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Popular Religion and Postsocialist Nostalgia
Licheń as a Polysemic Pilgrimage Centre in Poland*

Abstract: The paper discusses the intertwining of religious-national symbolism and socrealist aesthetics in a popular pilgrimage site in Poland: Licheń. In the last decades of the 20th century, a local cult with a sanctuary devoted to the Virgin Mary has turned into a popular nation-wide pilgrimage site. It is argued that the popularity of Licheń derives from the familiarity it evokes, that the longing for the recent and familiar past is fulfilled by the, seemingly contradictory, combination of popular religion and the aesthetics characteristic for the People's Republic of Poland. This is visible in the monuments, paintings, architecture, the cult of one man, as well as the language at the sanctuary. However, this particular poetics, rooted in recent history, is vitalized by modern technology and global trends, thus creating a successful and attractive pilgrimage destination.

Keywords: Licheń, pilgrimage, popular religion, postsocialism, nostalgia, nationalism.

Introduction

In 2007 the Polish Ministry of Education (MEN) proposed a list of educational trips for students, promising co-funding to school excursions on the condition that they include visiting important historical and national sites. Among the prominent places on the list of the Ministry one can find the sanctuary in Licheń (MEN 2007). What is surprising about this choice is the fact that until recently not many people in Poland would have heard about Licheń, as it was one of the numerous local pilgrimage sites devoted to the Holy Virgin. However, at the moment Licheń—a village with not much more than a thousand inhabitants—has the biggest church in Poland and the seventh biggest temple in Europe and, according to the Polish Ministry of Education, it is a historical place which students should visit.

Licheń is situated approximately 10 km from the city of Konin. It has been a pilgrimage place for decades, notably after the coronation of the Icon of St. Mary from Licheń in 1967. During the 1990s, the construction of the basilica, meant to be a "vo-

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tive of the Polish nation for the year 2000," began. The basilica is now by far the biggest building in the area, with the interiors still being completed. However, the sanctuary comprises not only the basilica, but it is a vast terrain with two other churches, numerous chapels as well as parks, shops, restaurants and hotels. The area belonging to the sanctuary is 76 ha large (Marciniak 1999: 28). One of the religious highlights at the Licheń sanctuary is the stone-built Golgotha Hill, built in 1976. It holds not only the Stations of the Cross, but also thematic caves, either commenting the Calvary (e.g. the chapel with statues representing the scene of the whipping of Christ) or presenting a clear viewpoint regarding publicly debated issues (e.g. the anti-abortion cave).

The Holy Icon represents St. Mary with an eagle on her chest. According to the legend, this is how she appeared to a Polish soldier fighting during the Battle of Nations in 1813. This soldier searched throughout the "Polish lands," until he found the exact image of St. Mary, and brought it to his homeland, close to Licheń. The painting was placed in the forest in Licheń. The second time the icon proved its sanctity was prior to an epidemic of cholera, when St. Mary warned a local shepherd about the upcoming plague. After these events—the story goes—people believed that the icon was holy and the cult of St. Mary of Licheń began (Makulski n.d.). The local cult turned into a widely recognized pilgrimage destination mainly due to the papal coronation of the Holy Icon, which took place in 1967 (Marciniak 1999). However, only in the 1990s, with the project of building the basilica, did Licheń become famous nationwide, with an estimated number of 1 million visitors annually (Prusowski 2006: 149).

The aim of this paper is to show the possible reasons for such popularity of Licheń and to investigate why it is viewed as an important site for the nationalistic-oriented authorities. Leaving aside the financial and marketing reasons for making Licheń famous, it is argued that the longing for familiarity, which includes post-socialist nostalgia, is a major factor in Licheń's popularity. Deriving from the Greek words *nóstos* (return) and *àlgos* (suffering), nostalgia refers to the desire for returning to the homeland and to the emotions this yearning creates. The feeling of nostalgia evokes something that has been familiar and still lives within us, but whose external attributes

are at the moment unavailable (Burszta 1994). It is argued that this familiarity is achieved by the fusion of national and religious symbolism, along with traditional religion and the aesthetics of socialism, which can be traced to the Polish People's Republic [PRL], and that this familiarity is transmitted via thoroughly modern means of popular culture. The outcome of this particular melange of styles and traditions is a polifunctional pilgrimage site which is described below.

