



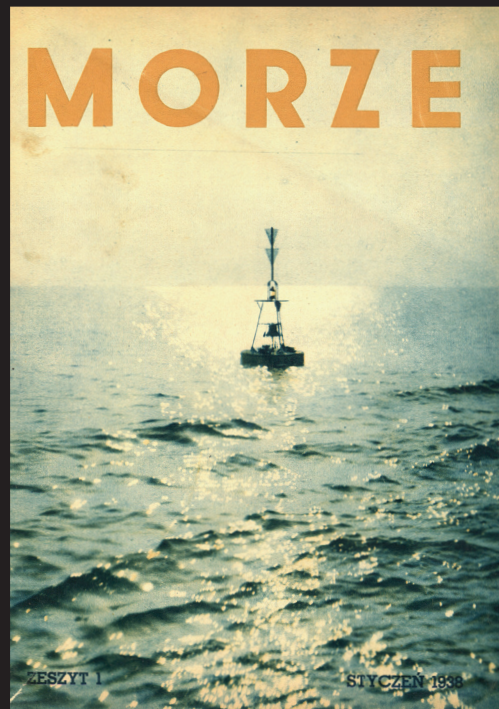
EXHIBITION
& SYMPOSIUM

AGNIESZKA POLSKA
ANA TEIXEIRA PINTO
ANDRZEJ LEDER
CLUB OF POLISH LOSERS
EKATERINA DEGOT
EMMA WOLUKAU-WANAMBWA
JAN SOWA
JANEK SIMON
KAROL RADZISZEWSKI
LINAS JABLONSKIS
MAREK RACZKOWSKI
MONIKA BOBAKO
OLEKSIY RADYNSKI
SLAVS AND TATARS
TOMÁŠ RAFA
ZBIGNIEW LIBERA
ZORKA WOLLNY (ON EL HADJI SY)

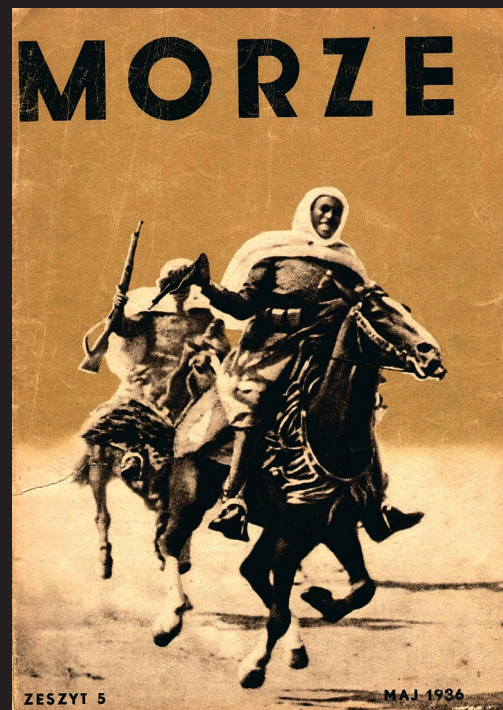
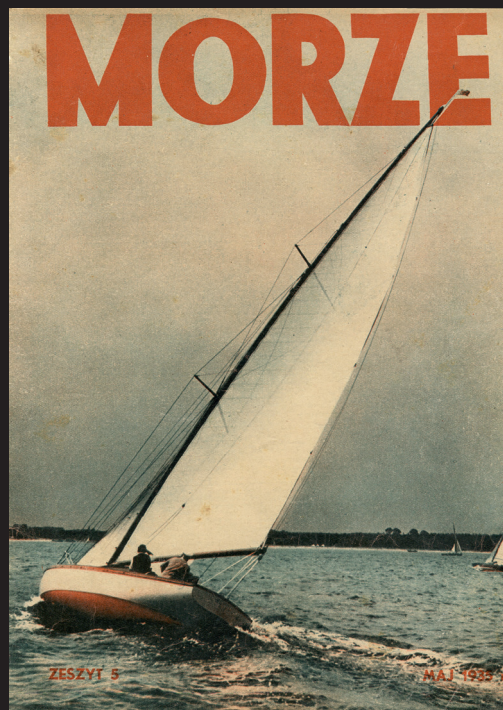
CURATOR EXHIBITION
JOANNA WARSZA
CURATOR SYMPOSIUM
JAN SOWA

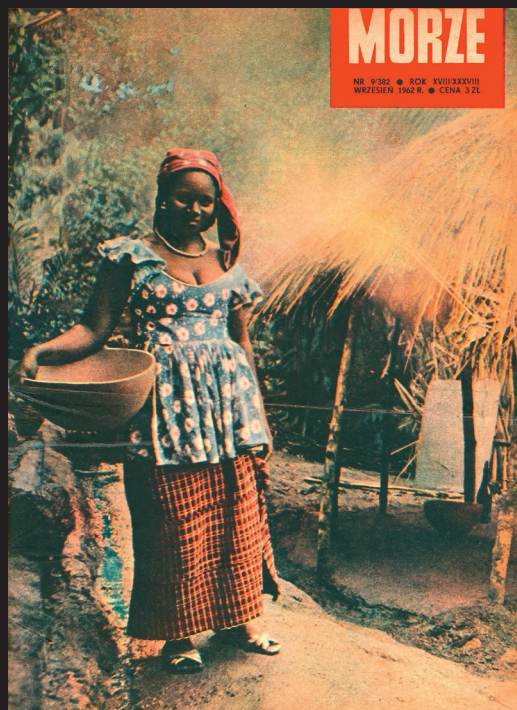
EXHIBITION 28.04.-04.06.2017
OPENING 27.04.2017 19:00
SYMPOSIUM 28.04.2017 15:00

Cover Demonstration in support of Polish colonies Poznań July 1938
From the archive of Janek Simon



Sea and Colonies 2006 [ongoing] A series of the covers of the monthly *Morze i Kolonie* [*Sea and Colonies*] published by Polish Maritime and Colonial League between 1924–1939, then from 1945–2000 by Maritime and River League and again from 2017.



