— SUBURBANIZATION OF THE SELF:

Religious Revival and Socio-Spatial Fragmentation in Contemporary Poland

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Abstract

In this article, I trace the elective affinity between planetary suburbanization and emergent forms of radical religiosity. I show how the centuries-long spatial hegemony of the Catholic Church in Poland has recently been undermined by the 'fundamentalist' broadcaster Radio Maryja—the bellwether of the Polish right-wing nationalist resurgence. I describe the twentieth-century suburbanization of both the state and Catholicism in Poland, supported by an analysis of a village-cum-suburb in one of Poland's largest agglomerations. I show how the latest wave of suburbanization, triggered by Poland's opening up to global flows of capital in 2004, ran parallel to the emergence of a 'post-secular', 'individual' and 'intellectual' strain of faith. I tie these in with the life stories and changes in gender and labour regimes of two key informants. I also show that the surge of right-wing nationalism should not be understood as a backlash against neoliberalization, but that it represents instead a project of regime change and new elite formation.

Introduction

The victory of the Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawliedliwość: PiS) in Poland's elections of 2015 did not come as a surprise. The policies that followed in the wake of it, however, did. While PiS began with a centrist campaign, after taking on the mantle of power, the party of Jarosław Kaczyński launched an ambitious programme of regime change from within. *Rozwibrowanie*—a term coined by one of the strategic advisors of PiS—captures this process very well. It is derived from the Polish word for vibration and denotes the shaking up of the status quo and the waking up of hitherto dormant social groups. It aims at breaking down old dividing lines and forging new alliances. In the course of this political *blitzkrieg*, previously marginal forces suddenly assumed the centre stage of politics. This includes the National Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny: ONR), a neo-fascist group that has enjoyed the government's benevolent tutelage, and the powerful lobby of hunters and climate-change deniers who seem to have hijacked Poland's Ministry of Environment.

The most formidable of all, however, is *Radio Maryja*. On the face of it, *Radio Maryja* is merely a self-funded Catholic radio broadcaster established in 1991. Since then, however, the station has grown into a veritable media and political empire, and by 2018 it had become the second most popular social movement in Poland, with a level of support estimated at 9% of the national population (Pacewicz, 2018). *Radio Maryja* currently boasts two million listeners, and has organized a veritable 'church within the Church', including its own TV station, daily newspaper, university complex, film production company and even mobile telecommunications network (now defunct). Its radical politics (nationalistic, Eurosceptic, anti-establishment, xenophobic and

anti-communist) has been denounced by the Church authorities, including the last three Popes. Tadeusz Rydzyk, the movement's founder, has for years served as the favourite villain of the liberal media (Pobłocki, 2004), who wryly portray the massed ranks of his supporters as an 'army of mohair berets'. This is a derogatory term which alludes to their militancy, mature age (the mohair beret is a fashion item only among older females) and intellectual bluntness, if not obtuseness. Now, after being mocked and ridiculed for two decades, *Radio Maryja* has become the darling of the government.

My argument is that the 'traditionalist' *Radio Maryja* is not a vestige of Poland's past, but actually a product of its present, and one which represents a peculiar but integral part of the multifarious process of planetary suburbanization (Keil, 2017). Hence my analysis diverges from that of both liberals and Marxists, with their putative 'return of the repressed'. For liberals, the PiS government embodies the political victory of the uncouth, unruly and uncivilized forces that have always been present in Polish society and only recently kept in temporary abeyance. The knee-jerk explanations of left-wing authors, on the other hand, often boil down to little more than blaming the arrogant and self-serving liberal establishment. Ost (2005) and Kalb (2009), for example, claim that the disgruntled 'losers' of the neoliberal restructuring triggered in 1989 gradually moved over to join the radical right. Hence the rise of the concept of illiberalism that is now widely used to discuss political developments in countries such as Poland, Hungary or Turkey. I argue that right-wing nationalism is not merely a backlash against neoliberalization. It is far more ambitious than that, for it represents a project of (new) elite formation. Just like Viktor Orbán in Hungary or Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, what the Kaczyński regime seeks to nurture is its own loyal middle class. *Radio Maryja* is in the forefront of that process.

As Riley (2011) has demonstrated, twentieth-century fascism was not an ideology of the downtrodden but of the moderately well-to-do who organized in order to defend their (eroded or endangered, if only symbolically) privilege. Whilst during the 'Asian crisis' of 1998–2003 Poland's unemployment level surpassed 20%, since then it has dwindled to stand at 6% today. Average salaries have also risen. Many skilled blue-collar occupations (especially in construction but also in manufacturing) nowadays secure higher incomes than those of office clerks. The Polish economy weathered the 2008 meltdown practically unscathed. As evidenced in Figures 1 and 2, from the 'Polish crisis' of 1979–81 until Poland's accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004, the country was mired in a devastating crisis. The post-2004 economic boom generated a sense of precarious security. Scaremongering orchestrated by the PiS government builds on the fear of losing the 'privilege' of this long-awaited stability.

Hence the discourse of the PiS aims at restoring the dignity lost during the painful, protracted crisis of 1980–2003. Kaczyński accuses his liberal predecessors of being relentless Poland-bashers, and insists that now Poles should be proud of themselves. Perhaps the most telling feature of this was the government's PR campaign, which saw several of the Polish lorries that regularly transport cargo around Europe painted with the slogan #RespectUS. This was part of a larger project seeking to 'raise Poland from its knees'. Government representatives insist that their policies are neither nationalistic nor xenophobic but simply uphold the people's right to feel 'at home' in their 'own' country. As I will show in this article, this domestic metaphor should be understood literally. Just as revealing is the way that the mundane logistic infrastructure that facilitates Poland's place in the EU economic order became the literal carrier of the #RespectUS message. Both examples demonstrate that Poland's nationalist policies are a response to the social and economic processes unleashed not in 1989, but rather in 2004.

Once Polish space was opened up to flows of foreign capital in 2004, a construction frenzy lasting fifteen years ensued. EU funds made it possible, amongst others, to complete Poland's highway network—a project which had been jumpstarted during the 1970s but had to be aborted in the wake of the debacle in 1980. The new
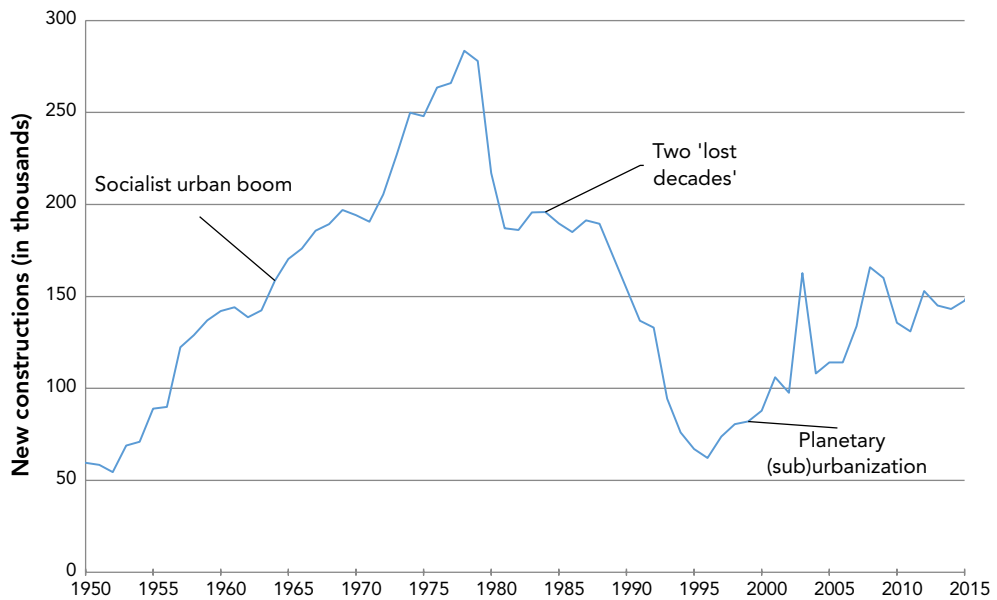
FIGURE 1   The three periods in Poland's recent urban and economic history (*source*: figure produced by the author using data published by the Polish Statistical Office [Główny Urząd Statystyczny: GUS; URL https://stat.gov.pl/])
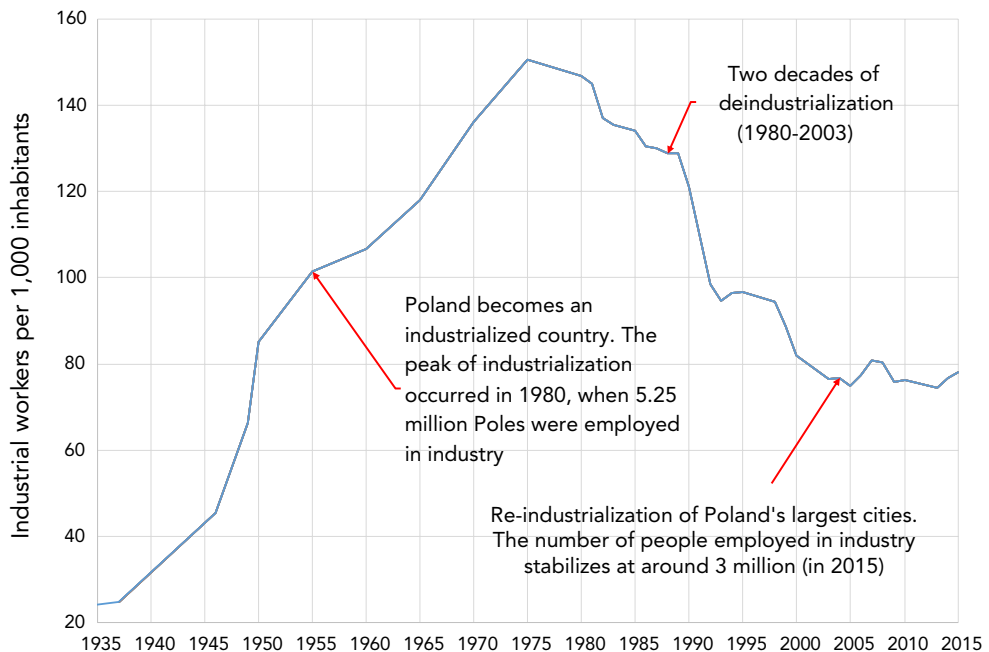
FIGURE 2   The dynamics of industrialization and deindustrialization in Poland, 1935–2015 (*source*: figure produced by the author using data published by the Polish Statistical Office [Główny Urząd Statystyczny: GUS; URL https://stat.gov.pl/])

