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It is Colonialism After All: Some Epistemological Remarks.

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The fifth issue of the 2010 volume of *Second Texts* includes articles arguing with the concept of colonialism and post-colonialism as it relates to Poland.¹ The authors of these articles, otherwise great literary scholars, recommend replacing colonial and post-colonial perspectives with “dependent” and “post-dependent” perspectives. They provide the following arguments to justify that position: Poland was “dependent” on the Soviet Union after WWII (we might add that it was “dependent” on Russia, Prussia, as well as Austria during the partitions). Polemists claim that this specific dependency can’t be called colonialism, as the latter primarily covers overseas conquests while Poland shared or shares a border with countries it was subject to. Proponents of the “dependency” theory claim that overseas

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1 Articles in *Second Texts*, no 5, 2010: L. Koczanowicz, “Post-post-communism and Cultural Wars,” 6-21; D. Kołodziejczyk, “Post-colonial Transfer to Central/Eastern Europe,” 22-39; G. Borkowska, “A Post-colonial Perspective on the Polish Soil: Some Questions of a Sceptic,” 40-52. The *Slavic Review* decided to go with a completely different approach by publishing Elżbieta Ostrowska’s “Desiring the Other. The ambivalent Polish self in novel and film” (*Slavic Review* 70, no.3, (2011), 503-523). This particular piece holds the postcolonial perspective throughout its entirety.

conquests are colonial in nature, while the more proximate, overland conquests are not. Besides, the physical presence of Soviet hegemony was not apparent or obvious in Poland (except in the first few years after the end of WWII), a direct opposite of the Indian experience, where a British viceroy, appointed by the sitting British monarch in London, was the actual source of authority and where the rules were enforced by stationed British troops. In the People's Republic of Poland, the First Secretary of the communist party, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and multiple other officials were of Polish extraction. Furthermore, the authors posit that colonialism induces the settlement of the colonized territories by the colonizing nation which, in turn, results in the imposition of a foreign language (English, French, Dutch) on local education, administration, and intellectual life. Colonialism translates into direct political and economic dependency on the metropole; meanwhile, our authors suggest that the same does not hold true when the relationship is one of dependency. Given these considerations, the polemicists argue, researchers working in the field of cultural, social, and most importantly literary studies should employ post-dependent instead of post-colonial terminology.

Let's start with the problem of overseas conquests as supposedly requisite for colonialism to even take place. If "outramer-ish" invasion is prerequisite for calling a territory colonized, what should we do with Scotland or Ireland, two Celtic countries subjugated by the English? Can we really call the crossing of the narrow stretch of water separating Ireland from England an overseas invasion? That Ireland was colonized is beyond dispute and its situation slightly resembles what Poland went through. Irish national identity was preserved at the cost of significant blows to demographic, economic, and cultural development - the infamous "potato famines" of the 19th century which forced a host of Irish to emigrate to the US being one example. The number of people of Irish-American descent living in the United States is currently nine times the number of Irish people living in Ireland. And lest we forget, the Scottish Parliament, disbanded by the English invaders in 1707, was reconvened as recently as 1998. Michael Hechter's book on the colonization of Celtic nations on the fringes of Western Europe became one of the founding texts of "internal colonialism" in Europe.² Following in the footsteps of the Celtic researchers, Russian émigré and cultural scholar Alexander Etkind classified the majority of Russian conquests as "internal colonialism."³ Even if we were to dispute

2 M. Hechter, *Internal Colonialism. The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); B. O'Leary and J. McGarry, *Understanding Northern Ireland. Colonialism, Control, and Consociation* (London: Routledge, 2012).

