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Polish Post-Colonial and/or Post-Dependence Studies.

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Foreword

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1.

The history of Polish society as well as Polish literature and culture could constitute not only a complex and rich, but also almost a paradigmatic case in the post-colonial research in the categories of domination and subordination. Enough to say that the so called First Polish Republic was ranked one of the Central and Eastern European empires in the early modern history (16th-18th century) but then, after the complete loss of independence in 1795, for over 120 years it remained politically non-existent. Polish territories and their inhabitants became incorporated in the structures of the three neighbouring empires of modern Europe: Austria, Prussia, and Russia, and subjected to – in each case slightly different – methods of colonial management and strategies of the center-periphery dependence.

It is important to add that, even though the year 1918 brought the revival of the state independence within the so called Second Polish Republic, it did not last for too long. The beginning of the World War II in 1939 caused the re-erasure of the Polish statehood from the political map and another division of its lands and inhabitants between the battling empires: the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. Although the end of the World War II in 1945 resulted in re-establishing the Polish state

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under the name of the Polish People's Republic, the country's sovereignty was limited (as it was subject to full control of the Soviet Union). Two-thirds of its borders were moved, its ethnic composition radically changed and its territory decreased to a similar extent (in comparison to the inter-war period).

Only the 1989/1990 events triggered the re-birth of the full sovereignty in Poland (this also happened in the rest of Central and Eastern Europe) which returned to its previous name of the Polish Republic. Also, only then, from under layers of suppression, concealment, and distortion of the official versions of the past, gradually emerged unworked shocks and traumas, or to the contrary, memories (or fantasies) of the past glory. They were becoming components of rival memory politics and simultaneously – the subject of the analytical, critical attention.

2.

I believe that this almost grotesque summary of Polish history was necessary to demonstrate the palimpsest complexity of the problematic field and the reasons of a slight delay with which post-colonial, post-dependence and (to some extent) post-imperial studies are being included in the research both in the narrower, Polish context and in the broader, Central-European one. Discussing them in detail seems superfluous. However, it is worth signalling that they have distinct genealogies and conceptual nets which overlap, cross, and permeate each other with reference to their common problematic syndrome – and in the way they cannot be distributed among separate disciplines.

Although post-colonial studies have their origins in literary and cultural research, already in books written by their "founding fathers," Edward Said and Franz Fanon, it is possible to see aspirations to go beyond those disciplines towards social, historical, and political matters. In the first period – for about two decades – their development was merely limited to the Western world issues and more precisely, it only involved analyses of complex and changeable in time relations of domination and subordination between the so called First and Third World (composed of the former colonies of the first one). Only in the late 1990s, owing to a few articles, but most of all thanks to the monographic study *Troubadours of the Empire: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (English edition entitled *Imperial Knowledge*, 2000, Polish ed. 2002, Ukrainian ed. 2006, Belorussian ed. 2009, Chinese ed. 2009, chapter 1 in Russian 2007) – the book considered a "founding" study on the topic – by Ewa Thompson, Polish professor of Russian studies and Slavist from the Rice University, the post-colonial matters entered the so called Second World (the relationship between Russia, then the Soviet Union, and the neighboring countries and nations it had dominated) and gradually paved their way through science as a rightful subject of research within the humanities. It should be added here that, in Poland, a similar, "founding" role in the research over the old-time Polish Republic as a colonizer was assumed by

the books of a French historian Daniel Beauvois: *Les confins de l'ancienne Pologne: Ukraine, Lituanie, Bielorussie XVIe-XXe siecles* from 1988 and particularly his *Ukrainian Triangle: gentry, tsar and people of Volhynia, Podolia and Kyivshchyna 1793-1914* (Trójkąt ukraiński: szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1793-1914, Lublin 2005).

The discussion carried on among Polish researchers for several years now did not lead to the full consensus regarding the legitimate use of the term but it made the scope of problems it defines one of the most important themes of the scientific research. This already resulted in first essayist publications such as Maria Janion's *The Amazing Slavdom (Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna)* from 2006 or monographs like Dariusz Skórczewski's *Theory – Literature – Discourse: Post-colonial Landscape (Teoria – literatura – dyskurs. Pejzaż postkolonialny)* from 2013. Generally, it might be stated that this process of "institutionalization" of post-colonial studies within the research conducted in Central and Eastern Europe has been still taking place, being on different stages in given countries. It is perhaps most difficult to be completed in the context of the research concerning Russia and conducted by Russians, as we can assess on the basis of mainly negative and very emotional reactions to Ewa Thompson's book.

The second approach: the post-dependence studies originated, generally speaking, in the economic and sociological research; more precisely, in the research devoted to the situation of Southern American countries, which initially constituted the empirical basis for the dependence theory. It justified the mechanisms of leaving countries under-developed not with internal but with external reasons: the strategy of imperial centers towards peripheries. Its most well-known form was elaborated by Immanuel Wallerstein who made it a global theory of transforming economy and social structure. Recent years have brought, on the one hand, critical reevaluation of the ideas behind the dependence theory, on the other hand, its emanation onto socio-cultural and historical-political studies, examples being Larry Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994) and Richard Wortman's *Scenarios of Power* (2006). Within this approach, one could also fit analyses of the Polish post-dependence discourse understood as a collectively defined set of institutionalized, significant articulation practices – organizing human experience, identity projects, social, political and cultural relations, axiological and symbolic communal imagery, forms of perceiving reality – which were taken up after the situation of dependence was resolved and at the same time, they almost always carried its traces. The effect of these works, combining post-colonial and post-dependence inspirations, are numerous collective volumes, for instance published by the Post-Dependence Studies Centre, and two original books: Hanna Gosk's *The Stories of "the Colonised/Colonizer" (Opowieści „skolonizowanego/kolonizatora")* from 2010 and Jan Sowa's *The King's Phantom Body (Fantomowe ciało króla)* from 2012.

Finally, the youngest of them all (and by now scarcely present in Polish criticism and literature) – post-imperial studies. They derive from political and historical analyses of modernity and, similarly to the previously described ones, from criticism of dependence theories. In the context of recent books by Stephen E. Hanson *Post-Imperial Democracies* (2010) or Dmitrij Trantin *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story* (2011), it seems that this perspective still remains dominant. However, post-imperial studies also have their, increasingly strong and interesting, branches in other disciplines. One of the examples could be Rita Sakr's work *Monumental Space in the Post-Imperial Novel* (2012) where the author puts forward her interpretation of the palimpsest monumental spaces impregnated, on the one hand, with cultural memory, ideological missions, symbolic monuments of domination and violence, on the other hand, with subversive practice of emancipation and democratization activities of individuals and communities in the public sphere.

While it is true that Rita Sakr analyses neither monumental spaces nor Russian novels, how cognitively rewarding might be the perspective emerging from the fusion of memory studies, geopoetics, and post-imperial literature, Ryszard Kapuściński argues in the chapter *The Temple and the Palace* of his *Imperium* presenting the fluctuating status and functions of a square in Moscow where in the Tsar period, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior was built, then (per Stalin's order) destroyed to make space for the planned Palace of Soviets. Eventually, the latter was not built, while the remaining foundations were adapted for a swimming-pool for Muscovites (though, not permanently: most recently, which could not be observed and described by Kapuściński, the temple has been rebuilt – apparently, we are living in the post-secular times...). It is highly probable that this topic and this type of research may become more keenly analyzed by – not only Russian – literary and culture theoreticians. Eventually, it cannot be ruled out that Kapuściński's *Imperium* itself, also with regards to its quite critical reception by Russian readers, could play in the future a founding role in the field of cultural, post-imperial studies pursued by Russian researchers – similarly to the earlier mentioned books written by other, "foreign" authors who commented on subjects that are "restricted" for "native" representative of a given culture.

3.

Eruption of the traumatic past, intensity and diversity of rival memory politics as well as reactivation of religious and pseudo-religious needs and practices in the areas connected with both public life of the community and individuals' privacy compose a new problematic field of contemporary mentality most recently worked out and elaborated on by post-colonial, post-dependence and post-imperial studies. Their efficiency to a great extent depends on the reception of the shared comparative perspective, confrontation of memory discourses, dialogue-like exchange of

experiences, sense negotiation and in the relations between nations and cultures. These, however, still remain at a deadlock.

Perhaps this happens due to the fact that previous programs of learning other cultures, national images of the past and communal identity patterns were based on the power of sublime art of persuasion in favour of an enriching value for someone who gets to know the Other – maybe this is why they did not prove particularly effective. I believe that it is necessary to re-direct this argumentation, i.e. to admit that an important and inherent part of our self-knowledge, mature self-consciousness, critical self-cognition – so much the community as individuals – is also our image in the others' eyes as well as the ability to take over the external point of view and confront it with our cultivated internal image of ourselves. I am certain that only this simple – but maybe not easy to implement – activity can make development of inter-cultural relations, encounters, and dialogues something indispensable, needed on a daily basis, being of individuals' and communities' interest.

A fairly useful category which can get us closer to reaching this goal we owe Mikhail Bakhtin, one of the most original literature and culture scholars of the 20th century. What I have in mind here is "wnienachodimost" ("outsidedness") – one of the key notions in Bakhtin's glossary. In his work about Bakhtin, Tzvetan Todorov suggested that this hardly translatable term should be "internationalized" (by reaching out to Greek sources) and called "exotopy," while a Polish translator Danuta Ulicka translated it as „niewspółobecność" ("noncopresence"). Bakhtin introduced it in his works as early as in the 1920s, then frequently used it, systematically expanding the spectrum of its application. The technical term describing "intra-literary" relations between the author and the character eventually turned into the universal category of historical cultural anthropology. In any case, it occupies a well-deserved position in contemporary interpretations of the Bakhtin's theory (and not only), which allows me to avoid here examining its primary meanings.

In most general terms, exotopy is about identification of the "shifted" position of the experiencing and learning subject always situated – timely, spatially, nationally, and culturally – outside of its own object (whether it will be another object, subject, community, culture, or itself). And what is most important: one should not see in it weakness or an obstacle to overcome (for example, by participation or empathy) but an inherent feature of human (self)cognition, a condition of authentic understanding and a marker of inventiveness (creative exploration).

"In understanding," wrote Bakhtin, "the most crucial matter is the (timely, spatial, and cultural) noncopresence of the learning subject in comparison to what he/she wants to creatively comprehend. Yet, a person is not able to truly see even their own looks or to realize it fully. Any mirrors or photographs will not help him with that. Only other people are capable of grasping and understanding his/her real appearance, both thanks to their spatial noncopresence and to the fact that they are **different**. [...] Someone else's culture is only revealed in the eyes of another culture.

[...] We ask the other culture new questions which it wouldn't have posed itself, and we search through it for answers, while the other culture responds, unveiling its new aspects and new layers of meaning"¹.

One could say that in this view, it is still the originally formulated but in fact a classically modern opinion on the value of an external point of view, looking at oneself or confronting the image of oneself in the eyes of the other (in the modern European tradition already initiated by "the strategy of the other" in de Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*). What is more interesting (and less often noticed), however, Bakhtin makes it specifically complemented with a truly innovative conviction. It leads the scholar to rejecting the idea of an individual or a national culture as a kind of a closed container (a view we owe to romanticists such as Schelling and von Herder's concepts of culture as a sphere or an island). As far as the subject is concerned, Bakhtin argues that "one is not given any internal area of independence, one is always on the verge, and delving into oneself, one looks into *the other's eyes* or sees oneself *with the eyes of the other*"². The same concerns culture: "The field of culture should not be imagined as a certain spatial entity with boundaries but also possessing its internal territory. The field of culture hasn't got an internal territory: it is entirely located on the boundaries. They run everywhere, intersect at its every point."³

Let us notice that from this point of view, boundaries between the internal and the external do not distinguish any longer an autonomous identity of the individual or communal entity but quite the opposite: they run within it. For, it originates on the verges, it has a status of the border territory where the external gets internalised, whereas the part considered the most "own" one exposes its external genealogy. I believe that the latter Bakhtin's identity concept – as exotopy, as self-diversifying self, as the internalized Other – not only anticipates the key recognitions of the contemporary thought but it should also constitute the shared assumption concerning inter-cultural dialogues. It somehow extorts (being the very interest of the understanding and effective critical self-cognition) the necessity of self-definition, attention, and respect – towards the Other. The Other who is both within and around us.

4.

It could be said that post-colonial and post-dependence studies, particularly in their initial phases, in their specific way confirm pertinence of Bakhtin's concept, including its simplest dimension: the emphasis on the indispensability of the "other's"

1 M. Bakhtin, *Estetyka twórczości słownej*, transla by D. Ulicka, ed. by E. Czaplejewicz, Warsaw, 474.

2 *Ibid.* op. cit., 444.

3 M. Bakhtin, *Problemy literatury i estetyki*, transl. by W. Grajewski, Warsaw 1982, 26.

perspective to make a member of a given community realize something absorbed by his/her "blind spot." Enough to think about the role a Palestinian Edward Said and an Algerian Franz Fanon played in reinterpretation of the European image of the Orient. But also about the role of an American Larry Wolff in the critical reflection over historical genealogy of the political and discursive shape of Central and Eastern European countries, the role of a French Daniel Beauvois in realization of colonial aspects of the political and cultural tradition in Poland or the role of Ewa Thompson, a Polish-American scholar, in problematizing the colonial and imperial elements of the Russian culture (also in works of its most estimated representatives).

Essays included in this volume examine and "internalize" this point of view of the "other" in order to see it as a tool of independent acts of recognition and cognitive search. The authors are the leading Polish researchers interested in analytical possibilities offered by new theoretical "glossaries." Their function turned out to be productive on many levels and what is most crucial, these glossaries make it possible to pose new questions to texts (even the most classical and "overinterpreted" ones), questions that were hitherto unheard of (and sometimes unbelievable), and to "receive" new, unexpected, revealing answers. The selection of works published in "Teksty Drugie" is representative to the Polish debate in general, also due to the fact that for two decades the magazine has been the main forum of discussions conducted in Poland on this topic.

Undoubtedly, the most heated threads of the discussion were the following three matters: legitimacy of placing old-time Poland in the position of a colonizer; legitimacy of analyzing the Polish history in the 19th century and part of the 20th century in the category of colonizing (particularly in reference to Polish-Russian relations); and legitimacy of pursuing post-dependence studies treated as an alternative or complementary research strategy. Although such debates are far from being resolved, both the course of the discussion registered in the presented works and the constantly emerging monographs suggest that there is space for a consensus and gradual legitimization of post-colonial and post-dependence studies in the Polish academic circles.

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