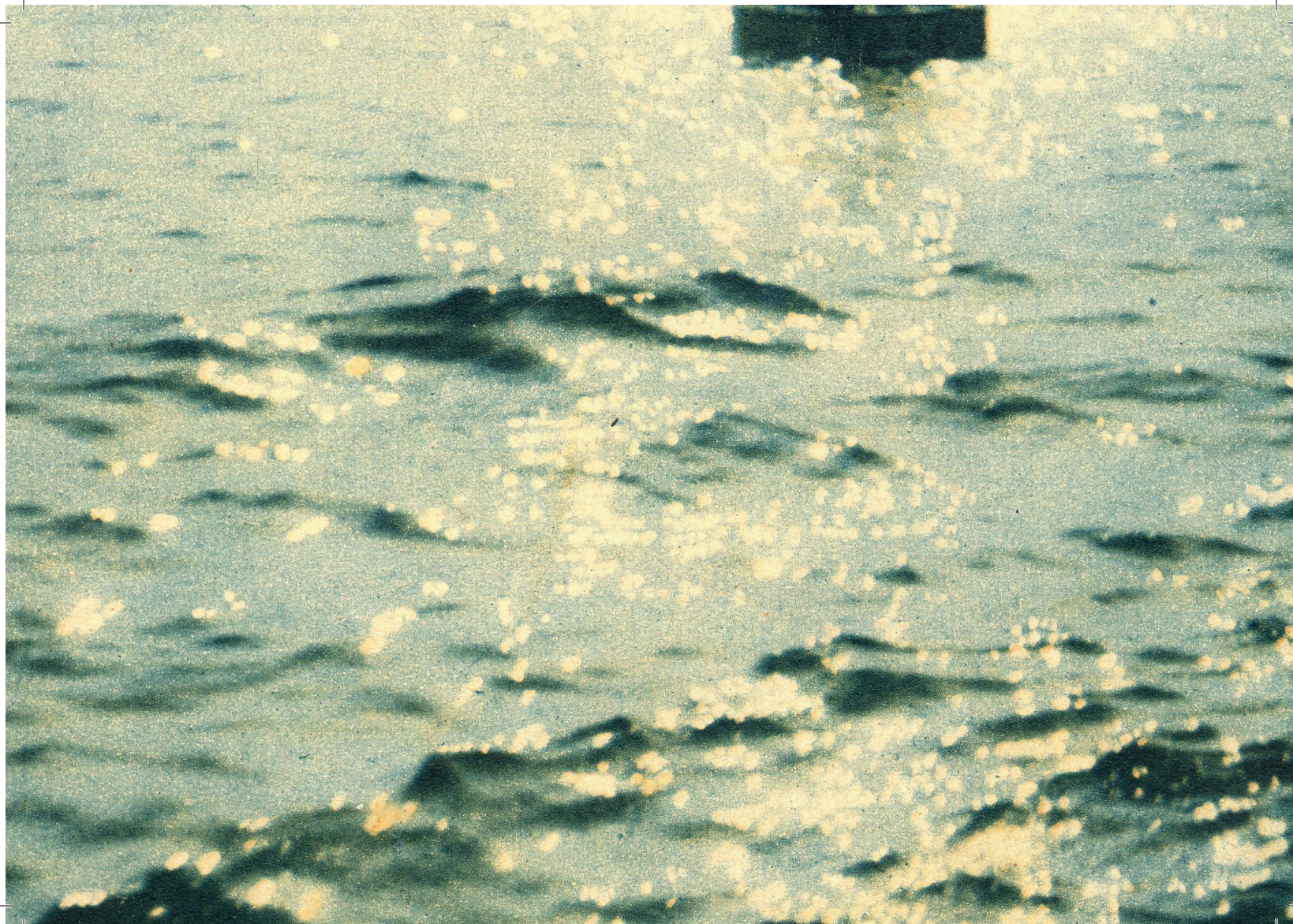




IN VIEW OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS
IN POLAND, YOU MIGHT HAVE ASKED
YOURSELF WHAT IS GOING ON? CASTING
A LIGHT ON HOW COLONIAL AND
POST-COLONIAL FORCES HAVE
NAVIGATED THE TERRITORIES OF EASTERN-
EUROPE, POLAND IN PARTICULAR,
THE EXHIBITION SHOWS ITS EXPANSIONARY
AMBITIONS BOTH IN THE VICINITY AS WELL
AS OVERSEAS, ON MADAGASCAR OR IN
CAMEROON, ECHOES OF WHICH CAN BE STILL
FOUND IN THE CURRENT RIGHT-WING
RHETORIC, IT TELLS A STORY OF »ANOTHER
COLONIAL NEIGHBOR,« SUPERIOR AND
INFERIOR BOTH TO THE EAST AND
THE WEST, WHERE EVERYTHING TODAY
»IS GETTING BETTER.«

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AN INTRODUCTION: ANOTHER COLONIAL NEIGHBOUR

Elena Agudio and
Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung

The contemporary political
situation and climate in Poland
and in other Eastern European

countries, together with the global authoritarian and demagogic turn; the attacks on democracy, human rights, working conditions and the environment, are forcing us to not only resist and react but also to stop, reflect and look backward, to disentangle matrixes of unexplored histories of oppression and colonial violence.

