

5. Ungarn / Hungary

Nonnen und Tschekistinnen. Vorstellungen der ungarischen Staatssicherheit von einer katholischen Gegenöffentlichkeit in den frühen fünfziger Jahren
Árpád von Klimó.....307

Remembrance and Oblivion: 1956 and the Politics of Memory in Hungary
Heino Nyssönen335

6. China / China

Public Secrets: Propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party and Correspondents (*tongxun yuan*) in Shanghai after 1949
Lorenz Bichler357

TEIL III / PART III

VERGLEICHENDER AUSBLICK / COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Von Schichten, Räumen und Sphären: Gibt es eine sowjetische Ordnung von Öffentlichkeiten? Einige Überlegungen in komparativer Perspektive
Gábor T. Rittersporn, Malte Rolf und Jan C. Behrends389

Open Spaces and Public Realm: Thoughts on the Public Sphere in Soviet-Type Systems
Gábor T. Rittersporn, Malte Rolf and Jan C. Behrends423

DANKSAGUNG.....453

AUTORENVERZEICHNIS / CONTRIBUTORS455

Sphären von Öffentlichkeit in Gesellschaften sowjetischen Typs Zwischen partei-staatlicher Selbstinszenierung und kirchlichen Gegenwelten

Public Spheres in Soviet-Type Societies Between the Great Show of the Party-State and Religious Counter-Cultures

herausgegeben von/edited by
Gábor T. Rittersporn/Malte Rolf/Jan C. Behrends

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INHALTSVERZEICHNIS / TABLE OF CONTENTS

TEIL I / PART I	
THEORETISCHE KONZEPTE / THEORETICAL APPROACHES	
Öffentliche Räume und Öffentlichkeit in Gesellschaften sowjetischen Typs: Ein erster Blick aus komparativer Perspektive (Einführung)	
<i>Gábor T. Rittersporn, Jan C. Behrends und Malte Rolf</i>	7
Exploring Public Spheres in Regimes of the Soviet Type: A Possible Approach (Introduction)	
<i>Gábor T. Rittersporn, Jan C. Behrends and Malte Rolf</i>	23
Licht an, Licht aus! „Öffentlichkeit“ in der (post-)sowjetischen Gesellschaft	
<i>Ingrid Oswald und Viktor Voronkov</i>	37
TEIL II / PART II	
FALLSTUDIEN / CASE STUDIES	
1. Sowjetunion / Soviet Union	
Öffentlicher Raum und gesellschaftliche Utopie. Stadtplanung, Kommunikation und Inszenierung von Macht in der Sowjetunion am Beispiel Moskaus zwischen 1917 und 1964	
<i>Monica Rütters</i>	65
Der Moskauer Kultur- und Erholungspark. Formen von Öffentlichkeit im Stalinismus der dreißiger Jahre	
<i>Katharina Kucher</i>	97

**THE WEeping VIRGIN MARY AND THE SMILING
COMRADE STALIN**

Polish Catholics and Communists in 1949

Izabella Main

This article deals with two events that occurred in the eastern Polish city of Lublin in 1949: the so-called miracle of Lublin and the celebration of Stalin's 70th birthday.¹ The first episode had both devotional and political aspects while the second can be understood as a political act, even though it also implied an attempt to create a cult. Juxtaposing the two events contrasts spontaneous reaction to an alleged miracle with a stage-managed function that was imposed on the public. Both incidents occasioned defiant gestures against the Communist state, although the purported miracle also induced believers to question the authority of the Church. At the same time, the state's reaction towards the miracle and its success to put through the birthday celebration are indicative of the Communist state's powerful resources.

Both events occurred in the same physical sphere, so much so that they quickly constituted a confrontation over public space. The Communists did not have great difficulty to occupy the territory of the city. In the long run, however, believers managed to take the upper hand. They operated in a symbolic realm that could not be taken away from them, not

¹ This essay is a part of a doctoral dissertation entitled "National and Religious Holidays as the Clashing Point of the State, the Church and Opposition in Poland, 1944 – 1989: The Case of Lublin" defended at the Department of History, Central European University, Budapest, 2002.

even by the Catholic Church that has been disinclined to accept the idea of a Lublin miracle.

First I shall clarify the religious and political context of the miracle, the responses of the Church and of the Communists to the incident as well as the methods the latter implemented to prevent and repress religious agitation. Then I shall discuss the celebration of Stalin's birthday and deal with the evidence we have about unruliness in Polish society at the time. The analyses will be concluded by remarks about the meaning of the two events for a local community and about the way they were remembered later.

The Lublin Miracle: The Event

On Sunday, July 3rd, 1949, after a mass in the Lublin cathedral, a nun, Sister Barbara, noticed that the likeness of Virgin Mary on the side-altar was weeping. She immediately informed the sacristan Józef Wójtowicz and the priest Tadeusz Malec who conveyed the message to the auxiliary Bishop Zdzisław Goliński.² Goliński chose to ignore it and to follow the regular order of Sunday masses. The rumor, however, quickly spread among believers. They gathered in the cathedral praying, singing and weeping until late evening when the church was closed. Pilgrims appeared on the next day and congregated in the cathedral. There was soon a line of believers outside the cathedral waiting for their turn to see the miraculous altarpiece and to pray to it.³ Six processions took place around the church on July 6th, and a crowd estimated at 3,000 people assembled about the place. On July 8th, pilgrims arrived from distant counties of the Province of Lublin and the message spread across the neighboring Kielce region where rumor had it that "Lublin's security service doesn't let people near the church and even shoots at them."⁴

2. Kras, Józef: *Placząca Matka Boża w Lubelskiej Katedrze*. Kult - Koronacja [The Weeping Virgin Mary in the Lublin Cathedral. The Cult - the Crowning], Lublin: Polihymnia, 1999, p. 27.

3. Ziółek, Jan and Przytuła, Agnieszka (ed.): *Represje wobec uczestników wydarzeń w Katedrze Lubelskiej w 1949 roku* [Repressions against Participants in the Events of the Lublin Cathedral in 1949], Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1999, pp. 24-25.

4. Archive of the Ministry of Interior and Administration (AMSWIA), MBP (Ministry of Public Security), GM 559, pp. 362-372.