Licheń in the Context of Popular Religion and Pilgrimage Tradition

The phenomenon of pilgrimage has been studied by scholars who concentrated on its different aspects: the creation of "communitas" (Turner, Turner 1978), pilgrimage as an arena of rivalry, competition and contestation (Eade, Sallnow 1991), or the analyses of similarities and differences between pilgrimage and tourism (MacCannell 1973; Cohen 1992), to name some. In the Polish case the importance of pilgrimage has been connected mainly with national issues, most notably the struggle for independence in the period of wars and occupation and the reaction to oppression by the communist regime (see Jackowski and Smith 1992; quoted in Galbraith 2000). Mass participation in the pilgrimage to the most famous Polish monastery, Jasna Góra in Częstochowa, was understood in the 1980s as an expression of protest against the state. Polish pilgrimages have been traditionally seasonal (May–October), occurring with higher intensity on special occasions and events such as the Pope's visit or important festivities. Another feature of the pilgrimage landscape in Poland includes visiting several sanctuaries during one pilgrimage, a tradition going back to the PRL [Polish People's Republic], when pilgrimages where camouflaged under the name "touring trips" (Prusowski 2006: 156). It is also important to stress that in Poland, just

as in other Catholic countries, the bulk of pilgrimage destinations are Marian sites (cf. Westerfelhaus 2007).

The success of Licheń sanctuary may be seen, in part, as analogous to the popularity of Częstochowa. Both sites are devoted to St. Mary—"the Queen of Poland"—and both, though to a different extent, refer to the struggle against the communist regime. However, the differences among them are probably much more striking. It may be argued that in contrast to the traditional pilgrimage in which not the arrival but the travel is the most important, Licheń represents a new model of "being a pilgrim" which often resembles tourism. The high standard of accommodation and food offered, the combination of prayer and leisure, and numerous available highlights, make the Licheń sanctuary especially attractive. People stay in Licheń for a longer time than in the other pilgrimage sites in Poland (Prusowski 2006: 156). It is also an interesting example of the way the architects and designers of the place materialized their vision, without any financial restrictions. Interestingly enough, the pilgrims do not use the space as a manifestation of the nation, but rather treat it as a leisure space (in contrast to other nationwide pilgrimage centres, as Częstochowa or Łagiewniki). Therefore, in the words of one young pilgrim "this is not a boring place." Despite the solemnity of the national and religious symbols it is not necessarily understood by the visitors as a sacred and highly official site.

In her analysis of popular religion and pilgrimage, Liliane Voyé (2002) points to the polysemy of modern pilgrimage. Certainly the existence of various possible meanings was not absent in past times, but today certain functions have been transformed and the importance of some others has been diminished, if not disappeared. Thus the social functions of pilgrimage one might refer to are, among others, returning to the origins of faith, supplicatory actions or penitentiary meanings (Voyé 2002). The traditional role of pilgrimage as a penitential activity is not as prominent as originally (cf. Tomasi 2002, Voyé 2002), and Licheń, with its comfortable infrastructure, may serve as a good example of the diminishing importance of this aspect of pilgrimage. On the other hand, supplicatory functions may explain the popularity of Marian shrines in the Catholic world, Licheń just being one of them. Holy Mary represents the tender, compassionate and emotional face of the Church and this "appears to contrast with the pretension of the instrumental rationality of modern society" (Turner 2002: 123). Furthermore, if one of the functions of pilgrimage is the return to the origins of the faith, Licheń is on the one side the origin of a Marian apparition, but on the other it alludes to Polish national origins, due to its central geographical location as well as its proximity to the first settlements considered to be Polish. Thus the museum of the sanctuary greets the visitors with a rhetorical question: "What if Lech (the legendary founder of the Poles, brother of Czech and Rus) was from Licheń?" Therefore this pilgrimage site is indeed an affirmation of national identity, seen in the symbolism of the Holy Icon, in the history of the apparition itself, as well as in the numerous material and textual references to the Polish nation present in the sanctuary.