investments were tangible evidence that, after two decades of conspicuous stasis, 'Poland was changing'. In 2011, this secured a swift re-election for the liberals—an impressive feat in Eastern Europe, where incumbents are frequently voted out of office. Little wonder, then, that the liberal discourse relied extensively on construction metaphors. 'We are not doing politics but building bridges', read their campaign slogan. 'Let's be constructive' (*Zgoda buduje*)—ran another. Yet the enthusiasm for such technocratic 'politics of warm tap water' (as their critics dubbed it) was itself becoming increasingly lukewarm. Hot water in your bathtub may be exciting when it is a novelty, but it is easy to start taking it for granted. The language of 'domestic nationalism' developed by PiS represents the next logical step—providing a sense of being 'at home' in this new, post-2004 reality.

While authors such as Ost or Kalb seek explanations for the rise of 'illiberalism' in the hidden realm of production, I argue that the spaces of residence are equally, if not more, pertinent. This is why I analyse how the post-2004 thrust of suburbanization prepared the ground for the later successes of the Kaczyński regime. This point has salience beyond contemporary Poland. As Jerram (2011: 38–9) notes, European fascism emerged at a time when left-wing parties enjoyed a confident hegemony over politics on the shop floor. Because the fascists could not beat the socialists in the factories, they took to the streets, where they coalesced around street fighting. In this sense, one could say that the far right were the first to claim 'the right to the city' (Pobłocki, 2018: 378). The earlier, left-wing urban uprisings (most notably the Paris Commune of 1871) were grounded in the politics of (artisanal) labour (Gould, 1995; Ross, 2015). The geography of twenty-first-century right-wing nationalism is of course different, but in order to understand it, we need to scrutinize the politics underpinning the spaces of residence, and not merely the spaces of work.

Moreover, from the Paris Commune through the wave of protests in 1968 to today's revolts in Tahir Square, Syntagma Square and Gezi Park, images of urban politics are often about centrality. And yet the peripheries have been equally, if not more, vocal—as demonstrated by Holston (2009) for the Brazilian or Bayat (1998) for the Iranian case. Both have shown how, to borrow Bayat's formulation, 'the silent encroachment of the ordinary' by rank-and-file residents eventually coalesced into political change on a national scale. The present article follows this line of research and focuses on quotidian micro-practices that provide a *spatial* explanation for the rise of *Radio Maryja*. The literature on urban post-secularism or the 'fundamentalist city' has largely been focused on urban centres as well as urban communities (Baxstrom, 2008; AlSayyad and Mejgan, 2010; Beaumont and Baker, 2011). In contrast, my ethnographic analysis of 'new everyday suburbanism' (Keil, 2017: 177) and of the suburban 'politics of everyday life' (*ibid*.: 183) shows how planetary suburbanization has facilitated a move away from the local community and towards something I call 'multi-scalar individualism'. I also develop the idea of 'fragmentation', which captures the elective affinity between radical forms of religiosity and the process of suburbanization. I combine insights from ethnographic fieldwork and a biographical analysis of the life trajectory of a 'mohair' *Radio Maryja* partisan with an analysis of the spatial transformations of her most intimate dwelling milieu and of the metropolitan region she inhabits.

I begin, however, with an analysis of how Poland's pattern of suburbanization fits into the global landscape of sprawling development. I compare and contrast twentieth-century suburbanization on both sides of the Iron Curtain and argue that the distinctiveness of the Polish case lies in the entanglement of the Catholic Church in Poland's transformation from a rural to a suburban country.

Complete (sub)urbanization East and West

'The postsocialist period marks a pivotal point in the evolution of cities in Central and Eastern Europe', note Stanilov and Sýkora (2014: 316). 'For the first time in the history of the region, suburbanization has become the dominant process of

metropolitan growth, [with] population increases in the suburbs surpassing the growth registered in central cities'. They also report that 'suburban sprawl, which was virtually unknown before the fall of the communist regime, has become a defining feature of the postsocialist metropolitan landscapes' *(ibid.)*. In a similar vein, Mantey and Sudra (2019) argue that suburbanization only recently became a central feature of the economies of the East and the South that are busy 'catching up' with the 'developed' West.

This is both true and untrue. As I will show, twenty-first-century suburbanization is a novel phenomenon with distinct features, but it is also embedded in older trajectories of sprawling development. As is easily discernible from Figures 1 and 2, the *annus mirabilis* of 1989 represents no watershed for Poland. Instead, there are two other major tipping points that break its post-war history into three distinct periods. The year 1980 marks the end of a protracted state-led modernization boom, predicated on both industrialization and suburbanization, which I call the Long Sixties (1956–1980). This was followed by two 'lost decades' (1980–2003) of urban crisis and deindustrialization. After Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, a new dynamic emerged comprising the re-industrialization of Poland's largest metropolitan centres as well as a market-led (sub)urban revival. It is crucial to appreciate that these three periods occur, roughly, at the very same juncture points as for Western countries. The early 1980s, for Brenner (2004) amongst others, marks the onset of global neoliberalization itself, and the 'Asian crisis' of 1998–2003 is generally regarded as providing the background to the rise of global financialization and planetary (sub)urbanization. In this sense, countries such as Poland are hardly lagging 'behind' global trends or needing to 'catch up', but are fundamentally 'coeval' with them, to borrow a term from Fabian (1983).

This pertains also to the pattern of development in the mid-twentieth century. State-led 'urban Keynesianism' ruled supreme on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Socialist housing estates comprising modernist high-rise towers—that to this day serve as the symbol of state socialism—were quintessentially suburban (Pobłocki, 2012: 82–3). They were often built *within* the administrative borders of cities, and this is perhaps why they have fallen under the radar of suburban research. Yet at a more fundamental level, just like in Western Europe and America, during the 'the Long Sixties' (which in each case occurred at slightly different times), socialist countries transitioned from 'implosive' to 'explosive' urbanization, to use the concept borrowed by Brenner and Schmid (2014) from Henri Lefebvre (2003). The situation in Poland at the time of this transformation was typically described, to use Alfred Weber's phrase, as a move from 'agglomeration' towards 'deglomeration'. This transition did not only express itself through fringe development within existing metropoles, but first and foremost through the widespread suburbanization of the countryside. The latter aspect has hitherto received little scholarly attention.

The rise of 'implosive', compact agglomeration in the late nineteenth century was predicated upon institutionalizing a sharp urban-rural divide (Cronon, 1991; Smith, 1991). Under such a regime, one became urban by migrating to a big city and relinquishing the rural 'way of life'. From the Long Sixties onwards, the modern way of life became increasingly accessible, regardless of one's physical location. You no longer had to come to the city—instead, the 'urban way of life' came to you. Lefebvre (2003: 1) described this as the world's 'complete urbanization'. I concur with Keil (2017: 67–70), who argues that it is more appropriate to describe this process as planetary suburbanization. The Polish countryside hardly became 'urban' in the sense that it started resembling nineteenth-century Paris or twentieth-century New York. Instead, the architectural style (the single-family detached house) and sparse settlement pattern, as well as the novel lifestyle idioms, were reminiscent of the global 'everyday suburbanism'. Such suburbanization was indeed all-encompassing in the Lefebvrian sense because it engulfed metropoles and towns as well as the nominal countryside. Warsaw, which before 1939 was one of the most densely populated cities on Earth, was

rebuilt after 1945 as a centreless, sprawling modernist city. Nonetheless, this kind of makeover was most transformative in the countryside. From this point of view, Poland's twentieth-century 'urban revolution' actually represented a massive leap from the rural to the suburban.

This explains the conundrum of Eastern Europe's putative 'incomplete urbanization' (Szelenyi, 1996). Brenner and Schmid (2014) show how our analytical vocabulary still falls prey to the narrow, demographic definition of urbanization, as fashioned during the 1950s by Kingsley Davis. If we adhere to the Kingsley Davis dogma, then Poland is indeed modestly urbanized: roughly 60% of its population dwells in areas denoted administratively as cities, although since 2004, the nominal number of Polish urbanites has actually fallen by 1%. But this does not mean that Poland has 'ruralized', or that its urbanization remains incomplete. Nowadays only 5% of the Polish population (and 13% of its 'rural' inhabitants) are employed in agriculture (Halamska, 2016: 62). This is why it is more instructive to look at urbanization as a broader social and cultural process—a 'way of life', as it has been conceptualized by Luis Wirth (Brenner and Schmid, 2014). Urbanization nowadays is about *how* one lives and not *where* one lives.

To be sure, the death of the compact city and explosive mushrooming of (sub) urban ways of life have also transformed landscapes, and there is an ongoing debate about how this new, dispersed form of development ought to be called. However, gauging whether to call it deglomeration, sprawl, fringe development, peri-urbanization, extended urbanization, suburbanization, the in-between-city or a *desakota* is not my prime concern here. Instead, I argue that 'urban' research ought to look beyond the largest metropolitan centres (and their fringes) and embrace spaces such as Poland's nominal 'countryside'. Schmid (2014) once argued that Switzerland at large can be understood as a giant city. In a similar vein, I would say that Poland represents a massive suburb. I have opted to look at Poland's sprawling landscape through the lens of suburban theory as developed by Keil (2017) because it is best suited to my case and purpose. First, Poland's overall settlement pattern is fundamentally sparse. Its 'large cities' are tiny from a global point of view, and the country's overall population density is small: 124 people per square kilometre, while in Germany the figure is 231, in Britain 245, in Japan 337 and in South Korea 490. Second, the people who inhabit this sprawling landscape live a thoroughly suburban life, no matter whether they dwell in a nominal 'city' or a 'village'. This is why, following Keil (2017: 26), I understand the suburb not as a place (or a location) but as a process as well as a way of life. Embracing the term 'suburban' also allows me to compare and contrast the twentieth- and twenty-first-century patterns of 'urban explosion' and then arrive at my central point, which is to analyse how these spatial transformations have refashioned politics.

The key difference between the two waves of suburbanization lies in the role played by the state and in the (dis)connection between suburbs and labour regimes. Twentieth-century suburbanization was by and large driven by the state. It may have girded the globe, but it was essentially an inter*national* phenomenon, because it was organized around the national scale. Even though the actual spatial outcomes may have varied—metropolitan vertical suburbs in the East look very different from the horizontal suburbs in the West, for example—on both sides of the Iron Curtain '(sub) urban Keynesianism' was the dominant force (Pobłocki, 2012: 67–70). What is new in planetary suburbanization is the fact that the state no longer acts as the hegemonic agent of development (Keil, 2017: 11). The neoliberal rescaling triggered in the early 1980s was, in Brenner's words, a move away from an 'autocentric' to a 'multiscalar' regime. The former could also be described as mono-scalar, in the sense that it 'promot[ed] a particular scale as a relatively self-contained, self-propelled unit of economic development' (Brenner, 2004: 206).

While it is true that nowadays the national scale is no longer the centre of gravity for economic, social or cultural processes, there is one main caveat to this:

politics. The political realm represents perhaps the very last sphere of human activity that is contained within national borders. To be sure, there has been some devolution of politics to the local level, as well as a parallel rise of supra-national institutions such as the European Union. Yet the political contention is still by and large organized alongside national publics, and so is the democratic process. While there may have been some portents of an emerging global public opinion—this is, for example, how Harvey (2012: 116–17) understood the synchronized global wave of street protests in 2003 against the US-led invasion of Iraq—this is still a long way from the election of a global government. The rolling back of the nation-state has, however, reshaped national politics. The example of *Radio Maryja* provides an excellent case in point. It is a prominent political actor that produces and exploits a very different geography than, say, political parties or trade unions—institutions that used to run the political show throughout the twentieth century.

 Radio Maryja has found a new socio-spatial anchor for its radical politics. It stands in sharp contrast to (as well as actively combatting) both the state and the official Catholic Church. Both the latter are territorially organized institutions, while *Radio Maryja* is not. Moreover, *Radio Maryja*'s form of 'traditionalism' is of a completely different order. Twentieth-century suburbanization generated a community-based form of politics which in the United States, for example, manifested in a bigoted defence of the property values and racial purity of a homogenous, middle-class white community (Kruse, 2005). Polish middle-class politics during the twentieth century was—because of the different nature of the socialist state—more progressive (Pobłocki, 2018). Yet twenty-first-century (sub)urban politics, as Keil (2017: 181–3) argues, is governed by a different set of principles and needs to be understood on its own terms. The traditional 'quiet bigotry' of the 'sitcom suburb' is long gone. Today's bigotry is still suburban but, as I will show, it is also explosive: it is militant, post-secular and multi-scalar.

 In short, twentieth-century global suburbanization was state-led, communal and labour-centred. This was so largely because the suburbs developed in tandem with spaces of production. They were essentially spaces of reproduction, i.e. places from which one commuted to work (Keil, 2017: 189). While many suburbanites still do commute nowadays, the process of financialization has profoundly reshaped the meaning of the suburban 'way of life'. The new suburbs—and the one I analyse in this article represents a superb example of this—are increasingly 'rentier suburbs'. At one level, this stems from the massive relocation of production from the West (and the East) to the global South. This did not bring about the abolition of labour in the West but instead led to a proliferation of 'bullshit jobs' (Graeber, 2018). As a consequence, even though the middle-class salaried masses in the West travel to their jobs every day, work as such has ceased to be the central pillar of their identity. This has also redefined the nature of the suburban experience, which, as Halawa (2015) documents with regard to the Polish case, is now structured more by fluctuations on the global currency markets (as many mortgages in Poland are forex-denominated) than by work.

 A central feature of this multi-scalar suburban experience is its pervasive individualism, which, as shown in a study of Warsaw's Białołęka district, 'oscillates between libertarianism on the one hand and social anomie on the other' (Lewicki *et al.*, 2016: 275). There is an overwhelming scalar vacuum left by the absentee state, visible on a daily basis through the lack of public services such as schools, kindergartens and clinics. The new suburbanites communicate this vacuum in their lives through the sentiment of being 'left alone', and indeed very little exists between the atomized individuals (or individual households) at the bottom scale and global forces at the top. In contradistinction, the twentieth-century (sub)urban boom in Poland was driven by the state and was centred around a local community. Socialist planning in general pivoted around the 'microdistrict' (*microraion* in Russian, *osiedle* in Polish, *lakótelep* in Hungarian)—a high-rise neighbourhood that was supposed to be self-sufficient

and inward-looking. The infrastructure that addressed most of the residents' needs (retail shops, health clinics and schools) was designed to be within walking distance. The socialist metropolis was conceived as a polycentric cluster of such suburban neighbourhoods—towns within cities (Figure 3). And as we will see, the nominal 'countryside' was swiftly drawn into this polycentric, sprawling model of spatial development.

Because the twentieth-century suburbanization process was state-led, it tended to produce homogenous spatial outcomes within nation-states. Hence America's strip developments and the dull monotony of its sitcom suburbs. The monotony of the socialist *microraion* and its suburbanized countryside was different, however, because the socialist state had different priorities to the capitalist one. While American suburban expansion hinged on what Harvey (2010: 48) called a 'state-finance nexus' (hence the salience of the government funding agencies Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae for what may have seemed like a market-driven development), the Polish case is distinguished globally by what may be called the 'state-church nexus'. Historically, the Polish state has been very weak—for example, it did not even exist during the climacteric nineteenth century. In order to execute the ambitious modernization plan during the Long Sixties, the government therefore had to flirt with Church authorities in order to muster the necessary support and resources.

After the 1980 state failure, the Catholic Church filled the resulting vacuum and completed the process of suburbanization that had been jumpstarted by the communists. This is why, contrary to secularist expectations, the years 1945–1989 witnessed the largest boom in church-building in Poland's entire history (Snopek *et al.*, 2019). As Figure 4 shows, a substantial chunk of these 3,781 churches were erected during the

FIGURE 3   Poland's community-built churches represent the completion of the socialist 'unfinished utopias' (photo by Igor Snopek, reproduced with permission)
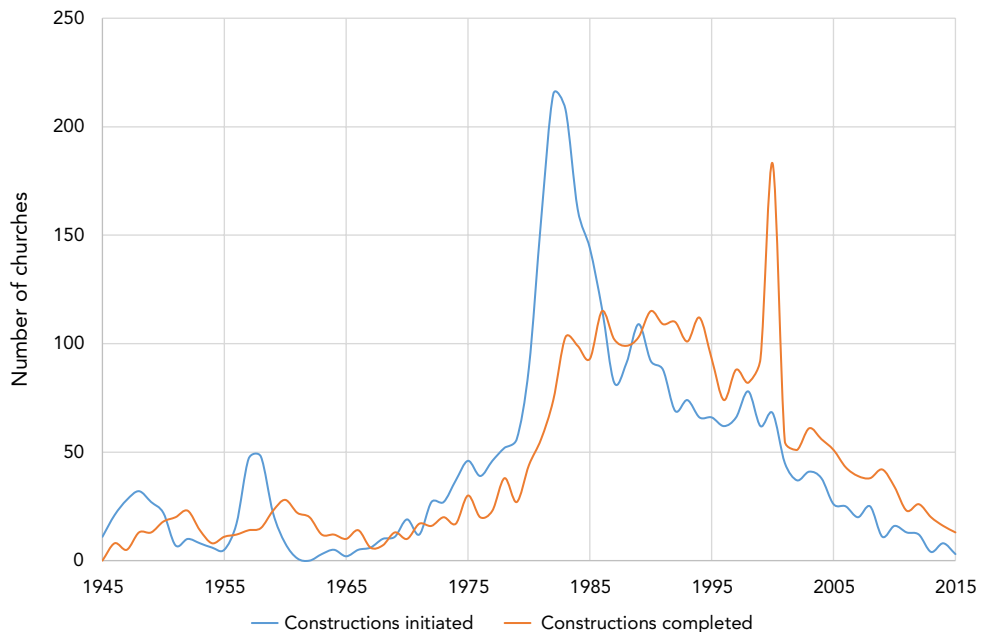
FIGURE 4   Church constructions initiated and completed in Poland, 1945–2015
(*source*: figure produced by the author using data collected by Kuba Snopek and the
Day-VII Architecture research team)

1980s, continuing the state-led construction boom that had unfolded earlier under the
communists. During the 1960s, as part of the millennial anniversary of the founding
of the Polish state in 966, the state organized a massive grassroots school-building
campaign in which many residents participated. The campaign, known as 'Community
Action' (*czyn społeczny*), saw the construction of a thousand schools in both 'urban'
and 'rural' areas. The Church emulated and expanded on this strategy. The new
mega-churches were not only 'houses of God' but actually served as multi-purpose
local community centres. This is why church-building in Poland can be seen as the
equivalent of suburban self-constructions in other parts of the world, notably in Brazil
(Holston, 2009).

  The state-church nexus was mutually beneficial. On the one hand, the communist
authorities 'borrowed legitimacy' from the Catholic authorities (Poznanski, 1996: 63).
On the other, in the course of the post-war modernization the Church underwent
a major transformation, mainly by emulating some of the successes enjoyed by the
communists. As Lebow (2013) points out, state socialism in Poland could not be
described as a totalitarian regime aimed at crushing the individual and their agency.
Instead, it engendered many 'unfinished utopias'—meticulously planned (suburban)
environments *designed* to facilitate social and political activism. And even if during the
1980s the residents' energies were channelled towards erecting crosses or churches, the
spirit of civic engagement was entirely congruent with communist ideals. This is why, as
Lebow shows, *Solidarność*—a 10-million strong social movement which coincided with
the state failure of 1980—actually aimed at delivering the early (i.e. Stalinist) promises
of the communist revolution and was not opposed to it.

  It took a while for the Church authorities to realize how momentous the post-
war transformation was. During the 1950s it adopted a conservative line and openly
admonished the readiness with which peasant sons and daughters rejected their

rural lifestyles and mores. For centuries, the Catholic Church was first and foremost a powerful landowner, and the clergy represented a parallel quasi-state elite. Before the Second World War, the state-church nexus was so tight that it was the responsibility of teachers to bring schoolchildren to Sunday mass. By the 1960s, however, the clergy were cognizant that they had to keep up with the changing times. The Vatican II reforms did away with the centuries-long elitist traditions, emulating the activist and community-oriented approach instead. Perhaps the most symbolic of all these changes was the revolution in the liturgy. After 1965, the mass was no longer held in Latin but in the appropriate vernacular, and the priest, who previously faced the alter with his back to the congregation, now spoke directly to the people (Figure 5).

The career of Karol Wojtyła, who became the Pope in 1978, is a good case in point. While his mentor, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, represented the old, traditional clergy (a well-educated person from a well-to-do-background that the faithful had to look up to), Wojtyła, the quintessential activist-priest, was for his parishioners more of a peer than a distant and aloof role model. When the Polish state collapsed in 1980, the Church swiftly took on the mantle of local community building. This should hardly be a surprise: the Catholic Church had often 'stepped in' before when the Polish state was in crisis because it has always been more resilient. The spatial architecture of the Catholic Church harks back all the way to the seventeenth and even sixteenth centuries, whereas the spatial structure of the Polish state has been subject to frequent revisions. The seat of local government has moved from place to place, but the location of churches (and the division into parishes) has sometimes remained unchanged for centuries. And while the Polish state has been both territorially and politically vulnerable, the Church has successfully managed to weather the storms of the past centuries.

FIGURE 5   The self-constructed urban mega-churches adhere to Vatican II principles that put the community at the centre of both the liturgy and the sacral architecture (photo by Maciej Lulko, reproduced with permission)

Moreover, the territorial set-up of the Church was perfectly suited to accommodating the twentieth-century suburban revolution. The Polish state's administrative structure is organized around territories: hence the current three-tier administrative division is aimed at easing access to local centres of power. In contradistinction, the Polish Church's administrative structure is organized around management of the population. So while large cities usually constitute one administrative unit for the state (*gmina*), the Church tends to divide urban centres into a number of smaller units (*dekanat*). This means that while the surface areas of each *gmina* tends to be similar, the population living within it may differ substantially. With the *dekanats* it is the other way around: the area they cover may be substantially different, but the population living within them tends to be similar. The 'rural' *dekanats* are territorially larger and their 'urban' counterparts are territorially smaller, but each comprises a population of around twelve thousand souls. The spatial organization of the Church thus breaks down the largest metropolitan centres into communities similar in size to a small town; likewise, it also glues together scattered 'villages' into communities comparable to small towns. This structure was thus perfectly suited to facilitating territorial community-building, and this is perhaps the reason why it was the Catholic Church that oversaw the completion of Poland's transition from the rural to the suburban.

Nowadays, however, these advantages no longer apply. Both the state and the Church are territorially organized institutions. *Radio Maryja*, however, is not. It grew in the spatial interstices of both, and instead of being a territorial community, it is a media-centred network comprised of individuals scattered around the country. While the Catholic Church has been an auxiliary to the state-led autocentric and mono-scalar development, *Radio Maryja* rides the wave of multi-scalar spatial fragmentation in Poland that was triggered by the crisis of 1980 and then attenuated after 2004. In this sense, the post-2004 suburbanization unsettled not just the pattern of twentieth-century development, but actually some of Poland's most deeply seated spatio-political structures.

From commuter to rentier suburbs

In order to appreciate the elective affinity between the *Radio Maryja* creed and planetary suburbanization, let us zoom in on the place I call Gora. From the administrative point of view it is—and always has been—a village. The people who inhabit Gora would also call it a village, even though one could hardly describe them as peasants. Some of them still live off farming, but it would be impossible to tell that from their way of life: how they dress or speak. Most of Gora's inhabitants are wage labourers who commute daily to a nearby agglomeration, one of Poland's largest. The commute is an easy one, as Gora has been connected to the larger metropolitan region through a municipal bus service since the 1970s. Even though the settlement's history reaches back a few centuries, all of Gora's houses were built after 1945. The architectural style is neither urban nor rural but quintessentially suburban. A quick glance at this landscape reveals that Gora suburbanized in two waves: first during the Long Sixties, and then in the wake of Poland's accession to the EU.

Gora is a classic Polish linear settlement, where houses were originally erected alongside a single road. During the 1960s, when intensive links between the nearby city and its environs gradually drew Gora into its orbit, an alternative main road for the village developed, reshaping Gora's spatial set-up into a Y-like formation. At the root of the forking roads was a little pond and a shop. The two roads, the old and the new thoroughfares, stemmed from this central place. While the old main transport axis served only local functions, the new thoroughfare linked Gora to the larger metropolitan region. In the early 1970s, the village mayor marshalled residents for the self-construction of a bus stop and a loop road. This was in response to a demographic

dynamic, in that the post-war baby boomers were now entering the labour market and looking for jobs. Unlike their parents' generation, who in the 1950s had had to move to the cities in order to find non-agricultural jobs, the Gora youth in the 1970s could became urban wage labourers without having to migrate.

When the youth of Gora started their own families, they self-built their houses (mobilizing the labour of extended kin and neighbours) on family land. These plots were typically rectangular, with the front side adjacent to the road rather narrow but very oblong, reflecting the older land divisions. The young people either built a new home behind their parents' house or erected larger, multi-generational houses. My key informant Marta (not her real name) and her husband built their house right next to the new, supra-local, thoroughfare. They were both newcomers to Gora, and both worked as teachers in a school built (also by mustering the local labour force) during the 1960s. Marta's best friend, let's call her Renata, on the other hand, belonged to the 'native' inhabitants of Gora, who lived alongside the older thoroughfare and inhabited the area that is still today referred to in everyday conversation as 'old Gora'. The former main road that ran through the centre of this old settlement was never modernized—in the 1990s it was still a dirt road—having been marginalized by the construction of the new route which sucked Gora into the larger agglomeration.

Marta and her husband represented classic farmer-workers (*chłopo-robotnicy*)—wage labourers who also tended to the land and animals in their free time. Like most residents in Gora, they received salaries but they also kept livestock that served as a reliable source of food and could be turned into extra cash if necessary. It would be grossly misleading to see this as residual of Poland's agricultural past, or a mark of its putative 'incomplete urbanization'. Even in the age of nineteenth-century compact cities, as argued by Cronon (1991: 7), the urban and the rural were 'separated but not isolated'. Cronon shows how Chicago's metropolitan expansion generated its 'own' countryside—a point reiterated by Soja (2000: 19–49), who argues that the earliest cities did not evolve from villages but preceded them. In other words, the rural is not an evolutionary stage antecedent to the urban. Rather, demand from the city for food and other staples represents the very trigger of agricultural production.

One of the reasons why Poland drifted towards an explosive mode of urbanization in the 1960s was the high level of resistance towards collectivization in farming. The state was unable to centralize food production but had to feed the swelling population that worked outside of agriculture. It thus had to rely on food imports and scattered small-scale agriculture. This applied especially to meat production—the surging demand for which became a hallmark of life in post-war Poland. Meat was never a significant element of the Polish peasants' diet—they were too poor to eat it on a weekly, let alone daily, basis. By the 1970s, each of the major cities had become girded by a web of small farms, where food for the metropolitan tables was produced by people like Gora's farmers or farmer-workers. These farmer-workers were perhaps the most emblematic of Poland's makeover from a rural to a suburban way of life.

The salience of grassroots food production became particularly pronounced after the 1980 meltdown. The state proved to be incapable not only of feeding its own population but also of providing consumer goods. A new cottage industry in the metropolitan suburbs as well as in the suburbanized countryside mushroomed. Marta and her husband, for example, designated a part of their property for breeding nutria––an animal whose fur was then processed in small sweatshops into hats and winter clothes. These rodents—as well as the pigs and chickens Marta and her husband bred—were hardly a vestige of Poland's rural past; they were instead part and parcel of its new suburban aspect, in the same way that Alpine cows have become an integral element of the Swiss (sub)urban landscape (Schmid, 2014). Therefore, it is crucial to understand that even if Polish suburbanites used terms such as 'urban' or 'rural', they employed them to describe different regimes of labour (a crucial part of their specific way of life)

and not different landscapes. Poland's rural-to-suburban transition did not eliminate agricultural work but turned it into a job on the side. It would be erroneous to call this 'incomplete urbanization'. It was complete because the peasantry—as a class and as a way of life—was eliminated. Even those who now worked full-time in agriculture were no longer peasants but farmers—and farming was an occupation, just like any other form of modern labour. Poland's explosive suburbanization thus fundamentally transformed 'the rural' and then internalized it.

Hence, while Western commuter suburbs in the twentieth century tend to be landscapes engendered by wage labour, places like Gora could be called 'recombinant suburbs', where people combine 'urban' wage labour with 'rural' food production. A quick assessment of the spatial organization of Marta and her husband's suburban property shows how such labour regimes were fashioned in space. The oblong strip of land was divided into three distinct parts, each corresponding to the type of labour performed there. The section closest to the road was separated from it by an iron fence and comprised the couple's two-story house, a well, a dog kennel, and a lawn with benches and some fruit trees. Further away from the highway there stood a wooden fence separating the residential part of the property from the productive one. The latter was further subdivided. Right behind the wooden fence there was a stable for two or three horses, sometimes housing a cow or a pig, and dozens of free-range chickens. Even further away from the road (and hence practically invisible to passers-by) was yet another stable, haystacks, a greenhouse for tomatoes, and a small garden with garlic, herbs and the like. Then there was yet another fence behind which there was a regular field where the couple usually planted potatoes. The first, residential, part of the property was reflective of their wage labouring status; the second was fashioned by their additional activities to make a little extra cash on the side, and only the most remote section was fully agricultural and linked to the food they produced for themselves and for their children, who lived in cities proper.

In other words, the twentieth-century suburban experience in Poland—at least in the case of Gora's residents—was defined by a mix of various labour regimes, each expressed differently in space. The transformation that later engulfed Marta in the 2000s represents a move towards a life more congruent with the twenty-first-century model of suburbanization—one which is completely dissociated from labour. This is why under the aegis of planetary suburbanization the rural-urban divide finally disappeared, as the commuter suburb morphed into a rentier suburb. For Marta this entailed the gradual abandonment of all forms of work. It started when she and her husband retired in the late 1980s. However, because domestic chores were not evenly distributed, for Marta quitting her job did not mean that she stopped working. Still, gradually she began to have more free time, and by the mid-1990s she had developed an interest in *Radio Maryja*. Her husband was scornful about her 'hobby' and demanded that she continue to carry out her household duties (i.e. not only preparing his food but also serving it to him) until he died in 2003. Although her religious transformation had begun before then, it only got into its full swing after he expired. Until then, as she recalled, 'I was not a human being. It was only work, work, work'. From the 2000s onwards, her lifestyle turned from being productive to being contemplative.

As Keil (2017: 11) argues, suburbanization is a process. It therefore follows that it can engulf not only spaces but also people. Hence my idea of 'self-suburbanization': embracing the suburban way of life without changing one's location. For Marta, this began with her deliberate rejection of the local food economy. Back in the 1990s she still either produced her own food (eggs, meat, potatoes, butter, milk and the like) or, during the first years of retirement, would buy it from neighbours. However, increasingly she began to obtain food from the nearby store, where only non-local items were sold. 'I am a rural noblewoman' (*wiejska dama*), she would tell me, laughing, meaning that she could no longer enjoy eating simple 'country food'. The milk she used to buy from the

neighbour now 'smacked of the cow', she said, and it literally made her feel sick. So did the butter. Hence she replaced it with margarine. Marta's children brought her home-made dishes, either prepared by them or by some relatives, and these Marta enjoyed, but she did so precisely because they were exogenous to her own local community. She also gradually purged her immediate surroundings of all the vestiges of her former productive life with her husband. Not only were there now no animals on the premises (not even pets) but she also cut down all the fruit trees (some of which were very old). The reason she gave for this was that she did not want to bother about processing the fruit into jams—still a considerable burden of labour on Polish women. The fence that used to separate the residential and productive spaces was torn down and the stables became a storage place for random items.

The same transformation engulfed the house. Before her husband's death, they had a bedroom on the first floor and the two rooms on the ground floor served as 'display rooms' (*pokój paradny*). The one with the TV set was constantly occupied by her husband and he turned it into his semi-private den. Marta would listen to her *Radio Maryja* in the other room on the ground floor. Both rooms, once guests arrived, could temporarily serve the role of a quasi-public space. The most common practice in Polish houses is to receive guests in the room with a TV, since watching TV was usually not an individual but a group activity. Yet such a space in Marta's house was occupied by her husband. Thus they received guests in 'her' display room. Her own belongings there had a temporary character, since before any guests arrived she had to clear them away quickly. The kitchen was the only part of the house that was fully and legitimately Marta's. After her husband died, however, she instantly moved into the TV room, and took along with her all her 'private' activities (reading, praying, and even sleeping) as well as the 'public' ones (watching TV and receiving guests). The other display room was reserved for more official gatherings, such as family get-togethers, while the space upstairs was turned into a storage place where all the undesired objects (especially those which reminded Marta of her marriage) were set aside to collect dust. Only now could she truly feel 'at home' in her own house. She re-appropriated this space and then transformed it so that it became congruent with her new post-productive and post-secular self.

Born-again suburbanism

It would be all too easy to look at this as an isolated life event. Marta's makeover was about re-connecting with the wider world, not about shielding herself from it. That wider world—including Gora—was absorbed into the second wave of Poland's suburbanization. Marta was born again as a *Radio Maryja* militant, and Gora was reborn as a new kind of suburb. Because of the post-2004 housing boom, another settlement, just on the outskirts of Gora and right next to a forest, emerged. Middle-class professionals, attracted by the wholesome environment and lower taxes, took on forex-denominated mortgages (see Figure 7) and created a new settlement there. It was at a safe distance from Gora's asphalt main road, which in the meanwhile had become really busy and noisy and hence unattractive for newcomers. Driving down the dirt road in 'old Gora' was initially the only way to get to the new district. Suddenly, the formerly neglected communication axis became busy with upmarket cars and SUVs driven by the new inhabitants commuting to the nearby city.

All of this unsettled the spatial as well as the social balance between 'old' and 'new' Gora. Because of the real-estate boom, a handful of local families made fortunes from land sales. Consequently, they gave up farming and, so the rumour went, now lived off the interest from the money they had made. Even if this was not entirely true, it shows that productive activities were no longer perceived as central to the Gora community. During the crisis-ridden 1980s and 1990s, being an (independent) farmer was more highly esteemed than working for an urban wage because it secured a better income. By the 2000s, however, Marta's generation of Gora inhabitants had largely

retired. Those who had had city jobs now received pensions, but because these were typically paltry, many of Gora's pensioners did not forsake their agricultural jobs on the side—like keeping a cow or a few pigs. By eating their own food, they could reduce their expenses, or even make some extra cash from selling the pigs or the milk. In any case, the general tendency was that performing agricultural labour suddenly became indicative of one's inability to secure a respectable income. The post-2004 development realigned the top level of Gora's hierarchy. Now it was occupied by a handful of former farmers-turned-rentiers as well as the newer suburbanites, both of which lived off non-agricultural activities.

There emerged a pronounced degree of peer pressure to either forsake or hide productive activities in Gora. The history of Renata—Marta's best friend—illustrates this well. When Marta arrived in Gora with her husband in the 1960s, Renata was one of the very first people, as Marta put it, 'to talk to me like an equal' (in other words, young women were not considered peers in the male-dominated community). Renata was the daughter of a well-to-do farmer who was a member of some of the most venerable families in Gora and also the village mayor at the time. A further bond between the two women was their shared fate of being married to an abusive male. Renata often gave refuge to Marta when she occasionally had to abscond from her own home in fear of domestic violence. Both of them also experienced the slow deaths of their husbands, which coincided. Ever since, however, their pathways have diverged, although their friendship has remained strong. While Marta retired from all forms of work and embraced *Radio Maryja*, Renata continued working on the family farm. Her family owned land, but not such that could be turned into suburban lots. They were unlucky. In 2009 Renata was 71, living with her son, his wife and their child. Her son took over the running of the farm while his wife worked in the city. Because her daughter-in-law was occupied full-time in the city, Renata took on what were considered to be the wife's duties: feeding the pigs, milking the cows and the like. She also took care of her grandson when his mother was at work. Hence, while Marta was financially independent (and received support from her middle-class children), Renata had no income of her own and thus remained wholly dependent on the relationships of reciprocity with her kin.

Because the dirt road that runs through old Gora passes right next to Renata's house—and in the wake of the post-2004 suburbanization was frequently used by upmarket automobiles—Renata suddenly found her activities under the spotlight. She is renowned locally for being the foremost expert in gardening: she was one of the very first Gora residents to start nurturing a garden with non-edible plants (i.e. a suburban garden for display and not for producing food). Her advice is often sought by would-be gardeners, and I saw her numerous times bringing twigs or plants for Marta so that she could plant them in her own garden too. But there was a crucial difference between the two gardens. Renata's was truly spectacular and lush, comprising many tall plants. The garden was adjacent to the family house, with the farm buildings set behind them. Renata tended to her garden so that, as she once explained, 'people don't see me running around with a wheelbarrow'. In other words, the point of designing and working on the garden was to disguise Renata's labour at the back of the house.

Marta's garden, in contrast, was more of a lawn peppered with a few tiny bushes and some flowers planted right next to the house. After the 'purge' of her property and the dismantling of the fence, one could see through the entire lot (and a very long way at that). Paradoxically, although Marta's garden was transparent to the world, it was not for display. Rather, it communicated the unproductive and contemplative character of her new self. This is why she also placed a few benches there, which she used for prayer or for reading. Renata's garden, serving as a veritable screen, had no benches because it served no recreational purpose. Renata's garden was traditionally 'Catholic', in the sense that it was conspicuous, folksy and oriented towards the local community. Smack bang in the middle of it there was a statue of the Virgin Mary—a

hallmark of twentieth-century Catholicism, found both in 'villages' and in many cities. Such statues were usually communal property, in the sense that they were maintained collectively. At face value, therefore, Marta's garden looked just like those of the newest suburbanites—who like her did not run around the plot with a wheelbarrow. Although her house was obviously not erected during the 2000s, nor was it located in the newest district. However, the way she transformed it showed that she was 'keeping up' with the aesthetic norms set by the latest surge of suburbanization.

Marta's religious conversion (she was never a believer, nor a frequent church-goer before her sixties) not only coincided with the planetary suburbanization but was congruent with it. Her new garden was expressive both of the new suburban way of life *and* of her involvement with the trans-local community of *Radio Maryja*. Simply by reading this particular micro-landscape, without knowing who inhabited it, one could infer that this was the home of a middle-class, liberal suburbanite. However, knowing Marta's life story and how central *Radio Maryja* had become for her quotidian practices, it transpires that this landscape was also a perfect expression of the type of faith she embraced. I argue that the concept of 'multi-scalar individualism' captures a crucial aspect of the twenty-first-century suburban way of life in Poland and allows us to describe the link between Marta's trajectory and that of other new suburbanites. Just like her, they are usually anchored within trans-local networks, alienated from their neighbours, aloof from the predicaments of their local communities, and pursuing individualistic strategies (see Kajdanek, 2012). Yet the austere emptiness of Marta's garden, its contemplative and outward-oriented character, was *also* congruent with how *Radio Maryja* transformed Polish Catholicism. As practised by Marta, it represents a continuation of the process of ridding Polish Catholicism of its former rural—or folksy—attributes, akin to the (post)secularization movement within Islam (Simone, 1994; Baxstrom, 2008; Mahmood, 2011).

This form of Polish Catholicism is also very twenty-first century in its post-secular embrace of politics. While Marta was often scornful about the way regular priests would occasionally talk politics during their Sunday sermons, she did not mind this with *Radio Maryja*. This is because listening to the radio is far more interactive than going to church. 'In the past', she told me, 'there were no believers (*nie było wiary*). People who attended the Sunday mass did not understand what the priests said [services were held in Latin], and they were so exhausted from farm work that they fell asleep'. She criticised old-school Catholics for being superficial and conformist. She said people went to church not for religious but for social reasons—to meet their neighbours, or to exchange the latest gossip. Marta seldom visits the local church because her religiosity is not centred on her local community but on herself and the network of 'true believers' coalescing around *Radio Maryja* and scattered around the world.

Radio Maryja's allure for Marta lies in its high level of interactivity. Listeners are encouraged to call in and express their views. A lot of the airtime is devoted to prayers, in which listeners actively participate. This generates a sense of belonging, and Marta knows by heart the names (and places of residence, often from the Polish diaspora) of some of the most active listeners. Unlike Renata, whose day is determined by her many chores, Marta's quotidian routine is structured around the programming of *Radio Maryja* and the TV soap operas she watches. All her other activities, such as cooking or even family visits, are scheduled in such a way that they fill in the gaps between her favourite programmes. Her children know what time they can pay her a visit, so that she would be free—for example in between a prayer and an episode of her favourite series. Her faith is neither folksy nor communal (as with twentieth-century Catholicism), but rather, intellectual, political and vehemently contentious.

Marta's religious observance is also fundamentalist, in the sense that it aims at contemplation as based upon the scriptures. Thanks to *Radio Maryja*, 'I went through the entire catechism of the Catholic Church', she told me, and she was especially keen

on the rosary—a prayer told interactively on air. The central place of using the rosary in contemporary Catholicism is part of the heritage of John Paul II. Before him, it was considered to belong to the folksy, low-brow faith. Yet as Wojtyła himself put it, the rosary should not be regarded 'as some kind of amulet or magic object' but instead as an instrument designed to produce 'spiritual effects'. It represents 'a method of contemplation. As a method, it serves as a means to an end and cannot become an end in itself' (John Paul II, 2002). I was struck that Marta, who is generally very careful about her belongings, habitually left her rosary tied to a wooden chair in the garden. Generally, she is a person who would take extraordinary precautions about material objects. I have seen her rosary being rained upon and she did not mind, because—unlike other things that she would bring in after leaving the garden—the rosary had no material value for her.

Although Marta's trajectory is of course idiosyncratic, it is also part and parcel of broader trends. Religious observance in Poland is highly gendered. According to a survey conducted in 2012 by the Catholic Church, while 13.9% of Polish males considered themselves deeply religious, the figure was nearly twice as high (25.6%) for women. This was congruent with another token of engaged religiosity—taking Holy Communion every Sunday (13.7 % of men and 25.8% of women declared they did this). The gender gap as far as religiosity is concerned is also widening, from 7.2% in 1991 to 11.7% in 2012. Parishioners' knowledge of the basic tenets of Catholicism was also tested. While in 1991 women's knowledge of the number of sacraments was 8.4 points higher than men's, by 2012 this difference had grown to 14.5. At the same time, the ratio of male and female parishioners who felt themselves to be 'an integral part of their local parish community' remained stable.

These changes, in my view, can be accounted for by the onslaught against the 'traditional' (community-oriented) Catholic Church wrought by the post-secular, individualistic and, I claim, suburban *Radio Maryja*. It may also explain the following paradox: while the popularity and influence of *Radio Maryja* has been on the rise, Polish society as a whole has actually become more secular. In 2017 the number of church-goers (as measured by the Catholic Church, so the true figure may be even lower) stood at 36% of the adult population. This is an all-time low, at least since 1980, when such statistics first started to be gathered. At the same time, the number of people regularly receiving Holy Communion (the real believers) has grown (Figure 6). While throughout the twentieth century Poles used to be church-goers even if they were not profound believers, Marta— who is not a frequent church-goer but an ardent believer—provides a good example of the new trend: the rise of the intellectual, individual and trans-local model of faith. This divide partially overlaps with a generational rift. While mature women like Marta typically embrace the radical political religiosity of *Radio Maryja*, the youngest echelon of Polish women represents the most left-wing of all the demographic groups (Flis, 2016).

Although there are no studies that discern the class composition of *Radio Maryja*, my analysis shows that radical conservatism is not, contrary to what some might believe, an ideology of the downtrodden. Compared to Renata, Marta is highly educated and well-to-do. A survey from 2011 (CBOS, 2011) shows that among Poles the dominant demographic for *Radio Maryja* listeners comprises people aged over 65 (29% of whom listen to the station), who are widowed (29%), retired (22%), and who have only completed basic-level education (19%). There is no significant rural-urban divide, as *Radio Maryja* aficionados are scattered around the country and, indeed, all over the world. While these figures represent the building blocks of the stereotypical profile of a 'mohair beret', it needs to be stressed that one can be widowed or retired but—like Marta—also better educated and financially independent. Mature women who, like Renata, lead a hand-to-mouth existence or are still burdened with household chores do not have the time to indulge in *Radio Maryja* as profoundly as Marta does. They have no time to contemplate religious texts, nor to call in when a heated political discussion unfolds on air. All this implies that statistical aggregates are no longer useful
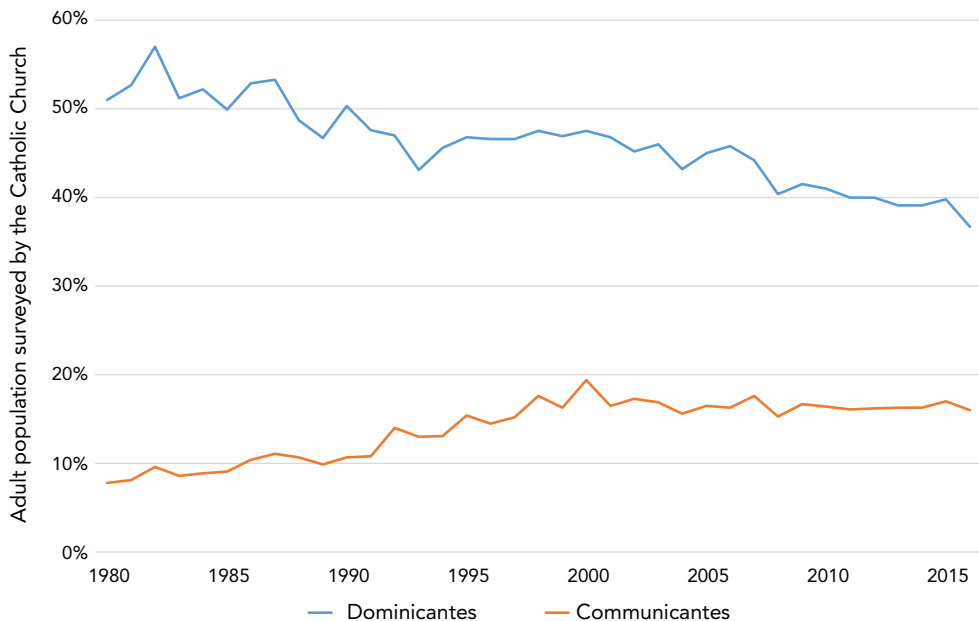
FIGURE 6   The falling number of church-goers (*dominicantes*) and the rising number of ardent believers (*communicantes*) in Poland (*source*: figure produced by the author based on data published by the Catholic Church in Poland in the *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae in Polonia* [2018: 34])

for analysing contemporary society in Poland because it has become fragmented into disparate and isolated pieces. The parts do not join up any more.

Parallel fragmentations

'Poland is an extraordinarily diverse place', noted the anthropologist Frances Pine (1998: 106) in her analysis of the 'fragmentation' engulfing Poland in the 1990s. 'The busy affluence of the urban centres' was reminiscent of West European metropoles, while at the same time there existed extraordinary pockets of poverty unplugged from the wider economic and social circuits. 'This occupational regional diversity', noted Pine, 'makes any coherent analysis of the national economy very complicated' (1998: 106–7). The move away from a mono-scalar society—one that was by and large organized around the nation-state—means that today it is practically impossible to find micro cases that would be 'representative' of the society at large. The same problems emerge when we try to perform an analysis of politics—even of politics at the national scale. Existing explanations of Poland's illiberal turn assume a seamless transition between the local and the national. Ost's (2005) local vignettes add up to a coherent image of Poland's *Solidarność* (Solidarity) trade union and how it betrayed the workers, while Kalb's (2009) analysis oscillates like a metronome between a single factory and national politics. The socio-spatial fragmentation of contemporary Poland means that we need to understand the dynamic between the micro and the macro in a new way.

Of course, under the thin veneer of national unity there has always lurked regional diversity. As the anthropologist Olędzki (2015: 264) puts it, 'on the scale of territorial differentiation known across the world—from minimal to extreme—the Polish case comes close to the extreme'. Nineteenth-century ethnographers gave testimony to this with the dictum: *co wieś, to pieśń*—for every village there is a different

song. And indeed, the wide range of folk cultures—both quotidian and artistic—confirms this diagnosis. In part, this stems from the historical weakness of the Polish state. That is why the idea of fragmentation is, in my view, better suited for explaining what has happened in Poland than concepts such as neoliberalization. Not least because the latter was originally coined as a non-spatial concept. To be sure, authors such as Harvey (2005) talk about the urban *roots* of neoliberalization (lying in New York City's 'long default' of the 1970s), and others, such as Brenner and Theodore (2002), show its urban *repercussions*. Nonetheless, the idea of fragmentation makes the analysis of the dialectic between the social and the spatial easier. It is germane to some concepts from urban studies that have sought to pinpoint the accelerating polarization of the post-Fordist world: the 'dual city' or 'splintering urbanism', for example. Pine (1998) borrowed the idea of fragmentation from Harvey (1991), who used it in *The Condition of Post-Modernity* casually and descriptively rather than analytically. My point is that it is well-suited to capturing, at least in the Polish case, the transition from a mono-scalar to a multi-scalar world.

Fragmentation (of scales) is the opposite of a process we could describe as integration (around a dominant scale)—and this is precisely what Smith (1991) writes about in his analysis of the contradictions of 'equalization' and 'differentiation' within capitalism. In the Polish case, 1980 marks the very peak of 'Keynesian' social, political, cultural and economic integration under the aegis of the national scale. The 1980 crisis produced not only state failure but also a 10-million strong social movement. It was not only one of the world's largest such movements, but also one with a telling name—*Solidarity*—which shows how socially 'thick' it was. (The move from mono-scalar integration to multi-scalar fragmentation is congruent with what Ferguson [2006] describes as a transition from 'socially thick' to 'socially thin' regimes.) The church-building boom of the 1980s represents the very final chapter in this nationwide community-building. Polish society was already disintegrating during the 1980s, both socially and spatially: while in Britain Margaret Thatcher announced that there was 'no such a thing as society', at the same time Polish sociologists were warning about an impending 'anomie' and 'indifference', and during the 1990s they lamented the massive erosion of trust.

In the wake of the 'Asian' crisis, the fragmentation triggered in 1980 became attenuated. Poland entered into a new relationship with the core countries of the European Union by exporting cheap labour (chiefly to Britain), subcontracting the assembly of parts of consumer durables produced by Western companies (for example, white goods for Whirlpool and Indesit, based in Italy, or automobiles for Germany's Volkswagen), and becoming a place where German and American corporations could 'park' their excess capital. By 2015, 93% of all the money that went into the construction of new office spaces, shopping malls and warehouses in the whole of Poland came from Western (mainly German and to a lesser extent US) investment funds (Pobłocki, 2017: 26). Yet Poland is very different from the Spanish and Greek models (see Lopez and Rodríguez, 2011), where the housing sector was sucked wholesale into international money circuits. Most developers in Poland are local firms with no links to international corporations. The Polish economy as a whole is actually hardly financialized at all, and its main predicament is not an excess but a dearth of capital (Lewicki, 2014). Hence the ease with which the country weathered the 2008 crisis. Because Poland was not entangled in complex relations with global financial institutions, it was hardly affected by the meltdown. We can see, however, a substantial financialization of individual households (Figure 7). In other words, while the production side of (sub)urbanization is financed locally, the consumption side (mortgage loans) is strongly tied to the global economy.

This shows that at the more general level, the various segments of the Polish economy and society are highly fragmented and guided by divergent rationalities. As
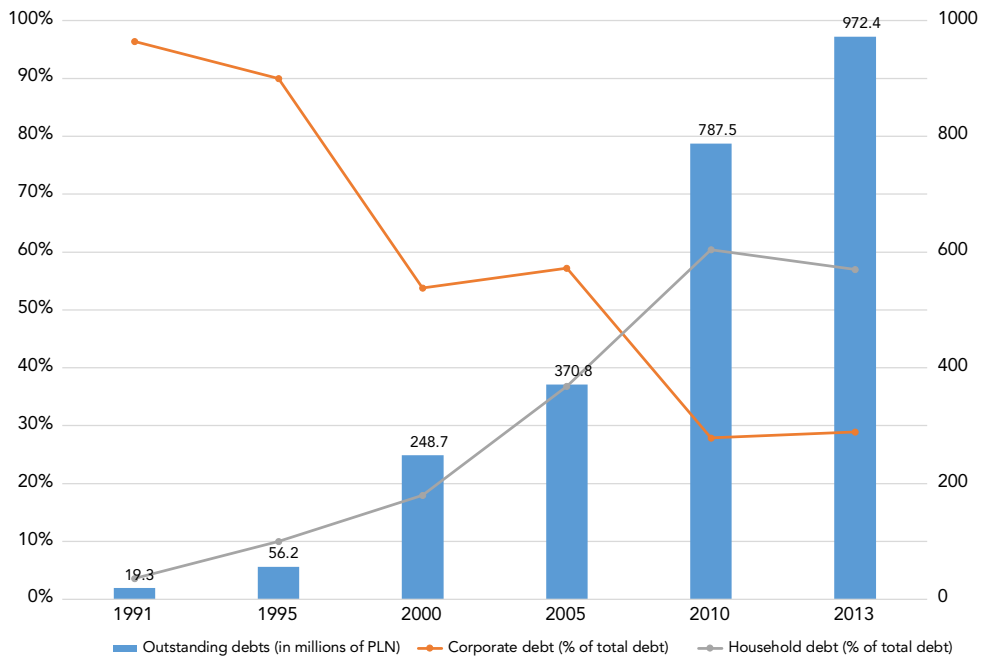
FIGURE 7   The financialization of households in Poland, 1991–2013 (*source*: figure produced by the author using data published by the Polish Statistical Office [Główny Urząd Statystyczny: GUS; URL https://stat.gov.pl/])

a consequence, the experience of Polish factory workers—who participated in the global industrial revolution led by China and Germany—is very different from that of those who profited from the building of new shopping malls in metropolitan centres, or those who live off the profits of land speculation. And these trajectories are also fundamentally different from those of other groups that are truly disconnected—like the new 'hunters and gatherers' (Rakowski, 2016) emerging in some of the poorest post-industrial communities, who combine foraging with subsistence agriculture. Poland's erstwhile state-led social integration is long gone. There is no whole, only a sum of the parts. Krzysztof, a deskilled factory worker from Wrocław whose story was analysed by Don Kalb (2009), came to exactly the same conclusions as Marta did, and both became members of the *Radio Maryja* network. Their individual biographies are *radically* different, however. There is no 'average' *Radio Maryja* listener, and claiming that either Marta or Krzysztof are 'representative' of the movement would be to miss the key point. The quest for the holy grail of twentieth-century social science—to find the perfect Middletown, i.e. a local site that would be representative of national trends—may have been possible back then, in a mono-scalar society. But it is not so now in the age of multi-scalar individualism and planetary suburbanization.

The rise of right-wing nationalism has to be understood against this backdrop. The PiS government did not start with a broad social base. Instead, it has expanded its influence by utilizing the kind of language that speaks to atomized groups and individuals, often scattered spatially around the country. Although PiS did not employ the political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica for its electoral campaign (but did enrol an army of Twitter trolls), the party's approach was similar to that deployed during Donald Trump's presidential campaign. The way that Trump's political message was fine-tuned to individual (rather than group) preferences through targeted ads on social media was unprecedented. The Trump campaign also embraced *rozwibrowanie*—a

strategy that no longer seeks to glue together the broken pieces, but instead rides the wave of fragmentation. Unlike Poland's liberals, the PiS government understands that politics is no longer about manufacturing the consent of the putative 'majority'. The party's strength lies in its ability to bring together the many minorities, including *Radio Maryja* listeners, and to speak an argot that builds a bridge between their increasingly idiosyncratic experiences.

Finally, while during the twentieth century city centres around the world were marked by their diversity and suburbs were characterized by a predictable sameness, today's gentrified inner cities are becoming increasingly homogenous, whereas the suburbs are 'raw, unpredictable, and diverse' (Keil, 2017: 60). One possible way of tackling this 'raw diversity' methodologically is to embark on a study that, just like this article, combines ethnographic spatial research with biographical analysis of the smallest scale of all (that of an individual) and embeds such idiosyncratic trajectories within the wider context of global tectonic shifts. If we wish to understand what is going on in a fragmented and eroded nation-state that is only partially and unevenly plugged into the global economy, then we need to listen to the bellwethers of Poland's 'domestic nationalism' and—just like them—learn how to join the scattered pieces together.

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