including the nationality-based tension observable at the time between the Polish and Slovak inhabitants of the village. Ultimately, Robotycki was forced to change the ending of one of the chapters, dropping the “inappropriate” paragraph.

Professor Robotycki died suddenly two months after our meeting, in January 2014, but his words stuck with me, raising further questions. To what extent could the ideological framework of PRL affect the choice of specific research subjects, the process of conducting research and the results thereof? How did ethnologists position themselves in relation to the then official policy towards our discipline? What individual strategies did they use to be able to conduct their research mostly in accordance with their own scholarly interests?

In order to avoid oversimplifications related to the broad and complex issue, I will focus on the case of the Chair of Slavic Ethnography at the Jagiellonian University [Katedra Etnografii Słowian UJ]. By examining the scholarly biographies of two of its scholars – Zbigniew Biały and Czesław Robotycki – who conducted ethnographic research in the northern Spisz area from the 1960s through the late 1970s, I aim to investigate the connection between their scientific work and policy, including both the rules imposed by the system, and the individual strategies of the political involvement. As I will attempt to demonstrate, their political choices influenced not only the research topics and the ways in which they were pursued, but also led to

fundamental shifts in their scholarly interests in response to the dynamically changing political situation in the PRL period.

## Sources

Due to the significance and diversity of the sources I used to reconstruct the situational and political context of research conducted by Biały and Robotycki, my reflections are situated within both archival anthropology (Dirks, 2002; Lennartsson, 2012), and the anthropology of the archive (Zeitlyn, 2022).<sup>1</sup> In addition to published texts, I will refer to various primary sources directly and implicitly related to their research, mainly never published, and sometimes even classified as ‘secret’. It is precisely this type of materials that, after all these years, allows not only to glimpse behind the scene of scientific work, but also gain a better understanding of the specificity of the times in which they were created.

Primarily, I refer to the publications associated with the research conducted by the Chair of Slavic Ethnography [hereinafter: KES] in the region of Spisz, and to field materials produced throughout its duration (mainly interviews and questionnaires). Irrespective of their informative aspect, closely related to the given questionnaire topic, such sources offer valuable insight into the research practices followed at the time. In order to provide some political context for the research, it is also important to ascertain the degree to which a given research topic was considered sensitive at the time.<sup>2</sup> What proved relevant in this respect was my research query at the archives

- 1 The specifics of such research in anthropology, as well as the epistemological potential and limitations of working with archival sources and of making the archive into one’s research area have already been examined in my previous publications; I therefore chose not to discuss them herein (Golonka-Czajkowska, 2023a; 2023b).
- 2 After the end of World War I and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Spisz became the subject of border conflicts between Poland and Slovakia. In 1920, after heated negotiations, the northern part of Spisz, known as Zamagurze Spiskie (Slov. Zamagurie), was assigned to Poland by the Conference of Ambassadors. Neither Polish nor Slovak nationalist activists were satisfied with this verdict. In 1938, taking advantage of Czechoslovakia’s difficult position, Poland demanded the cession of four more villages by the border, annexing Tatranská Javorina (Pol. Jaworzyna Tatrzańska) and its surroundings. In September 1939 Slovakia – allied with Nazi Germany – attacked Poland from the South and the entirety of the disputed territory was incorporated into the First Slovak Republic. After the Second World War, northern Orawa and Spisz returned to Poland. However, a large portion of the local population expected the territory to be annexed into Czechoslovakia. A series of violent Slovak and Polish demonstrations took place in 1945. By the end of 1945 it became clear that the shape of the border would not be revised. The number of incidents decreased. In 1946, however, these regions became the arena of intense anti-Communist partisan activity carried out by Polish groups from the “Błyskawica” unit (Lightning), led by Józef Kuraś, “Ogień” (Fire). Slovak homesteads were an important source of supplies for partisan soldiers. Kuraś’s notes indicate that some of these steps were aimed against Slovak activists. Undoubtedly, however, the partisans also applied the principle of collective responsibility. They imposed high “*kontrybucje*”, or penalties in kind, on entire villages, robbing their residents. In April 1946, partisans of “Ogień” entered the village of Nowa Biała (Nová Belá), kidnapped and murdered four Slovaks. Although over 70 years have passed, the memory of “Ogień” is still fresh in the imagination of Spisz residents, and elicits strong emotions (Łoziński, 2019).

of the Institute of National Remembrance [IPN] and the Archive of Border Protection Forces [WOP], conducted in relation to my research project on Polish anti-Communist partisan units under Józef Kuraś “Ogień”, operating in the Tatra region after the Second World War.<sup>3</sup> The materials I examined (reports, dispatches, inspection reports) made me realise which of the issues mentioned by researchers in Spisz had also been of much interest to the authorities of the day, and could therefore have been considered sensitive or politically “incorrect”.

In my investigation of the relations between ethnology and politics in the case of the Spisz project, I shall also make use of documents related to the research and teaching activities of the KES, such as research plans, curricula, conference materials, and meeting minutes, held at the Archive of the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology UJ [hereinafter: IEiAK UJ], as well as files deposited at the National Archive [ANK] concerning the political activities of Zbigniew Biały and Czesław Robotycki – primarily minutes from meetings of the Polish United Workers’ Party [hereinafter: PZPR] cells at the university departments of ethnography, archaeology, and sociology from 1970 to 1982. I am aware that the mentioned documents reveal but a fraction of the researchers’ lives, and that I am no longer able to ask them for any comments or much-needed clarification. I nevertheless hope that the analysis of these documents will still help put their research projects in the context of their professional activity, and reveal some less obvious connections between ideology, policy and the science they pursued. Considering the sensitive nature of this data, which also includes information about private life, I will focus on the documents related to the main subject of my topic. I deliberately refrain from passing judgment on the political choices made by the abovementioned scholars, especially since I live in a very different reality, in which freedom of expression already seems to have become an inalienable right. However, since these files are still access-restricted (“for research only”) and their content may be controversial from a present-day perspective, using them requires particular responsibility and careful consideration of the consequences of making them public (Agostinho et al., 2019; Van der Hoonaard, 2018; Subotić, 2022; Golonka-Czajkowska, Trebunia-Staszal, 2022).

In addition to analysing the aforementioned archival materials, I also interviewed several witnesses, who as students took part in the research carried out in the Spisz region at the time. Their recollections, treated here as a source of knowledge (Kaniowska, 2003), helped me place the analysed sources within the situational context of their creation and shed light on the decision and actions taken by the coordinators of fieldwork. At this moment, I extend my sincere gratitude to all who shared their memories of those days with me.

