

**FOUR MADONNAS**

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## I.

### THE RAINBOW MADONNA

She looks at me with the same gaze as the traditional Madonna that hung above the door of my grandmother's kitchen. It has been years since I sat at that kitchen table, but I can well remember the dreamy and melancholic gaze of that poorly reproduced icon, the Black Madonna, beaming from overhead. This contemporary icon reminds me of the traditional mother-and-child Madonna. Cloaked in rather modest, black attire, revealing only a dark face with a big scar on the right cheek, what makes this Madonna image so special are the rainbow halos above the heads of the child and herself. These haloes are the attribute referenced in what has become her common name, the Rainbow Madonna.

Her image appeared on my Facebook News Feed sometime in early May 2019. The so-called 'perverted' Madonna posters were found hanging all over public areas of the city of Płock. Attached (as reported by the police) to rubbish bins, public toilet doors, trees and walls of public buildings, the posters intended to show solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community. A few days earlier, on the occasion of an Easter celebration, a leading priest of the biggest church of Płock built an installation symbolising the grave of Jesus Christ. As part of the installation, he placed multiple cardboard boxes around the altar, listing all Christian sins, including "hate", "aggression" and "theft", alongside "LGBT" and "gender<sup>1</sup>". People with non-normative identities were placed in the same category as criminals.

Activist Elzbieta Podleśna - who gave her name to the media in support and solidarity with oppressed minorities - decided to create the Rainbow Madonna as a reminder that Madonna accepts and cares for all. After all, the motif of a rainbow can be traced to both the Old and the New Testament, symbolising the covenant between people and God. Unfortunately, the ruling government officials and the clergy failed to recognise that fact. One day after the posters appeared around the city, Podleśna's house was raided and she was arrested under the charge of mistreating Article 196kk; she was accused of offending religious feelings and profaning religious symbols.

On multiple occasions prior to this incident, Article 196kk has been used as a tool of censorship, usually targeting artists who dared to publicly criticise the Church. In 2002, Dorota Nieznalska exhibited her special installation *Pasja* that dealt with themes of

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<sup>1</sup> The so-called "ideologia gender" (gender ideology) is a vague, collective term used by the right wing to address the agenda of the opposition. It includes fighting for the rights of women and the LGBTQ+ community, sexual education and counteracting gender-based violence.

masculinity and suffering. Nieznalska was heavily criticised for placing an image of a penis on a metal Greek cross. She had to face legal charges on account of an alleged violation of the Polish Penal Code. In 2014, the Argentinian director Rodrigo Garcia premiered his play *Golgotha Picnic* in Poland. In his work Garcia discusses consumer society and his general despair for the human race through deconstructing the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The piece immediately received a harsh backlash from high-ranking members of the clergy, resulting in violent demonstrations by Polish Catholics and nationalists. In 2017, the Croatian director Oliver Frljić premiered *Klatwa* (inspired by the work of Polish playwright Stanislaw Wyspiański) on the stage of Teatr Powszechny in Warsaw. The piece shines a light on the inseparable connection between the Church and the state and how that affects freedom of expression. Immediately after the premiere, the Polish clergy, together with the ruling party, threatened to press charges against Frljić for ‘hate speech’.

As explained by the Minister of Interior, Joachim Brudziński, the accusations of the Rainbow Madonna’s profanation of the Black Madonna were not directed at the artistic work itself, but at the fact that the posters were placed in inappropriate, degrading locations. Here, I start to wonder why the immense quantity and variety of souvenirs (panties, for example) with the image of the Black Madonna sold at the Jasna Góra Monastery<sup>2</sup> do not undergo the same judgment. It seems like if you have the ‘right’ views and beliefs, you can use and alter religious symbols in any way you wish (Diduszko, “Objawienie Tęczowej Matki Boskiej”).

Unfortunately, the passive position held by the majority of Polish society results in a reinforcement of the bonds between the Church and leading conservatives, silently permitting them to openly offend and abuse minorities. Stumbling upon the image of the Rainbow Madonna made me feel proud that there are still people who dare to actively oppose these injustices. I found it extremely effective to use a symbol so ingrained in the history of the Catholic Church, especially in Poland. The gentle touch of removing the golden halo - a symbol of wealth and power - and replacing it with a rainbow - a symbol of peace and freedom - was very powerful to me. This simple gesture imbues the icon with an urgent message: that the Madonna is the mother of all. As clarified in one of her interviews, Podleśna’s position does not come from an atheist stance: she left the Catholic Church but still considers herself a believer. Therefore she, just like anyone else, has the right to use the symbols of her religion.