Licheń, as any pilgrimage site, may certainly be viewed as an expression of popular religion, understood here as a set of beliefs, practices and rituals which differ from

the official doctrine. One must keep in mind the fact that not only was the sanctuary born in accordance with some specific trends (like popular culture or references to the socialist realism) but it also has to be seen as a result of a dialectical process between official religion and local models of religiosity. Therefore it has to be stressed that the religious complex of Licheń is an outcome of the interaction between local and global trends, as well as official and popular religion. The main characteristic of the latter is the fact that "it refers first of all to practices and to concrete actions, and is not primarily concerned with words or the Book (...) it is not centred on a comprehensive attitude or an intellectual reflection" (Voyé 2002: 125). This is particularly significant in the Polish case, where folk Catholicism has been an important feature, due to both the rural character of the majority of the Polish society and the role of faith in the construction of social identification. In his complex study on Polish culture Stefan Czarnowski (1938, 1958) considered Polish folk religiosity as specific because of its "confessional nationalism," the particularly strong cult of Virgin Mary, sensualism and the cult of images, as well as strong attachment to its rituals.

How useful are these reflections for the understanding of the Licheń case? There is no doubt that the sanctuary may be understood as an exemplification of popular religion. Good examples are the omnipresent shops and stalls with religious objects, for instance St. Mary-shaped bottles for holy water or the reproductions of Virgin Mary's icons, which become themselves objects of worship. Moreover, it may be argued that the cult of images is the key to understand the whole religious complex, characterized by very literal paintings, which constitute a specific "Biblia Pauperum." In this way such representations may be regarded as examples of "Catholic Kitsch" (as defined by Westerfelhaus 2007) and an important element in ritual communication, similar to a Catholic mass, to "a situation (...) in which particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed"(Carey 1975, quoted in Westerfelhaus 2007).

However, on the other hand it is important to ask whether Licheń should be seen as an expression of traditional "folk religiosity" or rather as "religiosity of folk type," which is not anymore typical only for the countryside but inherent to people's mentality (cf. Bukowska-Floreńska 1999). As such, it may be an object of manipulation, especially in the moment of change and insecurity (such as system transformation) when the longing for familiarity is particularly strong. Some of Licheń's characteristics definitely correspond to this phenomenon. It may be argued that the sensual and emotional aspect of folk religiosity is precisely the reason for borrowings from socialist realism (seen as something familiar, resembling the time of youth etc.). Moreover, Licheń fits the model of another contemporary institution—Radio Maryja; both represent folk religion in a new frame. What is "new" here is not only the use of modern tools of communication but a kind of folk religiosity organized from above where the charismatic leaders guide the masses of believers, coming mainly from the unprivileged sectors of society (Motak 2002). The marketing strategies applied in Licheń on the one hand, and a look at the statistics regarding the pilgrims (the sanctuary visitors are mainly village inhabitants, people with elementary or secondary education the biggest group among whom are elderly women (Prusowski 2006: 153–156) on the other, may justify this kind of a statement.

Licheń as a Pilgrimage Site: Nationalism and Religion Intertwining...