The feminist movement which coalesced last year in Poland under the name of *Czarny Protest* to react and demonstrate against a proposed total ban on abortion announced by the current government, has not only been able to inspire and show ways to embody the struggles, but in the choice of its name *Czarny*, black, it has also been able to provide us with a hint of and a route to further continue immersing oneself in Joanna Warsza's curatorial and artistic investigation on Polish and Slavic colonialism. And to continue to find new counter-hegemonic narratives and threads of research about Eastern European geopolitics. Talking about Jan Sowa's analysis between the ideologies of American slavery and Polish serfdom, in the article **Slavery vs. Serfdom, or Was Poland a Colonial Empire?** 

Mikołaj Glišński wrote: »The common American derogatory term based on the Latin word for black, 'nigger,' finds a surprising semantic correlation

in the Polish word 'czerni' [adj. czarny – 'black'], a generic neutrum denoting in the Sarmatic idiom which became standard Polish for the rebellious Ruthenian people of Ukraine. This also points to the fact that the realities of skin and color were just as easily manipulated through cultural and linguistic operations.«

Acting upon an invitation by S A V V Y Contemporary to intercept and further delve into Eastern European colonial routes, with her project **Everything is Getting Better. Unknown Knowns of Polish (Post) Colonialism**, and its ironic title quoting the current Polish government rhetoric, together with various artists and the sociologist Jan Sowa, Joanna Warsza traces elements of colonial discourse in the Polish historical presence in Ukraine and its unfulfilled plans in Madagascar; making an analogy between the ideologies of slavery and Polish serfdom and comparing technologies of oppressions, but also tries to understand and addresses the subject of Poland from a multi-layered perspective of colonial narratives, both as coloniser and colonised.

One of the major preoccupations of S A V V Y Contemporary is the attempt to understand the present through the lens of history and through the finicky collection and reconnection of dots and traces of forgotten and silenced colonial pasts. Working with S A V V Y Contemporary's core exhibition and discursive programme we are striving to offer a platform to disclose imperial legacies still embedded in mechanisms of power and the indelible effects of epistemic violence, but also and especially with the radical and participative archive project *Colonial Neighbours*, created since the very inception of S A V V Y Contemporary, we are painstakingly digging and researching in the closets and drawers of (German) colonial memory and amne-

20 sia, exhuming dusty objects, documents or immaterial elements helping us trace a clearer map of our contemporary political situatedness.

With Joanna Warsza's project *Everything is Getting Better: Unknown Knowns of Polish (Post)colonialism*, we are extending the lack of critical examination of European colonial legacy to the Polish imperial past and present. Theoretical reflections and speculations about the possibility of comparing the post-colonial world to the post-Soviet condition have been already largely explored. Some thinkers have been questioning and exploring the possibility of how to apply the post-colonial perspective to the areas of Central and Eastern Europe and examining the post-socialist context through the lens of post-colonial studies, showing how much these complex parallelisms and analogies are crucial and important and how much the need to re-analyse the historical and »psychological« profile of a region or a nation can be fundamental for the understanding of the current political and geopolitical context.

It was in the 60s that the Polish-émigré literary political magazine *Kultura* regarded the racial discrimination and colonialism of the »West« as deserving of the same condemnation as the national discrimination and »ideological« and economic imperialism perpetrated by the Soviet empire: one of its leading columnist, Londyńczyk, in supporting the efforts of the anti-colonial movements in Afro-Asian countries in those years talked about a parallelism between the situation of these nations and the ones incorporated into the USSR and into the Eastern Bloc. Soviet propaganda, with slogans such as »internationalism« and freedom »for those oppressed by capitalism«, paradoxically became an ally of anti-colonial movements (for the fear of the collapse of this

»anti-imperialist« façade) and consequently for a long while post-colonial theory missed to question the colonial oppression and imperial domination within the Communist world.

With the exhibition and discursive project curated by Joanna Warsza and Jan Sowa, *S A V V Y Contemporary* is tackling the »colonial« paradigm within Central and Eastern Europe from different threads and perspectives, such as the Western colonial discourse forming around the German notion of »Eastern Europe« during the nineteenth century, the post 1989 spread of capitalism and neoliberal economy and more contemporary considerations (the lands between Germany and Russia still retain a specific position in the Western episteme). It also touches on Soviet imperialism as a form of colonialism as well as the colonial aspirations within the region, such as the functioning of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, or Poland's unrealized imperialistic plans in Africa or Madagascar investigated by Janek Simon. The project challenges the subject of Poland in a triple relation: Poland as former colony of Soviet Russia, as former »aspirant« colonizer and finally in relation to the western hegemons.

I believe that this project, an admirable assemblage of curatorial perspective, poetic yet incisive works of art, and an accompanying discursive programme, performs the necessary labor of dissecting the notion of the semi-periphery, the concept of slavdom and the means of self-victimisation. These ideas help us to not only to question the repressed colonial aspirations and the post-colonial condition of the region but also to better understand and re-read the post-communist condition, and the current crisis of democracy which we find ourselves entangled in.