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<sup>2</sup> The famous monastery in Czestochowa is one of the countries’ most famous places of pilgrimage. The precious Black Madonna icon resides here.

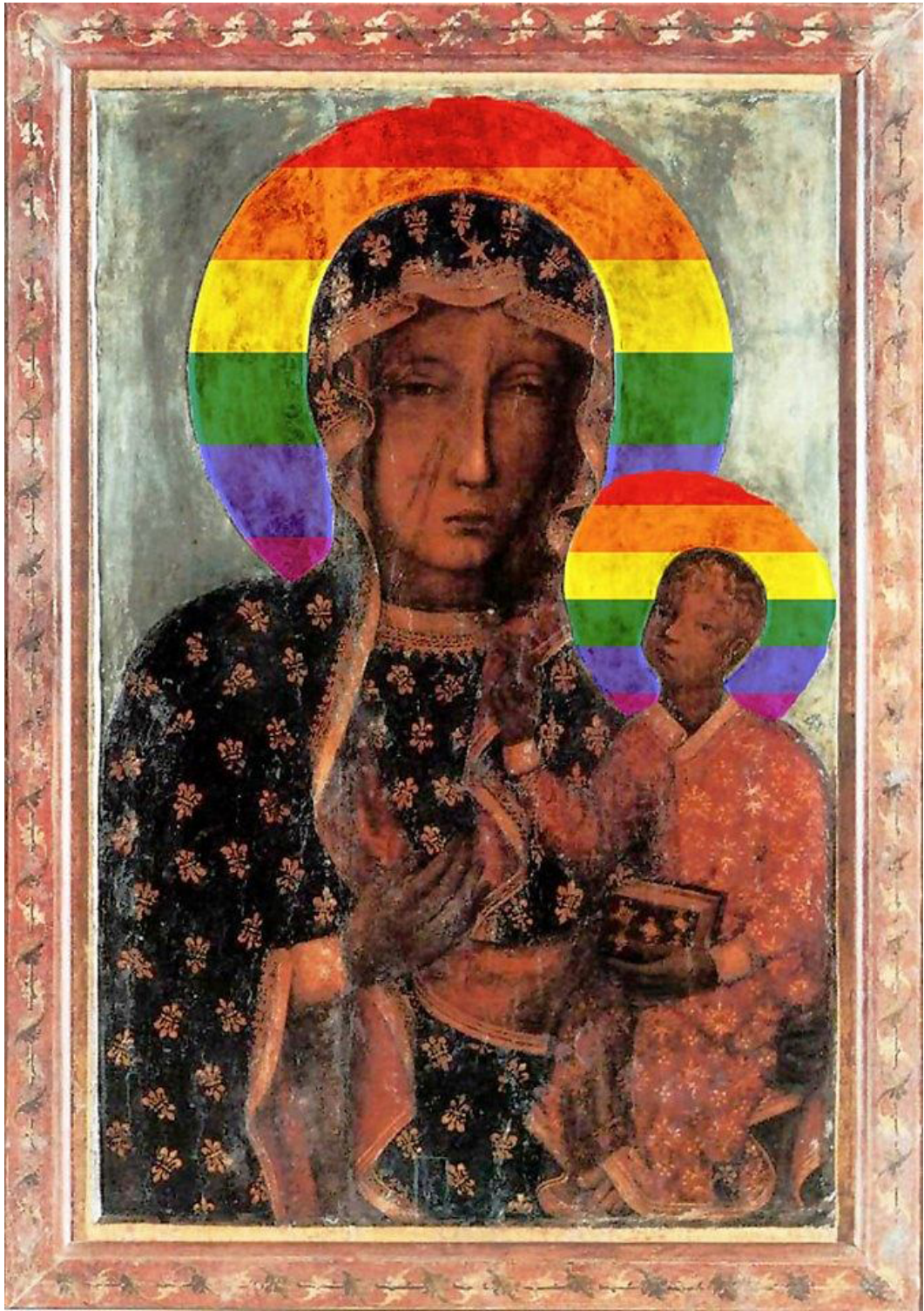


Fig. 1 Rainbow Madonna, 2019



Fig. 2 Black Madonna of Czestochowa, 1717

In late May I decided to contact Podleśna, the supposed author of the re-made icon. I was surprised by how quickly I managed to find her on a social media platform. After a short introduction, I really tried to make clear how much I praised and admired her work. She responded and, to my surprise, it turned out that the Rainbow Madonna was not her own creation; she was simply the distributor of the posters. Due to her activist experience and the unsafe nature of the action, she volunteered to be the face of the campaign, allowing the others to remain anonymous.

