

THE SYMBOLS OF *SOLIDARITY* IN THE PERIOD OF MARTIAL LAW

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The strategics of Solidarnost in using symbols appeared to vary in form and content, although all the forms were devised illegally. The author mentions the following symbol forms: street wall graffiti, gifts with the symbols of religion and Solidarnost, brought to church services for the homeland by institution and company staff; also stamps, greeting cards for holidays, anniversaries and other occasions; calendars, magazine covers, leaflets, emblems, military medals, costume jewelry, poster and picket-sign slogans. In order to study all these types of signs it was necessary to give them a common scientific denominator, and that is their symbolism.

For some time now, scholars representing many different branches of study have been dealing with the question of symbol. In spite of this, the results of up-to-date studies wholly confirm the need to continue such studies - especially from the ethnological point of view - in order to uncode the essence of, or at least make more precise, the term *symbol* itself.

I would like to make clear that, in using the term *symbol*, I have in mind that category of signs whose meanings are understood only via abstract conotation. As a vital feature of the symbol I see also the combination, such as noted by S. Awiernicew (1988), material *image* with *deep sense*. The unifying nature of the symbol is dependent upon the joining of the material object and sense, bringing also together people for whom this sense is understandable. Of course, the *sense* structure of the symbol used is not univocal and is multi-layered. It is in fact based on the active, internal functioning of those who accept it. Also, symbol never belongs to only one synchronized cross-section of a given culture, since they penetrate the culture virtually, i. e. reaching people of all classes in the given culture. On one hand, is cultural memory which does not allow itself to be isolated in chronological layers and, on the other hand, cultural memory is actively correlated with new context and, under their influence, is transformed.

This short study is not intended to answer the fundamental questions and doubts concerning the complicated nature of symbol. It is however, an attempt at pondering the role played by symbols as well as their functioning, during the very specific situation which Poles were faced with during martial law.

In the 1980 the workers from Gdansk shipbuilding yard while going on strike placed on the gateway the image of the Lady of Czestochova and, the Pope John Paul II. Those were surmounted by with enormous oak cross decorated with white-and-red corona and national banner. Thousands of inhabitants of Gdansk who kept coming to the gateway of the shipbuilding yard during the strike brought flowers with them and decorated the gateway creating a specific *altar* in which dominated the symbols being very important for the Poles. As the time passed the *altar* was continually enriched with other signs related to the Polish national tradition.

Thus, already at the very beginning of its formation *Solidarity* recalled national and religious symbols demonstrating in this way the values which to be worth to identified with. The symbols became one of the forms to determine the identity of this great opposition movement. Using the symbol became especially important during the martial law which was established above all in order during to crush the *Solidarity* being in opposition toward communist authority and deprive it of social support. In spite of these attempts the *Solidarity* movement not only survived but it managed to gain more public support and the unheard of members of partisans. In view of the fact that its underground activities of the *Solidarity* as well as the possibilities of social communication in general were significantly restricted by the martial law rigours. It seems that the appropriate strategy of using symbols by the *Solidarity* was played an very important role in this respect.

This communication through symbols proceeded in different ways and, on different forms. The underground post-office issued hundreds of stamps, greeting, anniversary or occasional cards. Distributed were illegally printed calendars and posters. Rich in symbols was also the typography of illegal books and periodicals which were widely distributed. People in Poland bought various illegally manufactured badges and emblems. The *Solidarity* symbols were also painted on the walls of houses, they appeared on banners held during demonstrations and marches as well as on votives deposited in churches in many different forms which will be discussed farther in this paper. In addition to the *Solidarity* sign these were the symbols well-known to Polish people strongly connected with our cultural and historical tradition, although often either modified or interpreted anew they revealed their new meaning in the contemporary context in the light of current, often violent events.

Speaking about the *Solidarity* symbols one should begin with its graphical sign which initially was designed to be the name of the Union but finally it left its subject and entered the canon of national symbols. The graphical form itself (arrangement of letters and their notation) has certain symbolism. The sign is resemble to a group of people marching together holding a white-and-red banner. It was distinct clear reference to riots and protest i. e. to all this from which the *Solidarity* had arisen. The Polish banner waving above the crowd introduces a distinct national feature. During the martial law,

even thought wearing of the *Solidarity* badges was forbidden and punished they were commonly used. And it was not particularly to demonstrate one's membership of the Union but to manifest one's protest to against rendering the *Solidarity* illegal and against establishing of the martial law as well as to demonstrate the support for the *opposition*. The *Solidarity* emblems were pinned by many people who never been the *Solidarity* members. In those days it was one of signs representing the resistance and fight against the violence such as freedom or independence primory for which the *Solidarity* struggled. This sign was painted on the wall of houses, on banners as if dripping with blood. Soon it was customary to write in the same way the opposition slogans or inscriptions, which was called *solidarica* or *solidarka*. In 1983 during the visit the Pope in Poland the majority of unofficial welcome inscriptions and banners were written in this style replacing the forbidden word: *Solidarity*. The strong influence of this sign could be evidenced also during the last electoral campaign when different parties tried to place it their electoral posters and in order to draw public attention to their candidates. There even were reported several proceedings taken against the illegal usage of the *Solidarity* symbols. This sign had always univocally and positively interpreted and it evoked associations with the values virtues being the important for the Polish people, such as freedom, independence or repulsion of away violence.

The delegalization of the *Solidarity* as well as all of the occurances surrounding the declaration of martial law on December 13th 1981 brought about a particular situation in Poland. Generally speaking, the authorities and society stood against each other like two declared enemies and, more so than ever before, strongly felt their self-identity and mutual distinction of power. By *authorities* I have in mind government, communistic party apparatus, administration, armed forces and militia. Opposed to them was the underground *Solidarity* various their organizations, which were in the most part illegal, the church as well as millions of unorganized citizens. It would be useless, however, to force a precise definition of these two opposing sides. Important is the fact, that social consciousness separated these two sides very distinctly: there existed only *US* and *THEM*. In the common, everyday language, e. g. that used in documento, public appeals or also scholarly studies published by underground organizations, common place was the distinction of *US* and *THEM*. Although this division functioned earlier, the establishment of martial law gave it imparticular sharpness.

Above all, the division *US* - *THEM* brought upon itself the defacte meaning of *US* = Poles and *THEM* = foreign, occupants. Vocabulary from the Nazi-occupation period once again came into common use. In the underground press, as was the case in everyday talk (especially among youth) widespread became the use of terms such as: *lapanka* (round up), *kociol* (encirclement of the enemy), *Gestapo* (used in reference to the militia and armed forces), *Ausweis* (identity papers), etc. In leaflets and appels published by underground organizations their was talk of the necessity of organizing an opposition movements and the building of an underground nation. Practical handbooks for conspirators were also published. A very rich *war* folklore also came into being. Jokes, sayings, songs, etc., from World war II were revived, their texts modified or just brought up to date by changing key words so as to make them applicable to the current situation.

As was the case during the Nazi-occupation newly devised honor codes were established anew, e. g. honor codes for workmen, artists, journalists, musicians, actors, scholars etc., these defined the responsibilities expected of all so-called *righteous Poles* in their relations with the occupying authorities. These honor codes defined, for example, what sort of behaviour would be considered as collaboration, which included - among other things the receiving of any and all medals offered by authorities, the participating of artist and performers in official jubilees and ceremonies, appearing on television. In many circles, these honor codes were closely adhered to.

As soon as in the first days of martial law, symbols pertaining to the fight with Nazi-occupants began to appear. The return to the use of such symbols indicated not only that martial law was treated as a time of foreign occupation but it emphasized the division *US = nation* and *THEM = occupants*.

The symbol being most frequently used was an anchor encrowned with the letter *P*, i. e., the symbol of *Fighting Poland*. The anchor is christian symbolism stands for hope; this symbol, painted on walls or painted over Nazi announcements, was one of the most characteristic signs during World War II in Poland. It was later propagated in many reproductions in photographs and films or in exhibitions commemorating of the Polish fight against Nazism. During martial law, this symbol once again found its *natural* surroundings. Youth and members of underground organizations painted it on the walls of houses as well as on printed proclamations of martial law. This symbol was often modified - the anchor was drawn so as to form the letter *S*, *S* standing for *Solidarity*. This was also one of the graphic symbols most commonly printed on illegal i. e. underground postage stamps, greeting cards and calendars. The theme of Nazi-occupation also occurred in many series of stamps commemorating leading figures in the resistance movement, e. g. the series commemorating important figures from the Warsaw Uprising, or the series dedicated to the Polish People's Army (*Armia Krajowa*) an army which has also become a symbol for contemporary Poles.¹ This war - code was understood by everyone very easily, since it grew out of symbols commonly known, being a part of already established signs which might be determined as the national. These are above all the symbols pertaining to the periods of the Polish fights for independence, especially related to the January Uprising being the unsuccessful fight against Russia in 1863. The known distinguished Polish philosopher, Leszek Kolakowski for many years now residing in the diaspora recalls that the reaction of Poles to the establishment of martial law which reached the West could be divided into two categories, i. e. those who said that the situation was as if under occupation and those