3 A. Etkind, *Internal Colonization, Russia's Imperial Experience*, (London: Polity Press, 2011).

some of Etkind's and Hechter's conclusions, it is hard to object to the taxonomy they propose.⁴

Thus, the argument concerning the "overseas" nature of colonies suggests rather the timid character of scholars who are not yet ready to construct their own theories of nationality-based adjacent colonialism. The discourse on overseas colonialism becomes a measure that delineates the limits of discourse on the Polish situation. As the overwhelming majority of French and English postcolonial texts actually concerns colonies establishes overseas (in Africa and Asia), it is generally assumed that colonialism has to be an overseas phenomenon. This position reflects one of the problems plaguing postcolonial studies in Poland and, more generally, in non-Germanic Central and Eastern Europe. I described it another publication as submitting to the gaze of the surrogate hegemon at every attempt to establish theoretical frameworks.⁵

The situation is similar when it comes to settlement and language. Why should Central and Eastern Europe retrace and repeat situations that took place in Africa or Asia? Once again, we're dealing with something I'm inclined to call scholarly docility. As foreign scholars established that African and Asian colonialism included efforts to impose a foreign language as official and set up settlements populated by colonists, it was immediately assumed that the same would have happened in Poland had colonialism ever transpired there. But the essence of colonialism lies in the subjugation of both territory and people whose national consciousness is either already developed or is still developing under colonial domination, political and economic exploitation of a given territory, as well as hindering or even halting development.⁶ And that is where the Polish situation perfectly fits the colonialist taxonomy. When Poland remained under foreign domination in the 18th and 19th centuries and right after the end of WWII, Polish national consciousness was no

4 The body of literature on colonialism in Scotland and Ireland is already quite substantial and includes M. Kelly's "Irish Nationalist Opinion and the British Empire in the 1850s and 1860s" published in *Past and Present* 204, no. 1 (2003), 127-154, as well as L. Connell's "Modes of Marginality. Scottish Literature and the Uses of Postcolonial Theory" published in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 23, no.1-2 (2003), 41-53.

5 E. Thompson, "Whose Discourse? Telling the Story in Post-Communist Poland," *The Other Shore. Slavic and East European Cultures Abroad, Past and Present* 1, no. 1 (2010), 1-15.

6 The capitals of Sweden, Norway, and Finland present one politically neutral example of "white on white" colonialism. Stockholm is a beautiful city with striking 19th century architecture, whereas Oslo was clearly a creature of the 20th century and Helsinki retained its small-town character. After visiting these capitals it becomes abundantly clear that Sweden acted as hegemon towards the two other nations. It is worth adding that Sweden withdrew from Norway in a truly gentlemanly fashion, by first permitting a referendum on the matter of Norwegian independence and then formally ceding authority in 1905.

less developed than the consciousness of either the English or the French,⁷ but Polish development capabilities were considerably diminished,⁸ while the lack of mass Soviet settlement on Polish lands was the result of local conditions and circumstances. In contrast to Great Britain or France, both of them countries that exported their excess population to the colonies (recall Dickens' Mr. Micawber and his voyage to Australia), population density in Russia was so low that it could not afford to dispatch its own citizens to its more sparsely populated colonies. Secondly, in contrast to African and Asian possessions, the infrastructure of Russia's Central European colonies in most cases surpassed Russia's own infrastructure in quality, thus the colonizing power did not have to invest in building roads or establishing institutions facilitating the transfer of wealth from the colonies to the metropole. When the Marshall Plan was bringing Western Europe back to its feet with a cash influx to the tune of about \$12 billion, a similar sum was being siphoned out of the Central and Eastern European economies by Russia.⁹ That's why discourse on colonialism in Poland has to differ from postcolonial deliberations of Gayatri Spivak or Homi Bhabha, representatives of two nations who, while benefiting from Western technology, were at the same time victims of exploitation perpetrated by the metropolises.

What we are touching on here is the issue of essentialism. Postmodern scholars of literature (including the proponents of the theory of "dependency") are generally considered critics of essentialism, as this is the direction that Western literary criticism has been developing in. However, colonial theory *sans* any modification, often invoked by the "dependence" crowd, is a clear example of essentialism. Why is it so often invoked then?¹⁰ Polish

7 I am referring, of course, to classes which formed and later cultivated said national consciousness.

8 Huge museums, universities, and scientific institutes were founded in St. Petersburg and Berlin, not in Warsaw; when wishing to have a taste of the imperial and then share it with their own citizens, the rich and powerful of those times visited not Warsaw but Berlin and St. Petersburg. Poland was not a country people left behind, and not one they would visit. It is hard to overstate the advantages a prestigious metropole has over a provincial capital which commands little to no interest. These benefits are often hard to quantify, but they are very real.