Various authors have argued that there are important inherent links between nationalism and religion (cf. Anderson 1983, Mosse 1993, Smith 1999, Szacki 1999). The legend regarding the establishment of the cult as such exemplifies the intertwining of national and religious symbolism. And the Holy Icon itself is an example of this symbiosis: St. Mary holds an eagle (the Polish emblem) on her chest. And this connection between nation and religion is one of the most conspicuous characteristics of the sanctuary. This includes references to national history, especially to national martyrdom, but also the symbolic representations of the Polish nation and its connection to Catholicism. Hence it is not an exaggeration to say that in the sanctuary, each official object conveys these two (religious and national) meanings. The obvious examples are the monuments, which are present there in abundant numbers. The majority of them commemorate Polish history, with a special focus on its dramatic and tragic aspects. One can find, for example, monuments of the Warsaw Uprising (an angel holds a dead partisan, above them there is a sign: 'Warsaw accuses'), of the various Polish military formations, of the Poles that died in concentration camps and the gulags, to name just a few. There are monuments commemorating specific figures: the pope John Paul II, Jerzy Popiełuszko, Maksymilian Kolbe and many others.

Some monuments, chapels and caves are devoted not to the history of the Polish nation, but to the symbolic idea of the nation. Thus there is a monument of the Polish Family, which includes grandparents, parents and four children. A cave devoted to the anti-abortion cause is named "the Monument of the Polish Children," and it is adorned with red stones imitating splatters of blood around an image of a fetus, with a "grave of the unborn child" and with a baby facing a wall, on which we can read among other things: "Mother, father, Mr doctor, sister nurse, Mrs neighbour: Don't kill me!" The monument of Mother Homeland at the Crossroads of History (Pomnik Matki Ojczyzny na Rozdrożach Historii), representing a young woman holding a cross, with a small child cuddling against her legs is yet another statue linking—through the notion of motherhood—the nation to family and kinship ties. The nation is represented also in the religious paintings, most notably the Nativity Painting placed in the right wing of the basilica. It is divided into three parts, with the Holy Family in the middle, important historical and political figures (John Paul II being pictured as the most prominent of them) on the right, and "typical" representatives of various occupations on the left. Other examples of the national symbolism in Licheń include the shape of the benches in the basilica that resemble the gear of the Hussars (the Polish Winged Cavalry), or the various representations of eagles, which are a notable part of the landscape at the sanctuary.

Apart from visual symbols, there is an abundance of written texts about the nation in the sanctuary; interestingly enough, they are full of stylistic, grammar and spelling mistakes. For example on one of the two main columns of the basilica, there is a paragraph speaking about and an important battle in national history: the World War II battle of *Monte Cassino*. The text reads: "The eagle, as the symbol of Poland is the

proof of our connection with the Roman tradition. The eagles safeguarded the victory of the Polish soldier under *Monte Casino*." This is one example of the characteristic style and form of the inscriptions, captions and informative boards scattered throughout the sanctuary. It is maybe worth pointing out that there is a spelling mistake in the name of Monte Cassino, reducing the name of a very important historical site to a name of, one might suppose, a nightclub. This would seem anecdotal, was it not for the fact that it is engraved on one of the two main columns leading to the biggest church in Poland.

The quantity of national symbols and their seemingly organic relation to the religious ones renders them nearly invisible. None of the interviewed research participants touched upon the subject of national symbolism of the sanctuary. This is also quite telling with regard to the obviousness of the relation between nation and religion in Poland. One can point at various origins of this unity (cf. Brock 1969, Chrypinski 1989, Borowik, 1997, 1999, 2002, Załęcki 2001), however, the specific situation of the Catholic Church under the communist regime as the sole organized institution united with civil society (meaning nation) against the oppressive communist state is a significant factor of the close link between religion and nationalism in contemporary Poland. As Jan Kubik points out, the Catholic discourse, as opposed to the communist state, became strongly patriotic in the 1970s what strengthened national identity (1994: 124). Successively, it was enforced in the 1980s when the "Solidarity" movement cooperated with the Church and when many priests became deeply involved in the civil society activity. Nowadays, in the postsocialist reality, the public importance of the Catholic Church seems to be unquestionable but, as Chris Hann observes, it is not anymore a way to express citizens' protest while it still provides the source of national identity (2000: 17). And the words beneath the cross on the Golgotha Hill in Licheń are perhaps the most evident sign of the "natural" union of Catholicism and Polish nationality: *Beneath this very cross, Beneath this very sign, Poland is Poland, A Pole is a Pole!*

...and Socialist Realism Aesthetics

In order to understand the meaning of national symbols in the sacred space in the specific Polish context it is crucial to remember that the national-religious sentiment was an important feature during the Polish People's Republic (PRL). At those times the Church was identified with the opposition movement and was the sole organization that provided an institutional counterweight to the state. Throughout the opposition movement religious symbolism was evident, be it a pin of the Madonna from Częstochowa on Lech Wałęsa's lapel or a large color photograph of Pope John Paul II above the entrance to the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk (Kubik 1994, Velikonja 2003). Moreover, the myth of Poles as a chosen people gained additional influence through the "theology of nation" developed by Primate Stefan Wyszyński (Brzeziecki & Makowski 2005, Chrypinski 1989, Velikonja 2003). The pontificate of John Paul II was another decisive factor in the national-religious unity, not only because of the experience of communitas that his pilgrimages to Poland inspired, but also due to the fact that the pope himself underlined the importance of Catholicism for Poland and "the contribution of the Polish nation to the development of man and his humanity" (Porter 2001: 290). To this day Catholicism remains one of the core identity markers that are extremely visible in the political and public sphere, where the link between Polish nation and Catholicism tends to be shown as "natural" (see Galbraith 2000: 68). What is meaningful in Licheń, however, is not only the link between nationalism and religion, but its similarity to socialist poetics.

The nostalgia for PRL is especially visible in Licheń's aesthetics. Motives typical for the style and design of socrealist architecture, such as the power of the state or the exploration of nature, can be found there. Licheń itself is depicted as the heart of Poland and even the cradle of Polish statehood. The architectural highlight of the sanctuary, the basilica, is presented as a quintessence of Polish architectural style. It is underlined that the inspiration for this project derives from Polish tradition and landscape, as it is meant to resemble fields of wheat (Makulski n.d., Marciniak 1999), yet another typical image of socialist realism. The main architect even claims that this building represents "Gusto Polacco" (sic) (Głuchowski and Kowalski 2007). In the local museum the explanation to this architectural enterprise includes the following statement:

> Why is the architecture of Licheń's shrine Polish?... The tension between the proportions is encoded according to the specifically Polish feeling of simultaneous exultation and realism. The proportions of divisions and shapes of basic composition elements are also held in accordance to "Gusto Polacco"...

The term "Gusto Polacco" itself is an example of newspeak, as in fact the basilica is visibly eclectic (Klekot 2002). Barbara Bielecka, the main architect of the sanctuary, admits that the complex was constructed with the use of tradition very familiar to many visitors. And certainly the aesthetics of the PRL is one of those familiar traditions.

What is striking in the sanctuary is the monumental character and size of the basilica, which, although not in contrast to the tradition of erecting churches, again brings to mind the practices of the communist state. The fact that the basilica is

the biggest church in Poland is a source of pride not only for its designers, but also for the local inhabitants and the pilgrims. After all it is claimed that the building contains enough space for hosting 7000 people (Marciniak 1999: 33). The paintings and sculptures at the sanctuary bear resemblances to socrealist style. Many of them depict the leaders of the Church (portrayals of the parish priest, Eugeniusz Makulski, hold a prominent place in Licheń's art), or battle scenes. The Nativity Painting, mentioned above, presents in its left part representatives of different occupations waiting to pay tribute to the newborn Christ. Actually this image reflects the customary way of representing occupational stratification in the communist period, with the stereotypical image of a miner, a peasant, a worker etc., and for the same reason it brings to mind official delegations of those times while greeting authorities.