Already on July 4th, Bishop Piotr Kalwa who had been informed by Bishop Goliński, appointed a commission to examine the weeping picture. It was composed of priests, theologians and physicians who established that the reasons of the phenomenon were not evident and that the substance they investigated was neither tears nor blood.⁵ After the findings by the commission, Bishop Kalwa issued a pastoral letter. He concluded that the phenomenon was not supernatural and that it should not be considered miraculous. He also asked believers not to organize pilgrimages. The letter was issued on July 6th, but was read in parishes only on Sunday, July 10th, a week after the incident. The few days between July 4th and July 10th were the ones when news about the miracle were spreading and when pilgrims were making their way to Lublin.

The letter of July 10th did not discourage pilgrimages. On Sunday, July 10th, 25,000 people came; on the next day - a working day - 15,000 people gathered. Word about the miracle also reached Warsaw province. Pilgrims arrived from Western and Northern Poland in the following days.⁶ Groups of believers marched from the railway station and assembled around the cathedral; they were waiting in lines to see the painting, they were singing religious anthems and praying aloud.

The bishop, instead of simply denying the miracle and forbidding the pilgrimages, recognized their positive aspects. He wrote in his missive:

"It has to be emphasized that there are positive spiritual effects in connection with the events in the cathedral: their extraordinary power can awaken and deepen religiosity. For example, there are cases of conversion to Catholicism, and numerous confessions in Lublin's churches. We should be grateful to the Virgin Mary for her kindness, even if this is the only result of the events in the cathedral."⁷

The letter complied with the authorities' demand to halt the gatherings, all the while accentuating welcome consequences of the phenomenon.

5. Ziółek and Przytuła (ed.): *Represje wobec*, p. 33; Kras: *Placząca Matka Boża*, p. 19. There is no trace of this report in the Archive of the Lublin Diocese.

6. AMSWIA, MBP, GM 559, pp. 376-382.

7. The letter is published in Ziółek and Przytuła (ed.): *Represje wobec*, pp. 33-34; and in Kras, *Placząca Matka Boża*, pp. 95-97.

The Political Context: State-Church Relations

At the moment of the alleged miracle, the Communist party (the Polish United Workers' Party, PZPR) was unquestionably ruling the country. The Communists came to power in the wake of the Second World War and with the support of the Soviet Union. On July 22nd, 1944, a Moscow group of Polish Communists established the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) and proclaimed the so-called "July Manifesto". This government, first seated in Lublin and recognized only by the Soviet Union, gradually strengthened its power on territories liberated by the Red Army and by the Soviet-sponsored Polish Army. After the war, underground movements loyal to the Polish government-in-exile in London were liquidated. The rigged referendum in June 1946 and the equally rigged parliamentary elections in January 1947 led to the elimination of all legal opposition. In December 1948, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) was forced to merge with the Polish Workers' Party (PPR), the Communist party. The PZPR was created in this way. These developments could leave no illusion as to the character of the new regime.⁸

The Communist state was rather careful in handling its relationships with the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic Church represented not only the predominant denomination. It had also a well-developed organization and a high moral authority, especially among the rural population. The clergy had often supported the Polish underground during the war; some priests were persecuted by the Nazis. As a result, the Church gained rather than lost public approval. In 1944, the Communists permitted the reopening of the Catholic University of Lublin. Though the activities of the university were gradually constrained by the authorities, it managed to influence the local community as well as believers throughout the country. In 1945, the Communist government decided that the concordat between the Vatican and Poland was no longer in force. From 1946 the state imposed censorship on publications of the Church, detained priests and confiscated Church property. During the elections of 1947 the Church sympathized with the opposition, but it did not openly accuse the Communists of rigging the vote. Relations between the state and the

8. Kersten, Krystyna: *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Church gradually worsened. They openly criticized one another and prepared programs for countermeasures.⁹ The state instituted the surveillance of the clergy by the security service, arrested and prosecuted numerous priests, strengthened anti-religious propaganda in the press, schools and mass organizations, and attempted to bring about internal divisions in the Church. The clergy spoke about its persecution in the churches, in the Catholic press and in pastoral letters.¹⁰ Furthermore, relations with the Holy See and a Church organization in Poland's western territories that the regime did not recognize, contributed to strained state-Church relations.

The Local Background of the Lublin Miracle

The miracle occurred in a unique conjuncture. July 3rd was the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the first Sunday of the new bishop's religious duties in Lublin. There was a particularly festive mass in the cathedral dedicated to the sacrifice of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of the Lublin Diocese. The new bishop of Lublin, Piotr Kalwa, was appointed by the Primate of Poland, Stefan Wyszyński, himself one-time Lublin bishop. The investiture of Bishop Piotr Kalwa took place on June 29th and was seen as a religious demonstration. The state security agency anticipated the participation of Primate Wyszyński, the members of the Episcopate and a large number of believers, and it was aware of the clergy's attempt to attract mass participation.¹¹ The Party report about the investiture stated that it was not as impressive as had been expected by the Church, and that only 3,000-4,000 people marched through the city.¹² Still, any public religious activity with high visibility in the public realm was understood as a threat for the PZPR and for the authorities of Lublin. Such activities also offered Catholics a feeling of belonging to a community that opposed the Communist regime.

9. Dudek, Antoni: *Państwo i Kościół w Polsce 1945-1970* [State and Church in Poland 1945-1970]. Kraków: PiT, 1995, pp. 8-16.

10. Dudek: *Państwo i Kościół*, pp. 16-17.

11. AMSWiA, MBP, GM 559, p. 279.

12. Lublin State Archive (API), KW PZPR 51/VI/626, p. 61.

Relations between the Church, the Communist Party and the city authorities were already very tense due to an open confrontation that had occurred a few weeks earlier, on the occasion of Corpus Christi. The Corpus Christi procession started traditionally at the cathedral and it led through the streets of Krakowskie Przedmieście, Trzeciogo Maja and around Plac Litewski, the main city square. In 1949 the Lublin authorities decided to diminish the importance and the public visibility of this religious holiday that fell on June 16th. Directors of secondary schools were instructed to send pupils for compulsory military training outside the city. Pupils were allowed to return to Lublin only in the late evening, by the time when the procession was over. Even though many young people took part in the military exercise, there was a violent confrontation during the procession. A car of the security service violently drove into the marching crowd who in revenge turned it upside down and attacked its passengers although they were allowed to escape afterwards. The entire incident was photographed and filmed and these materials were later used to identify and arrest culprits.¹³ For all that, different sources disagree over the course and sequence of events.