9 R. Pearson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 28-31; R. Bideleux, I. Jeffries, *A History of Eastern Europe. Crisis and Change*, (London: Routledge, 2007), 461.

10 I would also like to add that there are many different essentialisms: False essentialism was described by Edward Said in reference to Bernard Lewis. What Said meant was that the *cognoscenti* from Western think-tanks depicted subjugated Arab societies as unchanging, ossified in their backwardness and primitivism, in direct contrast to the societies of Western Europe whose capacity for change and development the same scholars considered self-evident (E. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 315-321).

researchers who employ the logic arguing that “the British established multiple settlements in Africa, while the Russians never did the same in Poland” seem to believe that the concept of colonialism has to remain unchanged from the time when it was formed by Western cultural scholars. God forbid should it be modified and adapted to the conditions of Central and Eastern Europe. Contending that colonialism is immune to changes in definition is an example of both passive acknowledgement of theories worked out in conditions far different from those in Poland as well as misunderstanding essentialism itself. Thus, my argument is with the way in which colonialism is situated amidst essential entities and the mindless carbon-copying of Western-produced descriptions of colonialism.

Proponents of the “dependency” theory have additional arguments. Leszek Koczanowicz argues against using the concept of (post)colonialism in Polish contexts thus: despite significant efforts to transform it into a metropole, the Soviet Union never became a cultural metropole to countries it subjugated. In Poland, the West retained that position. Thus, Poland was never a Soviet colony. The author rightly notices that for 20th century Poles (as well as for those living in the 19th century) Paris and not Moscow was the metropole.

It is a classic example of reaching for the surrogate hegemon (Paris) in order to prove that Poles never submitted to the real hegemon. I concur that Paris and New York were Poland’s cultural hegemon, whereas Moscow never assumed that role. But the habit of emulating the “more cultured” is a by-product of being colonized. I highly doubt that in the time of Włodkowiec or Kochanowski, that is back when Poland was nobody’s colony, Poles considered Europe divided into parts, some of them better than the others. When Paweł Włodkowiec appeared at the Council of Constance in 1414 to argue for granting amicable and unwarlike pagans a right to live in peace and condemn the Teutonic Knights’ pillage and bloody conquest of the Eastern lands, his speech was not tainted with any sort of feelings of inferiority towards Western Europe. There are no documents from that time that would bear witness to our feelings of inferiority towards “Paris.” Yes, families sent their sons to study in Italy as the universities over there were still superior, but the proud metropole/meek periphery dichotomy simply did not exist back then. The fact that Poles internalized this dichotomy centuries ago and then made it a cornerstone of their outlook on life is in and of itself an expression of feelings of inferiority generated by colonialism. The utter lack in their capacity to form intellectual theories, in direct contrast to thinkers from Western Europe or the US, is characteristic of colonized peoples. Such peoples think that they should espouse metropole-produced theories because the peripheries cannot articulate themselves and the world around them, while texts created in the peripheries are inherently less valuable and meaningful than texts written by

authors located in the metropolises and employing their language.¹¹ In other worlds, looking to the West as an example suggests the colonization of the minds that followed the political debacles of the First and Second Polish Republic. The argument that the West remained a metropole for the Poles and that this fact nullifies the legitimacy of the claim that Poland was colonized by the Soviets is incorrect. It actually confirms it.

Despite the common characteristics I mentioned above, each colonialism is a separate case, British colonialism in India, the Spanish effort in Mexico, and the Belgian occupation of the Congo, each of them was different. Protestant (Anglo-Saxon) colonialism was racist (the United States struggled with the consequences of that until the late 1960s), whereas Catholic (Spanish) colonialism did not outlaw interracial marriage – one of the outcomes of the latter approach is the reshaping of the population structure in Latin America, which nowadays is mostly of Spanish-Native American extraction. The metropole was not necessarily a source of generally recognized and appropriated cultural models: in British-colonized China, the English political and cultural model was never considered superior to the Chinese one. Colonialism in Poland or, broadly speaking, in non-Germanic Central Europe, was not a copy of some other method of subjugating weaker entities but had its own individual character and peculiarities which revealed themselves in the postcolonial period. The rejection of concepts related to the process of colonizing Poland is an unnecessary tribute paid by Polish scholars to Western European narrative of literary criticism accompanied by fear of overstepping its boundaries.