Apart from admiring the motivations and the courage of all of the authors, I also really appreciated the aesthetics of the poster, and dreamed of getting one for myself. At that time I was busy creating a work for the End of Year Show at the Sandberg Institute, dealing with questions regarding possessive nationalism in Poland. I wrote to Podleśna again, this time asking if it would be possible to receive one of the Rainbow Madonna posters. Her answer caught me off guard. Because of - as she put it - 'obvious' reasons, the activists were not in possession of the posters any longer.

From her response, I figured that the materials must have been confiscated and destroyed by the authorities. I felt embarrassed about my naivety. Having left Poland at the age of eighteen, I began my adulthood in a Western reality. I spent the past six years in a bubble of privilege and art school, where I was pushed to experiment, to risk and provoke.

Envisioning the poster as a great addition to my exhibition in the safe environment of my Amsterdam art school, I overlooked the context in which the poster had come into existence and the context that had made it such a potent political statement.

## II.

### **THERE IS A CROSS IN EVERY CLASSROOM**

Today I received the final results of the parliamentary elections in Poland, which happened yesterday. On 13 October 2019, sixty-one percent of the thirty million citizens authorised to vote, including myself, went to choose their representative in the Polish parliament. Almost half decided to identify with the national-conservative, right-wing populist political party *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (which translates to Law and Justice, hereafter PIS). It had been a very turbulent first term of office for PIS, but apparently their destruction of the judiciary system, heightened oppression of women and minorities, and attempts to destroy multiple cultural institutions was not enough.

The ideological transformation of Central and East Europe (CEE) in 1989 from state socialism to capitalism placed large numbers of people into precarious circumstances, often greater than what they had experienced under communism. However, from looking at studies of GDP (gross domestic product) per capita from 1950 to 2015, we see that Poland, compared to the ten other CEE states, dealt with the transformation relatively well (Sawulski 9-11). Nevertheless, the rapidly closing workspaces, mass layoffs, unemployment and hyperinflation was the reality that people had to face, especially in the first decade of the transformation (Sawulski 16). In addition, dubious politics from 1990 onwards resulted in today's general feeling of uncertainty. By introducing the famous program *Rodzina 500+* (Family 500+) PIS promised to reduce the poverty level by providing families with 500 PLN (Polish Zloty) per month for every second child<sup>3</sup>. The program gave people the impression that they had an increase in financial support, but it of course encouraged families to have more children, which was an intentional effect of the legislation. Since 2016, in order to be entitled to that social support, approximately one hundred thousand women decided to give up their waged jobs. In a cunning way, PIS once again managed to reinforce normative family structures (Sawulski 134-139). Sudden financial improvement and a lack of a broader economic awareness kept the electorate happy. As a society, Poland gave PIS permission to continue the 'good change': together with the Catholic Church they could slowly infiltrate, and then dominate, all spheres of a theoretically democratic country.

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<sup>3</sup> Initially the program guaranteed 500 PLN for every second child, and the same figure for the first child, too, of families with low income. A few months into the program the legislation changed and all families - no matter their income or size - were eligible for the social money.

The Catholic Church is the wealthiest and most powerful institution in Poland. In 1950, it had to give away its assets to the socialist government of the country and in recompense, in March that same year, *Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa* (Polish People's Republic, hereafter PRL) formed the Church Fund. After 1989, a specially appointed property commission, without much verification, handed over land and real estate to the Church, making it even wealthier than it was before 1950 and eliminating the need for the Church Fund. Nevertheless the Fund continues to function, providing the Church with enormous amounts of money every year. On top of that, the Catholic Church charges the public heavily for all kinds of ceremonies whilst being exempt from paying most taxes (Diduszko 18, 86).

In 1990, just before the presidential elections, the Episcopal<sup>4</sup> publicly demanded the introduction of 'Religion' as a regular school subject. In fear of losing favour with his electorate, and without consulting with parliament, the Prime Minister at the time, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, was forced to comply with the demand, marking the beginning of the Church's infiltration into the public school system (Diduszko 86-87).