According to one participant, the procession had a religious and peaceful character. A guard of honor for the colors, composed of students, was preceding the believers singing religious hymns and praying aloud. When the car drove into the procession, people attacked it. However, a priest – a supervisor of academic youth – asked students to avoid excesses and to return home.¹⁴ On the faith of a document by the security agency from June 16th, when “the procession was dispersing, some people attacked cars of the security service that were passing by and raised hostile shouts. As a result of these incidents, provoked mostly by students of the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL), eighteen people were arrested, including nine religious activists.”¹⁵ A report issued on June 21st concluded that “thirty persons were arrested, including twenty-one students of the KUL and the other university of the city (UMCS). Among

13. Ziółek and Przytuła (ed.), *Reprezje wobec*, pp. 23-24.

14. Sobczak, Alina: *Wspomnienia [Recollections]*, in: Ziółek, Jan (ed.): *Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski w latach 1944-1953. Wspomnienia i relacje [The Catholic University of Lublin between 1944 and 1953. Recollections and Reports]*, Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 1999, pp. 145-146.

15. AMSWIA, MBP, GM 559, p. 311.

the arrested were leaders of Catholic organizations, an officer of the pre-war army, and other people who were highly influenced by the clergy.”¹⁶ While security service reports attributed responsibility to the believers, especially students, an account by the Province Committee of the PZPR stated that “during the Corpus Christi feast [...] the carelessness of security officials led to a disturbance.”¹⁷ The incident made clear that tensions were increasing and that the next confrontation was only a matter of time.

The Devotional Context

In the tense atmosphere of the summer of 1949, the vision of the weeping Mary was enthusiastically accepted by believers because it was interpreted as divine intervention. Studies of miracles point to the role they may play for individuals as well as for communities. For devotees, the apparition of the Virgin Mary may signify the alleviation of personal, communal or global suffering and the bestowing of grace on a particular community or on the entire world.¹⁸ In some cases, the apparition is followed by the communication of a message, often understood only by the initiate, or by the revelation of secrets such as the secrets of Fatima. However, most of the time no message is transmitted and believers are left with ambiguity and uncertainty. Such instances include the exuding or bleeding of paintings and the moving or bleeding of crucifixes or statues.¹⁹ The pious are likely to have to choose from a wide range of interpretations for such cases ranging from the announcement of unknown misfortunes or the conversion of sinners to a call to receive divine grace and to a reward for virtue. As William Christian has pointed out, at least one advantage of a mute sign is that “each observer can read into it *ad libitum* general or private meanings, or both.”²⁰

16. AMSWIA, MBP, GM 559, p. 316. There were two universities in Lublin: the Catholic University (KUL) founded in 1918 and Marie Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS) that was founded in 1944 by the regime in order to counterbalance the influence of the KUL.

17. APL, KW PZPR 51/VI/626, p. 60.

18. Zimdors-Swartz, Sandra L.: *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 165.

19. Christian, William A. Jr.: *Moving Crucifixes in Modern Spain*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 103.

20. Christian: *Moving Crucifixes*, p. 103.

The miracle of Lublin did not convey an articulate message. But in the context of strained relations between believers and supporters of the regime, the vision promised strength and power to convert sinners (the Communists) and to mobilize the faithful. The enthusiastic reaction to the weeping altarpiece can be read as an expression of the longing of Lublin believers for divine intervention in a situation in which the state was exercising its power against religious practice. There is a strong correlation between political turmoil, the persecution of the Church and the phenomenon of miracles and apparitions.²¹ The believers often perceive divine intervention as a sign of hope for a better future, and such feelings were noted in Lublin too. Moreover, several believers experienced miraculous healing, even though none of them was examined by physicians and the only trace of this are votive offerings.²²

The weeping likeness of the Holy Virgin was a copy of the picture of the Virgin Mary of Jasna Góra, a sanctuary in Częstochowa. The Black Madonna of Jasna Góra is revered as a miraculous image. Its cult originates in the 17th century, at the time of the Swedish invasion of Poland in 1655, when King Jan Kasimir dedicated the Kingdom of Poland to the Blessed Mary in order to thank her for the successful defense of the Jasna Góra Monastery.²³ The cult of the Black Madonna intensified with time. This led to the Vatican's decision in 1890 to designate the Virgin Mary as the symbolic Queen of Poland. The Pope ruled that her holiday should be celebrated on April 1st. After 1918, the Polish Episcopate decided to unite the holiday of the Queen of Poland with the holiday of the Constitution of May 3rd, 1791. The Vatican approved the decision in 1923.²⁴ It was in

21. See Blackburn, David: *Appearitions of the Virgin Mary in Bismarckian Germany*. New York: Knopf, 1994, p. 37, and p. 399. Blackburn described several waves of miracles which came in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, Bismarckian anti-church policies and wars in the 20th century. The largest modern wave of miracles occurred between 1947 and 1950; they resulted from "wartime suffering, post-war deprivations, and political turbulences".

22. Kras mentions several cases of healings which occurred not only in 1949 but also later. These included healing of incurable diseases: blindness, infertility, rheumatism, and others. See Kras: *Placząca Matka Boża*, pp. 35-48.

23. Pomian-Szednicki, Maciej: *Religious Change in Contemporary Poland: Secularisation and Politics*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, p. 34.

24. Zaleski, Wincenty: *Jasna Góra 1382-1982*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Salezjańskie, 1982, pp. 232-233.

1927 that a copy of the Black Madonna of Jasna Góra was placed in the Lublin cathedral.²⁵

The weeping was first noticed by ecclesiastics, by a nun and by priests. The rapid spread of belief in the miracle among the laity can be partly explained by a specific type of religiosity – popular, non-intellectual, and venerative – especially characteristic of the rural population of Poland. The bishop denied canonic status to the vision and he also asked to halt pilgrimages to Lublin. Still, some clergymen visited the cathedral.²⁶ Disagreement among the clergy might have resulted from the widespread view that secular authorities had influenced Bishop Kałwa or even imposed the denial on him.²⁷ Belief in the miracle and skepticism about it divided the clergy as well as the laity, with rural clergymen probably more often lending credit to the sign of divine intervention.

