

*Paper prepared for the Euroacademia International Conference
Re-Inventing Eastern Europe*

Vienna, 17 – 19 May 2012

This paper is a draft

Please do not cite

**THE SANCTUARY IN LICHEŃ:
REDEFINING RELIGIOSITY AND ENTERTAINMENT**

Helena Chmielewska-Szlajfer
Euroacademia Conference Reinventing Eastern Europe
Vienna, May 17-19, 2012

Helena Chmielewska-Szlajfer
New School for Social Research, New York
Institute of Applied Social Sciences, University of Warsaw, Poland

Abstract:

The 1989 political transition in Poland, a peaceful change from Communist state and economy to democracy and capitalism, had an enormous influence on other social spheres. The transition reopened the country to the outside world, especially “the West” which had been mythologized in the Communist period as a place of political freedom, wealth, consumption and culture.

One of the spheres where transformation has been particularly noticeable has been Catholic religious practice. While the Polish Church played an undeniably significant role in overthrowing Communist rule, it, too, has been forced to rethink its role in post-1989 Poland. An example of this change can be found in a brand new sanctuary built in a small town, Licheń, in 2004. The sanctuary not only boasts a basilica almost the size of that in the Vatican and is famous for being the epitome of kitsch, it also offers novel visual interpretations of Polish history merged with Catholicism, as well as new adaptations to the needs of pilgrims: hotels, cafes, barbecue spaces, ponds and playgrounds—all within the sanctuary walls.

The sanctuary in Licheń serves as a vivid example of the changes which have been taking place in Poland during the last twenty years in terms of religiosity, interpreting contemporary history and the “Western” influence of entertainment, which can now be found in such bastions of traditional values as a religious sanctuary. The emphasis on making difficult topics more accessible has been causing them to become more undemanding and fun; at the same time it has replaced serious reflection with entertainment. The Catholic Church in Poland appears to be incorporating elements previously belonging to the sphere of the secular, gradually transforming the ways of practicing religion.

Keywords: Poland, Licheń, sanctuary, religion, entertainment

The sanctuary space and elements

The sanctuary in Licheń, a small town in central-west Poland inhabited by less than 1500 people, has recently become unique for a number of reasons. It boasts one of the biggest basilicas in Europe, and while finished as recently as 2004 its style is an out-of-proportion, oversized interpretation of baroque. Although the history of the sanctuary itself dates back to the 19th century, the idea to build the gigantic basilica next to already existing two churches emerged in the 1980s—a tumultuous decade in Poland—thanks to the sanctuary's charismatic administrator, Father Eugeniusz Makulski. The intention of the building's founder was to emphasize the significance of the sanctuary in Licheń as a space of Marian devotion, known for its miracles since the 19th century. At present the sanctuary is in the same rank as the centuries old Jasna Góra, famous for its Black Madonna, situated in the city of Częstochowa in southwest Poland, until recently the most popular sanctuary among Polish Catholics.

The sanctuary in Licheń is surrounded by a wall, for the most part concrete, designed to separate it from the outside world. The space inside includes the brand new basilica; two churches, St. Dorothy from the 15th century and the 19th century St. Mary of Częstochowa; Golgotha from the 1970s, a manmade hill inspired by the Biblical site where Christ was crucified, which is filled with caves made of stones donated by individuals; in addition to numerous chapels, statues and monuments to Polish national and war heroes, as well as to priests who helped create the sanctuary. Moreover, the sanctuary space houses two pilgrims' houses, both new, clean, and—unlike the rest of the sanctuary—with an austere, modern feel. The space surrounding the two old churches which are located close to each other, seems cluttered with different monuments, crosses and stones both religious and related to Polish national history, souvenir shops with postcards, plastic crosses and key rings, a spring with holy water and numerous monuments. The entrance gate located close by, separates the sanctuary from a two-lane roadway, a small parking lot and a lake which is also popular with people coming to the sanctuary. The other end of the space with the new basilica is, instead, empty with a manicured lawn and concrete pathways. This backdrop allows the newly built place of worship to stand out and dominate over the surroundings.