According to the CBOS (Public Opinion Research Center) survey from 2016, ninety percent of Poles declare that they are believers but believe "in their own way" and do not associate themselves with the Polish Church, while only thirty-nine percent attend Sunday Mass and try to live according to the Church's teachings (Diduszko 73-74). As stated in the Constitution of Poland, religion can be taught in public schools only if it does not violate freedom of consciousness and the freedom of other beliefs (Diduszko 77). However, I can very well recall seeing a cross in each and every classroom of my old elementary school. Like most in Poland, I was also baptised. Some families do it out of belief, some out of habit, and others in fear of judgment. My parents never really went to church, nor did they talk about God and faith. However, at the age of three months, a priest poured a few drops of water on my little baby head, and I entered the Christian community with the name Patrycja.

I am thinking back to the image of the remade icon Rainbow Madonna and her child. Jesus looks so helpless and innocent in the arms of his mother, safeguarded by the rainbow, a symbol of freedom and equality. The shelter of maternal care seems to protect the child from the cruel and unjust outside world, which sooner or later we all have to face. In a country like Poland, you have to fit a specific profile to be treated justly and with respect. The profile of a

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<sup>4</sup> Central organ of the Catholic Church in Poland. It is composed of three cardinals, thirty-two archbishops and 122 bishops.



‘good Polish citizen’ is propagated by the ruling party and the Church through all spheres of public life, including education.

Officially, religion can now be taught in public schools, but due to its optional status it is supposed to be scheduled so that students who do not wish to attend can easily choose not to. Unfortunately, that is not the case in the majority of Polish schools. An alternative ethics class is offered in only a few of these institutions. Meanwhile catechesis is part of every curriculum, with an intensity often exceeding that of the mandatory subjects. Religion classes usually take place in the middle of the day, between obligatory classes. If a parent - or indeed the student - decides it is not necessary to attend, the student must wait outside the classroom, inevitably feeling excluded by peers as well as by the teacher (Diduszko 76-77). What’s more, the money that supports the teaching of religion in schools comes from the state budget, and therefore from all citizens’ taxes (Diduszko 88). You may be an atheist or believe, but disapprove of, the anti-humanistic and anti-science teachings of the Church, but you still have to pay for it.

As underlined by the Episcopal, the catechesis guides young people towards building an attitude of unconditional obedience and love towards God and religion. This lack of independence from God, encouraged by the Church, can make young people feel ashamed of their own sexualities and desires (Pacewicz, “Katecheza o seksie”). Furthermore, the Church condemns abortion, contraception, in vitro fertilization and all intimate relations that fall outside of the normative, heterosexual ones blessed by the Church itself.

*Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie* (How to live in a family) is a school subject still circulating in the majority of public schools. Despite touching upon important but basic topics such as puberty, relationships and reproduction, the subject fails to provide a generous knowledge of sex with all its complexities (Knaś, “Zdarza sie, ze prowadzacy wychowanie do życia w rodzinie wstydzia sie slowa seks”). From what I remember from my days at school, the class was dominated by a heteronormative, patriarchal discourse, full of gender stereotypes and religious preaching. In 2018, in response to the lack of sex education available in schools, as well as outside of them, Anja Rubik, a model and activist, started a project called #sexedPL, where people could openly share their experiences, stories and knowledge.

Right before the parliamentary elections of 2019, the ruling party, following the advice and consent of the Church, introduced a new program to the Polish parliament. “Stop Pedophilia”- a project useful only by name – calls for imprisonment up to five years for providers of sex education or any form of support regarding sex and relationships to minors. The project views discussions, with young students, around gender and sexual identity, and

the need for equality and tolerance regarding these issues, as a propagation of pedophilia and as 'sexualisation' of the youth (Staśko, "Tak wygląda sytuacja dziewczyn i młodych kobiet w świecie bez edukacji seksualnej").

This September, my sister's son started elementary school. Amongst other classes he also 'studies' religion. According to my sister, it's nothing dangerous, "they just learn about God and sing songs". Similarly to me, my sister stopped attending church a long time ago and does not agree with the intolerant politics propagated by the clergy. Nevertheless, she sees nothing worrying in sending a six-year-old to a religion class, which, anyway, all his friends attend as well. If only there was a rainbow halo above my nephew's head to make him resistant to the manipulative and dangerous teachings of the Church.

### III.

#### CAZALE, HAITI

The Peters World Map<sup>5</sup> is hanging right above my bed. I place my finger on the blue field representing the Atlantic Ocean. I look at the island to the right of Cuba. On the map, which continues to unfold in my mind, from Haiti's capital city Port-au-Prince, I follow a path towards the market town Cabaret and trace then up the mountain, which can be reached by hopping on a truck's trailer if you are lucky, or otherwise by foot or on donkeys. The higher I climb, the clearer the air becomes. From here the horizon appears wider, revealing the rocky land completely devoid of trees (Orizio 138).