Confrontation Around the Miracle

The first letter of the bishop had little effect on the faithful who continued to gather near the cathedral and to openly manifest their devotion. On July 13th, a young woman, Helena Rabczuk, was trampled to death by a crowd rushing away as suddenly rumor spread that a scaffolding was falling down. This led to an official investigation and to an unsuccessful attempt by the governor of Lublin Province to close the church.²⁸ After the accident, the authorities undertook several measures to prevent pilgrimages and to stop religious mobilization. They administratively forbade selling tickets to Lublin. Police patrols were placed on the roads leading to the city and stopped people who did not live in Lublin or could not prove the necessity of entering it. These efforts, however, hardly had any effect. Ticket controllers did not fine passengers who had not paid the fare, the number of trains actually increased, the train schedule was upset, and people found many ways to justify their visit to Lublin.²⁹

25. Kras: *Placząca Matka Boża*, p. 13.

26. Kras: *Placząca Matka Boża*, p. 30; Ziółek and Przytuła (ed.): *Represje wobec*, p. 40.

27. See Kras: *Placząca Matka Boża*, *passim*.

28. Bordinow, Giennadij A. et al. (ed.): *Poliska-ZSRR. Struktury podległości. Dokumenty WKP(B) 1944-1949 [Poland-USSR. Structures of Dependence. Documents of the CPSU 1944-1949]*. Warsaw: ISP PAN, 1995, p. 299.

29. Ziółek and Przytuła (ed.): *Represje wobec*, p. 28, and p. 45.

The authorities also organized demonstrations against the miracle. The participants passed by the cathedral carrying banners with slogans like "Down with the clergy", "The Middle Ages", "Ignorance and illiteracy". They were also shouting at the believers. The latter sang religious hymns in response, defiantly displayed religious books and paintings as well as rosaries. In addition they waved sticks and crosses at the activists. The clashes led to arrests on charges of attempts to overthrow the political system and spreading hostile propaganda and rumors. There were numerous rallies and gatherings organized in factories, schools and institutions after July 14th to protest against the "provocation" of the "Lublin miracle." The local press published various petitions and resolutions denouncing the wonder. The zealous security service reported 2,500 anti-miracle rallies in Lublin Province for July 14th and 15th alone.³⁰

On Sunday, July 17th, further confrontations took place. Several accounts of them are preserved in the collection of personal reminiscences and memoirs in the Archive of the Lublin Diocese.³¹ According to the sources, the authorities organized a rally on Plac Litewski with speeches broadcasted through loudspeakers while the Holy Mass was celebrated in the Capuchin church on Krakowskie Przedmieście. The voices of the demonstrators and the prayers were sounding at the same time. People representing the authorities, the Party, the militia and the security service started to march towards the cathedral behind a red flag. On their way they encountered a group of believers who were marching towards the militia headquarters in order to demand the release of those arrested since Corpus Christi and the miracle.³² The participants of the illegal demonstration were following a cross. This version was given by the believers and as such presents the events from their perspective and under the influence of their emotions. This confrontation in the shadow of the symbols of two universes, the red flag and the cross, has all the chances to belong more to the realm of literary imagination than to that of history. Nevertheless, it also accurately accounts for the symbolic nature of the conflict around the Lublin miracle.

30. Bordiniugow and Kochański (ed.): Polska-ZSRR, p. 302.

31. As these were not accessible, I could only use accounts published by Ziółek/Przytuła and Kras. Ziółek and Przytuła (ed.): *Represje wobec Kras: Placząca Matka Boża*.

32. Ziółek and Przytuła (ed.): *Represje wobec*, pp. 31-32.

A report by an attaché of the Soviet Embassy in Warsaw that was based mostly on press material from *Trybuna Ludu* (People's Tribune) and *Sztandar Ludu* (People's Standard), gave a different reading of the July 17th events. It stated that a rally of 25,000 people was organized in Lublin at which the Minister of Public Administration and a member of the Central Committee of the PZPR, Jan Izydorczyk, were speaking on the state's approach to religion and the Catholic Church:

"We did not and do not make a distinction between believers and non-believers, between people defending and fighting religion [...]. We, the people's government, respect religious sentiments. We do not fight religion and we abide by the freedom of religion and conscience. Nobody forbids belief in God, to pray, to attend religious services, to baptize children, to worship holy pictures, [and] to participate in Corpus Christi processions. Nobody forbids teaching children religion, to fulfill religious services by the clergy. [...] Nobody is allowed to offend religious sentiments, to violate symbols of faith, crosses, holy pictures."³³

The official, therefore, claimed that the state guaranteed religious freedom and consequently the freedom of all religious practices, even public processions like the one on Corpus Christi. He claimed that the state merely opposed the clergy's political stand. After the speech, the participants passed a resolution demanding the Church hierarchy to stop its hostile activity and to regulate state-Church relations by mutual agreement.

The document of the attaché stated that the rally was well-prepared, Party activists secured mass participation from the countryside and ensured a solemn atmosphere. But afterwards, "devotees provoked a demonstration of 2,000 people who demanded the liberation of detainees and who marched towards the militia headquarters to set them free [...]. The militia dispersed the 'demonstration' and arrested about 300 people."³⁴ This description is similar to the believers' accounts so far as the goals of the illegal gathering are concerned. Still, the official version underlines the provocative character of the religious demonstration and its contrast with the solemn atmosphere of the official rally. A further report by the Ministry of Internal Security stressed the provocative nature of the believers' march and emphasized its relationship with other hostile

33. Bordiniugow and Kochański (ed.): Polska-ZSRR, p. 300.

34. Bordiniugow and Kochański (ed.): Polska-ZSRR, p. 301.

activities: "It is not a coincidence that simultaneously with the miracle and illegal gatherings, there is economic sabotage and attempts to wreck production."³⁵ This report stated that thanks to the appropriate reaction of the working class and the peasantry, hostile and provocative goals were not achieved and the provocateurs suffered a moral and political defeat. Yet the fact that 2,000 people openly opposed the state in a public demonstration, bore testimony to the weak support for the new regime.

The End of the Miracle

On July 18th, Bishop Kahwa wrote a new letter to demand that his previous appeals be followed. The letter spelled out that "people are asked to disperse because there was no miracle."³⁶ It was sent to parish churches in order to attempt preventing pilgrimages. But believers continued to visit the altarpiece and some of them claimed to have seen the picture in tears as late as the end of July and early August.³⁷ As the authorities arrested a few cathedral priests on the charge of stage-managing the miracle, there was no personnel left to take care of the church. The bishop had hardly any choice but to close it on August 8th.³⁸ After a week, the cathedral was reopened under the pressure of the governor of the province and the director of the security service. They did not want to be accused of closing the cathedral through employing force.

This week was sufficient to stop the flow of pilgrims. And as there was no longer a trace of tears on the painting, the affair of Lublin's miracle came to an end.³⁹

The miracle of Lublin resulted in many arrests. They started on July 10th. About 500 people had been detained by July 17th, most of them between the 14th and 17th. Only 50 of them were brought to court.⁴⁰ Despite several appeals by bishops, the priests and the staff of the cathedral were

35. Paczkowski, Andrzej (ed.): *Aparat bezpieczeństwa w latach 1944-1956. Taktyka, strategia, metody* [The Security Service between 1944 and 1956. Tactics, Strategy, Methods], Vol. 2, Warsaw: ISP PAN, 1996, pp. 154-155.

36. Ziółek and Przytuła (ed.): *Represje wobec*, p. 35.

37. Kras: *Placząca Matka Boża*, pp. 32-35.

38. Ziółek and Przytuła (ed.): *Represje wobec*, pp. 41-43.

39. Ziółek and Przytuła (ed.): *Represje wobec*, pp. 43-44.

40. Ziółek and Przytuła (ed.): *Represje wobec*, p. 30, and p. 74.

released only a year later, between July 20th and 25th, 1950. This was a result of an agreement between the government and the Episcopate on April 14th, 1950, that included a clause about the liberation of the detainees.⁴¹

Lublin's miracle made the division between supporters and opponents of the regime obvious. A press campaign by the authorities presented the latter as uneducated or even illiterate peasants from the countryside. The majority of pilgrims probably did come from the countryside. However, among the people put on trial, several were well-educated and many had at least some education.⁴² Ziółek maintains that all social groups and professions, including the military and Party members, were represented among the pilgrims.⁴³ There are no sources about the pilgrims and their social background. Nevertheless, it seems highly probable that the rural population that was generally more devout, believed in the wonder.

The alleged apparitions during the German *Kulturkampf* in Marpingen were clearly understood as "backwardness, superstition, disorder, the power of the priests, and the rule of ignorant mob" by liberals and people with higher education. Even among clergymen, the phenomenon elicited more embarrassment than enthusiasm.⁴⁴

As for the Lublin miracle, the final response of the Church remains unclear. We do not know if the affair embarrassed or inspired ecclesiastics. It is certain, however, that the miracle led to an open clash between supporters of the divine character of the event and backers of the Communist regime. The purported miracle turned into a political issue as popular piety resulted in a short-lived movement among Catholics. Devotees prayed together, displayed religious symbols and sang religious chants; even a hymn was composed about the miraculous weeping.⁴⁵ William Christian has suggested with respect to apparitions, visions or miracles,

41. Ziółek and Przytuła (ed.): *Represje wobec*, p. 42.

42. Ziółek and Przytuła (ed.): *Represje wobec*, p. 30. Educational level is known for 38 out of the 50 defendants. 5 finished primary schools, 7 completed vocational schools, 10 obtained secondary education, and 16 attended secondary schools or universities. It is rather obvious that the authorities were interested in prosecuting the more educated since these were more dangerous and influential.

43. Ziółek and Przytuła (ed.): *Represje wobec*, p. 30.

44. Blackbourn: *Moving Crucifixes*, p. 404.

45. Kras: *Placząca Matka Boża*, p. 38.

that they are likely to cover three realms: those of theater and fraud, piety and veracity, and neurosis and hysteria. Documents of the security service, the report of the Soviet attaché and press material underscored hysteria and neurosis among the crowd, whereas apologetic or excessively trustful accounts emphasized piety and veracity. There are no traces of fraud, however. The only theatrical moment around the miracle was the dramatic public confrontation on Plac Litewski on July 17th, when emblems of both camps were opposing one another and when believers attempted to occupy the forestage that can be understood as the whole realm of Poland's symbolic Queen.

The Celebration of Stalin's Birthday

The victory of the regime's allies in the conflict around the Lublin miracle of July 1949 was brought into bold relief by the celebration of Stalin's 70th birthday in December of the same year. Festivities took place throughout Poland with initiatives such as the naming of four factories in honor of Stalin, renaming streets, competitions for achievements in production, exhibitions, sending telegrams with greetings and a special train with birthday gifts. In addition, local ceremonies were prepared as well as a central one in Warsaw on December 20th.⁴⁶ On December 21st, 1949, a cornerstone was placed for a Monument of Polish-Soviet Friendship in Warsaw, that was in fact never completed.⁴⁷ Moreover, anthologies of Russian and Polish poems devoted to Stalin, numerous novels and the Generalissimo's biography were published in 955,000 copies as well as special issues of periodicals in more than 3 million copies.⁴⁸

Several ceremonies took place in Lublin itself – in the city theater, in the concert hall and in the building of the Province Committee of the

46. Kupiecki, Robert: "Natchnienie milionów." Kult Józefa Stalina w Polsce 1944-1956 ["The Inspiration of Millions." Joseph Stalin's Cult in Poland 1944-1956], Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1993, p. 87, and pp. 107-108.

47. Grzesiuk-Olszewska, Irena: Polska rzeźba pomnikowa w latach 1945-1995 [Polish Monumental Sculpture between 1945 and 1995], Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 1995, p. 49.

48. Bikont, Anna and Szczesna, Joanna: Towarzysze nieudanej podróży. Dzień, w którym umarł Stalin [Fellow Travelers of a Failed Journey. The Day when Stalin Died], in: Gazeta Wyborcza (19.2.-20.2.2000), p. 25.

PZPR. The celebrations were associated to the 32nd anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, on November 7th, and to the Month of Consolidation of Polish-Soviet Friendship.⁴⁹ A circular letter the Ministry of Education sent to the Province Department of Education declared that the Month of Friendship Consolidation should be celebrated in a more festive way, because it coincided with the 5th anniversary of People's Poland. The watchword was given by Bolesław Bierut, First Secretary of the PZPR:

"The friendship with the Soviet Union, the support of the Soviet Union, the example of the Soviet Union are the fundamental sources of our victory. This watchword should unite the efforts of the entire Polish society and all social institutions and organizations to fight the remaining prejudices and fixed ideas which are abetted by reactionaries in the country on account of the Soviet Union."⁵⁰

The program of the Month included participation at the farewell party for delegates who were to leave for a meeting of the Association of Polish-Soviet Friendship (TPPR). The organization of new TPPR units in schools and a series of meetings were foreseen alongside with lectures and discussions related to the Great Friendship. Last but not least, preparation for celebrations of the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution was also high on the agenda.⁵¹ Anniversary ceremonies were supposed to be held between November 4th and 6th in factories and state farms.

The Province Committee of the PZPR found that Stalin's birthday was celebrated without serious difficulties. Resolutions to accomplish extra work were accepted unanimously and enthusiastically, and they were executed. Lectures on Stalin's life and activities as well as birthday festivities attracted a large public and were met with general approval. No hostile activities were detected.⁵² The report also mentioned 68 ceremonies and 72 lectures devoted to the 70th birthday of Stalin but complained that only one ball took place on the day of his birth because it coincided with Advent. This state of affairs was explained in terms of "religious

49. APL, WRN 267, pp. 24-25.

50. APL, KOSL 1043, no pagination.

51. APL, KOSL 1043, no pagination.

52. APL, KW PZPR 51/VIII/30/1, p. 20.

conservatism".⁵³ Nevertheless, the essential problem was not spelled out by the authors of the Party document.

Stalin's birthday preceded Christmas by no more than three days, so that it did not fail to bring religious issues to the foreground. Traditionally, believers prepare this important Christian holiday during the entire month of December. Initiatives related to the celebration of Stalin's birthday were featured on the front pages of newspapers in December 1949, whereas references to Christmas were made only on the last pages. They dealt with intensified shopping and buying Christmas trees and the press even managed to elude employing the word "Christmas".⁵⁴ A certain synergy between Catholic faith and Communist ideology was hard to avoid. It is more than probable that the most engaged religious activists of Lublin were already imprisoned by December 1949 and that the majority of the population compliantly participated at official ceremonies. The devotion to Stalin that the authorities imposed had some chances to evoke ambivalent and strange feelings which were not without analogy to those elicited by prescribed religious worship.

The description of the celebration by the Party leadership does not fully resemble the account of the Province security service. The secret police did not conceal that hostile activities also took place:

"Stalin's 70th birthday was celebrated in a festive way. Greetings to Stalin were sent with joy and enthusiasm and commitments were made to increase productivity and revolutionary vigilance in the fight with the class enemy. It must be emphasized that hostile elements and the politically engaged clergy attempted to disturb the celebrations of Stalin's birthday. For example, on December 20th and 21st exhibitions and decorations were destroyed at three places in the town of Hrubieszów, a brick was thrown at Stalin's portrait and flags were torn into shreds [...]. Similar cases of destroying decorations and portraits of Stalin, Bierut and [Defense Minister Konstanty] Rokossowski took place in Łuków, Kraśnik, Krasnystaw. Also, hostile leaflets, insulting Stalin and the members of the Polish government, were spread."⁵⁵

53. APL, KW PZPR 51/VIII/30/1, p. 20. Traditionally, Catholics refrained from dancing and other secular festivities during Advent.

54. See for example the issues of *Trybuna Ludu*, the main Party newspaper, published in December 1949.

55. AMSWiA, MBP, GM 330, p. 243.

Surprisingly, the report uses the same propaganda language as the Party document. It emphasizes enthusiasm, joy, and commitments. However, it also describes defiant acts. There are no accurate statistics on anti-regime gestures. Nevertheless, they were more likely directed against Soviet symbols than against Polish ones. This is suggested by the anti-Soviet content of several leaflets spread on Communist holidays as well as by attempts to destroy monuments to the Soviet liberators.⁵⁶ There are a few documents about attempts to blow up the Monument of Gratitude to Soviet Soldiers that was built in 1944 on Plac Litewski in Lublin.⁵⁷ Defiant acts against Soviet symbols, clearly represented a negative attitude to Soviet power. Given Defense Minister Rokossowski's past as a Soviet Marshal who was until November 17th, 1949, commander of Soviet troops in Poland, his portrait also functioned as a Soviet symbol.

Additionally, Stalin's birthday was celebrated by renaming the central city square of Lublin, Plac Litewski, into Plac Stalina (Stalin Square). The Chairman of the People's City Council (MRN) devoted a speech to Stalin's 70th birthday. He proclaimed:

"To give expression to the feelings of Lublin's working class for the Commander in chief of the Nations, the Great Teacher of the working masses [...], and the Leader of the International Proletariat, the MRN of Lublin decided to rename Plac Litewski into Stalin Square, in order to give voice to the deep attachment and sincere feelings of Lublin's community to the genial Leader who mobilizes the masses of the entire world to fight for Peace, Progress and social Justice."⁵⁸

The speaker employed the notions of peace, progress, and social justice that were the principal slogans of the Communist regime. His proposal was acclaimed unanimously, the document stated.⁵⁹ It did not happen for the first time that Plac Litewski was rebaptized. During the time of German occupation, it was called Hitler Square. The renaming in 1949

56. For example, a leaflet from 1948 urged "true Poles to oppose Russia and its plan to take over Poland" and called for the elimination of "traitors" among fellow countrymen. See AMSWiA, MBP, GM 1294, p. 14.

57. Gazeta Lubelska [The Lublin Daily], 22 (27.8.1944), p. 1; Gawryszczak, Piotr: Podziemie polityczno-wojskowe w Inspektoracie Lublin w latach 1944-1956 [The Political and Military Underground in the Lublin District between 1944 and 1956], Lublin: Norbertinum, 1998, p. 118, p. 150, and p. 159; AMSWiA, MBP, GM 331, p. 6.

58. APL, WRN 373, no pages.

59. APL, WRN 373, no pages.

could be seen as a symbolic victory of the Soviet leader over the memory of the Nazi *Führer*, as well as the substitution of one totalitarian rule by another, as a symbolic meaning given to an important public space.

Manufacturing the Stalin Cult

Obviously, the Communists were not attempting to call forth a dedication comparable to the devotion to a saint or to God. For all that, Stalin's birthday celebration and the propaganda surrounding it had a few things in common with religious cult. To commemorate his anniversary, youth relay races were organized throughout the country. Youth started out on December 8th, reached the capitals of provinces within a few days, and arrived in Warsaw on December 20th.⁶⁰ The participants carried "greetings and reports on commitments from all villages and towns", and reported these during a central celebration in Warsaw.⁶¹ Birthday gifts for Stalin were collected and displayed in the National Museum of Warsaw between December 13th and 15th. The presents were then conveyed by a special train that was to reach Moscow on the leader's great day.⁶²

There is a certain similarity between the relay races in Stalin's glory and the pilgrimages during the Lublin miracle as well as the regular pilgrimages made to various sanctuaries in Poland. The idea to honor Stalin this way might in fact have been inspired by religious pilgrimages. At any rate, during the celebration of the millennium of Poland's adhesion to Christendom in 1966, the regime once again competed with religious pilgrimages through organizing marches, relay races and various sport competitions.⁶³ Pilgrimages are both collective and individual actions – believers take pains to achieve personal redemption while simultaneously constituting part of a group when marching. Sport competitions also took on a double character because not only individuals but also groups representing different schools and factories were competing. Both pilgrimages and relay races generated worship and cult for a higher authority, and

60. *Trybuna Ludu*, 338 (8.12.1949), p. 2.

61. *Trybuna Ludu*, 338 (8.12.1949), p. 2.

62. *Trybuna Ludu*, 343 (13.12.1949), p. 2; *Trybuna Ludu*, 345 (15.12.1949), p. 1.

63. For example, see Friszke, Andrzej: *Tysiąclecie kontra Milenium* [Thousand Years vs. Millennium], in: *Więź*, 2-3 (1994).

they also left room for the exercise of overt or covert group pressure in these actions. The presentation of gifts is customary when celebrating a person's birthday. But this might take on a special connotation when it comes to a political leader. Whereas the votive offerings for the Virgin Mary after the Lublin miracle had an individual character, the action of presenting Stalin with gifts had collective features. The latter also exemplified the collective and far-fetched nature of official rituals.

Quasi-religious elements in the way Stalin's birthday was celebrated can also be seen in the poetry produced for the occasion. An example of this is this poem written by a construction worker, Stanisław Olszewski:

"On the day of your birthday, dear Stalin,
make the exploitation of the poor disappear forever,
the working class, that believes in you,
asks you [to accomplish] this."⁶⁴

The style and language of the poem clearly imitate those of religious hymns. It is not clear if the worker spontaneously composed this poem. It is likely that the author was asked by his superiors to write a poem and that he wrote it as well as he could, in the familiar form and language of a religious anthem.

The techniques and strategies to lay the foundations of a Polish cult of Stalin were not entirely alien to Polish conditions. But they had hardly any chance to succeed. No one could ignore that the celebration of *Stalin's birthday* was dictated by the authorities. It was equally difficult to overlook the obstacles to a genuine Stalin cult under Polish circumstances. Way before the Soviet leader's crimes were officially exposed in 1956, the Polish public was well aware of his role. Anticommunist, anti-Soviet and anti-Russian sentiments were also fueled by a long history of conflict with the eastern neighbor. Beyond persecutions in Polish territories the Red Army occupied in the wake of the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 and the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1920, there was a deeply rooted tradition of antagonism with Russia that reached back to the partitions of Poland in the 18th century, to the suppression of national uprisings in the 19th century and to heavy-handed Russification under tsarist rule.

The liberation from Nazi occupation by the Red Army and by Polish forces backed by the USSR was likely to alleviate tensions. But the har-

64. Kupiecki: "Natchnienie milionów," p. 95.

assessment of the pre-war élite and the annihilation of the Polish Home Army that had been set up with Western help, were not conducive to improve relations.⁶⁵ In such circumstances the celebration of Stalin's 70th birthday may have been seen as one more ritual imposed by the Soviet "friend". Costly publications, gifts and festivities were unlikely to be welcome by citizens of a war-ravaged country. As for Lublin, discontent had the best chances to be aggravated by the events that followed the miracle, including the believers' and the Communists' fight over public space.

The Memory of the Miracle

Lublin's miracle of 1949 had far-reaching consequences. In 1950, a report of the Lublin Province Security Service informed general Stanisław Radkiewicz, the Minister of Public Security:

"The hysteria around the 'miracle' is maintained in the cathedral that, since the 'miracle', was turned from an episcopal church in a site of pilgrimage with an order of services like places with miraculous images such as Jasna Góra."⁶⁶

The report voiced apprehensions concerning the miracle's revival and hostile activities of the clergy, especially during the processions of Corpus Christi. Supposedly hostile activities related to Lublin's miracle reappeared in 1955 when a report of the Province Security Service mentioned that the

"Catholic clergy supports the story about the alleged miracle the clergy concocted in Lublin's cathedral in 1949 [...] they arranged an altar with flowers and candles. The most guilty are the auxiliary Bishop, Wilczyński, and two cathedral Vicars, Niedziolko and Frankowski."⁶⁷

No other instances are documented after 1955 but Lublin's miracle survived in the collective memory of the city's religious community with references reappearing into the 1980s.

65. On attitudes towards Communists, see Kersten: *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland*; Cichy, Michal: 1945 – Koniec i początek [1945 – The End and the Beginning], in: *Magazyn Gazety* (26.5.1994), pp. 8-14; Albert, Andrzej: *Najnowsza historia Polski 1918-1980* [Contemporary History of Poland 1918-1980]. London: Puls, 1991.

66. AMSWiA, MBP, GM 331, p. 1.

67. AMSWiA, MBP, GM 209, p. 5.

The first large celebration of the miracle's anniversary took place in 1981, during the period of the legal existence of Solidarity. It coincided with the anniversary of the July 1980 strikes in Lublin.⁶⁸ About 30,000 believers gathered at a festive mass in front of the cathedral and a street procession carried the painting.⁶⁹ The first anniversary of the strikes was celebrated with a mass in front of a car factory. A monument of a worker breaking his fetters was unveiled after the ceremony. Both events symbolized opposition to the Communist regime that took different forms in different epochs. What is more, they culminated in the conquest of emblematic space.

The alleged miracle of Lublin remains as unexplained and unclear as it was half a century ago. The Church, after first denying the wonder and later ignoring it, finally recognized "the significance of a private cult and devotion". In 1988, a Marian Year with an Eucharistic Congress taking place throughout the country, the altarpiece was crowned by the Lublin bishop, Bolesław Pylak. Pope John Paul II issued a document about the crowning and elliptically referred to the miracle:

"This image is called the image of Our Weeping Lady, on account of a special event. Considering that the cult of this image has increased in recent years [...] the Bishop Bolesław Pylak asked the Holy See for permission to crown the image."⁷⁰

At the end of this document, the Pope encouraged the cult of the Weeping Virgin Mary. In a telegram for the opening ceremony of the Diocesan Eucharistic Congress, the Pope once again alluded to the miracle:

"We need to be open to the word of Jesus Christ [...]. We are invited to such a complete openness by His Mother who suffered with Him under the cross. We are reminded of Her suffering and Her sacrifice by the im-

68. As a result of projected price increases, strikes spread in Lublin Province in July 1980. Workers of strike committees demanded both economic and political changes. The strikes culminated on July 17th and 18th when railway and road traffic was halted. However, on July 20th, an agreement on salary increase was signed and workers returned to work. The strikes restarted in August throughout Poland and political demands came to the fore. Free unions were authorized thereafter and Solidarity was created. See Baker, Colin: *Festival of the Oppressed: Solidarity, Reform and Revolution in Poland 1980-1981*. London: Bookmarks, 1986.

69. Kras: *Placząca Matka Boża*, p. 15.

70. The letter is reprinted in Kras: *Placząca Matka Boża*, p. 109.

age of the Suffering Mother of God that is going to be crowned in the Lublin cathedral."⁷¹

The crowning took place at the opening ceremony of the congress and not on the anniversary of the miracle. The belated recognition therefore did not necessarily amount to an acknowledgement of the miracle. It merely lent support to a local cult and to popular piety centered around the altarpiece. This is not surprising, however, in view of Church policy towards other alleged miracles and visions that consists in issuing a final affirmation or denial only after many years of investigations.⁷²

At present, many people evoke the Lublin miracle as one of the most important events during Communist rule in the city's history. But only two people out of many whom I have interviewed, mentioned that Plac Litewski was named Stalin Square until 1957. They also knew that it used to be called Hitler Square. Both of them are historians.⁷³

The complete absence of memory about Stalin's symbolic place in the Lublin cityscape has more than a few things to do with the widespread habit of using old, pre-war street names instead of later ones. For example, people consistently used the old name, Lubartowska Street instead of Stalinogród Street, and Zamojska Street instead of speaking of Bucezek Street as it was rebaptized to honor a Communist hero.⁷⁴ Street and square names were understood as assigned by the authorities in order to enshrine persons and ideas close to the establishment. Still, it was another matter if they were remembered at all. Their memory depended on the way communities and their spheres of action were constituted in function of the meaning people associated with the persons and ideas in question.

71. Kras: *Placząca Matka Boża*, pp. 110-111.

72. In the case of Medjugorje where Marian apparitions have been reported since 1981, the Roman Catholic Church continues to refrain from issuing a final denial of recognition. Only three apparitions and miracles are recognized by the Church among hundreds which have been claimed to occur in the 20th century. See Bax, *Mart: Medjugorje: Religion, Politics and Violence in Rural Bosnia*, Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1995; Zimdors-Swartz: *Encountering Mary*.

73. Interviews with Zbigniew Nasalski and Cyprjan Skwarek.

74. Interviews with Mieczysław Kurzątkowski and Jadwiga Chmieliak. Marian Bucezek, a member of the KPP, was killed while defending the country in 1939. He was elevated to the status of a national hero in People's Poland.

Conclusion

Lublin was a rather provincial town in Eastern Poland when a spectacular event brought country-wide attention to it in 1949. The miracle of Lublin, a purported weeping of a likeness of Virgin Mary in the cathedral, resulted in mass devotion, in open demonstration of religious faith and in a clash between believers and city authorities, even though the local bishop promptly denied that a wonder would have been in question. The Weeping Virgin Mary remained silent. But the masses believed in her wonderful working qualities. Believers felt their faith reconfirmed through personal encounters with people sharing their convictions and through a feeling of community that united them in piety. They started openly to demand the liberty of fellow believers previously arrested and to ask for religious freedom.

It is interesting to compare the devotion to Virgin Mary, the symbolic Queen of Poland, to the emerging cult of Stalin, or more precisely to the attempt to create such a cult. The Generalissimo took the highest position in the Hall of Fame of new Communist heroes. His portraits were displayed everywhere, places and entire cities were named in his honor. Stalin's cult culminated in the celebration of his 70th birthday in December of 1949. The spontaneous manifestation of popular devotion sharply contrasted with the decreed homage to Stalin. Popular piety obviously had a subversive character, whereas the birthday celebrations were designed to demonstrate the allegiance and submission of the masses to the Communist regime.

Believers brought their faith outside churches in the wake of the miracle. Limitations imposed on the Corpus Christi procession led to an increased visibility of religious cult and even to competition over public space in Lublin. The major city square and central streets became arenas where the scope of the official sphere was contested and where the extent of the religious sphere was made evident. The attempt to confine religious belief to the private sphere remained unsuccessful and it proved impossible to stifle the religious realm. The believers of Lublin united around the alleged miracle and became a community for a while. They undermined the state's claim to exclusively organize collective activities and dominate the public sphere. The state attempted to reassert this claim

on the occasion of Stalin's birthday. Here again its authority was undermined by indifference and by hostile incidents.

Lublin was a highly symbolic place for the Party and for Catholics: the legendary place of the first Communist government and the site of a purported miracle. The mobilizing power of Lublin's symbols had everything to transform the city in a public space, or, more precisely, in a space with different publics. These publics were rallying around widely differing symbols. So much so that they could not help being in conflict over the city's space for long decades.

The miracle of Lublin was an important moment in the city's history. It never fell in oblivion. The celebrations related to Stalin became embarrassing even for Party members and hardly anyone remembers them today. The contrast is all the more striking, since the miracle was only alleged while Stalin did indeed celebrate his 70th birthday in 1949. It was not an easy task for the Communists to make show of unity around the leader of a state whose friendly intentions were by far not obvious. And it was even more desperate to oppose the unworkable cult of this leader to the veneration of the symbolic Queen of Poland that rallied masses of the faithful.

- Zum Ursprung einiger Besonderheiten der sowjetischen Parteiföfentlichkeit. Der stalinistische Untertan und die „Selbstkritik“ in den dreißiger Jahren
Lorenz Erren.....131
- Public Spaces in the Communal Apartment
Katerina Gerasimova.....165
- 2. Tschechoslowakei / Czechoslovakia**
- Kunst als Ersatzföfentlichkeit? Thesen zum Vergleich der antitotalitären Wirkungen von Kunst in der DDR und der ČSSR nach 1970
Dieter Segert.....195
- 3. DDR / GDR**
- Kunstföfentlichkeit in der DDR als Gegen-Gegenföfentlichkeit
Juliana Raupp.....217
- Die evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR. Zur Institutionalisierung einer öfentlichen Sphäre zwischen System und Lebenswelt
Michael Haspel.....239
- 4. Polen / Poland**
- The Weeping Virgin Mary and the Smiling Comrade Stalin: Polish Catholics and Communists in 1949
Izabella Main.....255
- Teutonic Knights and Polish Identity: National Narratives, Self-Images and Socialist Public Sphere
José M. Faraldo.....279