¹ *Armia Krajowa* (The Peoples Army) - the part of Polish Armed Forces involved in conspiracy against the foreign occupants, which took its orders from the emigration Polish Government in London. This was the strongest body of the Polish conspiracy, and recognized Nazis and the Soviet Union as enemies of an independent Poland. After the war, the majority of Peoples Army officers were imprisoned and murdered by both Polish communist authorities as well as Soviet authorities.

Warsaw Uprising - occurred in 1944 upon the approach of Soviet armed forces to Nazi occupied Warsaw. This uprising ended in tragedy due to the Soviets to give aid to the Polish partisans. The Soviets waited until the partisans were massacred by the Nazi before entering Warsaw. The Warsaw Uprising is revered by Poles as a symbol of ultimate martyrdom and heroism in the name of the country. This tragic occurrence is also considered as one of the most dramatic episodes in Polish history.

who compared the situation to that following after the failure of the January Uprising. The *Solidarity* very often turned to the symbolism of past fights for independence with foreign occupants. Soon after the declaration of martial law, women began wearing black jewellery - cross with crucified eagles. These crosses were a faithful reproduction of so called *black jewellery* worn by women over 130 years earlier as a symbol of mourning after the failure of the anti-tsar uprising. There were also many movements to urge people to wear symbols of national mourning. The theme of the January Uprising found its reflection in the thematic stamps and greeting cards which were decorated with rebellion leaders of this time or reproductions of paintings by Arthur Grothger, who painted pictures showing the tragedy of the Uprising's failure, and were until just recently almost never exhibited publicly in Poland.

An important place among the *Solidarity* symbolism was held by those symbols which have reference to the 20 years of Polish independence during the inter war period. Of these symbols, the most important was the image of the Polish Marshall and distinguished politician of those years, Joseph Pilsudski who became famous due to the victory in the war against the Bolshevics. He is admired by Poles as one of their national heroes (but until just recently treated as a fascist dictator in official history handbooks). The image of Pilsudski appeared quite frequently on calendars, stamps, greeting cards etc., and many people bought his portrait. A very special place in the *Solidarity* symbolism by crowned eagle. It has been used as a Polish national symbol since the 13th century, and from 1919 as Poland's state crest. After World War II, the crown was officially removed from the eagle's head. The crowned eagle has probably never before been so widely used and such a variety of forms as during the period of martial law. Of course the *Solidarity* eagle had to be different from that used as the state crest (the symbol of the authorities), and therefore they brought back the eagle in a crown. Also used often was the crowned eagle dating from the period of the reign of Polish King Sigismund August. It has characteristic letter *S* related to King's name, which was interpreted a link to the *Solidarity*. One of the main graphic motives of the *Solidarity* publications, found also on flags of various local *Solidarity* organizations, as well as on religious votives, in Easter-time Good-Friday grave decorations, or in various other emblems, was the combination of the eagle and anchor, or the eagle to which was added the image of the Lady of Czestochova, or the crucified eagle. There was a multiple printing of a series of stamps on which were presented crowned eagles from different periods of Polish history, as well as eagles used as ensignians by various military divisions during the period of Polish independence. All of the commemorative envelopes issued by the underground post-office were stamped with a crowned eagle in several versions. There also appeared a joke involving the fight between the eagle and *WRON - a* (in Polish *wrona* means *crow*). *WRON* was the abbreviation for the *Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia of the Narodowego* (*Military Committee for the Salvation of the Nation*), of which General Jaruzelski was the head. In no time at all appeared jokes and sayings based on this motif. For example, was popular the saying *the crow will not overcome the eagle*. This same motif was also used in graphic.

Within the retory of symbols which *Solidarity* utilized, religious symbolism clearly dominated. Even before the *Solidarity* became a formal organization, the symbols under which the workers striking at Gdansk shipyard in 1980 appeared were, above all Our Lady Czestochowa and the crucified Christ. These symbols were placed on the main entrance gate to the shipyard, in the factory hals, and, in the room in which the historic, so-called 21 Gdansk Postulates were signed, a large crucifix was hung above the chairmas's table. These symbols later accompanied strikers and demonstrators everywhere. During martial law it was the most often repeated graphic motif of numerous underground publications, posters, cards and underground postage stamps.

In seaking of the religious symbols of the *Solidarity*, one should remember that the image of Our Lady of Czestoshowa, known as the Black Madonna, takes on a particularly significant meaning here. The cult of Black Madonna is extraordinarily strong and has an ancient tradition. The monastery at Jasna Gora at which the miraculous pilgrimages since the 15th century. Our Lady of Czestoshowa was chosen the patron saint of the Polish nation and has been named the Queen of Poland. It was Her care that saved the monastery at Jasna Gora and, by the same token, saved Poland from the Swedish invaders. It was She who was to protect Poles in critical moments in history; many victorious battles which decided for Polish independence are attributed to her intervention. It was to Her that many Poles prayed and still pray in times of danger, not only in individual cases but also at critical historical moments for the whole nation. The wound on the Madonna's face (according to legend the picture was profaned by to sword cuts during a robbery at the monastery) is the embodiment of suffering and persecution. During martial law it was painted in red-and-white - the national colours. Hence there was a clear attempt to stress that the wound inflicted once upon this Holiest of all Polish saints, had now been inflicted on the Polish nation. Indeed She is its patron.

The image of Our Lady is also an element of the *image* of Lech Walesa, who continually wears a Black Madonna pinned to his suit coat lapel whenever he appears publicly. It is an elemnt exhibited on many of his photographs and posters, also during the current presidential campaign.

Next to the Black Madonna, an equally universal symbol is the crucified Christ. Even during the present presidential campaign one of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's election postres shows him as leading a procession hand in hand with a The *Solidarity*,activist who is holding a large crucifix.Undeniably, aside from purely religious meaning and an accenting of the values to which the *Solidarity* refers in its battle against communism, the widely visible symbol of the cross should also be read as an attempt to express Poland's fate in this symbol of crucifixion. The history of Poland is arranged as a succession of tragic events connected with the battle for freedom of this nation and its dignity. Poland's suffering and martyrdom is seen as a personal towards crucifixion for the nation and the battle undertaken by the as the next phase of this journey. Such a view of the fate of one's own nation is exemplified in a fragment of a verse by an anonymous poet interned in one of the camps after the declartion of martial law. This quote was printed onto a calendar published by an underground press: *With an official decree,You have nailed, o Lord, Poland to the cross of history.* Also used repeatedly

on emblems, pins and underground postcards, incorporated into jewellery sold during martial law and into the graphic design of opposition periodicals was the symbol of the crucified, crowned eagle - Poland's national emblem. It was Poland that was spread out on the cross like Christ. This is undoubtedly a reference to the Romantic, messianistic view of Poland's fate. *Poland, the Christ of Nations*, wrote, among others the great poet and Romantic Adam Mickiewicz. This theme is extremely visible in the symbolism of the *Solidarity*. Especially after martial law, an evident reactualization of messianistic symbolism came about.

Among the symbols of the *Solidarity*, the figure of Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Wyszynski (the latter was superseded during the Stalin era and known for his unbending views regarding communism) likewise appears very often. On one of the greeting cards published by the *Solidarity*, the Pope is pictured reading a *Solidarity* newspaper, and another, he is shown blessing a small boy wearing a T-shirt with inscription *Solidarity* (a child wearing this T-shirt while walking through a field was used as the theme of a widely known poster printed on the occasion of the first anniversary of the founding of the *Solidarity*). A couple of stamps with various poses of the Pope embracing Lech Walesa were also printed. During last years elections to the Polish senate, this was also a motif used on election posters and were quite popular among Poles, who decorated their homes with them. Also sold were emblems with the image of Lady of Czestochowa, scars on whose face were printed in red and white. The under postoffice published numerous series of stamps with religious themes, such as a serious entitled *Polish Madonnas* or a series of *Pietas*, on which instead of Christ, the Virgin Mary is holding a *Solidarity* activist killed by the secret police during martial law (a different victim on each stamp) or miners from the famous *Wujek* mine who were killed during the first days of martial law. There also appeared a series of stamps entitled *Martyrs and Religious Heroes*, beginning with St. Wojciech, who is said to have given up his life for his faith and ending with the Rev. Popieluszko, who gave up his life for his faith and his country. These are only a few examples of this very rich symbolism which harked upon values which are hold important for Poles, among which was the Christian faith. This saturation of religious symbolism gave an added meaning to the difference between *US* and *THEM*. On the side of *US* was also the Christian faith. On the side *THEM*, values foreign to the Poles, and thrown out by them.

I would like to add, that the church as an institution more or less officially supported the *Solidarity* movement and so the onset of martial law brought into many churches the same symbols to which the *Solidarity* evoked. This would be noticed, for instance, in decorating of *Christ's tomb* during Easter- Friday services where the theme of Christ's martyrdom was connected with the theme martyrdom of Poland and the fate of the *Solidarity*.

A popular slogan of many demonstration organized by the *Solidarity* was that *Poland is US!* And this *US* was filled by the with maningful content: the crownes eagle, a partisan fighter from 1863, Pilsudski, the Warsaw Uprising, the Virgin Mary, the Crucified Christ, the Pope, etc. A certain modification of these known and correctly understood by everyone symbols, (which the authorities tried, unsuccessfully, to

eradicate since the communist take over of Poland) reinforced the opinions, that the *Solidarity* is a continuation of all hitherto highly held by Poles values: nation, independence, freedom and christianity. This was emphasized in many different ways, such as by the underground publishing of the formentioned postage stamp series *Martyrs and Spiritual Heroes* which begins with St. Wojciech, the bishop who was killed in the 10th century by the Prussians, and ending with the Rev. Jerzy Popieluszko, who was murdered by the Secret Service and was one of the spiritual guides of the *Solidarity*. A similar series of stamps, dedicated to reknowned 1863 anti-tzar rebellion leaders and, in the same graphic form, a series of famous leaders of Peoples Army (*Armia Krajowa*) and the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. On some of the few calendars printed by the underground, a crowned eagle is climbing a schackle of photographs of four great Poles - the Pope, Cardinal Wyszyński, Czesław Miłosz (an emigrant poet winner of the Nobel Prize, whose works were until just recently banned in Poland) and, Lech Wałęsa. A quotation of Miłosz also ends a greeting card published by the *Solidarity*, on which is pictured King Mieszko I, who is responsible for the baptism of Poland, crowned eagle, the Lady of Czestochowa and, in the center, an image of the Pope raising his hand in a blessing. An example may also be the twin badges which on one, is shown a man painting the symbol of the Fighting Poland on a city wall with the date 1939, and on the other, the same motif with the date 1983 and, the same anchor but with a letter S.

The Polish sociologist Stanisław Osowski, differentiates two types of national ideology: those, which are based on the values of the nation-fatherland, with authorities and politics as something foreign, outside, and those which are based on the idea that politics is tool, but also the highest achievement of nation. In the Polish situation of a long lasting absence of freedom and independence and to have to serve a foreign authority (it is worthy to note, that the period after World War II was also felt by people in this same way) the authorities was always foreign, and people did not identify with them but the nation was sacrosanct. During the martial law, these emotions took on especially sharp meaning. The symbols used by the *Solidarity* were an expression of national ideology, as well as a tool of strengthening this ideology. These symbols were those known and revered by all Poles, but once again discovered thanks to the new, violent situation.

An analysis of the symbolism of the *Solidarity* allows also one to conclude that one is dealing with two categories of symbolism: symbols of defeat and symbols of victory. On the one hand, there were symbols referring to national uprisings against the German and Soviet occupant. On the other hand, there were symbols connected with the regaining of Poland's independence in the interwar years or the *Miracle on the Vistula* - a victorious battle with the Bolsheviks near Warsaw in 1920 which defended Europe against the onslaught of communism. Placed side by side were images of Polish as heroic *martyrs for their faith and nation* who paid for hopeless causes with their own death, and images of those who could be called *Eminent Poles* whose battles or success and fame were recognized as victories for Poland. This juxtaposition of the two together represents the mutual penetration of the symbols of defeat and victory, and seems to perfectly reflect the 19th century messianistic vision of Poland's fate and her role in

Europe - a vision in which tragic battles and suffering and misfortune gain, by convention of this myth, a personal, valued and essential dimension. They are the basic for the positive changes and the ultimate victory. According to these Romantic visions, under Providence and with the sacrifice of many of its generations, a miraculous turn of events would at last occur: its heretofore enslaved people would regain their independence. In the past this justified fights for freedom which were often hopeless and condemned to fail. In the symbolism of the *Solidarity*, the actualization of symbols related to this myth and the references to thought patterns which are rooted in just such a view of the history of Poland are clearly visible. The common identification of society with these symbols bears witness to the fact that the Romantic way of thinking is not foreign to Poles as it through just such signs to defeat and victory that the present reality is appraised by Poles, and their attitude towards their government, captivity and violence has been expressed. Under just such symbols the fight for individual freedom and national independence was taken up once again in 1980.

SOME SYMBOLS OF 'SOLIDARITY'



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SIMBOLI *SOLIDARNOSTI* U VRIJEME RATNOG STANJA

Sažetak

U ovom članku pokušava se razmotriti uloga i mehanizmi funkcioniranja simbola u specifičnoj situaciji ograničene društvene komunikacije do koje je došlo u Poljskoj nakon uvođenja ratnog stanja 1980. godine. Članak je posvećen simbolici "solidarnosti" kao opozicijskoj strani u odnosu prema komunističkoj sindikalnoj organizaciji i njenoj vladi, a istovremeno "Solidarnost" je predstavljala društveni pokret od najvećeg značenja. Čini se da svoje održavanje "Solidarnost" kao formalna grupa nakon njena legaliziranja i društvene potpore neviđenih razmjera duguje i pravoj strategiji operiranja simbolima.

To komuniciranje preko simbola vršilo se na razne načine i u raznim oblicima: zidni napisi, izdavaštvo ilegalne pošte i tiskare (kalendari, marke, plakati, leci i sl.), zavjetni darovi u crkvama, natpisi i amblemi na zastavama za vrijeme demonstracija itd. Sve se to zbivalo u uvjetima kad su vlada i pučanstvo stali jedan protiv drugoga kao dvije izrazito neprijateljske snage koje su izraženije nego ikad osjećale svoj vlastiti identitet i posebnost. U društvenoj svijesti ta je podjela bila vrlo izrazita: postojali su samo "Oni" i "Mi". Opozicija je značila: "Mi - Poljaci", "Oni - okupatori, stranci". Društvo je počelo formulirati svoj odnos prema vladi kao prema okupatoru. "Solidarnost" se također počela pozivati na simboliku pokreta otpora iz II svj. rata. U tu kategoriju simbola spada sidro okruženo slovom "P", tj. znak Borbene Poljske, koji se ispisivao na zidovima kuća ili su se oni otiskivali preko obavijesti o uvođenju ratnog stanja. - Bio je to i jedan od najčešćih grafičkih motiva na ilegalnim markicama, čestitkama i kalendarima. Važno mjesto među simbolima "Solidarnosti" imali su i oni koji su se odnosili na period od 20 godina neovisne Poljske nakon I. svj. rata. Dominirajuću ulogu odigrali su ipak religijski simboli, posebno slika Majke Božje Čenstohovske, razapetog Krista i Pape Ivana Pavla II kao i svećenika Popieluszke kojega je služba sigurnosti SB ubila. Ovo korištenje religijske simbolike dodatno je naglašavalo razliku "MI" i "ONI", jer je na strani "MI" stajalo katoličanstvo, kršćanska vjera, a na strani "ONI" vrijednosti strane poljskom narodu (ateizam, komunizam). Simbol križa koji je bio toliko eksponiran u različitim situacijama treba shvatiti također kao simboliku raspete poljske sudbine, sudbine Poljske države. Tu se vidi i povezanost s mesijanskim mitom "Poljske - Krista naroda".

Prijevod: Neda Pintarić