Cazale is a village similar to hundreds of others on top of the bare mountains of Haiti. The dwellings of the locals are a mix of African-looking huts made out of dried mud or plaited straw, covered with banana leaves, and brick constructions with upper stories and little balconies, more in the Tyrolean style. The houses are dotted about at random due to the lack of a village road. For a long time, before its collapse, the only substantial and central building was a small, stone church dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel<sup>6</sup> with a graveyard attached right next to it (Orizio 140).

Despite looking quite ordinary at first glance, this particular village carries a unique and special story. Amongst the dark-skinned Haitians living here there are many who appear quite different from the majority. High-cheekboned with blue eyes, fair skin and straight, blond hair - just like many others in East Europe - are the descendants of Polish soldiers, now frequently known as 'the Polish Haitians'. Their story dates back to 1802 when 2,570 soldiers of the Polish Legions<sup>7</sup>, commanded by Napoleon Bonaparte, were sent to Haiti with the task of suppressing the uprising of the enslaved people of Saint-Domingue (the name of the island under French rule, from 1659 to 1804). The Polish soldiers worshipped Napoleon, who promised to restore freedom to Poland (which was under the double protectorate of Prussia and Russia at that time) in return for their assistance with restoring the order of his colony. However, uniforms ill-suited to a tropical climate, no sense of the field and an epidemic of

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<sup>5</sup> A type of map in which countries and continents are depicted accurately, relative to their actual size. Traditional maps have tended to show countries in incorrect proportion to one another, to the advantage of the European colonial powers.

<sup>6</sup> The church was built by Polish legionaries shortly after their arrival to Haiti. In the year 2000 the church suddenly crashed down. The inhabitants of Cazale suspected that witchcraft had something to do with it.

<sup>7</sup> Polish military units that served with the French army mainly from 1797 to 1803, although some units continued to serve until 1815.

yellow fever broke their dreams of a quick and easy return home. After multiple defeats and many deaths, the Polish soldiers started to see a parallel between the situation of the enslaved rebels and their own situation back home. The enslaved black Haitians and the Polish nationalists were all fighting for the same ideals of liberty, independence and freedom from foreign tyranny. So soon after, hundreds of the soldiers decided to side with the black Haitians and join in the fight for their revolution. After the French were defeated, Haiti became a free state with an independent constitution formed in 1805<sup>8</sup>. Many of the soldiers stayed on the island and became citizens of the only place in the world brought into being by a revolution of enslaved people (Orizio 146).

Aside from their Slavic features, the soldier-ancestors left no books, documents nor even tales to be passed down to the new generations of Polish Haitians of Cazale. More than two hundred years after the revolution, all that remains is a painting depicting the Madonna and Child, reminiscent of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa. The painting is kept under lock and key in a dusty corrugated iron hut that now serves as a church (Orizio 140).

In Poland, the Black Madonna is believed to be the mother and protector of every true Catholic. Already back in the nineteenth century, in fear of the pagan communities they had to face, the Polish soldiers took the Madonna icon to Saint-Domingue as a shield from the ‘uncivilized other’. Over time, the Madonna started to gain new meanings and was ironically incorporated into practices that the Catholics feared the most. The Haitian Voodoo practitioners gradually identified with the powerful, dark-skinned icon. Their beliefs are a mix of animism from Togo and Benin (from which people were shipped to plantations of Saint-Domingue), and elements from Buddhism, as well as Christianity (Kornak, “Carna Polonia”).

The Haitian Ezili Dantor and Child sits and gazes the same way as the Polish Black Madonna. Ezili, however, is dressed in rather modest garments with a lot of colour. She holds a dagger in her right arm, used to defend her devotees during the Haitian Revolution. The original golden halo evolved into a crown made from pineapple, and the baby Jesus was swapped with Anais, Ezili’s daughter. Ezili is believed to be the pantheon of Lwa, who represents the divine forces of love, sexuality, prosperity, pleasure, maternity, creativity and fertility (Tinsley 4).

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<sup>8</sup> According to the constitution, no white person was to either enter or own any of the island’s territory. However, the constitution made an exception for Polish and German people. All citizens, no matter their skin colour, were to be called black.