The present text will, by necessity, only refer to a small fraction of a very broad corpus of archival material pertaining to the Spisz research conducted by the KES.

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<sup>3</sup> The project *Józef Kuraś “Ogień” and his troops in the social imagination. An anthropological study on experiencing the past* (National Science Centre, grant no. 2016/21/B/HS3/02921).

The wealth of that collection, as well as the breadth and complexity of the subject, far exceeds the analysis presented herein, which I consider to be merely one possible interpretation and a prelude to further, more systematic research.

## Ethnography/Ethnology in post-war Poland

Before analysing the case study of research conducted in Spisz by Krakow-based ethnologists in 1960s and 1970s, I must briefly discuss the status of ethnology/anthropology as an academic discipline in Poland.<sup>4</sup> Since the issue of attempts at ideological control, to which anthropology (first called ethnography and then ethnology) was subjected in post-war Poland has already been outlined many times (Buchowski, 2011, 2017, 2019; Sokolewicz, 2010; Jasiewicz, 2005; 2019; Posern-Zieliński, 2005), I shall only reiterate the most important conclusions. Painting a dynamic picture of our discipline in the PRL period, Michał Buchowski draws attention to significant paradigm shifts that occurred within the field, as well as to the different schools and styles of practising anthropology, then referred to as ethnology/ethnography (the two terms were interchangeable). He emphasises that, as an academically practised field of knowledge, ethnography did not have a uniform format within the Marxist paradigm and he notes, “[...] in a more or less conscious fashion, ethnographers were usually immune to political pressure” (Buchowski, 2011: 158–159).

Zbigniew Jasiewicz also draws attention to the internal diversity of Polish ethnography and the dynamics of paradigm shifts. Discussing the reasons for the failure of the official post-war academic policy, which the authorities tried to impose in the 1950s (requiring anthropologists to adopt Marxist methodology and a uniform set of research techniques), he mentions the pull of pre-war research traditions, different for each centre of learning (Jasiewicz, 2019: 61–64). In fact, each of the five centres of academic ethnology of the Interwar period (Poznań since 1919; Lviv since 1924; Kraków since 1925; Vilnius since 1927; Warsaw since 1934) developed its own methodological direction. This is not to mean that members of the different schools never drew inspiration from one another, especially since the professors that headed

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4 It's worth clarifying the name of the discipline itself. For readers unfamiliar with the history of anthropology in Poland, the term might seem misleading. In the early postwar years, the field still operated under its prewar name – ethnology and ethnography. During the Stalinist era, following Soviet scientific classifications, only “ethnography” was officially accepted. After the political thaw of 1956, “ethnology” reappeared step by step in academic use, often practiced in ways comparable to Western anthropology, though mostly focused on local contexts due to limited opportunities for international research. A good example is the scientific biography of Prof. Zofia Sokolewicz. In the late 1950s, she interned at LSE's Department of Anthropology and later, in 1965, helped publish the Polish edition of Raymond Firth's *Human Types: An Introduction to Social Anthropology*. From 1973 to 1999, she was the head of the Chair of Ethnography at the University of Warsaw, which was renamed in 1984 to the Chair of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology. At the Jagiellonian University, Andrzej Waligórski, a former student of Malinowski at LSE, was key to advancing social anthropology, teaching at KEOS and KES from 1948 to 1973 (Kubica-Heller, 2000).

the centres would sometimes change their place of employment. Jan Stanisław Bystroń, an outstanding ethnographer and sociologist of culture, who had studied ethnology e.g. at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris, worked successively in Poznań, Krakow and Warsaw. Kazimierz Moszyński, a proponent of critical evolutionism, gave lectures in both Krakow and Vilnius. Cezaria Anna Baudouin de Courtenay-Ehrenkreutz-Jędrzejewiczowa, who represented the school of phenomenology, worked in Vilnius and later in Warsaw. Stanisław Poniatowski from the University of Warsaw and Adam Fischer from the University of Lviv were both followers of the cultural-historical approach (Jasiewicz, 2019).

Zofia Sokolewicz, in turn, writing about the paradigm shift in Polish ethnology during the 1960s, repeatedly pointed to the epistemological and axiological limitations of Marxism as ideology based in the principle of materialistic monism – a fact of considerable importance in the study of culture. According to her, this change was driven by the need to address more philosophical and existentially deeper questions. Ethnographers began to see culture not merely as a correlate of social structure, but as an autonomous domain of human values that required interpretation and understanding in its own peculiar categories (Sokolewicz, 2010: 23). Consequently, the symbolic aspect of culture came under the spotlight once again, this time analysed through the lens of alternative epistemological approaches – French structuralism, the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics and phenomenology (especially the area associated with the study of religion).

In light of the above, it is worth considering, how academic ethnography at the Jagiellonian University was positioned within the ideological framework imposed by the communist authorities just prior to the launch of the research project in Spisz. In the late 1950s, there were two separate units dealing with ethnography: the Chair of Slavic Ethnography [KES], headed by Kazimierz Moszyński (1887-1959), and the Chair of Ethnography and Sociology [KEiS], headed by Kazimierz Dobrowolski (1894-1987).<sup>5</sup> Reality of the socialist state became a key advocate of reshaping ethnography.

At the time, the principal approach of the KEOS was Marxist social thought, based on the so-called diamat (dialectical materialism), which were promoted by Dobrowolski. Known for his leftist views even before 1939, he adapted well to the post-war reality of the socialist state and became a key advocate of reshaping ethnography. He promoted research focused on the transformation of peasant culture in the context of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation. Using the integral method,

<sup>5</sup> The origins of that specific organisational structure may be traced to the Interwar period. In the early 1930s the Jagiellonian University had two units teaching anthropology: The Chair of Slavic Ethnography headed by Kazimierz Moszyński, and the Chair of Ethnology and Sociology, headed by Professor Kazimierz Dobrowolski (Pomieczński, 2019). In 1957 the KEiS changed its name to the Chair of General Ethnography and Sociology; in 1970 the unit was incorporated into the Institute of Sociology [IS] of the Jagiellonian University. In the early 50s, the KES became a part of the Department of the History of Material Culture at the Faculty of Philosophy and History (Wróblewski, 2018); it ultimately became an independent unit after the thaw of 1956 (Klimaszewska, 1967).

he aligned ethnographic research with the needs of socialist society. He argued that ethnography should not only document social change, but also predict the future direction of development, becoming a tool to support state-led modernisation and planning in the economic, social, and cultural spheres (Kwaśniewicz, 1969; Gładyszowa, 1973).

