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Special Section: Poland's Wars of Symbols

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This interdisciplinary section provides a set of complementary tools to analyse the major symbolic clashes in contemporary Poland. It combines historical, cultural, sociological gender studies and political studies perspectives to offer complex insights into recent major events including the Black Protest and other social movements, and as well as the continuing relevance of historical legacies including that of the Solidarity Movement. Taken together, the four essays comprise an in-depth study of the dynamics of culture in the political realm, with Poland as a specific case study.

In different ways and using diverse material, the papers explore the contestation of community and identity in Poland. They show that narratives and symbols of national belonging are fields of conflict and polarization, and they foreground the instability and ambiguity of national symbols that can be reframed, hijacked and subverted. The contributions focus on processes of erasure and replacement, but also on resistance, appropriation, playful subversion, and irony. The construction and defence of boundaries is a prominent common theme, especially between the canonical (cult of 'appropriate' heroes, iconic spaces) and the marginal (borderlands, remnants of the Communist heritage, ethnic and sexual minorities). At the same time, the essays also show the permeability of boundaries between the conflicted ideological camps and narratives.

Overall, the section explores questions of how symbolic conflicts play out in the context of both "structure" and "communitas" (Turner). By studying the consolidation of state power, political mobilization, and the representation of the nation via popular culture, this collection of essays explores the dynamics of the political in contemporary Poland. Its particular strength lies in the conjunction of analytical depth, provided by each of the

individual contributions, and empirical breadth, with subject material ranging from popular protest (Graff) to contemporary cinema (Lewis). The essays also provide insights into deeper historical continuities and genealogies (Graff, Kotwas and Kubik on Solidarity, Waligórska on the meanings of the cross), and offer theoretical interventions on subjects such as the nature of populism (Kotwas and Kubik) and cosmopolitanism (Lewis).