

Missionaries, Migrants and Hosts. Pentecostalism, the ‘Other’, and Activism in Contemporary Poland

AIM:

This project aims to look at Pentecostalism as a minority, yet significant religious movement in the Polish religious landscape. Most of all, researching Pentecostalism as an alternative to dominant Catholicism, allows a nonhegemonic insight into current Polish socio-religious and political transformations and crises.

However, the main focus of this research is on changes in the social imaginary embedded in social practices that have been occurring throughout the last decade in the Pentecostal movement in Poland. These changes are largely due to the ‘Others’: migrants, newcomers, guests from the Global South and Ukraine. I am particularly interested in those changes that translate into the construction of social spaces developing as counterparts of the hegemony of national Catholicism, e.g., the construction of alternative models of belonging, citizenship and broadly understood activism.

One of the heuristic tools used to structure this research problem is the notion of the ‘Other’. It can be understood as both the part of the experience of Polish Pentecostalism and migrants, who are an equally new challenge for Polish Pentecostal groups, and as the Polish society in general. Therefore, my interest in the Pentecostal ‘Other’ is placed in the context of the new migration dynamics, which is part of the experience of many Pentecostal communities in Poland. I am interested in how this experience translates into civic involvement and activism, and to what extent it influences the construction of a new type of social imagination and everyday life practices, creating new spaces for mediation with hegemonic national Catholicism.

JUSTIFICATION:

Pentecostal movement in Poland is both expanding and marginal in relation to the Catholic religious and political matrix. Therefore, it is justified to see contemporary Pentecostalism as ‘Other’ in the Polish socio-religious landscape. Moreover, the transnational connectivity of Protestant Pentecostals, that was since the beginning of the movement one of its principal features, challenges the notion of Polish national Catholicism that has been evolving into its present shape most intensively in the last decade. At the same time, Pentecostalism in Poland has grown substantially in the last two decades, with a particular rise within the Catholic Charismatic movement. Conversions and reconversions between Protestant Pentecostals and Catholic Charismatics are not exceptional. This makes of Pentecostalism a specific type of socio-religious ‘Other’, both distant and familiar.

Furthermore, Pentecostalism in Poland proved to be receptive for multiple ‘Others’: migrants, missionaries, visitors coming from the Global South and Ukraine. This ‘Southern missionaries’ and ‘Ukrainian newcomers’ nexus is equally significant for contemporary Pentecostal developments in Poland as for Polish socio-politics. Therefore, it allows us to analyse how groups such as Pentecostals that are Polish religious and social ‘Others’, resonate with such important social and political issues as the current influx of migrants and with the refugee crisis. The current migrant crisis in Poland escapes simple political and social divisions. It is however assemblaged with current social and political debates and conflicts in Poland; thus the ‘Others’ constitute a complex tool, allowing further analysis of important social issues occurring in contemporary Poland, yet approached from outside of the religious mainstream.

RESEARCH:

The research is of ethnographic nature, conceived in order to construct academic knowledge through the transforming experience (Ingold 2014) of participation of the researcher in the lives of Pentecostal communities, people and leaders. The researched space constitutes an heuristic triangle of Krakow, the vibrant university and rapidly developing hub of international corporations; Lublin and Eastern Poland area being close to the epicentre of the current migratory crises, and Warsaw as the central point for multiple Pentecostal connections in Poland. The research will last twenty months during which our team will observe and participate in the construction of everyday life by Pentecostals, understand the connectivity patterns that manage social imaginaries and practices, and learn about civic engagement of Pentecostals in Poland.

EFFECTS:

The results of the project consider several levels. From studying particular cases we expect to elaborate an interpretative pattern which will inform about contemporary dynamics of Polish Pentecostal movements where ‘Others’ have introduced new forms of social imaginaries and practices.

I also expect to analyze how Pentecostals in Poland understand their belonging, their citizenship, civil responsibility and social engagement. This aspect is particularly important as the results will provide insight on these social groups that operate outside the Polish Catholic matrix and thus relate differently to the Catholic nationalist nexus.

Ultimately, unpacking the ‘Other’ by the use of the Southern-Ukrainian heuristic tool will provide an interesting comparative frame for multiple cases known from studies of West European and Southern Pentecostals. This will enable me to look at Polish Pentecostalism in the broader context of global circulations. Applying the framework of global Pentecostalism to Poland, will bring to light several aspects of global connectivity of Polish Pentecostalism thus far neglected.