The KES focused on studying peasant culture within the framework of critical evolutionism, a perspective upheld by Moszyński until his death. While both KES and KEOS aimed to document the rapidly changing rural world, Moszyński limited ethnographic research to oral communities, viewing them as central to the discipline. This narrow focus might suggest academic conservatism or a lingering romanticism toward folk culture. However, in the 1950s, when the communist authorities in Poland imposed historical materialism and stripped ethnology of its autonomy (Wróblewski, 2018), emphasizing folk culture could be seen as a form of resistance to ideological indoctrination (Sokolewicz, 2010). Although KES's "Slavic" focus aligned with the post-war political climate, Moszyński and his collaborator Jadwiga Klimaszewska (1910–2006), subtly distanced themselves from Marxist-Leninist agendas (Duszeńko, 2010). Even after the political thaw of 1956, KES maintained a detached, ethnographic approach, avoiding any critique of peasant culture from a Marxist perspective or attempts to "reform" it. This approach, reflected in its teaching and research program, was not the only distinctive feature of the unit, as will be discussed later.

### Beneficial ethnography. The research work of Zbigniew Biały

The attitude of the KES directors indubitably had a significant influence on the academic and research profile of the institution. As mentioned above, this is not to mean that their views were shared by the entire team of employees (which was rather small in number). In communist Poland – a state based on the Soviet model of governance, where science was obliged to be closely tied to the only correct ideological line upheld by the Party – having a politically involved member of staff was, essentially, a *sine qua non* condition for the continued existence of chairs and institutes.

In the case of the KES, the employee that represented such a politically active approach in the 1960s was Zbigniew Biały (1932–1986), a graduate of the institution who remained professionally affiliated with it for nearly three decades. He was employed in 1956, shortly after graduation, with the support of Moszyński, who had supervised his MA thesis. As Professor Klimaszewska recounted later in life, Biały seemed a "safe choice" at the time. Bright, enthusiastic and loyal towards his institution, for many years Biały did indeed lend his name to the official ideological image of the institution. Former KES employees remember him as a "true believer in Marxism" who remained loyal to the Party all his life, even when its ranks had already thinned.

Biały reached the height of his scholarly career in the 1960s, the period historiographers of the Polish People's Republic refer to as the "little stabilisation" (Dzięgiel, 2002). At that time, the KES was headed by Mieczysław Gładysz (1903–1984), Moszyński's former student and close collaborator. The new director aspired to improve the Chair's status within the university, transforming it into a thriving centre of teaching and research (Godula, 1989).<sup>6</sup> As a man of broad intellect and considerable organisational skills, Gładysz was able to navigate effectively the challenging academical landscape in Poland at that time. Significantly, as his colleagues recall (Dobrowolska, 2000), he was also proficient at team management (in 1968–1972 he served as the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and History at the Jagiellonian University) and took good care of his staff. Despite their differences in political view, Gładysz probably saw great academic potential in Biały, who was thirty years younger than himself, and gave him space to act in the hope that, with his support, the then stagnating KES could be reformed and elevated to a higher position within the university.

The young assistant threw himself into his work. Like Dobrowolski in KEOS, he was convinced that as an applied science ethnography had the potential to effectively trigger social change; however, he had his own idea on how to conduct ethnographic research geared towards applicability in KES. In 1962 the *Polityka*, the most widely read political weekly in Poland at that time, published an article by Biały, tellingly titled "Etnografia pożyteczna" [Beneficial ethnography] (1962: 11). In it, he presented his discipline as a science rooted in empiricism and capable of "providing a complete picture of the cultural development of given communities at a given time". He argued that "the results of ethnographic research – apart from their purely cognitive significance – are of great value for social action" and could prove useful in the development of rational economic policy in many areas, as he wrote, "the outcome of such 'practical implementation' of ethnographic research results could simply be measured in złoty" (1962: 11). He explained that the practical application of ethnographic research helps to prevent unnecessary conflict between rural communities and government authorities by acknowledging existing agricultural or artisanal practices as well. Then, he illustrated his claim with concrete examples: pattern of local folk architecture can help avoid the uniformization of modern rural buildings; folk herbal medicine has contributed to developing new treatments; folk literature, art and music enrich the national culture. Studying the peasant family as a core cultural and educational unit could improve the effectiveness of school and

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6 Mieczysław Gładysz was an acclaimed researcher of Silesian culture, an experienced museologist and one of the founders of the International Commission for the Study of the Carpathian Mountains [MKKK]. This research network played an important role in the 1960s and 1970s, acting as an international forum for the advancement of ethnographic knowledge and scholarly exchange between researchers of Carpathian highland cultures from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Hungary and the USSR and – after the research scope was extended to the Balkans – also from Yugoslavia and Bulgaria (Godyń, 2014).

youth organisation in shaping rural proper attitudes and views. Efforts to spread knowledge and promote secularisation in villages and small towns would be more successful if they took into account local ways of thinking, including remnants of magical thinking. Even sociological studies on the reception of media and educational content would benefit from insights offered by ethnography as a discipline conducting in-depth research on rural culture.

In Biały's sweeping vision, ethnography was portrayed as a holistic science able not only to describe the past and present state of culture, but also predict changes therein to put the idea of progress into practice and implement the plan for creating a new and flawless socialist society. This concept was clearly accordant with the governing strategy adopted by the authorities after the 1956 thaw, in the period of the so-called real socialism. It was then that, seeking more subtle, yet more effective methods of governance, the ruling party began to draw on the findings of academic disciplines specialising in this area: praxeology, cybernetics, systems theory, administration science and the theory of organisation and management (Kania, 2019: 206). Biały argued that, as a science grounded in Marxist theory of philosophy and history, ethnography held similar potential: "One may also argue that ethnography is able to tackle issues that were first defined in strictly theoretical disciplines (such as praxeology) and develop them further to the benefit of theory and practice" (1962: 11).

Similar statements regarding the role of ethnography, albeit in a somewhat different form consistent with the rules of academic discourse, also appeared in Biały's work in contemporary academic journals and during expert meetings. He was convinced (at least initially) that ethnography as a science able to deliver fact is the methodological study on the problem of verification in field research, published in the first issue of the KES journal *Prace Etnograficzne*. The article, which Biały co-authored with his wife – the logician Ewa Żarnecka-Biały (Biały, Żarnecka-Biały, 1963) – may seem surprising from a contemporary perspective. On the one hand, the general belief in the possibility of obtaining an "accurate picture of culture reality" certainly aligns with the positivist vision of anthropology; on the other hand, the use of the concept of intersubjective fact, along with methodological remarks on conducting interviews and interpreting the material, impresses with the precision of logical reasoning and the aptness of observations concerning methodology, especially in the context of the contemporary methodology of anthropological research on memory. The authors based their argument on an extensive corpus of methodological literature in social sciences (e.g. Madge, 1957; Fear, 1958; Mehlberg, 1958); philosophy and methodology of science, including Popper's theory of falsification (1959) and psychology of perception (Van Dyke Bingham, Moore, 1959; Weld, 1954). Given the highly limited access Polish authors had to foreign literature at the time, the eclectic list of references containing Polish, Soviet and Western works may seem rather surprising. It reveals the political standing of Biały and his wife, providing a nearly textbook illustration of Foucault's maxim linking power with knowledge.

## Biały's research in Spisz

The place where Biały began to implement his concept of 'beneficial ethnography' was the Spisz subregion Zamagurze, located within Polish borders. According to the research plan, prepared by him and adopted by the KRS in the early 1960s, the material collected in the files was intended to serve as the basis for an ethnographic monograph of this region. The planned publication was given the working title *Peasant Economy and Culture in Polish Spisz in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century*.<sup>7</sup>

Soon, this area also became a distinctive research laboratory for the majority of the staff and students of KES, including projects conducted under the auspices of the MKKK.<sup>8</sup> Several staff members also carried out their individual research projects in this region. Here, the first regular ethnographic studies of Romani culture in Poland were initiated and carried out at KES UJ over nearly two decades. Notably, throughout this period, Spisz served as a place where students learned to conduct fieldwork, including the expeditions organised by the Academic Association of Students of Ethnography UJ [Koło Naukowe Studentów Etnografii UJ].

Out of the fourteen villages found in this region, particular attention was given to four: Jurgów (Slov. Jurgov), Czarna Góra (Slov. Čierna Hora), Kacwin (Slov. Kacvin) and Łapszanka (Slov. Lapšanka). The "headquarters" of the operation was established in Jurgów, where research continued essentially uninterrupted until the end of the 1970s. According to Biały's ideas, young ethnographers were to focus on economic, technological, social and cultural issues related to farm and household management in the broad understanding of the term, particularly agriculture, shepherding, local cottage industry, handicraft and trade. Research was also conducted on the so-called classic ethnological topics of the day, i.e. issues accordant with the prevalent model of describing folk culture, which followed Moszyński's categorisation into material, social and spiritual, the realm of customs, rituals and magic, costume, verbal folklore, etc. Rooted in historical context, the research based on questionnaire interviews, surveys (some with open-ended questions) and observation carried out with varying levels of participation, was intended to provide data on the changes related to post-war processes of modernisation.

As mentioned above, Biały became the coordinator of the entire enterprise, devising the research plan and overseeing its implementation over the years with remarkable ingenuity. He obtained financing for the research not only from university funds, but also from sources which may seem rather unconventional from a modern perspective. One trip made by the student Research Group was, for instance, partially

7 The title appears in the assessment written for Biały by Prof. Gładysz in connection with the extension of his habilitation grant in February 1970. Arch. IEiAK UJ, Document file: Z. Biały. Inventory number missing.

8 It should be noted that the first postwar ethnographic research in Spisz was conducted in the late 1940s by the Chair of Ethnography at the University of Łódź. Its researchers focused on mutual aid, cooperation, and later on pastoralist economy of this land, too (Kopczyńska-Jaworska, 1961).

sponsored by the Rural Youth Association [ZMW], to which Biały had enrolled all the camp participants shortly before, in order to secure funding.<sup>9</sup> The idea could not have been accidental, since Biały was a very active member of ZMW.<sup>10</sup> He also came up with the plan to capitalise on the political changes that occurred in Poland in the year 1970 by including research conducted in Spisz on the agenda of the Departmental Organisation of the PZPR [OOP PZPR] for ethnography and archaeology; a fact to which we shall return in a further section of the present article.

The first field trip to Jurgów took place late in 1961. After that, KES students of ethnography under Biały's supervision would come there every year for shorter or longer stays, gradually becoming a fixture of the local landscape. The same may be said of their teacher, colourful stories about whom are still told by the eldest inhabitants of the village. The profile of this phase of research is well illustrated by a paper prepared by Zbigniew Biały during the International Conference on the Study of Folk Culture in the Carpathians, held in Kraków in 1964, and preserved in the archives IEiAK UJ.<sup>11</sup> In this presentation he outlined the research goals and main thematic areas, such as matters of inheritance, agriculture, shepherding and cattle rearing, crafts, food consumption, 'national consciousness', trade, construction and furnishing, meteorological knowledge, folk knowledge of wood and timber, folk medicine, beliefs, and annual rituals. Biały explained the diversity of the topics studied in the field by the need to reconcile the research directives formulated by the Commission for the Study of Folk Culture in the Carpathians with the didactic needs of the KES.

Reading the content of the above-mentioned paper carefully, it becomes evident that although it lists national consciousness of the Spisz inhabitants as a research topic, this issue is not developed at all. I may presume that this omission was intentional – national identity of the Spisz highlanders constituted a controversial issue at that time and therefore considered unsuitable for public discussion, and especially in an international forum. Polish-Slovak border conflict centred on Spisz and the post-war attacks by partisans of "Ogień" were still fresh in the local memory. The past was too dangerous to talk about openly, existing only in the form of a hidden transcript (Scott, 1990: 184), beyond the direct reach of the "Others".

Given the political dimension of ethnographic research and ethnographers' involvement in political matters, such moments inevitably raised questions. Did Biały address the issue of the national consciousness during his fieldwork out of purely scholar curiosity, aiming to create a comprehensive picture of the village's socio-cultural structure? Or was he focused on identifying social tension in order to find ways to alleviate them?

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9 Information shared by one of the participants of that trip.

10 He held the position of the deputy chairman for science at the District Student Council of ZMW in Krakow; he was also on the Council of Academics of the National Student Council at the ZMW. Arch. IEiAK UJ. Document file: Z. Biały. Inventory number missing.

