

WHERE IS A PLACE FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE IN POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES? POSSIBLE TRAJECTORIES

The aim of my article is to consider the possible travel trajectories in postcolonial space in order to show how research on Central and Eastern European regions connects with critical globalization discourses. How can we integrate postcolonial reconfigurations related to the way we think about Central and Eastern Europe into the global map of networks connecting the emergent and transitional (Hannerz 48) environments of meaning-creation? With regard to the postcolonial inspiration in critical discourses in Poland, as well as in Central and Eastern Europe, I locate a key significance in the mutual communication between “habitats of meaning” (Hannerz, 22) developed in the new peripheries of postcolonial reflection on the “center”, which of course is not the only center, but a dispersed archipelago of discourses. The intense and rich postcolonial research in this part of Europe exceeds the simple paradigm of multiplying the available theoretical matrices. Transferring postcolonial categories onto Central and Eastern European history and culture facilitates a new way of thinking about the nation, oppression and resistance, dependence, its long-term effects, identities and their border meanings, subjectivity as a site of agency, history as an ideological construct and a political tool.

What follows will be my attempt to identify the main trajectories of postcolonial thought in relation to Central and Eastern Europe and

to consider how they can be integrate with the map of critical reflection on globalization.

When examining Central and Eastern Europe, postcolonialism is most visibly implemented as a means of **identifying features of colonial dependency in the history of the region**. This research option employs the conceptual apparatus and methodologies developed in postcolonial studies in an effort to analyze the nature and influence of colonial dependence on the development of a region as a whole and its particular countries and societies in relation to Europe (understood usually as Western Europe). This area of research usually includes an analysis of Polish colonial discourse, that is, the paradox of being simultaneously in the position of the colonized and colonizer (Fiut) (Bakuła: 2006) (Gosk) (Borkowska). The logical continuation of this line of thinking is to analyze the postwar dependence on the Soviet Union within colonial categories and the situation following the collapse of communism as a postcolonial condition, whose main feature is its position as a breakthrough moment in terms of political transformations and the attendant social, cultural and economic changes. The scope of this research includes postdependence discourses, i.e. those which appeared after the period of dependency or at its closing period and which signal the epistemic overhaul as well as the attempts to outline decolonization programs – initiatives to decolonize knowledge outside of the global, colonial epistemology (Tlostanova, Mignolo).

Critical reassessment of identity discourses seems to be an intrinsic element of thinking about colonialism and the post-region. The postcolonial perspective quite naturally encourages revision of identity constructs and examining their place and interaction with the whole spectrum of social discourses. How relating the situation of Poland to the postcolonial condition can yield starkly opposite research outcomes. Ewa Thompson's and Jan Sowa's analyses are case in point. For Ewa Thompson, the colonial situation in Poland began with the Partitions, which deprived the country, along with the whole region thereafter labeled "Eastern Europe", of its subjectivity (which had already been distinctly defined, for example, in the idea of Sarmatism). As a result Poland was barred from actively participating in modern discourse. This is a situation that continues to this day and its most characteristic postcolonial, as well as painful, consequence, with real ramifications with regard to politics and the economy, is the ina-

bility characteristic of the Polish community to develop its own identitarian and, therefore, modernization programs, which would guarantee Poland its autonomy and the status of an active subject in the international community (Thompson: 2007, 2011, 2012). For Jan Sowa, the situation is the opposite. The direct cause of the Partitions was the country's inability to think a viable form of itself in modernity, in the form of the nation and state, which would be able to confront the challenges of modernity. This went along the inability to create an egalitarian social structure centered on the middle class that would preserve statehood. The passage to modernity was thwarted by the nobility, who refused to share its national identity with any other social class. The Partitions are thus, according to Sowa, to be understood as a modernization force (Sowa: 2012, 2013). I am citing these two radically diverse positions not to determine who is correct but to consider the postcolonial methodology, which leads to such different ideological stances. Taking such a wide synthesizing approach, the researcher always risks generalizing, either in a top-down manner by imposing a theoretical framework that contradicts the particular examples or a bottom-up manner, metonymically, by treating each example as a general rule. Jan Sowa, in line with nineteenth century historicism, interprets colonialism (here: the situation of Poland being deprived of its sovereignty) as a historical necessity and refers to the modernizing influence the Partitions had on Poland. This sounds exactly as if Marx's thoughts on British imperialism in India (Marx) were transferred onto another geographic situation.