In light of the above, we might ask which of the two concepts, colonialism or dependency, better reflects the situation that Poland was in after the Second World War. When trying to answer that question, we should not forget that employing a concept involves accepting all sorts of baggage that might be attached to it and how it was put into practice in the past. As Tolkien rightly observed, concepts are like stalactites because they accrue new meanings over time. That's where their capacity and multifaceted character comes from. How, then, do the two terms at the center of this argument look like in this context?

The word "dependency" certainly has a lot more capacity than the word "colonialism." A child can be dependent on its parents and our choice of outfit can depend on the weather. Our capability to contribute to the intellectual life of society depends not only on our innate abilities but also on the education we receive. We associate it with a host of dependencies we encounter in real life, as we all depend on something: the environment we inhabit, the

11 I would like to emphasize that marginal remarks about Poland written by second-rate scholars are still being cited, while Polish researchers are consistently ignored.

remuneration we receive for our work, the genes we inherited from our ancestors. Dependence is everywhere in nature and societies. We inhabit a nexus of interrelated dependencies: material, social, intellectual, and spiritual. In his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T.S. Eliot wrote about the inevitable dependence of contemporary writers on the output of those who came before them. All of the implications of the term "dependence" are introduced into the space where we plan on utilizing the concept. Thus, using the term obscures the essence of the matter in the case when certain territories and national entities inhabiting them are commanded by force to develop along the lines laid down by some external power, or their development is halted altogether by that same outside actor. It is an indisputable fact that between 1945 and 1989, the majority of high-level decisions that determined the fate of Poland and its citizens were made in Moscow and not Warsaw; in the back secrecy-shrouded rooms of the Politburo, and not in the back rooms of the Sejm (let me reiterate: I am talking about macro- and not micromanagement of the country). A similar relationship existed between New Delhi and London as well as Dublin and London. Given that there is another, narrower concept that accurately describes similar situations, and does so better than the term "dependency," I do not see a reason to use it. That is why it is "colonialism" instead of "dependence." After all, we should be using words in a manner that best conveys our intended meaning. Placing political, economic, and social subjugation in the fairly expansive conceptual framework of "dependency" transforms this type of relationship into something normal, commonplace, something that requires no further explanation. Given that we depend on a plethora of different factors, as do ethnic groups and territories, it is fairly easy to consider dependent relationships something normal. Currently, Poland is a sovereign nation but it is still "dependent" on the European Union. Our dependence on the Soviet Union, however, had a completely different flavor. The term "colonialism" clearly implies that the relationship it describes is not a result of mutual agreements, but rather an injurious, one-sided exploitation and therefore not normal. Colonialism is imposed and enforced with violence, which the proponents of calling the relationship between Poland and the Soviet Union dependence do not seem to notice.

The claim that the concept of post colonialism should be limited to Anglophone countries (where it was worked out) while in conversations about Central and Eastern Europe we should use the term "post dependency" is a classic *non-sequitur*, akin to stating that because capitalism first appeared in country A and B, we shouldn't try to use the term in countries C and D. Each colonialism is *sui generis*, but all of them have common characteristics that are fairly easy to discern and express, with violation being the key one among them. Colonialism begins with violence, with conquest, with a lost war, with

coercion, elimination of the elites of the colonized peoples, destruction of books and national identity. That is an apt description of what happened in Poland in the 1940s. National and tribal identity is an important factor in the process of colonization, without it we can talk only of conquest. Proponents of dependency theory do not take nationality issues into consideration, maybe because there is no place for these issues for postmodern epistemology. Nationality played a key role in the efforts of colonizers on Polish lands and it simply cannot be ignored. Between 1945 and 1989, Polish intellectual discourse was a discourse of a colonized nation. We have to consider nationality matters if we want to understand historic events like the Katyń massacre, deportations to Siberia, the elimination of the Polish intelligentsia, and the purging of Polish libraries launched in the 1940s.¹² Therefore, colonialism is a form of inflicting violence on a population whose national consciousness is already formed and its effects include the hindering or halting the development of colonized societies and significant changes in the intellectual life of said communities. Postcolonial discourse attempts to articulate these disadvantages and restrictions.