11 Arch. IEiAK UJ. Legacy of Prof. Mieczysław Gładysz. Inventory number missing.

Unfortunately, Zbigniew Biały is no longer here to answer questions; it is, however, evident that he was acutely aware of the thin ice he was treading on. The participants of these research trips with whom I spoke recalled that, before letting them go into the field, Biały would educate his students on the difficult history of Polish-Slovak relations in Spisz. One of the student trips organised in 1969 involved a tragicomic misunderstanding. The outcome and the incident itself, which occurred in Frydman (Slov. Fridman), where one of the student groups was stationed, provide an apt illustration of how sensitive to nationalist issues local people were at the time. The commotion was caused by two male students of ethnography, who came to Frydman from Krakow directly after completing their exam in military training (compulsory for first-year students in the PRL period). Dressed in military uniforms, they entered the local pub, whereupon one of the students jokingly called out to his colleagues sitting inside: “The Polish army has arrived!”. To the students’ astonishment, the entire room fell silent. For the next few days, the locals continued to ignore the presence of the young ethnographers, refusing to cooperate with them in any way. The tense situation was only diffused by professor Biały, who came from Jurgów, a dozen or so kilometres away, and vouched for his students. Given that the incident happened only a year after the Prague Spring, it is hardly surprising that the idea of the Polish army arriving triggered such an adverse reaction in the Slovak population.

Seeking a proper way to create “an objective, comprehensive description” of the culture of this region, by the late 1960s Biały decided to expand the scope of the research and create a large, interdisciplinary team of experts (Biały, 1987). He invited scholars from other disciplines and Kraków’s academic institutions to collaborate, including, among others, a physical anthropologist, a dialectologist, a literary scholar and geographers, an agronomist, a hydrologist and a surveyor, economist, health and hygiene specialist, and an architect. These researchers were to supplement the source base with hard data from their respective fields, particularly economics and agronomy – disciplines that had been Biały’s personal academic interest since his student days.<sup>12</sup>

Long, detailed questionnaires and surveys designed with the help of experts were intended to facilitate the acquisition of information on local economic practices. In reality, however, they proved a hindrance not only to the young practitioners of ethnography, but also to the locals thus “interrogated”, who had previously been happy to cooperate with the “students from Krakow”.<sup>13</sup> Apart from issues related to current and historical techniques of farming and animal husbandry, the surveys asked

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12 His MA thesis concerned the transition from single-sided to wide ploughing as part of the process of agricultural intensification (1955, supervised by Moszyński), and his PhD dissertation focused on the peasant economy in southern Lesser Poland in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (1966, supervised by Klimaszewska). In 1967, he commenced work on a habilitation thesis concerning the cultural and economic significance of fairs and markets in the same region and period; however, the project was never completed.

13 Recollections of one of the research participants. Interview conducted by the author in January 2025.

about specific amounts of grain, potatoes and milk produced on the farm, the animals kept, the number of eggs laid, forms of retail, etc. Such questions touched upon topics that were sensitive at the time, and may have caused those interviewed to feel distrust, especially in the context of the restrictive policy the socialist state adopted towards individual farmers – and the still fresh memory of the compulsory delivery of predetermined amounts of grain, potatoes and slaughter animals to state purchasing points to be sold at prices far below free market rates.<sup>14</sup> As one former student involved in such fieldwork later admitted, both parties participated in a controlled game of pretence typical of the period of “real socialism” in Poland. In accordance with the principles of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld, 2005), they were aware not only of the awkward nature of the questions their supervisors required them to ask, but also of the insincerity of the politically correct answers given by the farmers.

Analysing Biały’s research in Spisz on the basis of the material produced in the field and the publications it yielded, it is easy to see when the project lost its momentum and was gradually abandoned. This turning point came somewhere in the mid-1970s, when Polish anthropology started to embrace the then new paradigms, most notably structuralism and semiotics. While Biały did not try to put his own research on a different track, he did introduce these new directions to his students as part of his classes on theory of culture, in which he referred to the works of structuralists and semioticians. His long-standing interest in agriculture and his plans for writing a habilitation thesis on markets and fairs started to falter, as did the prospects for the results of his projects being put into practice. He was also increasingly alone in his political views; just as he had been at the start of his career. The rise of the Solidarity movement in the early 1980s, which transformed the KES into an active centre of opposition activity, not only changed the political power dynamics at the Chair, but also radicalised the mood among the staff. Nevertheless, Biały still had a small circle of devoted students, whom he occasionally took into the field despite his declining health. Instead of the comprehensive monograph he had envisaged, which was supposed to present a “full reconstruction of the cultural reality” in Spisz, one year after Biały’s death the KES published a special issue of *Prace Etnograficzne* (1987), in an attempt to summarise the project. In the introduction to the volume, Biały provided a concise overview of the research results, trying to prove the cultural unity of the region of Spisz and its ties to Poland (1987).<sup>15</sup> Portraying the Spisz dialect as the basic criterion for ethnic identification, he took a decidedly pro-Polish stance in the debates around the ethnic makeup of the region, which had continued for decades between Poland and Slovakia. The volume’s contributors

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14 The obligation to provide the mentioned goods was lifted and replaced by tax in 1972 (Kulikowski, 2013).

15 The text gives particular attention to the history of Spisz and to linguistic issues. It presents the Spisz dialect (as one of the varieties of highlander dialects in Poland) as the essential criterion for the cultural unity of the region.

included a physical anthropologist, a linguist, and geographers, who presented research findings and proposed specific plans for local economic development (e.g. expanding animal husbandry, changing crop management, and supporting tourism), while emphasizing the need to protect valuable environmental resources.<sup>16</sup> Dedicated to “friend from Spisz”, the volume marked Biały’s final farewell to the dream of ethnography as a means to fix the world.

### Towards socio-cultural anthropology. Czesław Robotycki’s research in Spisz

From a hindsight perspective, it can be clearly stated that the key figure who contributed to a significant shift in the research profile concerning Spisz was the aforementioned Czesław Robotycki (1944–2014). He not only posed new research questions – primarily focusing on the changes in the system of norms and values governing the behaviour of local residents – but also sought to answer them using lesser-known theoretical concepts. The process of this shift can be traced through materials preserved in the archives of the IEiAK UJ, including personal files, transcripts of interviews conducted by him and later by his students, the original version of his master’s thesis, and his doctoral dissertation. Taken together, these documents offer a rare behind-the scene glimpse into the development of Robotycki’s academic interest in Spisz.

Robotycki began acquiring knowledge about this region already at the beginning of his student years. In 1964, he took part for the first time in fieldwork methodology classes conducted in Spisz by Biały. It was at that time that nationality-based tensions began to surface in Jurgów again. As in the period immediately after the war, the conflict concerned matters of the local Catholic Church – an institution that continued to play a significant role in the region’s national policy, pursued alternately, depending on the political situation, by Polish (in the interwar and post-war periods) or Slovak (in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and during the Second World War) diocesan, strong patriotic oriented authorities.