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OPAQUE TO HERSELF: POLAND FOR EXAMPLE

Jan Sowa and
Joanna Warsza

There was a brief moment back in the good old 1990's when the burden of the past seemed to be gone and all historical divisions, including the European East and West happily overcome. The most extreme articulation of this point of view was provided by Francis Fukuyama, who even believed that the history has come to its completion and the future would just be a simple extension of the invincible combination of free market and parliamentary democracy. The cracks in this beautifully optimistic edifice appeared globally in 2001 with the 9/11 attacks and locally, in Europe, in 2003 with the heated debate provoked by the invasion of Iraq, when the so called »New Europe« (»former« East) enthusiastically backed the US and the core of the Old Europe (»former« West), mainly France and Germany, unequivocally condemned it. However it was only in 2015, when the European Union had to deal with the alarming refugees crisis that the illusion of unity was irrevocably shattered; despite changing political reality and new institutional arrangements the East of Europe, radically opposing any opening of its borders for the refugees, has remained a troubling and difficult to understand internal Other of European integration.

However, if this unfortunate development could be blamed only on a simple inter-cultural misunderstanding, it would not be worth much attention. The core of the problem seems to be the fact that not only the East is misunderstood and misjudged by the West, but that Central-Eastern Europe does not understand itself either, which has got a lot to do with its unrecognized past. Paradoxically, because one of the key differences between the West and the East is that the latter seems to be much more inclined than the former to anchor its identity discourse in the historical past. It is reflected in the incredible fixation of Central-Eastern Europe on commemorating past events, recalling past wars, reaffirming past glory, worshiping past heroes and reminding everyone of its sufferings and victories. It makes the societies of Central-Eastern Europe anthropologically much closer to the Middle-East than the West of Europe. Just like the Middle Age crusades are recalled by the Islamic fundamentalists as a reason for their contemporary hatred towards the West, so are ancient wars and victories recontextualized in Central Eastern-Europe as an essential background for nowadays politics. Yearly re-enactments of battle of Grunwald from the year 1410, when Poles and Lithuanians defeated the Teutonic Order (a protagonist of modern Prussia) are regularly re-framed in the public discourse as a warning for Germany not to hegemonize Poland within the European Union. Despite this strong reorientation towards the past, historical events remain completely mystified for contemporary citizens of Central-Eastern Europe who are apparently unwilling to face the true nature of their historical heritage. A fact, maybe, not as surprising after all if we keep in mind the psychoanalytical dictum that the subject remains fundamentally opaque to herself.

One of the most important blind spots of Central-European historical narrative is an almost complete lack of recognition of colonial episodes in the region's history. It has not really been much helped by the inevitable and inexorable rise of post-colonial theory. An old criticism sometimes raised against Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), concerns the fact that the author examines the relations between metropolitan countries and their colonial territories, omitting such (semi)peripheries as Central Europe. An inquiry into the colonial and post-colonial forces that have navigated the cultural identities of Eastern-Europe and Poland in particular can offer ways to better understand its current warring neo-nationalistic and megalomaniac condition, the permanent need of self-affirmation, the firm anti-immigration stance, and finally the lack of the critical examination of the own imperial past.

An eminent Polish literary scholar Maria Janion in her book from 2006, *Uncanny Slavdom*, characterizes Poland as an unconscious post-colonial space permanently torn between the feeling of superiority and inferiority. Janion claims that this post-colonial condition needs to be understood through its relation to Slavdom, as well as the suppressed colonial past. On one hand reclaiming being Slavic would approach Poland to Russia, therefore its Slavdom is distant. The same detachment makes Poles aspire to the western universalism, defending the Latin, Catholic and Mediterranean values (but always with an element of self-colonisation). Polish national identity is therefore constructed based on the trauma of inferiority and alienation from what is universal (the »Western world«), the superiority towards other Slavs and finally the permanent self-victimisation, which disables a proper critical self-examination. Many

of those aspects come back in an evident manner in the current political situation with the prevailing fear of the other and the stark refusal of any immigrants, while millions of Poles work and live abroad.