I'm skeptical about Dorota Kołodziejczyk's assurances that "analysis would reveal...."¹³ Why does the author not bring up any citations that would question the relationship between the political ideology of Anglophone postcolonialist authors and their peculiar blindness with respect to Soviet colonialism in Central Europe? According to the author, the reason for the ignorance of Soviet efforts demonstrated by American colonialism theorists is their bias towards researching primarily English-speaking countries. However, exiles and émigrés from Eastern Europe, from Miłosz to Gulag survivors, have produced a host of books in English that clearly indicate that Russian and Soviet colonialism was no less brutal in its efforts to destroy collective identities than the Western European one. Why weren't these tomes noticed by, let us say, Gayatri Spivak who so eloquently depicted the silencing of subalterns in India? Those are all rhetorical questions. The overwhelming majority of postcolonial scholars teaching at American universities are still associated with the leftists, who considered the Soviet Union a natural ally (the movement was also financially supported by money from Moscow). That's why scholars are so reluctant to notice the elephant in the china shop: Soviet Russia as a "par excellence" colonial empire. It is telling that proponents of dependency theory in Poland are so quick to justify their Western counterparts' reluctance.

12 The list of books intended for removal from public libraries were published in *Sarmatian Review* XIV, no 1 (1994), 214-217. The registries from 1949, 1950, and 1952 were found in the Central Archives of Modern Records and copied by the author of the article.

13 Kołodziejczyk, "Post-colonial Transfer to Central/Eastern Europe," 22

Dorota Kołodziejczyk admits that the concept of postcolonialism enabled the development of critical awareness in regards to “colonial dependency,” which, according to the author, includes issues related to imposing the colonizer’s language on the colonized nation and “situating the (post)colonial subject in relation to the empire functioning as administration, economy, and specific framing of history and culture”¹⁴ – but then quickly adds that after a short period of euphoria, postcolonialism turned out to be nothing more than just “postpessimistic optimism.” Well, that might be the case in Africa, but the situation is different in Central Europe where the articulation of colonial subjugation has just begun and where the development of post-colonial sensibilities might bring about the purging of Polish discourse from accretions carried over from the People’s Republic of Poland era.

Fairly few post-colonial literary scholars have been born in countries that are natively Anglophone – the fact that they are publishing in English is rather due to the fact that this particular language has a wider audience than, for example, Hindi or Arabic. Postcolonial literary scholars are well-versed in the actual geopolitical balance of power and it would be naïve to think that their political sympathies do not influence whether they took any interest in the lands conquered or annexed by the Russians, either during the czarist or the Soviet period. Polish proponents of the “dependency” theory seem to ignore this involvement. The absence of Central and Eastern Europe from Western postcolonial discourse is one of the byproducts of Marxist leanings exhibited by some of the most famous postcolonial scholars.¹⁵ As Terrence O’Keefe rightly noticed, “many European intellectuals—western, eastern and Mediterranean—joined or supported the Communist Party with the idea of playing a ‘leading role’ in the utopian transformations of society that the Party alleged it would bring about.”¹⁶ The lack of interest in Soviet and Russian colonialist efforts among Anglophone intellectuals is a result of their sympathies towards the Soviet Union and Russia’s power. We should also remember that followers of the Frankfurt School, which is currently enjoying record popularity, are waging war on the concept of nationality by excluding it from their human organization projects.¹⁷ Just like other social theories worked out in the

14 *Ibid.*, 25

15 This was noted in an article by David Chioni-Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique”, *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (2001), 111–128.