Fig. 3 Ezili Dantor, 1802

In 1983, a car carrying two Catholic priests went up the mountain to the village of Cazale. The community leaders, the Haitians with the fairest skin, and indeed anybody who cared to go along, were commanded to wear their best clothes and go to welcome John Paul II. Full of excitement and hope, the villagers watched the Polish pope emerge from his white plane and kiss the Haitian ground<sup>9</sup>. A few of them even managed to shake his hand. To others he promised assistance in the form of food, medicines and educational materials, emphasising that Poles should help one another. Since then, however, no aid has arrived (Orizio 159).

In 2010, a disastrous earthquake fell upon Haiti. 160,000 people were found dead and another 1.5 million lost their homes. The enormous tragedy shook up the world, encouraging many nations to send financial and sanitary support. Despite having a great historical connection to Haiti, Poland didn't show any special concern for the Haitians' suffering. The financial support they sent was deplorable. In fact, the impoverished West African country of Senegal (also a former French colony), feeling responsible to help the descendants of their enslaved ancestors, came up with the most generous offer. In addition to significant financial support, the President of Senegal filed a proposal to the African Union for dedicating a piece of African land to the Haitians for agricultural use (Kornak, "Carna Polonia, czyli o pierwszych polskich antyracistach").

I am looking back at the map hanging above my bed. Twenty-one and a half centimeters away, towards the north-east of Haiti, lies the country I tend to call my home. According to research executed by Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej (Public Opinion Research Center, hereafter CBOS) from 2017, today, Poland is the most ethnically and racially homogeneous country in Europe, with approximately ninety-seven percent of the population declaring themselves "fully Polish" and eighty-seven percent being Catholic. The recurrence of atrocious right-wing slogans like "Pure Poland, White Poland" or "Poland for the Polish" lead to the exclusion and isolation of any belief system that is different, not to mention progressive, inclusive and liberal.

Considering the above, the history of the Polish Haitians of Cazale strikes me right in the heart. As told by travellers who visited and talked to the descendants of the soldiers, they never had to suffer racial prejudice at the hands of the other Haitians. The Polish never had a position of power in Haiti and therefore weren't hated by anyone, and could freely and gradually assimilate to their new home (Orizio 169). The soldiers, despite being told to

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<sup>9</sup> According to some Christian Haitians, the gesture of kissing the ground by John Paul II was a coded signal identifying his involvement in Voodoo and meant to bring war to the country, which in fact happened a few years after his visit. They believe that men, and especially men with power, are guided by spirits.

suppress the “savage” and “wild” communities, instead used their own consciousness and saw their enemy as equal, admiring their struggle for freedom. This forgotten story should be shared extensively as a national history to learn from.

Today, the symbol of the Black Madonna – ostensible patroness of all Catholics – is being hijacked by nationalists and the Polish Church, according to whom the Madonna protects only the obedient, and those living according to Church teachings. They thereby exclude those with non-normative sexual and gender identities as well as those conceived by ‘non-natural processes’ (in vitro). Here again, the appropriated Polish Madonna - Haitian Ezili Dantor – could actually teach us so much more about the universality of love, especially for those who, in the course of historic and socio-economic development, are systematically placed at the margins of society.

#### IV.

### LIGHT FOR THE HERO

To this day I can still remember, on an April evening years ago, a mesmerising glow of lights hovering beyond the street named after John Paul II. That night I had planned to sleep over at my sister's place. After dinner, wrapped in blankets, we sat on the sofa, watching a movie whose title I can not recall anymore. Suddenly, a message broadcast live from the Vatican interrupted our screening: "The Polish Pope has passed away".

At the age of eleven I couldn't really understand the seriousness of the matter. However, seeing the tears flow down the cheeks of my sister, I figured something very sad had happened. Later on, I remember us standing in a crowd, each holding a lit candle. The atmosphere on the street was somehow magical; you could feel a strong social unity. People stood in silence, sobbing, and occasionally softly whispered words of prayer. My sister held me on her shoulders so I could see above the gathering crowds. The whole view beyond the horizon seemed completely covered by candlelight.

Fifteen years later, I find myself sitting in Teatr Powszechny in Warsaw: "This show is intended exclusively for adults. Please note that all scenes portrayed in the play are only an artistic interpretation. Please don't film and don't take any pictures".

Five minutes into the play *Klatwa* (Curse) by Oliver Frłjić, a white plaster figure, reminiscent of John Paul II, enters the stage. The familiar statue has a big, erect, silicon penis attached to its waist. One of the actresses playing the role of a young village girl, a subordinate member of the Church, drops to her knees and proceeds to perform oral sex on the figure. An archival recording of one of John Paul II's sermons reverberates in the background. After an unpleasantly long scene, another protagonist approaches the plaster pope and hangs a sign declaring 'Obrońca Pedofilii' ('Pedophile Defender') on his neck. The character takes a thick rope with a loop on one end and tightens it around the pope's head. The scene ends.

Treading a very slippery and narrow line, the performance kept me restless and uncomfortable for most of its duration. Despite its satirical undertone, the startling resemblance with the Polish reality frightened me. Every once in a while, I looked at my mother, who was sitting next to me, to check if she was still alright. After the play had ended, I was surprised by how much she appreciated and valued it as art. She said, however, "The scene with the pope was a bit too much".



Karol Wojtyła<sup>10</sup>, the man who, in 1978, became John Paul II, head of the Catholic Church, occupies an important place in the hearts of many Polish people to this day. Known for his modesty and unbiased devotion to faith, Wojtyła spent most of his life travelling around the world, meeting and talking to people from many different communities. Apart from his humble and altruistic demeanor, he also contributed to the process of the emancipation of Poland. Whenever he could, he used his public position to show solidarity with his compatriots. During his first pilgrimage to Poland in 1979, with the words, “Niech zstąpi Duch Twój! Niech zstąpi Duch Twój i odnowi oblicze ziemi, tej ziemi!” (“Let your Spirit descend! Let your Spirit descend! And renew the face of the earth. The face of this land!”), Wojtyła openly revealed his political stance, which stood in opposition to the Soviet regime (“Dlaczego Jan Paweł II był wielki?”).

Unfortunately, this image of John Paul II freeing Poland from its traumatic past concealed his other sins. Dating back even to the 1950s, the massive number of cases involving Polish priests molesting and sexually abusing children came to light only a few years ago. It is certain that the Polish pope protected and covered up the crimes of his countrymen priests, instead of recognising thousands of innocent victims.

The performance of the capital punishment of the pope gave me the creeps. Seeing a long-glorified figure sent to death created an undeniable impact. However, by thinking about the crimes in which he was complicit, by allowing them to go unpunished, the artistic interpretation seemed to be well justified. In contrast to my mother, I saw the pope as a human being, who despite his presumably good heart, deserved to pay for covering up the pedophiles and their acts. My mother, on the other hand, was educated to respect and honour unconditionally Poland’s national heroes. The relatively fresh memories of the past regime had conditioned her to see the scene as disrespectful, and as ‘crossing the line’.

The Catholic Church has contributed to creating and maintaining the Polish identity since the nineteenth century. During the partition, when Poland disappeared from the map for 123 years, the Church was the only significant institution that stood with its people and supported their dream of independence. Under State Socialism, the Church was bereft of all its wealth and power. The communists strived for a secular state, free from anyone who might be a threat to their politics. After 1989, the country felt obliged to repay the vast debt to the

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<sup>10</sup> Following the recognition of two miracles attributed to the intercession of John Paul II, he was declared holy on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 2014.

Church. However, having no limitations on doing so, we raised a monster able to act outside the law (for example the thousands of priests who, despite allegations of molesting children, did not suffer any consequences). Today, any attempt towards an ideological neutrality for the country is seen as yet another attempt to destroy Catholic religion.

Personally, I was never particularly involved with the Church, and during the short time I was, it happened due to social pressure and not because of a conscious choice. I know, however, that the institutional Church - a corporation with its ruling officials - doesn't represent the Church's totality. The community Church - people who experience a type of conversion, true believers, stand in opposition to the high-ranking clergy and their politics (that often have nothing to do with faith).

There are people within the community who actively fight for a more open-minded and progressive Church. The social campaign "Przekazmy sobie znak pokoju" ("Let us offer each other the sign of peace"), created in 2016 by Paweł Dobrowolski and Cecylia Jakubczak, aims to open a dialogue between the queer and Catholic communities. By observing a phenomenon of mutual reluctance, the campaign reminds believers that, according to Christian values, we are obliged to respect and be kind to each other. No matter one's sexual or gender identity, we all should have a place in the home of the One we believe in.