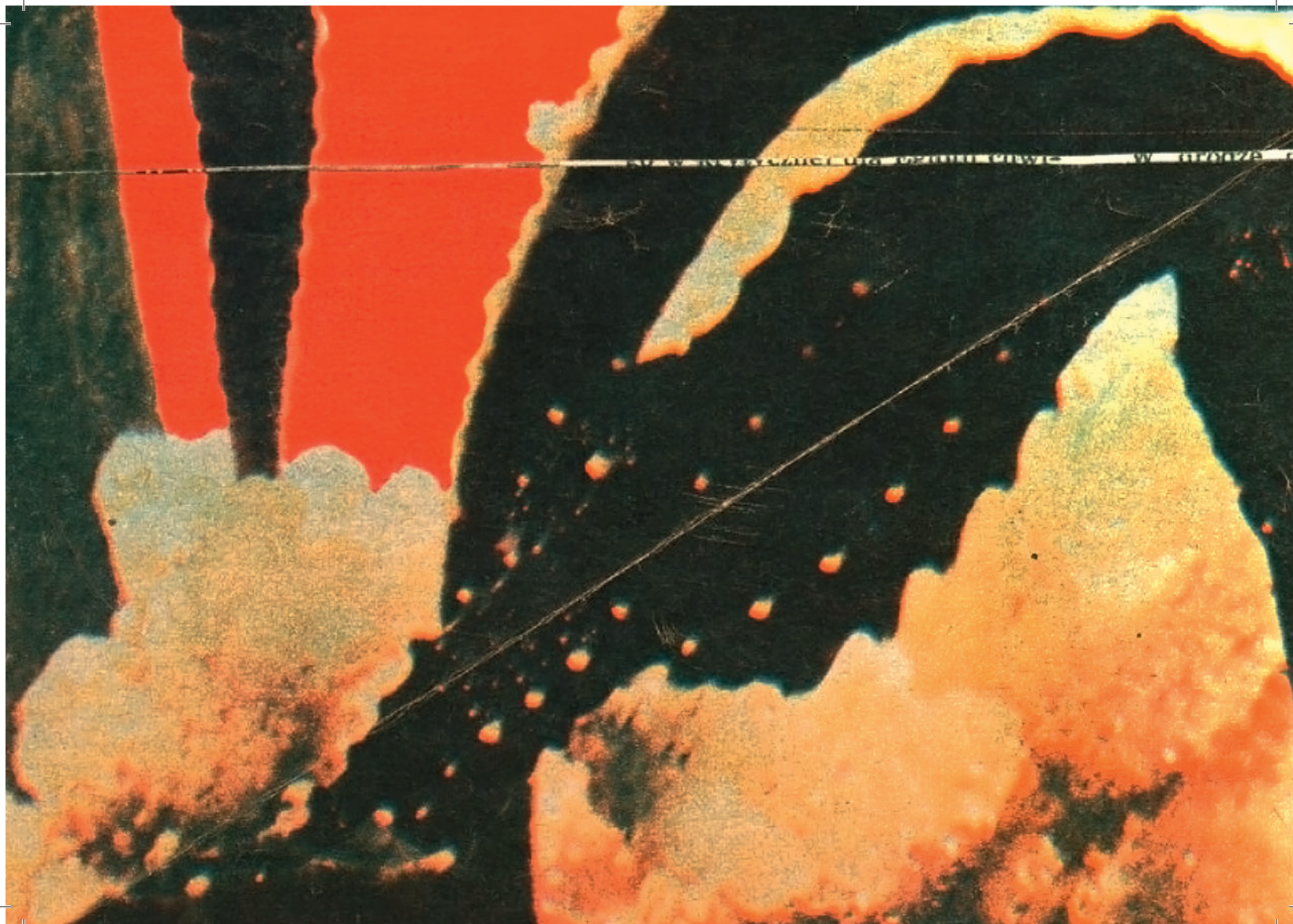
The key and defining traits of contemporary Polish national habitus; an uncanny mixture of inferiority complex and narcissistic fantasies of Poland's uttermost superiority over a »decaying« Western world – have their roots in negated colonial past. There is apparent correlation between the words »Slav« and »slave« dating back to ancient times. Scholars such as Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein have demonstrated in a convincing way that the part of the European continent lying East of the river Elbe and inhabited mostly by Slavs was the first peripheral zone of capitalist world-economy in early-modern times. The whole block of countries – the so called Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth being the biggest and the most prominent example in the area – was pushed into a state of dependency and underdevelopment, forcing its rural populations into serfdom (a kind of slavery, after all). Thus Central and Eastern Europe could be seen historically the first »Third World« (we refer to this term to facilitate communication as it is widely used, however we put it in quotation marks as we do not agree with its frame of reference – there rather is just one world, divided between the center and (semi)peripheries intimately linked with one another by a process of unequal material and symbolic exchange). The Kingdom of Poland and its nobility played a key role in extending the enslavement of peasants far into the South-Eastern Europe as it attempted to build its own colonial empire by dominating Lithuania and annexing vast areas of Ukraine in the 16th century and developing colonial aspirations in the

26 XIX/XX century with the Colonial Maritime League, as precisely depicted in the research of Janek Simon. It is still inspiring a post-colonial nostalgia in contemporary Poland hampering a critical reflection over the country's past as well as a recognition of its peripheral status. Instead Poland's nationalistic right, currently in power – aims at reestablishing Poland as a local hegemonic power in the region. This idea linked – history again! – with the so called Jagiellonian period of early modern times (Jagiellonian dynasty ruled much of today's Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania and Latvia between 1386 and 1572) is cast by the right as a desired alternative for integrating with the EU supposedly dominated by German interests. It also stands behind Polish expansionist and imperial infrastructural ambitions epitomized in Poland's attitude toward Ukraine described and deconstructed in this volume by Ukrainian artist Oleksiy Radynski.

This complicated picture has just gone through an interesting turn in recent years. The critical tools of post-colonial theory have ironically been appropriated in Central-Eastern Europe by the nationalistic right and used to reaffirm »traditional identities« and »cultural heritage« colonized and dominated – in their opinion – by foreign, liberal ideology. It has led to a form of peculiar »perverse decolonization« to use Ekaterina Degot's expression, where obscurantist attitudes, anti-progressive sentiments and religious fundamentalism are presented as attempts to preserve one's unique and allegedly endangered way of life. What's maybe even more interesting is that the twisted, anti-critical use of critical concepts has provided a platform for widespread populist uprising. Contrary to the beliefs of 20th century modernization theorists from Daniel Lerner to Francis Fukuyama, the peripheries seem to be ahead

of the populist curve, showing to the center its future. It is yet another perversion that may be called an »ill de-modernization« as it directly reverses the relations between the center and the (semi)peripheries as they are conceptualized in the frame of modernization theory: it looks like the future of Great Britain, United Kingdom and other highly developed countries is to be found in Poland, Hungary or Russia, not the other way around.