16 T. O’Keefe, *Mittleuropa Blues, Perilous Remedies. Andrzej Stasiuk’s Harsh World in Sarmatian Review* XXXII, no.1 (2012), (under review).

17 For a good introduction to the precepts of the Frankfurt School, see Leszek Kołakowski’s commentaries in his *Main Currents of Marxism*, Volume 3.

privacy of a professor's office, the tenets of the Frankfurt School do not take the experiences of Central and Eastern European nations into consideration, following György Lukács' credo: "when (...) 'facts' (...) appear to contradict the process: 'So much worse for the facts!'"¹⁸

The texts written by proponents of the "dependency" hypothesis lack any sort of reflection on whether separating the Central European struggle for independence from Western postcolonial discourse is a specific instrument of marginalization, wielded by Western postcolonial scholars and their Polish followers to suppress claims voiced by entities that were colonized by Russia. Reducing the process of annihilating the national identity of colonized peoples to nothing more than "government paranoia" is a very shallow interpretation and in no way does it cover the systematic purging of the national consciousness of Poles (and other Central and Eastern European peoples) of anything that might provide historical continuity. If silencing the "grand liberation narrative" (this beautiful phrase was coined by Dorota Kołodziejczyk) and the identity narrative is to become an integral part of "postdependency" studies, we risk turning it into nothing more than a dead field, just as it happened with literary criticism of "socialist realism."

In William Faulkner's novel *Wild Palms* (1939), Polish workers are portrayed as people who don't understand that the world is full of cold-blooded swindlers. The mine that they work in has been abandoned by the rest of the immigrants (both European and non-European); only the Poles have remained on site. They simply cannot fathom that someone could decide to exploit them so mercilessly and then condemn them to a slow and agonizing death in the wilderness. In his novel Faulkner managed to capture a set of distinct features of the Polish peasant from the turn of the century, features that later made him a subject of ridicule and humiliation in American pop culture. Tracing this literary motif and then placing it in a colonial matrix would be a huge success. This naïve simplemindedness that could not fathom that the mine owner is never coming back to Utah to pay his employees was undoubtedly a national trait, but can we call it a byproduct of colonialism? We saw it in Sienkiewicz's *For Bread and Bart the Conqueror*, in the works of Konopnicka as well as Wajda's legendary *Man of Marble*. In the novel, Faulkner touches upon an aspect of Polish identity that has never before been explored by researchers of colonialism in Poland in the 19th and 20th century. It turns "dependency" terminology into an exercise in the absurd.

18 György Lukács as quoted by Leszek Kołakowski in the third volume of *Main Currents of Marxism* (Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 3:265).

Dorota Kołodziejczyk correctly notices that in *Troubadours of the Empire*, I use postcolonial categories “in opposition to the model established in Anglophone postcolonial studies.”¹⁹ True, I am a proponent of interdisciplinary approaches and I find it easy to fluctuate between literary studies, history, and political science. Kołodziejczyk’s claim reveals the full dependence of “dependency scholars” on what happens and what is thought in “Anglophone research institutions.” The current generation of postcolonialist scholars is more and more focused on nominalist discourse and less and less involved in talking about historical reality (with African literary scholars being the only exception). Would it not be better to express categories befitting the Polish situation than to emulate those that were formed in reaction to different historic and social conditions? Mimicry, hybridity, and subalternity are all useful terms, but they are not sufficiently exhaustive as to explain every colonial situation that took place in history. Introducing additional ones, including “revolution from abroad,” as well as nationality and pro-European categories seems necessary in this situation. Postcolonial studies conducted by English-speaking Asians or Africans are usually anti-European, but from the perspective of Central and Eastern Europe, Europeanness is not the enemy, given that this part of the continent has felt an intrinsic part of the commonwealth ever since its historical beginnings. I am deeply convinced, however, that despite the innumerable associations, imitations, and linkages, Russian culture still competes with European culture while managing to remain separate from it. This particular model of Russianness, one that has been winning Russian hearts and minds for centuries, is a mortal enemy of Europeanness. Postcolonial discourse is not a discourse about abstractions, it is about historically shaped communities. It should not consent to some facts being discounted simply because power structure-affiliated institutions coordinating international discourse do not consider them to be pertinent. Anglo- and Francophone postcolonial scholars are occupied primarily with the technology of domination exerted by European nations over non-European ones; a portion of the discursive technology of domination they articulated is in no way applicable to Central and Eastern Europe. Jan Tomasz Gross was right to call the events that took place in Poland between 1939 and 1989 “a revolution from abroad.” A revolution aimed at specific nations. And calling that revolution and its consequences “dependency” is nothing more than a malapropism.