Another important reminiscence of socialist time is the museum devoted to the process of building the basilica. The main idea of the museum is to convince the visitors that this basilica is the purest and ideal realisation and synchronisation of various architectural styles, that it is the expression of several thousand years of architectural tradition. What seems to be interesting is the fact that a museum is associated either with commemorating the past or gathering artefacts of artistic value. However, in this case, the museum was built at the same time as the basilica to celebrate each stage of the building process. The texts in the museum bring to mind communist times as well. For instance, one of the persons responsible for designing RCL is presented on a photograph with a short note beneath: "Engineer Ryszard Wojdak, the main constructor of the sanctuary, transforms our dreams into steel and concrete, into material reality." This does bring to mind the poetics of PRL, and the most notable aspect of the language of the communist times—newspeak. As Michał Głowiński argues "the most important feature of newspeak is the imposition of values—already on the level of the language... A word is supposed to rather carry judgments than signify, it is to be instantly interpreted" (Głowiński 1990: 24). Apart from being indeed imbued with values, the captions and inscriptions in the sanctuary often make use of quotation marks, where no references are pointed at. For instance on the Golgotha Hill, one sign reads: "and the drunkards shall not enter the Heavenly Kingdom..." Using the inverted commas may suggest biblical provenance, but it is also a characteristic feature of the newspeak (Głowiński 1999: 102–104).

Discussing the PRL aesthetics of Licheń, the one man cultof the parish priest, Father Makulski, should not be omitted. He is presented as the sole initiator of the transformation of the local cult into a huge pilgrimage centre, as well as the designer and the creator of the basilica meant to be "the votive of the Polish nation for the year 2000." He started building the basilica during the communist era and continued his work despite many adversities. The written works on Licheń (Makulski n.d., Marciniak 1999), the pilgrims and local villagers all agree that—had it been not for him—the basilica would not have been built. He is the author of most of the guidebooks about Licheń. His managerial skills are praised, because he was charismatic enough to collect funds from the faithful from all over the world. Neither the Polish government nor the Catholic Church authorities supported this venture. The cult of Father Makulski is visible throughout the whole sanctuary. He is immortalized in the

large monument in front of the basilica which shows him offering the newly built sanctuary to John Paul II. He is also depicted in most of the paintings. Makulski appears on the Nativity Painting among the representatives of the "ordinary people," holding the basilica in his hands. Moreover, one can buy a postcard with his portrait.

The comparison of Licheń's poetics to the communist aesthetics may appear controversial at first glance, this seems less so when one considers the similarity of communism to religion. Just like nationalism, communism may be viewed as a religious-like phenomenon. Although communism has been much less successful than nationalism in the internalization of its doctrine by people (cf. Anderson 1991), which is certainly the case in Poland, nonetheless the striking resemblance of communist rituals and iconography to a religious system has already been analyzed by scholars (cf. Buchowski 2001, Kula 2003). As Marcin Kula observes, precisely because of its parareligious form, communism was so eager to oppose other religions and churches (2003: 20). Thus the grandeur of the basilica resembles monumental communist architectonic projects. In a similar fashion the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, perhaps the most important architectural symbol of communism in Poland, is strikingly similar to the pre-World War II project of the Temple of God's Providence (Kula 2003: 110-112). However, this resemblance does not need to be purposeful. As Kula observes, by standards of our civilization, symbolic importance is marked by exceptional height or grandeur (2003: 117). By the same token, the communist one-man veneration is a quasi religious cult, as it places this figure above the mortals. Hence, although the portrayal of Licheń's parish priest may resemble the depiction of communist leaders, those depictions themselves were emulating the cult of saints. Thus Kula (2003) uses the term "secular saints" for the communist leaders, whereas Buchowski refers to the party officials as King-Priests (2001: 28). In this light the similarities between the aesthetics of PRL and the pilgrimage site in Licheń are understandable; indeed one might point at the reinforcement of popular religion by the communist state and the socialist system (cf. Piwowarski 1976).

Tradition in a New Frame

Socialist realism is represented both in the form and, along with nationalism, in the content of the sanctuary. However, nostalgia for the familiarity of the recent communist times is without doubt placed in a thoroughly modern, globalized context. Licheń is a place built on opposites, among which the most visible is the relation of "new" and "old." Traditional patterns and modern trends are intertwined in all the dimensions of the sanctuary: architectural, religious and cultural.

Although the stress is laid on tradition, the basilica was also thought as a building which "was to challenge the 21st century;" therefore one can find in it a box for press and TV, computer rooms, a library, a cloakroom, just to name some. Another important feature of the sanctuary is the adaptation of new means which aim to present the 'old' religious message. One of such borrowings is the marketing strategy

aimed at collecting funds. Not only are there several places where one can donate money or buy a tablet for the church, but the offer is presented more than once. The perfect knowledge of a "client's" needs is proved by the special certifications for money donators or letters with acknowledgements sent to their homes. Moreover, the Licheń visitor is constantly "attacked" by different offers and chances, for example by an "incredible promotion" of priest-poet's books which can be purchased for a special price, "just for the visitors." How to interpret such an amalgamation of styles and trends? It has to be kept in mind that the sanctuary nowadays has to compete for worshippers, albeit mainly with other Catholic churches. Therefore it uses thoroughly modern strategies to present its offer as attractive and to show that it can be modern and traditional at the same time.

Licheń seems similar to an amusement park. Resemblances can be seen in the whole religious complex: it is composed of various "attractions" (basilica, Golgotha, restaurants, parks, fountains, shops, museums, galleries, hotel etc.) which are presented by the Licheń guides rather as a tourist than a religious destination. The church administrators use such expressions as "the season and off-season periods" and provide visitors with maps handed out at the entrance, boards with advertisements of accommodation and food services etc. Like a true amusement park, Licheń has also its highlight: the Golgotha Hill. What makes this religious place appear like it was a part of amusement park are, for example, the penitential stairs with the system of mirrors, the "cave of fears," that are placed at the Stations of the Cross, the sculptures similar to cartoon figures and many other things. It seems that Licheń is a multifunctional place: it combines entertainment with religion, leisure and duty, shopping with praying. An excellent example of such perception of Licheń is provided by the look into the guest book. It is full of comments on the quantity of things to see, the advantage of a nice rest in the park, good fun; moreover, they are expressed in a very colloquial manner. The official video tape sold in the sanctuary also conveys this idea of leisure. Two teenage girls recommend Licheń to the viewers using the expression: "Instead of going to Florida, come to Licheń." Nonetheless, this modern form of popular religion is yet another expression of the polysemy of this pilgrimage site.

Conclusions

The success of Licheń derives from the fact that popular religion is imbued with socrealist and nationalist content, placed in a very modern and current form, from a fusion of the nationalist symbols with socrealist aesthetics. Probably this is meant to evoke the 'good days' of the nation united, united against the communist regime, but in a familiar form and setting. This theme of unity against the outer world is reinforced by the negative attitude towards the religious enterprise presented by the mainstream media (Dzienisiewicz 2002), as well by the not altogether supportive feelings and actions of the Catholic hierarchy in Poland. Moreover, for many visitors the sanctuary constitutes a reason of pride: on the one hand, it is a "typically" Polish

religious site, on the other, it fulfills the requirements of a modern, "fashionable" tourist place.

It is argued that the fame and success of Licheń among pilgrims is owed to a very specific combination which provides a familiar setting. This familiarity can be traced on different levels. First of all, references to popular religiosity and traditional Marian pilgrimages may be seen as the expression of Polish folk culture, even though some of its features are designed from above. Secondly, thanks to numerous attractions, modern technology and marketing strategies "a distinct world" (whether it is St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, which several research participants likened Licheń to, or Florida in the words of the young pilgrim) is brought into the walls of the Licheń's sanctuary. And finally, the one man cult, newspeak, the aesthetics expressed in the paintings, statues and the monumental architecture of the basilica evoke a characteristic style, which was present in the Polish People's Republic. Due to this familiarity Licheń offers security to its visitors. It allows for nostalgia for the times of PRL, however without the negative "communist" connotations. After all, it is a Catholic pilgrimage site.

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