Many of the artists, thinkers and curators behind this exhibition and the accompanying symposium, are a group of friends who have been involved with each other's work as fellow artists and occasionally as critics, living in and out of Poland who have been brought together and invited to act and react to the events in the region, and it's relation to the opaque past. Sometimes, when reading the news today, one might have a feeling that art in the current political situation might feel unnecessary. For what is art, next to wars, conflicts or the right-wing ideological turns of several governments? We have always – and especially now – had the recurring question: can art become more than art? How does it relate to activism, politics or economy? Don't we overestimate its capacities in this regard, only because it will make us feel better? We believe that art is more resilient than we think, and needs to become more powerful in its own recognition as a part of a larger societal and political landscape, especially now.



EVERYTHING IS GETTING BETTER: UNKNOWN KNOWN S OF POLISH (POST) COLONIALISM

Introduction to the exhibition
Joanna Warsza

is going on? Why the government-fueled rhetoric of »rising up from the knees;« alienation from the EU; have an obstinate refusal of any critical self-examination and fear of the »other« gone mainstream?

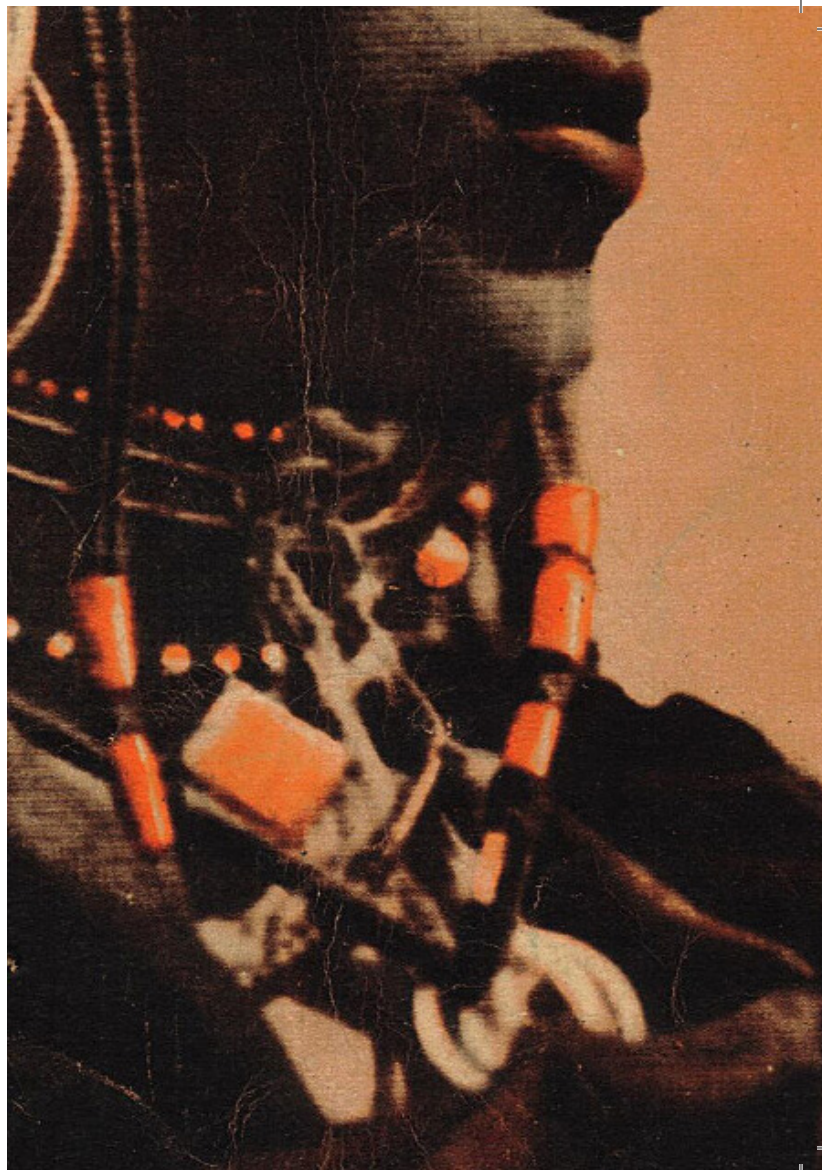
The exhibition *Everything is Getting Better: Unknown Knowns of Polish (Post)Colonialism* and the accompanying symposium propose to reverse the trope of permanent Polish exceptionalism and victimhood (always torn between Germany and Russia) by casting a light on how colonial and post-colonial forces have navigated the territories of Eastern-Europe. As a hegemon of its own history, Poland pictures its expansionary reveries both in its immediate vicinity (Ukraine and Lithuania) as well as overseas, echoes of which can be found in the current right-wing political rhetoric. The

In light of recent developments in Poland, you might have asked yourself what

backbone of the show is the timeline/chronical of the Maritime and Colonial League performatively staged by artist-cum-traveller Janek Simon, including a selection of works from his exploration of cultural geographies of the country's colonial legacy. In fact, Liga Morska – The Maritime League, created in 1930 to implement the colonies in Cameroon or Madagascar, continues to exist in its present guise as a Maritime and River organization.