A few months after the outrage at the appearance of the Rainbow Madonna on the streets of Płock, Róża Thun<sup>11</sup> tweeted a photo of a poster that had promoted participation in the pilgrimage of John Paul II to Poland in 1983. Funnily enough, the poster portrayed the Polish pope, with the Madonna and Child covered in rainbow haloes in the background. This accidental discovery caused an outburst of confusion for those who criticised the creator of the Rainbow Madonna. Why on earth would a national hero like John Paul II have used the symbol of a rainbow to promote a pilgrimage to his followers? But of course, the Rainbow Madonna was not his creation, he was simply the distributor of the poster.

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<sup>11</sup> Polish politician, representing Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform), member of the European Parliament since 2009.

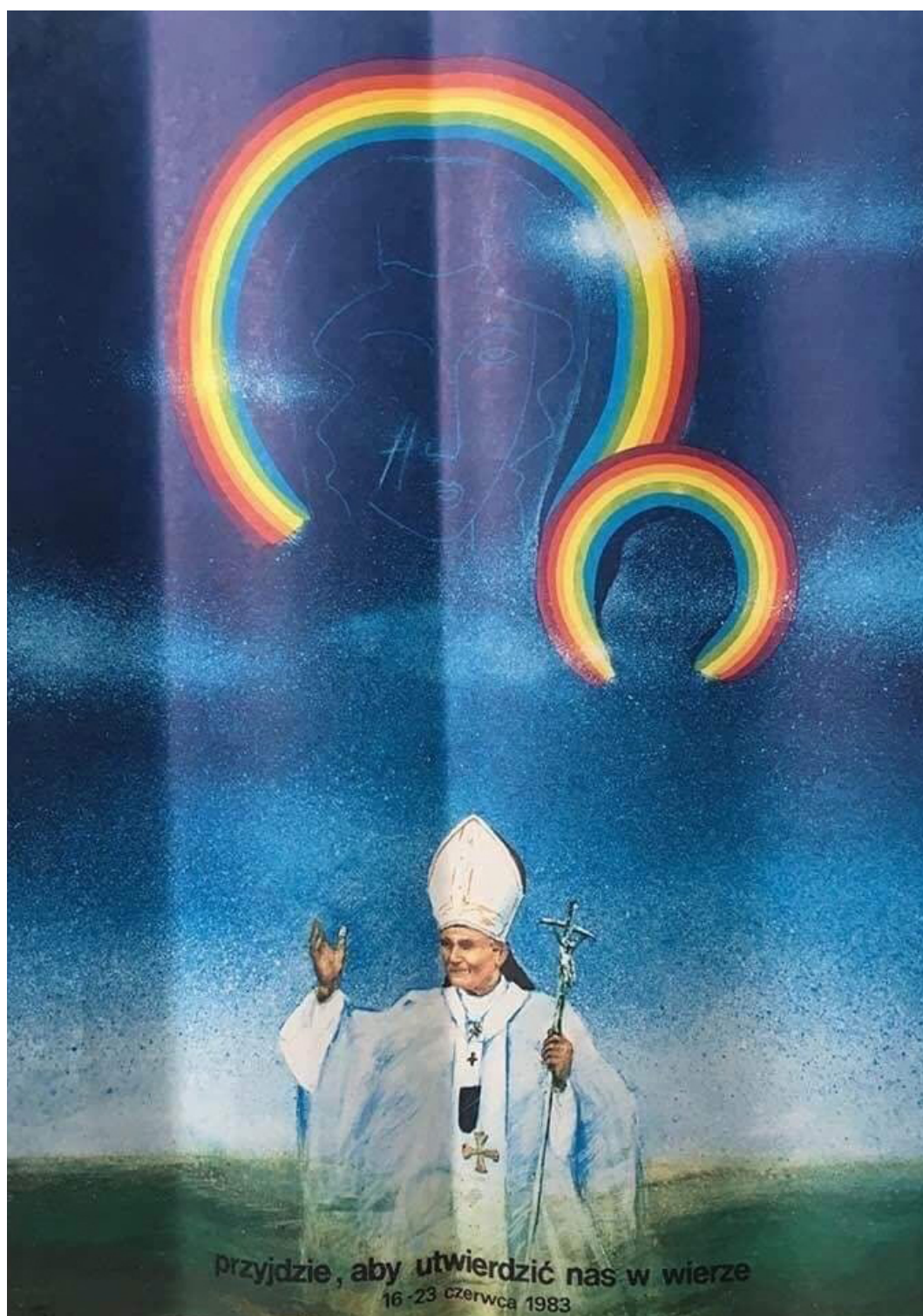


Fig. 4 John Paul II & The Rainbow Madonna, 1983

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