No other symbol is as omnipresent in Poland as the cross. This multi-layered and contradictory icon features prominently in public spaces and state institutions. It is anchored in the country’s visual history, inspires protest culture, and dominates urban and rural landscapes. The cross recalls Poland’s historic struggles for independence and anti-Communist dissent, but it also encapsulates the country’s current position in Europe as a self-avowed bulwark of Christianity and a champion of conservative values. It is both a national symbol – defining the boundaries of Polishness in opposition to a changing constellation of the country’s Others – and a key object of contestation in the creative arts and political culture. Despite its long history, the cross has never been systematically studied as a political symbol in its capacity to mobilize for action and solidify power structures. Cross Purposes is the first cultural history of the cross in modern Poland, deconstructing this key symbol and exploring how it has been deployed in different political battles.

Magdalena Waligórska is a cultural historian and sociologist. Her fields of interest include contemporary Polish and Belarusian history, nationalism and national symbols, Jewish heritage, Jewish–non-Jewish relations, and memory studies. She is currently leading a research group at the Department of European Ethnology of the Humboldt University in Berlin. She has published extensively on nationalism, Jewish culture, and Jewish–non-Jewish relations in journals including East European Politics and Societies, Holocaust Studies, East European Jewish Affairs, and Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry. Her first book, Klezmer’s Afterlife: An Ethnography of the Jewish Music Revival in Poland and Germany, was published in 2013.
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Catholicism and the Political Imagination in Poland

MAGDALENA WALIGÓRSKA

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I started working on this book when I was pregnant with my son, continued writing it while struggling to reconcile academic work with parenthood, completed it in the first year of the pandemic, and sent it into production right after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which turned the lives of all East-Central Europeans upside down. It has been a bumpy road, with one unprecedented challenge following the next, and a time when dark clouds started gathering above my part of Europe, bringing change we did not anticipate. So, even though the formulaic sentence makes its way into the acknowledgment section of every book, it has never been as true for anything else I ever wrote in my life – This book would never have seen the light of day if it had not been for the help and support of many individuals, who assisted, encouraged, and inspired hope in the author of this book.

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