A selection of works presented in the show expands, contextualizes, and footnotes the timeline. Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa engage with the history of Polish refugees evacuated to Iran during World War II, from where some fled onwards to Uganda, where they were housed in refugee camps. The collective Slavs and Tatars features a body of works on other orientalisms, led by an antimodernist trope of facing backwards, towards history, but moving into the future. A new film by Agnieszka Polska refers to Slavdom as analyzed by renowned scholar Maria Janion: a concept which on the one hand inadvertently brings Poles closer to Russia, while at the same time sharpening their aspirations towards Western universalism at the price of self-colonisation. Karol Radziszewski depicts the life of August Agbola O'Brown, a Nigerian-born jazz musician and combatant of the Warsaw Uprising; Zbigniew Libera imagines a moment of Polish troops cheerfully joining the US missions in Iraq in 2003; in a new film commission, Kiev-based artist Oleksiy Radinsky reveals the current mechanisms of Polish infrastructural protectionism towards Ukraine while Vilnius-based Linas Jablonskis drafts an imaginable scenario for Lithuania once dominated by Poland. Zorka Wollny creates a sound extension of paintings by El Hadji Sy about distress and death of migrants at sea. Marek Raczkowski and the Berlin Polish

Losers Club – Klub der Polnischen Versager diagnose the current madness of a country, where political elites are again dreaming of *Intermarium* – a geopolitical federation of Eastern-European bloc led by Poland from Baltic Sea to Black Sea. The exhibition tells a story of the nurturing of the (post)colonial psyche of a neurotic country, superior and inferior both to the east and the west, where »everything today is changing for the better«.



AGNIESZKA POLSKA

Ask the Siren 2017

The camera wanders through the streets of what looks like a semi-empty underwater Warsaw inhabited by a double-mouthed Mermaid. The soft whispering of the Siren brings back the suppressed Slavic roots tamed during the Christianization. The Mermaid recalls the curse of Polish nationalism, and particularly its concept of messianism, coined during Romanticism to overcome the partition of the country and justify Poland's special place in history. Inspired by the book Maria Janion's book, *Uncanny Slavdom*; the schoolbooks of history in Lublin high school; silenced pagan imagery and disturbed by the current nationalist political turn; Polska depicts the puzzled identity of a country, always aspiring to be part of the universal West, even at the price of self-colonisation; while obscuring its Eastern, pagan side. »This confusion«, says Agnieszka »makes me feel sometimes that Poland is drowning.«



CLUB OF POLISH LOSERS · CLUB DER POLNISCHEN VERSAGER · KLUB POLSKICH NIEUDACZNIKÓW

The interview with an interesting person. Count Moritz August Benjowski 2017 The interview with an interesting person. Dr. Ignacy Domeyko 2017 The assistant clarifies. Jarosław Kyczyński 2016 Mrs. Selke and the hate 2011 Czarosław Gzyms 2017

and Germans by hosting cultural events in line with the Treaty of Good Neighbourship and Friendly Cooperation from 1991. It addresses in particular protagonists from the cultural field, who do not fit into place and time, as well as those, who are dismissed or disregarded. In 2016 they succeeded in organizing a premiere screening of the propagandistic film *Smoleńsk* in Berlin, an undertaking, which the current ambassador failed to pursue. The Club is located at Ackerstraße 168 in Berlin.

CdPV has produced two films responding to this exhibition, and is screening three older films from its on-going series.

CdPV is an association founded by Adam Gusowski and Piotr Mordel in 2001 in Berlin. They both emigrated one year before the fall of the wall. The Club propagates interpersonal communication and empathy among Poles



Club of Polish Losers Berlin 2017 Photo Darek Gontarski Courtesy of the artists

EMMA WOLUKAU- WANAMBWA

Paradise 2012

Paradise tells a story about a memory of Koja – one of many refugee camps for Europeans, that were operated in Britain's African colonies during and after the WWII. Of the thirty thousand refugees whom the British sent to live in camps in Africa between 1941 and 1952, roughly seven thousand, mostly Poles and Ukrainians, lived in the Uganda Protectorate, which at a time had a resident European population of just two thousand.

Unlike Kenya and Rhodesia, Uganda was not a settler colony. The British didn't want refugees to remain nor to take roots, so they confined them to two very remote camps, denied freedom of movement and restricted their contact with the indigenous population. When the camp at Koja closed in 1952, it was entirely dismantled and its inhabitants were forced to leave Uganda. All that remains today is a recent reconstruction of its cemetery, while the knowledge of the camp's existence barely extends beyond the confines of the small town.

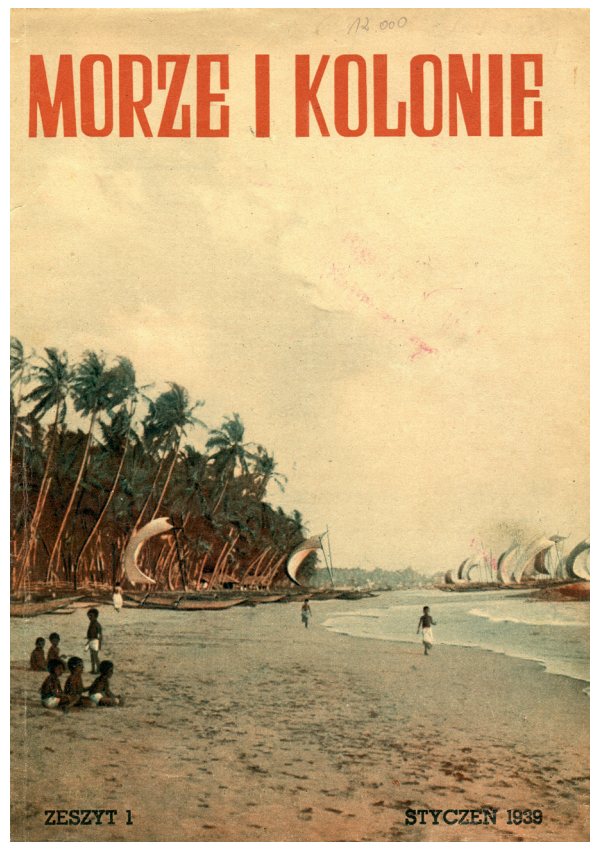
The story of Africa's European refugees remains peripheral within hegemonic narratives of both continents' recent histories, when so many European nations, Poland for example, consider themselves to be imperiled by the migration of forcibly displaced people from the Global South.