Time at the Licheń sanctuary is organized around the Holy Masses, which are celebrated several times during the day in all three churches within the sanctuary's walls. Apart from the possibility of taking part in this form of religious practice, the visitors—predominantly practicing Catholics from all over Poland who come individually or in organized groups—spend their time exploring the space. When they choose to pray in a church, the Holy Masses held in the basilica are the first choice. One can easily notice the basilica is the most popular feature of the site; the Golgotha comes in second. The churches, especially the basilica, are full during the Masses, and the Golgotha is always filled with people climbing up the man-made concrete, stone and translucent plastic hill filled with caves.

The Golgotha

The Golgotha is appealing not only because it is a hill 80 feet tall on an otherwise flat terrain, which allows visitors to enjoy the picturesque country landscape once they get on the top; the Stations on the hill and the grottos inside the hill are equally, if not more, interesting. While individuals and families explore the Golgotha taking pictures with their cameras and cell phones as they wander, organized groups can be often heard singing religious songs when climbing up the hill; this is particularly noticeable in the summer, the season of pilgrimages. The Golgotha, as everything else in the sanctuary, is permeated with Polish history of struggles for political independence, national martyrdom and the specifically Polish Marian cult. The scenes displayed in the caves are inspired by the New Testament, significantly by events taking place in Christ's final days. Colorful folk-like plaster life-size figures depict such scenes as the torturing of Christ, the revelation of Virgin Mary in Licheń, Mary Magdalene performing penance, and Judas kissing Christ. While the stone caves differ in size from 100 to 300 square feet and have small holes inside them for light, the most striking cave, according to the visitors (Kula 2002), houses "The Chapel of Unborn Children." In the first room one sees a life-size sculpture of a newborn baby turned towards the wall with an inscription "Mommy, Daddy / My Polish Nation / Doctor, Nurse / Don't Kill Me;" a glass mosaic in the form of a fetus can be seen on the adjacent wall, a written sign next to it states "To Millions of Polish Children Murdered by Their Loved Ones." Another sign points towards the Monument to Polish Children in the next room; there one can see Christ on the Cross looking at a tiny grave on the floor, while the mother and father sit on chairs on the two sides, their heads in their hands. The inscription on the grave states, "To the Unborn Child." Christ on the Cross can also be found on the very top of the hill, Saint John and Mary standing on both sides of the cross. Benches are attached to the stones and groups often stay there for a longer while to pray and sing religious songs. The atmosphere is usually solemn, supported by the singing pilgrim groups.

When one heads back down, one can see a copy of the painting of Mary from the chapel of Our Lady of Ostra Brama in Vilnius; the original was created in the 17th century and depicts Virgin Mary without Jesus, her hands crossed on her chest. She is usually dressed in gold “clothes,” with only her head and hands visible under the intricate riza. Before Vilnius became the capital of Lithuania in 1990 it was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and then, after World War II, part of the Soviet Union. The 17th century painting, claimed to be miraculous, played a significant role as a symbol of Polish Catholicism and patriotism during Poland’s struggle to regain independence after its partitioning by neighboring states at the end of the 18th century. The city gate where the painting hung was the site of many demonstrations held by Poles fighting for the Polish state. The copy in the grotto is surrounded by two other paintings which depict grand events in the history of the Polish monarchy: the 15th century Baptism of Lithuania and the 16th century Union of Lublin, the founding moment of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, one of the greatest achievements in Polish imperial ambitions.

The last of the caves one can visit on the Golgotha is the striking grotto of the Assumption of Virgin Mary. The translucent plastic-tiled walls reflect the light in the room, making the space sparkle with color. The scene shows life-size marble-like sculptures; angels take Virgin Mary up towards the Holy Trinity; the figures look as if they were floating in the air. Here, too, one can often see people praying in groups. Marble Stairs of Penance are located next to the cave, they lead up the hill; an inscription above the entrance states that one should climb up on one’s knees.

If one passes the nearby churches of St. Dorothy’s and St. Mary of Częstochowa, and walks outside the sanctuary gate towards the lake, one can find a spring with drinkable and apparently healing water. It is not uncommon to see visitors pour it into colorful plastic bottles (white, pink or blue) in the shape of Virgin Mary, which can be bought in souvenir shops inside the sanctuary.

The Basilica and other Polish-Catholic representations

The gigantic basilica towers over everything else; the building’s golden dome and sparkly window details shine in the sun. The basilica was designed with the help of symbolic numbers: the number of stairs which lead to the entrance is 33, the age of Christ when he was crucified; there are 365 windows which represent days and 52 entrance doors which represent weeks in a year; the ornaments on walls and columns have the shape of leaves, grains and flowers which in national iconography are considered specifically Polish, the ends of benches are shaped as wings of the 17th century Polish winged cavalry decisive for the victory in the Battle of Vienna, one of the greatest victories of the Polish Kingdom and Christianity over Islam. The vast walls and ceilings inside the basilica glow with light pink and gold. Visitors enter the space making the sign of the cross, then proceed to explore taking photos with cameras or cell phones. The modest-sized picture of Virgin Mary of Licheń—not much bigger than a postcard—is set in a big gold ornate frame centrally positioned above the high altar. According to the architect, Barbara Bielecka, the building’s saturation with symbols is deliberate; they are supposed to indicate the ties of the Polish nation with its land and the Catholic Church (Bielecka 2004; Makulski 2009).

It is not difficult to discover that the basilica was sponsored by individual donors; over 17 thousand marble slabs with the names of supporters are fixed on its walls in the side aisles and on the basement level. The so-called Golden Chapel, which owes its name to the predominant color, is also located there. Before the completion of the main part of the basilica the Masses were held in this chapel which can accommodate 2500 people. The main nave of the basilica on the upper level where the Virgin Mary of Licheń is set above the altar has a capacity of twenty thousand; five hundred thousand people can fit in the open space in front of the building.

One of the paintings popular with the visitors is located on the basement level of the basilica outside the chapels; it is a Nativity Scene triptych presenting the birth of Christ, set in a heavy baroque-like, wavy golden frame. A gold open book with a golden eagle similar to the Polish national symbol, standing on top of it seems to be coming out of the triptych’s central plate. Polish kings, great poets and clergymen (John Paul II as the most contemporary representative); urns with signs “Katyń” and “Monte Cassino” (both are names of sites which became symbolic in Polish history during World War II: the first is the name of a village in Russia where high-ranking Polish army officers were murdered by the Soviets; the other is the name of a hill and monastery in Italy where Polish soldiers died in battle); royal castles in Warsaw and Krakow (the latter had been the capital before it was moved to Warsaw in the 16th century); as well as the Jasna Góra monastery, famous for its miraculous painting of the Black Madonna (said to have saved the monastery during the Swedish invasion in the 17th century) are depicted on the right panel. The left panel shows representatives of different professions from farmers to soldiers, who, together with the Three Wise Kings, are carrying gifts for Christ. The figure of Father

Makulski, the curator of the Licheń sanctuary and creator of the basilica can also be found in the crowds approaching infant Jesus. The backdrop of the side panels is a renaissance-styled countryside landscape with hills and forests.

The central plate separated by two gold and marble columns attached to the main frame depicts a stone cave. Inside it Infant Jesus, in the center, spreads out his hands as if in a blessing from his crib; he is surrounded by yellow light. Virgin Mary is sitting on the left, while St. Joseph is standing on the right with his shepherd's stick; they are both looking at infant Christ. The bottom part of the painting is framed by lambs which are looking at the central scene; on the top a crowd of baby angels is looking at Jesus from the clouds. Two bigger angels are holding a sash with the inscription "Gloria in Excelsis Deo," as well as a floating sign "AD 2000" above it. Although the side plates depict scenes during the daytime, the central Nativity Scene takes place at night. A sign on top of the triptych reads "Christus Natus Est Nobis / Polonia Semper Fidelis."

Museum, stores and other facilities

On the sides of the basilica there is space for a store with souvenirs and books and a museum. Named Father Józef Jarzębowski Museum, the collection includes memorabilia of Polish 19th century heroes who fought for the state's independence, letters of Polish kings, European and Asian swords, in addition to paintings and prints made by famous Polish historical painters. The main exhibition presents the history of Poland from the first kings of the Piast dynasty to the fall of Communism in 1989. A collection of armor, weapons and other objects linked to the history of the Polish state is preceded by a video about Father Jarzębowski and the making of his collection. The founder, born at the end of the 19th century, spent his entire life collecting Polish national memorabilia treating them as symbols of Poland and the struggle for regaining statehood. The collection was initially housed in a museum founded by the Marian Fathers in Warsaw—Father Jarzębowski was a member of the Marian Fathers' Congregation—it was moved to Licheń in 2010.

The second floor of the museum is dedicated to paintings and prints. A huge-sized digitalized version of the first Polish Bible, originally translated in the 16th century, stands out in a surprisingly modestly advertised collection of drawings which includes the works of Piranesi, Rembrandt and the Polish 19th century painter Matejko, famous for depicting grand moments in Poland's imperial history. While the drawings remain mostly unnoticed by the visitors, one can usually find someone "flipping" through the Bible's digital pages set on a tall black lectern.

If one walks to the other side of the basilica one will find a souvenir store which offers a selection of Bibles, prayer books, postcards, close to life-size plaster sculptures of saints, silver crosses, and other objects which can usually be found in shops attached to spaces of religious worship.

The large open space between the new basilica and the older buildings in the sanctuary is covered with mowed grass. The only people who seem to leave the paths of concrete which cut across the lawn are children who use it as a field to play ball or simply to run around. Still, if one decides to go sideways instead of heading straight towards the basilica, one will find a wooden bridge hanging over a fishpond (the small colorful fish are a never-ending source of fascination and comment among the visitors), a fountain, a children's playground as well as a barbecue pit. These, too, are the more popular areas in the sanctuary, where one can sit down and relax; they also appear to be spaces favored by teenagers to hang out and by people who, despite the drinking ban, want to have a sip of beer.

The Grąblin Forest

Just over a mile outside the Licheń sanctuary lies the Grąblin Forest, famous for its 19th century miracles and revelations of Virgin Mary. It is treated as an inseparable part of the sanctuary, even though these two spaces are not adjacent to each other. The forest is also advertised on posters in the sanctuary. According to the official version, Virgin Mary, clad in dress with the Polish eagle on the chest, revealed herself to a Polish Napoleonic soldier fighting near Leipzig and told him to put her picture on display in the village where he lived. The soldier found the oil painting, made on larch wood not much bigger than a postcard, near Licheń more than two decades later and hung it high on a pine tree in the Grąblin Forest. Because of the eagle on Virgin Mary's dress, the picture was supposed to be hidden from the eyes of the enemies of Poland, which was partitioned at that time.

Years later the Madonna appeared in front of a cowherd in the forest, foretelling an epidemic—indeed there was a wave of cholera some years later—and gave her assurance that Poland had a special place in her heart. The Grąblin Forest became a place of miraculous healings and the cured gave money to build a chapel to house the painting. After the clergy officially recognized the miracles, the Virgin Mary of Licheń was moved to

a church. Hidden by the locals during World War II, the picture was put inside St. Dorothy's church after the end of the war, to finally find its place above the main altar in the Basilica of Our Lady of Licheń in 2006.

The forest bought by Father Makulski in the early 1990s, is filled with stone chapels in memory of Virgin Mary's miracles, statues and the Stations of the Cross. People walk down the main path in groups, praying or singing together, or having a stroll and taking photos. A huge rock with an inscription written by Father Makulski in which he thanks Virgin Mary, is placed close to the main entrance to the forest; and, as one can also notice on the Golgotha hill, countless stones are signed in marker pen and white correcting fluid with names of visitors and dates of their visits.

Given the proximity of the holy water source right outside the sanctuary, it may seem ironic that a pickup truck parked in front of the entrance gate to the forest advertises holy water from Lourdes.

Everything has a meaning

The importance of staging and stylization in confirming and creating traditions was emphasized by numerous scholars, including anthropologists Barbara Myerhoff and Sally F. Moore (1977). According to the authors who reinterpret Émile Durkheim's classic idea of rites as reinforcing existing traditions (1965), rituals have a "tradition-like effect" and create definite, indisputable meanings, especially in situations when the messages they present can be most questioned. Furthermore, according to Victor Turner (1974, 1977) such situations often take place in periods of transition which undermine previously dominant meanings. In the case of the sanctuary in Licheń this process may be noticed not so much in terms of strict ritual but in terms of adding and transforming elements (the building of the new basilica, depictions of recent events in Poland's history in religious paintings, etc.) to the already existing style of religious spaces. Moreover, it is not without importance that Poland is often labeled as one of the bastions of Catholicism; emphasizing Poland's strong religious devotion seems even more important for the Polish Church in an increasingly nonreligious society, both outside and inside Poland. While Myerhoff writes that "[r]ituals are stylized because they must be convincing" and that in order to be persuasive they have to be viewed as familiar (1977: 199), in Licheń the stylization applies chiefly to aesthetics and organization of space. Still, if religious ritual is to be understood more broadly, e.g. as the act of visiting the sanctuary by a member of the Catholic Church, the experience of being there and participating in the different activities the sanctuary facilitates may be interpreted as a form of taking part in a ritual.

Nevertheless, it seems as though on the surface nothing has changed. The new sanctuary in Licheń fits into the preexisting religious style: it was created near a site of miracles; it boasts a unique painting which depicts Virgin Mary, the maker of these miracles; the space of the sanctuary is clearly separated from the outside world; and it also holds a spring with holy water. Most of the elements inside the sanctuary, such as the basilica, the Golgotha, the Ways of the Cross fit the historically established version of a sanctuary; national and historical references can also be found in older, well-known sanctuaries. And indeed, the more contemporary Polish national and historical elements noticeable at the sanctuary in Licheń—particularly those which refer to the period after 1939, during which Poland fought in World War II, was forced to become a Communist Soviet satellite state, and regained independence in 1989—seem to be a continuation of the existing Polish custom of merging national history with Catholicism. On the one hand, this can be noticed in popular everyday beliefs in Virgin Mary's interventions in support of Poland's military struggles. On the other, it is visible in the actions of the Polish Catholic Church which was an active aid to the democratic opposition during Communist rule, and has remained an important player on the Polish political scene ever since. At the sanctuary in Licheń, Catholicism is presented as inherently entwined with Poland's history, mixing monuments to religious and national heroes in the open space, as well as religious and national historical narratives in paintings inside the basilica. At the same time Catholicism is linked to an imagined vision of Polish nature, hence the cornflowers, poppies and crops carved in the columns of the basilica.

Yet what seems new is this very presentation of Poland and Catholicism created in Licheń. Unlike Jasna Góra or Ostra Brama—with paintings of Virgin Mary which played a significant role in the history of Poland's struggles—neither the huge basilica, nor the two other older churches in the sanctuary in Licheń have in fact played a role in the national history so vividly depicted there. Furthermore, until the basilica was built the Virgin Mary of Licheń was hardly known to the broader public. Thus, what the sanctuary appears to lack in national historical significance, it makes up for in scale. The number of monuments to Polish war heroes located in the space of the sanctuary as well as the strong presence of figures important in the, also most recent, history of the Polish state in religious paintings inside the basilica may suggest that at least in terms of visual presentation the links between Catholicism and Polish national history have been getting stronger over time. Moreover, one can

sense that within the implicit religious narrative present in Licheń, the Polish democratic transition was possible only thanks to the support of the Catholic Church.

Aesthetics, historical narrative and religious practice

The organization of the sanctuary's space has a very contemporary feel. It is, after all, a novel idea to locate cafeterias, pilgrim accommodation and barbecue spaces inside the gates of the sanctuary, a thing unheard of in other, older Polish sanctuaries. In a sense, the sanctuary becomes a self-sufficient space which encompasses both the traditionally religious and secular; this way it also becomes more approachable and accommodating to the visitors. Indeed, when asked if they like the sanctuary in Licheń, most visitors claim that it is better than the older Jasna Góra. They appreciate the grandeur of the new basilica, the Golgotha hill made of stone and translucent plastic which makes it look like a mound, as well as the sculptures in the caves inside it, just as much as they enjoy the small fishpond, the fountains and benches scattered around the sanctuary space (Klekot 2002). The saturation with religious and national symbols does not seem to bother them—although some state the symbols need to be explained because there are so many of them and their meaning gets lost—as they claim not to focus on deciphering the details inside the space. What is more important is the overall sensation the sanctuary provides to its visitors, namely the sense of interacting with beauty, greatness and national pride, all mediated through a religious narrative (Dzienisiewicz 2002).

Unlike most regular visitors to the sanctuary in Licheń, its critics are often better educated and come from larger cities. Their disapproval is targeted mostly at the aesthetic side of the place and they seem to pay more attention to the details than the average enthusiastic visitors. The basilica is the biggest source of criticism—it is claimed to be out of proportion, oversaturated with a chaos of diverse references, from Ancient Greece, to *Dallas*-style nouveau riche, as the architect's aim was to encapsulate the entire history of architecture in this one building. It is accused of being too big for the sanctuary's space, ludic, inappropriately kitschy and in poor taste (Omilanowska 2002).

Some critics accustomed to a more traditional separation of the religious and the secular, seem disturbed by the sanctuary's screaming one-dimensional national and historical narrative, seamlessly linked with the space's recreational potential. They oppose the seemingly simplistic narrative, claiming that the sphere of religious belief should remain in the spiritual domain of the sacred, shielded from secular aspects of life such as entertainment.

The criticism of entertainment and leisure inside the sanctuary is often presented as an aesthetic argument. The basilica is frequently accused of being kitschy, overflowing with symbols, and of tacky looks which can only be appreciated by people lacking taste. This type of reasoning serves as yet another example of Pierre Bourdieu's (1998) concept of distinctions based on aesthetic values, as well as Jean Baudrillard's (1998) notion of kitsch as excess of connotations lacking proper meaning. Yet the main argument of the critics is that the basilica attempts to mimic the grandeur of old religious architecture, but in doing so mixes expensive materials used in the original buildings with cheap epoxy and plastic. The basilica is thus a fake replica despite its architect's declarations, merely pretending to look like the old magnificent originals. This faux grandeur attracts many visitors who do not notice or do not mind these shortcuts, but at the same time discourages others for whom this simulated appearance falls into the category of the disingenuous and, what is more, profane.

Religious leisure?

Among the various shared tropes which can be found at the Licheń sanctuary, at least one of them is particularly noteworthy from the point of view of religious practice and entertainment, that is the blurring divide between the religious and the secular. Although the sanctuary is institutionally defined as a Catholic Marian religious space, it offers different forms of non-religious leisure which seems intrinsic to the overall religious experience it facilitates. Moreover, what appears to be new and unique in the sanctuary in Licheń is that, at least to some extent, it does away with solemnity. It achieves this not by eliminating the serious religious and patriotic elements—on the contrary, the space is overflowed with Polish-Catholic symbols—but by adding new, surprisingly friendly and accessible features to the preexisting style of sanctuaries.

In an interview for a Polish daily, Father Makulski, the creator and administrator of the sanctuary, states that visitors need diverse stimuli. They should not be forced to participate in religious practices (such as Mass, or saying the rosary) for a long time—"the pilgrim won't spend an entire day inside the church." According to him,

pilgrims cannot focus solely on praying and they need more attractions, hence the cafeterias and bars where they can buy food and non-alcoholic drinks (Surmiak-Domańska 1998).

The fountains, fishpond and other recreational spaces have been designed using a similar philosophy of providing an alternative to official activities such as group prayers; they allow for individual contemplation, or simply relaxation within the walls of the sanctuary. Still, the addition of playgrounds for children and, what is even more notable, barbeque spaces seems to introduce a different of the religious space. The recreational, leisure-focused aspects of the sanctuary become an intrinsic part of the religious experience sanctified by the same institutional authority which originally legitimized the religious space. In Licheń the nonreligious elements, located outside the sanctuary walls in the past, have been incorporated into the space, blurring the distinction between the religious and the secular. As a result, the visitors are offered a mixture of grand, solemn narrative on Poland's unique ties with Catholicism with fair-like amenities; on the other hand, they witness an inclusion of elements which used to be secular into the physical realm of the religious.

It seems that the aspect of leisure is what makes the sanctuary in Licheń feel safe and familiar; it treats leisure activities as an agreeable form of bringing religious experience closer to people. Recreational facilities, the excess of visual symbols alluding to religion and the state, as well as the narrative which appears to inscribe the sanctuary in Licheń into the Polish religious and national history, all seem to shape an, perhaps ironically, coherent whole. It is a space which is not to be analyzed in detail but to be grasped in its entirety, as the overload of meanings and visual sensations help create a feeling—rather than an informed opinion—on contemporary Catholicism and Poland.

I believe the contemporary forms of leisure and religious practice visible at the sanctuary in Licheń show an interesting shift that has been taking place in treating Catholicism in Poland. In *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1963) Mircea Eliade writes about the infantilization of religious symbols when they are interpreted too literally, or when God—in this particular case Virgin Mary—is seen as playing a part in every single element of reality. It looks as though in Licheń the emphasis on making difficult topics more accessible has been making them more simplistic and trivial. Nonetheless, these easy symbolic meanings appear important to those who share them. Within the walls of the new sanctuary the playgrounds and barbeque spaces, the kitsch, the faux grandeur as well as Virgin Mary with the Polish eagle on her chest create an easy, pleasing and coherent narrative about Poland's spiritual uniqueness. While the paintings in Jasna Góra, Ostra Brama and other older Polish sanctuaries have played an important role as religious symbols in the state's political struggles, in the brand new Licheń Virgin Mary has become overwhelmed by the excess of diverse symbols originally intended to emphasize her significance. According to the interviewed visitors who gave their opinion on which sanctuary they liked best (Omiłanowska 2008; Dzienisiewicz 2002), in this symbolic excess they find themselves most at ease.

Bio:

Helena Chmielewska-Szlajfer is a Ph.D. candidate at The New School for Social Research in New York and at The Institute of Applied Social Sciences, University of Warsaw, Poland. She is writing her dissertation on the influences of everyday culture in religious entertainment, pro-voting campaigns and charity mass events in Poland after 1989. Her research interests focus on the sociology of knowledge, modern media and links between global and local cultures.

References:

- Baudrillard, Jean. 1998. *The Consumer Society: Myths and structures*. Trans. Chris Turner. Thousand Oaks, London: Sage.
- Bielecka, Barbara. 2004. *Świątynia Matki Bożej Licheńskiej*. Wrocław, Poland: ZET.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1988. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Durkheim, Émile. 1965. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Trans. Joseph Ward Swain. New York: Free Press.
- Dzienisiewicz, Izabella. 2002. Wizerunek Lichenia w mediach i w oczach pielgrzymów. *Polska Sztuka Ludowa - Konteksty* 56 (1-2): 149-58.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1963. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. Cleveland, OH: Meridian.
- Klekot, Ewa. 2002. Sąd smaku, czyli nierówni w społeczeństwie równych. *Polska Sztuka Ludowa - Konteksty* 56 (1-2): 117-9.
- Kula, Agnieszka. 2002. Licheńska Golgota jako przykład wznowienia tradycji oraz popularności nabożeństwa drogi krzyżowej. *Polska Sztuka Ludowa - Konteksty* 56 (1-2): 126-34.
- Makulski, Eugeniusz. 2009. *Opowieści Księdza Kustosza: 40 lat pracy w Licheniu wspomina Eugeniusz Makulski*. Wrocław, Poland: ZET.
- Moore, Sally F., and Barbara G. Myerhoff. 1977. Introduction. Secular Ritual: Forms and Meanings. In *Secular Ritual*, eds. Sally F. Moore, Barbara G. Myerhoff, 3-24. Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum.
- Myerhoff, Barbara G. 1977. We Don't Wrap Herring in a Printed Page. Fusion, Fictions and Continuity in Secular Ritual. In *Secular Ritual*, eds. Sally F. Moore, Barbara G. Myerhoff, 199-226. Assen, The Netherlands: Van.
- Omilanowska, Małgorzata. 2008. Od piramid do gusto polacco. *Murator* 7 : 34-9.
- Surmiak-Domańska, Katarzyna. 1998. Złote podkowy jadą do Lichenia. *Gazeta Wyborcza*.
- Turner, Victor. 1977. Variations on a Theme of Liminality. In *Secular Ritual*, eds. Sally F. Moore, Barbara G. Myerhoff, 36-52. Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum.
- Turner, Victor. 1974. *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors. Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