It is also hard for me to take a stance on Grażyna Borkowska’s comment, as it seems to me that she read her Said fairly perfunctorily. The author claims that in *Orientalism*, Said laid down his research hypotheses very

19 Kołodziejczyk, “Post-colonial Transfer to Central/Eastern Europe,” 34.

precisely,"²⁰ while it is precisely the other way around: the book's methodology is basically *in statu nascendi*, as it often happens with most pioneering works in any field. Methodologies are polished and improved only by epigones. Said vacillates between essentialism and the rejection thereof, between "fire in the chest" and discourse. I'm not writing this to attach any sort of label to the man, on the contrary: I am an admirer and a follower of Said, which means I am a proponent of involved research projects, studies that are not indifferent towards moral quandaries raised by the presence of either the West in the Middle East (in Said's case) or Soviet Russia in Central and Eastern Europe. Grażyna Borkowska seems to think that one the greatest sins a literary scholar can commit is directing discourse towards reality rather than trapping it in Derrida-inspired *écriture*. In contrast to Derrida, Said never used his books to paint himself a critic and philosopher tackling only text, he rather appeared to be a man interested in how history shapes discourse.

After the partitions, Poland never had the opportunity to fully interpret itself, not only due to institutionalized censorship (which Professor Borkowska reduces to nothing more than a factor limiting the capacity for self-expression), but primarily because a society engaged in resisting colonization efforts expends the overwhelming majority of energy it has at its disposal. In societies that are not threatened by colonization, that surplus energy is spent on producing material and cultural goods, and thus, on broadening intellectual discourse. Print censorship is fairly easy to circumvent, as Eastern European inventions like *samizdat* and *tamizdat* clearly demonstrate. But the most crucial fact is that social energy is being expended on resistance against the government instead of being spent on productivity. Nor should we forget about the damage to social cohesiveness caused, for example, by the seizure of property following the Soviet invasion in 1939. Similar seizures were employed fairly often; examples include the liquidation of the Belarusian Unitarian Church in the 18th century and the dissolution of Roman Catholic monasteries and orders after the January Uprising. Those and other "social breaches" precluded the normal development of society for generations. These processes cannot be nullified by the establishment of friendship societies fostering Polish-Soviet and Polish-Russian relations, whose tasks include making sure that Russian books are translated into Polish and vice versa.

The following example will illustrate the translation issue. In the 1970s, the Czytelnik publishing house printed 4,280 copies of Zbigniew Herbert's *Collected Works*, whereas the short stories of Valery Bryusov, a third-rate Russian

20 Borkowska, "A Post-colonial Perspective on the Polish Soil," 40.

symbolist writer, were issued in 10,290 copies. This sort of disproportion was fairly common back then. The authorities fed readers mediocre Russian literature, while keeping pre-eminent Polish writers from reaching the mass market and intended audiences.

Contemporary 50- and 60-year olds are poorly versed in Polish history and literature because, among other reasons, this particular education and publication policy was implemented and enforced for more than two generations. The marginalization of vital facts about colonization, as well as intellectual and economic subjugation, cultural continuity, and national autonomy proceeded without any major obstruction in that period. It was already obvious for Adam Mickiewicz that the construction of St. Petersburg and its opulent palaces was carried out primarily at the expense of Lithuania and Poland. Reading through Agata Tuszyńska's *Russians in Warsaw* quickly makes one realize the cost which both the Polish language and Polish culture paid after the Uprising, when Russian was declared the new official language in Warsaw. I have already written about this issue in "Kultura."²¹ The lack of awareness of these issues might be called a postcolonial hump which postcolonial studies could "fix."