Morze i Kolonie / Sea and Colonies, 2006-ongoing A series of the covers of the monthly Morze i Kolonie / Sea and Colonies published by Maritime and Colonial League between 1924–1939, then from 1945–2000 by Maritime and River League and again from 2017, accompanied by a selection of works from various travels of the artist exploring Polish colonial legacy.

The Maritime and Colonial League was a non-governmental organization in pre-war Poland, boasting of a membership of around one million in 1939. Established mainly by Polish officers from the Russian navy eager to influence the nations modernisation agenda and to

open the economy and mental geography to the sea; which eventually led to the construction of the harbor in Gdynia, followed soon by megalomaniac dreams about Poland becoming a colonial empire. The League lobbied to get the country of Togo (the argument was: a share of German colonial domains should go to Poland, after Prussia lost some of its territory). The League started a policy of systemic land acquisitions in Parana in Brazil and signed a secret agreement with the government of Liberia – which was supposed to bring African soldiers into the Polish army in case of war. Then they tried to acquire Madagascar, and by the late 30's when an economical crisis befell Poland, the government began to consider some of these proposals seriously, including deporting Jews to the island. The monthly *Morze* was the organisation's main educational tool and sold in more than 150k copies every month, with non-Westerners depicted in patronizing and derogatory ways. Even if the League political projects never got any closer to materialization, the ideas



Janek Simon *Morze i Kolonie (Sea and Colonies)* 2006 [ongoing]
From the archive of the artist

42 became quite influential and, have contributed to shaping latent racism that has quite recently become visible in Poland. The organization exists till today as the Maritime and River League, the magazine was just revived, in time for senseless ideas such as *Intermarium* – a geopolitical federation of Eastern-European bloc led by Poland from Baltic Sea to Black Sea.

*Polish Cultural Season
on Madagascar 2007-2017*

Had Poland succeeded to colonize Madagascar before the Second World War, it

would certainly have established today a rich cultural program on the island. Simon decided to self-organize a Polish season in Antananarivo, having participated in several similar activities. His project *Polish Cultural Season on Madagascar* organized in a rented shop in front of the Goethe Institute, consisted of an exhibition of several works by Eastern-European artists. Janek not only appropriated and expanded the institutional frame of cultural politics, but established one based on a what if scenario.

Among the numerous colonial plans of the Second Polish Republic, the failed attempt to gain control of Madagascar as »a token of appreciation from France« is likely to play a minor role, in reality Poland was also invested in Togo or Cameroon. Nevertheless the island functions in the symbolic sphere with the common expressions such as »Jews to Madagascar,« after the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 1937 suggested to relocate there the Jewish population as the alternative to Palestine. The government picked up the League's agendas and an official expedition was sent to the island to examine the situation. The idea of relocating Jews to Madagascar fluctuated, somewhat in parallel in

Germany. It emerged in the late 19th century and climaxed in *The Madagascar Plan*, a pre-holocaust Nazi scheme, which was dropped.

At S A V V Y Contemporary, the Season is presented through poster, a video: *A way to the port in Tamatave*, 2007 and a collection of promotional gadgets from the Adam Mickiewicz Institute.

*Nollywood Ashes and Diamonds
making-off 2013 [ongoing]*

In 2013 Janek Simon commissioned a successful Nollywood film

director, Niji Akanni, to remake a seminal Polish film *Ashes and Diamonds* by Andrzej Wajda. The film, which premiered in 1958, tackles the evaluation of communism. It depicted the WWII Polish Underground Resistance Army in an uncomfortable way for the communist regime, which made it a political event at the time. The production itself involved lengthy negotiations with censors. take out, new sentence from it's point of view on communism is definitely more balanced than the hegemonic anti-Soviet narration presented by post-1989 elites.

Nollywood emerged in Nigeria in the early 1990s from almost nothing. It is now the second biggest film industry in the world, having practically wiped out American films in Africa. Niji Akanni is planning to translate the Polish story into the realities of the Biafra War, a violent and under-represented civil war that tore Nigeria apart in the late 1960s. This topic is again subject to intense control and censorship, so the production, as in case with Wajda's film, will be screened for the censors first. The »making-of« trailer screened here is used as the main channel of presenting the project to global audiences and introduces the process of translating the

44 story, emblematic for two different semi-peripheral geographic realities, and their respective social and historical contexts.

Sculptures based on Oskar Hansen's sketches from Le Musée de l'Homme in Paris 2013

A series of sculptures is based on Oskar Hansen's sketches from his numerous visits to the anthropological *Le Musée de l'Homme* in Paris in early 50's. Those visits inspired Hansen, an architect and an educator, to shape the concept of the »Open Form,« in which the architecture was supposed to facilitate the heterogeneity of forms, becoming a tool that can be transformed by its users. