

Professor Anna Mrozek-Dumanowska – Obituary by Professor Jerzy Zdanowski



On February 2, 2021, Professor Anna Mrozek-Dumanowska died.

The Professor was associated with our institution from 1965, that is for over fifty years – first at the Section for Social and Cultural Issues of Contemporary Africa, then, from 1976 at the Department of Non-European Countries, and 2011 at the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures at the Polish Academy of Sciences. Undoubtedly, Professor Mrozek-Dumanowska co-created our institution and shaped its research profile. She was a philosopher and orientalist (Arabic studies) by education. She studied both faculties at the University of Warsaw. She researched the field of sociology and religious studies. The Professor's scientific achievements include monographs, editorial teams, articles, book chapters, papers at national and international conferences, research projects, reviews of dissertations and publications, and editorial issues of our journals. Her many-sided interests were particularly worthy of attention: initially, they included Arab philosophy, relations between Islam and Christianity, and nation-building processes in Africa; later contemporary Islam and its social functions, and subsequently phenomena on the border of religion and magic and movements of religious renewal. What united these studies was the desire to understand the essence of social change in the so-called "Third World" countries, which our research team worked on. The reality of the "Third World" changed more than the reality of the first or the second worlds, and applying the matrices of our development to local reality gave rise to numerous paradoxes. For Professor Mrozek-Dumanowska, religion and its social functions were the reference points for research on social change, and the main research field was Islam and the Muslim world. In the 1970s, exposing the social functions of religion was not popular, and among researchers of the "Third World," the

dominant theory was modernization, which assumed gradual secularisation and westernization of this world. The Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 showed the social and political potential of religion, confirming the correctness of the Professor's predictions.

During this period, there were discussions about basic terms and concepts. What should the research areas be called: the Orient, the "Third World," developing countries, countries on the way of development, and maybe countries of non-European cultures or countries of the South? I had the impression that Professor Mrozek-Dumanowska did not agree to such a strict delimitation of research areas; she believed that the Muslim world she dealt with was not only in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa but wherever there were Muslims. This position later became commonplace, and it is so today in the context of mass migrations. The works of the Professor indicated that their worlds migrated with people and that they interpenetrated one another. It was the starting point for studies by the entire team led by the Professor at the Department of Non-European Countries. Under her scientific guidance, several talented scientists – later professors – and several interesting research directions developed: religious syncretism (Afro-Christianity), the perception of the Orient in the West (subcultures), the phenomenon of cultural synthesis on the border of various religions (sects), the specificity of the nation in the non-European reality and the phenomenon of the revitalization of religion on the grounds of returning to its sources, i.e., *au rebours* reform. Some of these topics are still being addressed, which gives hope that the research from those years will not be forgotten.

In retrospect, several issues related to the Professor's scientific activity are significant. The first is the importance of direct contact with the examined object. In the 1960s and 1980s, trips to the "Third World" were not frequent. Studies were conducted based on texts and theoretical assumptions, and contact with people from that world was rare. The Professor had the opportunity to spend several years in Tanzania (1972–1974) and Libya (1985–1986), where her spouse, Professor Bolesław Dumanowski, taught geography at local universities. Getting to know the reality of these countries opened the way for a kind of empowerment of the studied subject. This time the basis for reflecting on the reality was the experience of meeting people of other cultures and learning about their behavior, views, and opinions about themselves and us. From these meetings and participating observations, the belief that religion, Islam, is a faith and a social system and plays an important political role, was born. It was a new way of thinking about Islam against the traditional approach of Oriental studies and the transition from getting to know the Orient to study it. In Tanzania, the Professor established contacts with other researchers from

Europe, particularly from Finland. These resulted in a research project with the Institute of Developing Countries in Helsinki and many years of cooperation between the Department and Finnish colleagues, culminating in an expedition of almost the entire research team to a conference in Helsinki by ferry. This confrontation was essential to our scientific work.

As the head of the Department of Non-European Countries in 1994–2010, I could always rely on the support and advice of the Professor. It was very important in the face of the permanent shortage of research funds and the need to argue that research in Asia and Africa is socially needed. Her substantive position in the discussions conducted in the team – very diverse in terms of research methods, worldview, and political differences – effectively alleviated tensions and avoided more severe conflicts, which can be considered a great value.

Just as it is difficult to imagine the history of research on the world of non-European cultures at the Polish Academy of Sciences without Professor Anna Mrozek-Dumanowska, it is so difficult to come to terms with the thought that she is no more. Over fifty years of scientific work will undoubtedly remain in her publication achievements and she herself – in the memory of her students and colleagues.

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