The developed critical discourse in both radically different analyses, which take the assumption of Poland's postcolonial condition as a given, is subordinated, in a surprisingly similar manner, to the problem of identity, and treats the "peripherality" of Poland and Eastern Europe as a state which should be overcome. Ewa Thompson construes this project of incorporating "peripheries" into the hegemonic order as a struggle for national identity, one which is developed through pedagogical efforts (understood perhaps as a nationwide effort to shape attitudes and beliefs). The national identity emerges from Thompson's work as an ideologically and ethically homogenous subjectivity, whose *raison d'être* seems to be in its communicating, validating and consolidating itself, which is to mean its identitarian integrity and, ultimately, its true indigeneity recovered from the resources of national culture and history. For Sowa, in turn, despite

declaring to have done away with this category altogether, identity returns as the Real of a historiographic projection. It is precisely the national identity of the Polish nobility, its exclusionary character and foundational lack (understood in Lacanian terms and realized as escapist phantasms of nativism, like Sarmatism) which impeded the development of modern Polish subjectivity in line with the West model, thus effectively sentencing the country to a permanently peripheral status. Granted that in the case of both authors the use of postcolonial apparatus merits consideration, even if controversial for their ideological presumptuousness. However, in both cases, thinking about how to overcome Poland's peripheral status by means of some autarky which emanates from, respectively for each of the two authors, a worked-through (Sowa) or recuperated (Thompson) identity seems to have its source in a teleological approach to history, which, in turn, leads to substituting the category of active subjectivity (agency) with a psychology-driven (psychologized) category of identity, which is, additionally, ideologically fixed¹. It is therefore worth drawing attention to how postcolonial historiography (developed, for example, by Subaltern Studies Group) utilizes the category of national identity as an exclusively discursive phenomenon, which comes into play in class, political and ideological divisions, a phenomenon that is differentiated and relational also in respect to the legacy of colonialism and is also able to create "peripheral" or "minor" histories in relation to modernity (Chakrabarty: 2000, 2002).

With regard to the above, I would like to venture the claim that postcolonialism in Poland is still held hostage by identitarian thinking and we should somehow emancipate ourselves from this state of affairs. Above all, postcolonial categories have proven themselves most useful as a critique of identity constructs. What is at stake here is not really the methodologically easy deconstruction of identity, which exposes its discursive nature, including its violent and oppressive performances, because it has been already done many times. The point is in taking advantage of the potential inherent in postcolonial

¹ Cf. Irena Grudzińska-Gross's interesting contribution in the debate in „Did the Holocaust replace the burgoise revolution in Poland?” In *Krytyka Polityczna*, April 25, 2013, where she claims that Polish history is usually approached as if it were an identitarian issue. She proposes moving away from identitarian thinking, away from history especially where arriving at historical truth could damage this identity. (Leder, Grudzińska-Gross, Dudek, Sierakowski)

theory for a dialogical opening of identity discourses to their own relationality, mutuality and liminality/borderliness, beyond the stubborn narcissism of the mirror stage, in which they can develop only as a phantasm of plentitude or a phantasm of lack. Postcolonial theory has always strengthened identity as a space of discursive agency and challenged its essentialist "fact" (Fanon).

With the help of a postcolonial theoretical framework, we could consider how to think transnationally through and beyond national debates, which portray society as being divided and increasingly locked in a narcissistic phantasm. Transnationalism could be defined as a space and practice where subjects transcend borders, regardless of whether they assume a dominant or marginal position (Lionett, Shih, *Minor Transnationalism*). Transnationalism is a part of the globalizational processes; it can be top-down and bottom-up, and of course the working assumption is that the bottom-up manifestations of transnationalism by definition constitute a critical force in relation to globalization. Case studies concentrate most of all on diasporas, refugees, minorities as groups undermining a consolidated national identity, whose specific symptom is to exclude otherness. However, it is rarely noted that the effect of minorities/diasporas (i.e., the exclusion effect, stereotypization, orientalization) is here secondary in relation to the constitutive ambivalence of a nation (which is a product of modernity, whose emergence and continuity is expected to bind the nation to a cultural system, **thanks to** which and **against which** the nation emerged, as Benedict Anderson proves in his study of the imagined aspect of the nation (Anderson). Comparative studies, which examine the national debates in post-communist regions and were comprehensively developed by Bogusław Bakula (Bakula: 2014), should therefore be expanded by an analysis of the phantasms of nativism which underlie thinking about nation – its collective unconscious manifesting itself sometimes as an aberrational fantasy of power, which in turn could be read as a symptom of lack (Žižek).

If an analysis of national debates in the region of Central and Eastern Europe is to be aided by postcolonial theory, it should take into account classic propositions of reading the nation as a discursive figure, whose constitutive feature, as indicated by Anderson and Tom Nairn (Nairn), is ambivalence. Homi Bhabha proposes to translate this ambivalence of the nation into the self-deconstructive split where the performative form of the nation (writing) constantly challenges

and undermines its pedagogical accumulation in the form of tradition and history (Bhabha).

Comparative studies, which, on the one hand, investigate the pedagogical aspect of national authority and, on the other, demand vigilance in relation to its phantasmatic projections, compel us to ask a question whether it is worth thinking about Central and Eastern Europe as a common transnational space, one which produces its own objects of knowledge on the basis of historical experience particular to a region of a combined dependence on European empires and communism; as a multilingual society which is not only based on identitarian criteria as it is on a certain commonality of imagination and sensitivity, inscribing itself within the postcolonial experience, something which Weber calls community of sentiment.

It is worth, then, positioning research focused on the critical memory cultures within this transnational perspective, whose analytical potential is guaranteed by a cognitive strategy of thinking through national (and community) categories and projects, and also beyond it (Huysen). The postcolonial perspective can bring critical insight into the techniques and politics of memory, the aim of which is to build a consolidated, most often national, identity. Depoliticizing the critical discourses of memory does not entail depriving memory of its inevitable political meaning (the mere fact that memory and its social expression is dialogical assumes a debate, discord, conflicting versions of remembering, selective treatment of archives, etc.); instead, it subjects these affiliations to the same analysis as the object itself. The postcolonial perspective in the work of critical memory cultures does not aim to discard the concept of nation, but to open it to its own limits, to a confrontation with what it attempts to eliminate or erase within itself. Critical memory cultures strive towards a revision of those places in a nation's historiography that constitute a problem for consolidating the politics of memory and resist the efforts to close the national narrative in its pedagogical, holistic horizon. Like in Olga Tokarczuk's *House of Day, House of Night*, the work of imagination sometimes has to create *ab nihilo*.

Who was the guy who spent his nights changing German place names into Polish ones? Sometimes he had a flash of poetic genius, and at other times an awful word-inventing hangover. He did the naming from the start, he created this rugged mountainous world. (Tokarczuk: 2002, 176)

Another trajectory with considerable dialogical potential is connected to border studies, which critically analyze the status of Central and Eastern Europe as a borderland, where the distinctiveness characterizing Western Europe is effaced. Maria Todorova's classic study draws our attention to the fact that the very politics of European studies in American universities render Eastern Europe a marked category (Todorova). The stereotypical imagology of Eastern and Central Europe includes: the image of a limitless border – the end of Europe, a minor Europeanness mixed with exotic otherness, lagging modernization, incomplete transformation, etc. These, in turn, became the object of subversive mimicry found in the works of such authors as Andrzej Stasiuk, Yurii Andrukhovych and Oksana Zabuzhko, in which the Western orientalizing perspective is turned into an ironic self-stereotypization. Its apparent goal – satiating a narcissistic fantasy of the West with a radical otherness of the region (narcissistic because its aim is to validate its own ego) – not only exposes the shame of such desires but also forces the objects of its own fantasies to confront the image of itself as condensed exoticism represented as sheer aberration. Stasiuk's travelogues are usually presented in critical commentaries as self-Orientalizing fantasies of unruly resistance to the force of modernizing globalization exerting itself on the region which manages to fantastically (and impossibly) reconcile pre-modernity with postmodernity. What appears to be the most valuable aspect of Stasiuk's writing hailing from the edges of the continent is the image of an aberrational cosmopolitanism characteristic of this lesser Europe, which exposes, paradoxically, the provincialism of the West entrapped in endless self-replication:

These questions can sound like complaints, but they're not. They speak only of West's the provincialism, which leads it to perceive the rest of the continent as a failed copy of oneself. (64) [...] Yes indeed, two hundred million new Europeans is a real challenge. [...] (Stasiuk 74)

It is worth noticing how this passage develops a critique of how Western Europe orientalizes Eastern Europe by turning it into a phantasm of otherness. It would seem that liminality is an aspect of a particular region which Western critics gladly reach for, as if getting involved in orientalizing practices was in this case safer and more acceptable. In these works the region becomes a heterotopia of illusion, dominated by an image of ethnic-national mixing, but without

taking into account the complex transcultural consciousness of the borderland that anteceded that of contemporary Western Europe, where multiculturalism figures as a postcolonial and postmodern phenomenon. The research correcting such simplifications and stereotypizations should show how border spaces develop their own epistemic system – a border epistemology which opens the “in-between” space onto the multiplicity of history, encompassing such histories that include discontinuity (together with attempts to erase border spaces from the postwar map) and onto incommensurability in relation to the historicism of modernity. A valuable contribution to research on Central and Eastern Europe we can call border studies has been the understanding of border spaces as objects of spectral knowledge – the erased or displaced presence which returns as a rhetorical figure, as an elusive difference defining the *genius loci*, or directly as a lacunae resulting from profound deterritorialization or historical violence, or even extermination. Here is where postcolonial literature meets the Central and Eastern European literature of displacement, representing these phenomena as a lost battle with silence, the consequence of which is the impossibility to articulate meaning:

the world vanishes from deep inside, from the center, too deep for history – either by way of common sense or science – to be able to reach down there. (Kertész 78)

Here it appears the twentieth century did bring a horrific catastrophe, something like a tectonic break, as a consequence of which everything that had happened and existed earlier – say, before 1939 – fell into oblivion. (Andrukhovych 7)

This is not the silence of an imperfect memory ... it is not some presence; it is simply a break, hole, emptiness, in which there are no words. (Ghosh 213)

That type of apocalyptic disruption of continuity resulting in silence is supplemented in literary texts with the figure of the impossible return – as a ghost, specter, recollection, a flash from the past palimpsestially overlying the present, or, likewise, as an incredible feeling of belonging beyond the individual experience. From the rich literature which addresses the problem of border spaces and liminality, I will draw on an example in which the attempt to represent this type of spectral knowledge is connected with the search of a genre – a rhetoric or formula which could appropriately do justice to the elusive heterotopia of the border space and periphery:

Artur Pepa didn't know. He also didn't know what to do with Hutsul country. There existed a whole branch of scholarship about it, scattered across hundreds of books and therefore dispersed, diminished, thus he didn't know what to start with and whether to start at all.. ... For no one had ever created the one Book that would comprise everything: the vernacular, the lambswool, the seven traditional ways of cheesemaking ... (Andrukhovych 102-104)

Border studies, which work to include the description of locality as difference in a wider horizon of reflection on the processes of creating cultural spaces, direct us towards a reflection on the worldliness of literature, which should be understood as an ethos of reading developed by Edward Said and defined in *The World, The Text and the Critic* (1983). The worldliness of literary work, especially in the context of comparative literature, determines it as a material being functioning in a particular historical and social narrative, immanent in relation to the surrounding reality which contains also the political-ideological discourse. Said advocates acknowledging in the worldliness of a literary work its role as a cultural authority, its history in the literary canon or in the effort to join the canon, or also, with regard to world literature as a particularly ideological construct, its performative act which extends far beyond the textual play of signifiers (Said). Postcolonial criticism very astutely follows Said's premise from the beginning defining literature as: language, representation, circulation and canon together with its margins as a place of active subjectivity created in defined contexts resulting from colonialism, in particular migration, mobility, separation of language from its place, and the place from its history and social materiality. The worldliness of literature constitutes in relation to globalization an interventional and critical force. If a novel has been seen as a more worldly genre than others on account of its entrenchment in quotidian reality, social milieus and political discourses, and also on account of its relative ease with which it can cross linguistic and cultural barriers and in which it organized social narrations, then the world-creating potential of this literary genre and its cosmopolitical status deserves particular attention. The cosmopolitanism of the postcolonial novel constitutes its defining feature – the awareness of a world beyond the directly experienced locality, the awareness of the world as a lost locality and uprootedness, colonial (and post-) migrations, in particular the migrations of underprivileged and subordinated classes – all this defines another form of being in the world from that of cosmopolitanism ty-

pically understood as a privilege of freedom from rootedness and unlimited affiliation to the world. In the new cosmopolitanism, which I propose to see as one of the consequences of the postcolonial condition, the awareness of interior and exterior forms of habitation is of utmost significance. On the one hand, new cosmopolitanism proves geographical and social situatedness of “habitus of thinking and feeling” (Robbins), and on the other hand, it produces translocal forms of affiliation (Robbins 2–3). This type of affiliation completely alters the center/periphery arrangement, mostly because the epistemic (in this case I will call it “world-creating”) advantages of mobility are no longer limited to the privileged elites. The cosmopolitanism of the mobile peripheries develops knowledge (the awareness of the world) and politics (particularly as a voice for those who find themselves on the worse side of the global work division), as well as a sense of an inherently conflicting aesthetics, and, as such, it becomes related to the category of the sublime (Tlostanova 2005).

The main object of research on the new forms of cosmopolitanism is precisely this non-universalizing, grassroots, ironic awareness of the globalized world. It manifests itself as a “cosmopolitics” in the novels of the new diaspora, post-diaspora, in postcolonial returns that could be labelled second-wave to historical turning points and the consequences of colonial dependencies that continue their influence far into the postmodern era. These studies should also include the problematics of the West/rest of the world dualism going beyond the revisionist formula of postcolonialism (Orhan Pamuk is one of the most obvious examples). Cosmopolitanism of these novels is based on their global geographical reach (more precisely, transcontinental relocations resulting in deep changes in the content and function of locality, minority communities and larger types of nations, class and ethnicities), on a thematic scope encompassing mobility, sometimes transgenerational, or taking place over a few centuries (novels about smaller globalization movements located in the area of, for example, the Arabian Peninsula or the Indian subcontinent); the migration of labor and subaltern classes – plantation workers in Western India or western colonies and dominions in Asia. These novels are distinguished by their epic scope in the sense that many of them are meant to supplement or undermine the grand historical narratives (the narrative of the modernizing effect of an Empire), with subaltern histories of mass migrations mobilized by the development of capitalism.

Within the scope of this criticism we could also include a reflection on the new economic emigration to Western Europe, its cultural and sociological specificity, particularly where it leads to the formation of new, subjected groups. For example, Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* develops the idea of a Third World (or peripheral) cosmopolitan based on the experiences of a contemporary Candide, a poor emigrant from India who came to America and who realizes his immigrant dream in the backrooms of New York restaurants, in kitchens and cellars, that is, in a world hidden from the eyes of a global consumer. For Olga Tokarczuk, migration gives the possibility to lighten the weight of identity which ties a person to a particular place, effectively immobilizing them. Just like in *House of Day, House of Night* the "I" dreams itself as an empty place, in *Flights* it develops as a project of the traveling "I", freed from identity, migrating from something rather than to something. In *Flights*, the migrant work is an element of anonymous workforce, existing outside the stories which make a person – otherwise just a biomass – a subject:

I took odd jobs wherever I happened to be. ... There were a lot of people like me there. We were paid under the table, and never questioned about where we came from or what our plans for the future were. ... Immigrants still en route to that fair, idyllic country they were sure was somewhere in the West, where people are brothers and sisters, and a strong state plays the role of parent; fugitives from their families ... the confused, the melancholic, those who were always cold. ... Wanderers, vagabonds. Crazy people ... deported back to their countries of origin on the basis of rules and regulations shrouded in mystery. (Tokarczuk 2017: 14–15)

As part of critical discourse on globalization, new cosmopolitanism reveals the structures of horizontal, lateral, and non-hierarchical connections; it develops relational and decentered discourses (not conditioned solely by the center) and contributes to a new methodology of analyzing cultural and demographic phenomena, which find their reflection in historiographic and novel discourses, i.e., in translocations, hybridization, locality and uprootedness. What is characteristic in these studies is their critical approach to identity paradigms, which have until recently dominated postcolonial studies, as well as to identity politics pertinent in academic programs and research. Instead, these studies turn towards the less confining discourses referring to the widely understood space allowing to take into account the phenomena of mobility, transfer of people and ideas, that is, generally

speaking, dynamic “flows” (Appadurai) in contemporary culture. Border studies, especially the discourses of Eastern European peripherality and transnational provincial cosmopolitanisms operating in the region inscribe themselves, due to their characteristic awareness of locality, in the formula of critical discourses on globalization. In my opinion, many authors, and literary trends from Central and Eastern Europe are active participants in the new feeling of worldliness found in global postcolonial writing. Novels which include the themes of border spaces – in the Polish case the novel of post-displacement, particularly related to the novels more or less appropriately defined as novels of the small or mythic motherlands after 1989, revising myths of belonging and acknowledging the historical chasm in the experience of locality and familiarity would be an important contribution to the current of “cosmopolitical” novel.

The critical potential of Central and Eastern Europe that should be observed in research on the region and its cultures dwells in its peripherality that seems to be an object of discontent and even shame, because it is understood mainly as a lack of autonomy in constructing identity projects and, consequently, participating in a plethora of cultural and economic projects of modernity. However, the wider perspective, transnational and in many ways trans-border, allows us to reveal the richness of forms of living in a “peripheral” world, including critical participation in the flows of globalization. Peripheries have always developed their own, more or less provincial (though always to some degree provincializing the hegemonic centers) cosmopolitanisms. The critical potential of a comparative and “cosmopolitical” criticism lies not in diagnosing, with the help of a postcolonial theoretical framework, how a particular region can rival the leaders of modernization or why they will never be able to catch up, but in including within the main currents of critical thought an examination of regions as complicated historiographic and geopolitical constructs, framed as close peripheries or close otherness in relation to European “norms”. The cosmopolitanism of Eastern and Central European peripheries would therefore contribute a form of “rooted cosmopolitanism (Appiah 91), in which the awareness of belonging to the world would be connected with an awareness of connection with place – nation, local cultural space, ethnicity, language, and also other, more imaginary forms of affiliation, such as literature and cultural landscape.

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