In this particular context, Grażyna Borkowska's assurances that Russian readers were familiar with Sienkiewicz, Prus, Orzeszkowa, and that Aleksander Świętochowski thought Poland "towers over Russia,"²² etc., sound rather pathetic. The fact that Sienkiewicz was translated into Russian is of no consequence to the problem of Russian colonialism in Poland. The British also read the *Upanishads* and other traditional Hindu texts. That didn't, however, change the fact that India was a British colony and that crucial decisions regarding the country were made with the colonialist interest in mind, rather than the local people or their culture. Add to that the loss of international prestige which the Poles, along with other nations of Central and Eastern Europe, have not since fully reclaimed. As political scientist Nancy Fraser observed, in the 20th century prestige became an important international currency frequently used in foreign policy matters.²³ Does Professor Borkowska really believe that actions like translating Sienkiewicz into Russian really balance out the anomalies in political, cultural, and economic development?

Postcolonial studies in Poland could help to nullify the perception in Western European and American discourse of Poland being nothing more than

21 E.M. Thompson, "Polish-Russian Dialogue," *Kultura* (Paris), Sep. 1991, 155-160.

22 Borkowska, "A Post-colonial Perspective on the Polish Soil," 43, 45.

23 N. Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition," *New Left Review*, no. 3 (2000), 107-120.

a Russian annex, a country without history and profile. This perception goes unseen by the majority of Polish nationals, but long-term work engagements at American universities make it very apparent. The marginalization of Polish culture cannot be abolished by establishing institutions that practice misnomers like “dependency.”

Talking or writing about colonialism touches upon one of the greatest issues that humanity is currently facing: the obsession with power and the unending acts of violence perpetrated by the stronger on the weaker. Colonialism is a very peculiar form of violence, albeit a form that is fairly common in the modern and postmodern world. Writing will not eradicate it singlehandedly, it can, however, serve to diminish its scale. I would like to take an opportunity to use a (postcolonial) paraphrase of Derrida’s observation that “the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command.”²⁴ Texts written in Polish and in other languages, generated during the colonialist period in Poland, should be interpreted in a way that guarantees that the textual methods and results of exclusion are clear to both Polish and non-Polish readers.

Polish postcolonial discourse is still in its infancy. The first order of business should be taking a closer look at Polish literature written in the last three hundred years and then placing it within the postcolonialist taxonomy. A few young literary scholars, with Dariusz Skórczewski at the head of the herd, are already doing just that. His analyses of Paweł Huelle’s *Castorp* and Słowacki’s *Salomea’s Silver Dream* are examples of the correct approach to the problem.²⁵ This type of studies should give rise to a map of colonial and postcolonial space in Polish literature, which we should then compare with a “map” of Polish literature from the pre-partition period.

The problem with terminology – whether we should use postcolonialism or postdependency – is related to the possibility of rewriting the last few hundred years of the history of Polish and European culture. Solving Poland’s contemporary cultural problems requires us to make a decision as to the type of identity we want to choose – either the type which includes self-determination suppressed by the colonial period, or the one purging Polishness of all substance. We have to accept colonial baggage and the influence it exerts over Polish thought if we want to construct a narrative of

24 J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, transl. G. Spivak, (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 158.

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D. Skórczewski, “Why did Paweł Huelle write ‘Castorp’?”, *Second Texts*, no. 3 (2006), 148-157; “Salomea’s Silver Dream’ as a Parade of Hybrids,” *Literary Memoir*, no. 1 (2011), 47-75.

Polish culture that will touch upon the most essential matters and reach beyond Polish borders. The originality of Polish culture lies in the fact that despite being violated by stronger neighbors over two hundred years ago, what I call “sarmatism” managed to come back to life again and again and then resurface, either in literary and non-literary texts or in social life. And dipping it in the murky and shallow waters of “dependence” utterly obscures and obfuscates this originality.

Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz