

Popular Science Summary

The project aims to examine important cultural phenomena connected with the history of Józef Kuraś a.k.a. 'Ogień' (English 'Fire') (1915-1947) and his troops, who operated in the Lesser Poland and Spiš regions during the Second World War and in the subsequent years. The activities of these partisan groups had and still have great significance for the social life of the regions mentioned. They are also an essential element of collective memory, they provoke lively discussions and cause much controversy. As conflicts are triggered by this topic, there is the need for insightful consideration of the impact that the history of Kuraś a.k.a. 'Fire' and his troops made. At the same time, it is an interesting example of the processes of a broader nature, such as memory conflicts, creating stories of the past, regional identity formation and increased interest in the history of the so called *cursed soldiers* or *disavowed soldiers*.

By some inhabitants of the Lesser Poland and Spiš, Kuraś a.k.a. 'Fire' and his troops are considered as heroes who fought for the liberation of Poland from the occupation of the Third Reich and for democracy after World War II. As secondary sources prove, the partisans were a crucial factor that affected Polish inhabitants' resistance against the imposed authority during 1940s. Nowadays, they are often symbols of the desired patriotic attitude. However, Kuraś a.k.a. 'Fire' and the freedom fighters under his command are not always seen this way - they are also criticized, especially in the Spiš region, and even accused of crimes (some of which are confirmed by historians). In this perspective, the history of partisans from Podhale can be seen as part of inter-ethnic antagonisms. The complex spectrum of meanings linked to the partisans both in the past and nowadays is much more complicated than it is shown by these examples of extreme opinions.

The project is aimed neither at the reconstruction of historical facts nor at sociological quantitative research. The main goal that the research group is focused on is to provide the analysis of Kuraś a.k.a. 'Fire' and his troops' past and present relevance to social imaginations both in Poland and Slovakia, that would be as accurate and as detailed as possible. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account the diverse cultural contexts. Another purpose of the study is to produce a reliable interpretation of the meanings which are linked to partisans and various attitudes connected with that issue.

These analyses and interpretations will consider the existing sources (i.e. archives, historical studies, journalistic writing, various online media, works of art) and sources established during the course of the field research. The study lasting many weeks will be conducted with the use of anthropological methodology and it will be carried out in the regions of Podhale and Spiš – the main territories where Kuraś a.k.a. 'Fire' and his troops operated. The main research techniques that will provide empirical data will be ethnographic interviews (with varying degrees of structuring) and participant observation.

The research is to provide valuable reflection on the impact of the partisans' history on the past and present social life in the Podhale region. We are convinced that the results will be useful for both anthropologists and other scientists, such as historians and sociologists. At the same time, we hope that it will be a chance to explain some of important social conflicts.