An account of the dispute over the right to include Slovakian in church services is recorded in the materials collected by the students, most notably in interviews conducted by Robotycki, who was then twenty years of age.<sup>17</sup> From a modern perspective, the material is a fascinating and unique record of identity processes taking place in the region, providing a vivid illustration of the fluid and relational nature of national identity (Brubaker, Cooper, 2000). The issue of social awareness, however, seems to have been only a side topic within the research conducted at the

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16 See also: Górka, Biały, 1987; Bubak, 1987; Górka, 1987; Kaczanowski, 1987; Pankówna, 1987.

17 Arch. IEiAK UJ. Sygn. 7460. Jurgów, 1964.

time under Biały's supervision, which was oriented towards gathering material for the planned monograph.

In 1968, under the supervision of the head of the KES prof Gładysz, Robotycki completed his MA thesis on the transformations in the economy and social life in the village of Jurgów in Spisz. Insightful and well-written, the work testifies not only to the considerable knowledge of the young graduate, who navigated the available academic literature with ease, but also to his command of the analytical and research-related tools of the trade. Analysed from a modern perspective, the text may be considered an interesting study in economic anthropology, supplemented with a broad historical context, typical for the interpretative method of Krakow ethnographers. It is precisely this aspect that reveals Robotycki's critical view of nationalism – far removed from the radical tone of historical policy conducted at that time in PRL by Władysław Gomułka's regime.<sup>18</sup> In a seemingly innocuous passage concerning the source material and references used in his work, Robotycki signalled his political views:

*Much valuable information was also obtained from the Wierchy annual, in which many articles about the so-called "Polish Spisz" were published in the Interwar period. Spisz was a border region which had in the 1920s become the subject of a dispute between Poland and Czechoslovakia. For this very reason, the period saw the publication of many works on Spisz arguing its "Polish-ness", mainly through ethnographic material (Arch. IEiAK UJ. Robotycki, Cz., 1968: 4, trans. Judita Mastalerz).*

Professor Gładysz, then serving as the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and History UJ, recognized Robotycki's intellectual maturity, critical acumen, and erudition, offering him a position as an assistant immediately upon his graduation in 1969. Being a highly promising scholar supported by his boss, the young teaching assistant started to forge his own path as an anthropologist. He still made visits to Spisz – individually or with groups of students – yet the topics he focused on strayed further and further away from the scope and aim of the research defined by Biały. In-depth, empirically grounded studies of norms and values became the main scholarly interest pursued by Robotycki for the next ten years. Following Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's (1961) assumption that moral phenomena belonged in the realm of collective imageries, in his research among the Jurgów community Robotycki tested several different methodological frameworks, most notably Erving Goffman's symbolic interactionism (1959), Ralph Linton's concept of "status personalities" (1945) and Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology (1967). He also referred to the works of contemporary Polish sociologists rooted in Marxist tradition, who were

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<sup>18</sup> His nationalist policy culminated in an aggressive anti-Semitic campaign initiated in March 1968, which led to another (after October 1956) socio-political crisis (Zaremba, 2001).

investigating traditions, social change and religiosity – i.a. Jerzy Szacki (1971), Antonina Kłoskowska (1969), Włodzimierz Pawluczuk (1972), and those with a strong Marxist orientation, such as Edward Pietraszek (1978), and even Hieronim Kubiak (1972).<sup>19</sup> But at the same time, the concept that remained his key source of inspiration was the sociology of morality focused around the key notion of ethos, formulated by the outstanding Polish philosopher Maria Ossowska (1969).

Despite frequent references to the sociologic works, Robotycki clearly emphasized in his dissertation that anthropology (this exact term was used multiple times) is a discipline distinct from sociology, characterized by a holistic approach to culture and focus on the study of small social group.<sup>20</sup> He stressed that culture is a complex system of real phenomena the study of which requires attention to everyday practices, meanings and values. Explaining his specific choice of methodology, Robotycki writes:

*For Levi-Bruhl and Malinowski /as well as e.g. Durkheim, Mauss, Lacan/ phenomena categorised within the umbrella term “morality” invariably constitute an integral element of a larger system comprising customs, legal practices, worldviews, etc. – i.e. more generally a certain cultural context. Understood thusly, cultural context is, naturally, equivalent to a set of phenomena that falls within the category of “ethos” as defined in the work by Ossowska cited above (Arch. IEiAK UJ. Robotycki, Cz., 1977: 10, transl. by Julita Mastalerz).*

Particularly significant to him was what Bronisław Malinowski described as the influence of culture on the motivation behind human actions – thoughts, feelings, and impulses of individuals are shaped by tradition and folklore, which leave upon them ‘a common stamp’ (Robotycki, 1980: 20–23). In this sense, as he wrote, anthropology is concerned with how individuals experience reality as member of a particular community.

Based on an eclectic, individually tailored theoretical framework, Robotycki’s doctoral dissertation provides a summary of his research activity in Spisz. Its publication in 1980 under the slightly modified title *Tradycja i obyczaj w środowisku wiejskim. Studium etologiczne wsi Jurgów na Spiszu* [Tradition and Custom in the Rural Environment: An Ethological Study of Jurgów in Spisz] marked not only a farewell to Spisz as his research field, but also the end of a distinct stage in his epistemological inquiries into social change, shaped by the influence of domestic Marxist sociology.

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19 Hieronim Kubiak, who specialised in sociology of religion and the nation, was a vocal proponent of Marxism and an active member of the PZPR. In 1981–1982 he held the office of Secretary of the Central Committee, and was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee in 1981–1986.

20 Arch. IEiAK UJ. Robotycki, Cz. (1977). *Tradycja, moralność i obyczaj w środowisku wiejskim. Studium etologiczne wsi Jurgów na Spiszu* [Tradition and custom in rural environment. An ethological study of the village of Jurgów in Spiš]. Doctoral dissertation. Kraków. Typescript. Inventory number missing.

Was his departure from this line of anthropological reflection in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and his subsequent criticism thereof, simply a consequence of changing paradigms and the methodological revolution Polish ethnology was experiencing at that time? To some extent at least, this must have been the case. Nevertheless, given the course of Robotycki's career and his ties to politics, this split seems to have had a hidden meaning. To understand it, we need to take a closer look at Robotycki's political standing in that turbulent period, and return once more to the late 1960s and early 1970s, when he began working at the university. Once again, Zbigniew Biały will appear next to him.

### Not all is self-evident.<sup>21</sup> The political activity of Biały and Robotycki in the light of PZPR

Immediately after accepting the position, Robotycki, who showed much promise as a scholar and was very popular with the students, became a tasty morsel for the party cells active at the university, since he was precisely the kind of person the PZPR wished to have in its ranks. The exact process of his recruitment is now impossible to trace, since no specific information on the subject could be found. It is not inconceivable that he was enlisted with the help of Biały, who had frequently approached his students and co-workers with an offer of Party membership. It may also be assumed that this development proved advantageous for Gładysz as well. As the head of the KES, he might have wanted to have a trusted associate – such as his student and assistant – join the ranks of the PZPR, thereby improving the Chair's status within the faculty. Archival records of the University Committee of the PZPR at UJ only indicate that by 1970 Robotycki was already one of the members of the basic PZPR unit for ethnography and archaeology, which was one of the smallest cells at the university (comprising three ethnographers and four archaeologists). The episode of his membership in the PZPR remains virtually unknown outside the narrow circle of his former acquaintances. I am aware that publishing this is a controversial step, especially since, unlike Biały, Robotycki did not publicly speak about it, as his colleagues recall. However, I believe it is worthwhile calmly considering the motives that may have led Robotycki to join the Party and take a closer look at what his activity might have involved, especially since, at that time, he was hardly an exception in the Faculty of Philosophy and History of the Jagiellonian University.

Before I proceed with the analysis of the documents, I must briefly outline the situation of academia in Poland at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. The early 1970s in Poland were a period of a temporary improvement in the social mood, brought about by changes in the high echelons of power. The discredited Gomułka stepped

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21 A reference to the title of Czesław Robotycki's book *Nie wszystko jest oczywiste* [Not all is self-evident] (1998).

down, replaced by the newly appointed First Secretary of the PZPR Edward Gierek, who promised to lead the country out of an economic crisis and open it up to the West, democratise social life and introduce a more pluralist cultural policy (Paczkowski, 2005; Eisler, 2014). The Ministry of Learning and Higher Education began to reform universities to adapt them to the needs of the state after the crisis of 1968 (Hübner, 2015). The organisational overlap between politics and science, typical of the communist period, meant that the task of overseeing the implementation of the changes was assigned to the Party structures within universities (Abryśżeński, 2023). I believe that at least some of the young researchers who had joined the PZPR (as the main legal political organisation at the time) did so not for ideological, but rather for pragmatic reasons. And that what guided them was not simple opportunism. Given the prerogatives of the organisation, scholars who belonged to it could, despite the hierarchical structure of the Party, hope to be able to use their voice to help steer state policy towards science and learning in a more democratic direction. Evidence for this claim may be found in the minutes of the party meetings of the Departmental Party Organisation of the PZPR [OOP PZPR] for ethnography and archaeology deposited in the National Archive, containing discussions on the need for changes in the organisation of teaching and research activity. For instance, during a reporting and election meeting in October 1970, Biały proposed that the motions committee request the Ministry to provide university party organisations with timely information about relevant changes. He also suggested granting more authority to the executive branch of the Basic Party Organisation [POP PZPR] to reduce the workload of the Staff Committee.<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, the documentation also contains some mentions of the research conducted in Spisz. During that same meeting, when formulating the agenda of the OOP for ethnography and archaeology, ethnographers brought their fieldwork under the protective umbrella of party activities, which – as I think – was intended to allow them to freely continue research in border areas and secure further funding. In section six, the OOP is urged to foster collaboration between university departments (Chair and Research Groups) and external bodies – national councils, institutions, and field stations – to promote practical applications of research. It recommends strengthening cooperation between the KES and the [Students] Ethnographer's Research Groups with the County National Council in Nowy Targ and the Communal National Council in Czarna Góra, and enhancing ties with ethnographers working on 'the Polish Spisz'.<sup>23</sup>

Two years later, during another report and election meeting of the same unit, when work on reforming the organisation of higher education was still ongoing, ethnographers

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22 ANK. Sygn. 29/2328/118 [256/XIII/53]. University Committee of the PZPR at UJ. Minutes of a report and election meeting of OOP PZPR at the Faculty of Philosophy and History UJ /history, history of art, ethnography, archaeology and musicology /, 26 October 1970, fol. 19.

23 Ibidem.

and archaeologists also put forward specific proposals concerning teaching and publishing at UJ. They opposed plans to shorten the duration of university studies to four years and called for reforms in publishing policy, including increased printing capacity, changes in editorial direction, involvement of external contributors, the right to publish course books, and the development of small-scale printing.<sup>24</sup>

The general assessment passed by their superiors on the activity of the OOP of ethnographers and archaeologists was far from favourable at the time, as evidenced by the numerous critical remarks found in reports from 1972. The party leadership accused the group of passivity, apparent from its small size, lack of activity of its secretariat and the low frequency of meetings. Two years later, following changes in the structure of party units at the university, ethnographers were grouped together with sociologists to form a single Party cell that operated until January 1990, when the PZPR was dissolved. Robotycki was the first person from this group to relinquish his party membership, which he did in February 1981.<sup>25</sup> In these politically turbulent times, it was a formal gesture of resistance, an official manifestation of siding with the anti-communist opposition. Along with the majority of KES employees, Robotycki began to show active support for the programme of changes championed by the Solidarity movement at the Jagiellonian University. A year and a half later, during martial law, his flat was raided by Security Service officers, who conducted a search and found a duplicating machine. Suspected of sedition, Robotycki was declared an enemy of the system and interned in September 1982. Deported to an internment camp, he was only able to return to his family three months later.<sup>26</sup>

The relationship between the party and the KES at the time is clearly evident from the following entry in the report on the activities of the Basic Party Organisation of the Institute of Sociology and the Chair between January 1981 and October 1982:

*A more complex situation persists at the Chair of Slavic Ethnography. Comrade Z. Biały is presently the only party member within the Chair. During the period covered by the report, cooperation between the POP [Basic Party Organisation] leadership and the Chair and its management was virtually non-existent.*<sup>27</sup> (transl. by Julita Mastalerz)

The party organs at the university lost all contact with ethnographers in March 1986, with the death of Zbigniew Biały. It was never restored until the political transformation of 1989.

24 ANK. Sygn. 29/2328/118 [256/XIII/53]. University Committee of PZPR at UJ. Minutes from the meeting of the OOP PZPR for Archaeology and Ethnography, 5 Dec. 1972, fol. 5.

25 The next collective exodus from the organisation occurred only after the declaration of martial law, when thirteen sociologists left the ranks of the PZPR on 14 December 1981.

26 Arch. IPN Ki 45/385 (9/J/82).

27 ANK. Sygn.256/XIII/4. Minutes from report and election meetings. Appendices to the minutes of the POP PZPR in IS and KES. Report from the activity of the POP PZPR in the period of January 1981 – October 1982, fol. 91.

## The strange world of Polish imaginaries. Robotycki and the “new Polish ethnology”

Returning to the main topic of the analysis – the relations between politics and ethnographic research activity – it makes sense to consider the degree to which the experience of the Solidarity campaign of the early 1980s could have affected Robotycki’s academic activity. It is then that he officially became one of the pioneers of the so-called “new Polish ethnology” – a reformist movement postulating fundamental changes in research areas and theoretical orientation (Benedyktowicz, Robotycki, Stomma, Tomicki, Wasilewski, 1980).<sup>28</sup>

The nature of the proposed changes clearly indicates a radical departure from the positivist and post-positivist frameworks of socio-cultural research; after more than a decade of involvement in the Spisz project – a quintessential example of the old approach – the shift was dramatic indeed for Robotycki. Having been fascinated by semiotics, sociolinguistics, theoretical literary analysis and *Nouvelle Histoire* since at least the mid-1970s, he was finally able not only to openly discuss these inspirations, but – most of all – introduce them to his research (Sokolewicz, 2015). He expounded his own understanding of the role of ethnology in an article on the phenomenon of the August 1980 strike at the Gdansk shipyard. The work, mentioned in the introduction to the present analysis, was the first text he authored after the change in theoretical orientation. He pointed out in it that ethnology, examining cultural phenomena within contemporary mass societies as well, address topics that other social sciences, such as sociology and social psychology, may consider exhausted or fully explored. It places particular emphasis on cultural elements often marginalized as superstitions, old wives’ tales, or vestiges of magical thinking. These often subconsciously culturally represent residual worldviews that appear to conflict with the dominant rational and empirical frameworks of modern society (Robotycki, 1990: 44).

He concludes his analysis with this powerful statement:

*The period of the strike, as well as the social mood observable in Poland as its consequence, was characterised by a certain tendency that proves ethnologically significant. There was a collective effort geared towards restoring authenticity and import to human words, gestures (or, more broadly, rituals), creativity and morality. What occurred was a kind of renewal of custom. The spontaneous nature of this social reaction indicates that it was a culture-making process. It progressed in*

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28 This programme generally called for moving away from positivist and post-positivist (functionalism) approaches in ethnology, advocating for the methods based on culture-specific categories. It emphasized the need for a unified conceptual and methodological framework focused on the semiotic aspects of cultural phenomena, such as religiosity, rituals, mythology, folklore and cultural identity. Its authors stressed the importance of enduring hidden structures and advocated for enhanced collaboration between ethnologists and experts from related fields such as history, semiotics, religious studies, linguistics, biblical studies, and art and literary scholars.

*accordance with the fixed rules to whose existence ethnography testifies. From this perspective, all theoretical analyses of transformations and supposed new customs in Poland quickly proved unconvincing and paper-thin. Examples of such ethnographic and sociological essays would easily fill a large-sized file. Ethnology, however, teaches us that the structures of cultural relations have been with us “since the times of Seth”. Repressed forms of expression of national character erupt when and where least expected; for custom can never be decreed, either at a party congress or at an episcopal synod. (1990: 48, transl. by Julita Mastalerz).*

Robotycki's texts published before 1989 contain no direct traces of political criticism, yet the focus on issues of the social imaginarium – symbols, myths and structures of long duration – observable in his works since the 1980s seems more than incidental (Robotycki 1985; 1987; 1988; 1990). The anti-systemic opposition of the 1980s, which was also embedded in his difficult personal experiences, became an opportunity for him to directly observe the power of myth in action. In this light, his focus on the realm of symbolism and the history of ideas was not a step backwards (as it might seem from a contemporary point of view) from the earlier, clearly sociologising brand of anthropological reflection, but a dynamic reaction to the current political and social circumstances of revolution and systemic transformation. It stemmed from the desire for a deeper understanding of the processes that were occurring in the collective imagination of the Polish people; processes that ultimately led to the failure of the communist ideology and the collapse of the regime. It is to this understanding of ethnology that Robotycki remained committed essentially to the end of his scholarly activity, despite all the new research areas and paradigms that appeared in the discipline after 1989.

## Concluding remarks

The lack of in-depth research on the political activity of ethnologists/anthropologists during the PRL period does not contribute to calm, nuanced discussion about the relationship between politics and our discipline. Moreover, it opens the door for 'archive hunters' who treat the deposited documents uncritically, often taken out from the broader historical, situational and biographical context, as compromising evidence of political collaboration with the communist regime – national betrayal and those in the current political games. For this reason, it is essential that anthropologists themselves engage in archival research in the post-war history of their discipline. Systematic study of archival sources, although it may often seem like a tedious task offering fewer thrills than the experience of 'living' fieldwork, ultimately bring results. It provides a deeper insight into the realities of the past, fills descriptions with significant details, allows for a better understanding of the choices made by the scholars, and also the still ongoing dialectical process of remembering and forgetting (Ricoeur, 2004).

As is evident from the example of the KES research conducted in Spisz, the diversification of anthropological circles during the PRL period was not limited to differences between specific academic centres, but could also be observed within institutions. Academic activity of Biały and Robotycki shows how they manoeuvred between the changing rules of ideological correctness and the dynamic political situation, as well between the organizational principles imposed on the academia by the system and financial constraints due to constant shortages that directly affected research funding. The political differences between these two researchers – which I have tried to describe – influenced not only change of research topics and the way they approached them, but also led to a fundamental change in their scientific interests in response to the rapidly changing political situation in Poland, from the late 1960s to the Solidarity revolution and the crisis of the 1980s. Differences in political views and in defining the goals of our discipline – which translated into dissimilar approaches to pursuing scholarly and didactic activity – did not magically disappear in 1989. They are still discernible on many levels, especially in the contemporary discussions around engagement and the search for the most *appropriate* ways of pursuing the craft. This, however, is a topic for another paper.

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### List of abbreviations

- Arch. IEiAK UJ – Archive of the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Jagiellonian University (presently the Department of Documentation and Scientific Information of the IEiAK UJ)
- Arch. UJ – Archive of the Jagiellonian University
- ANK – National Archive, Krakow
- Arch. IPN – Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance
- UJ –Jagiellonian University

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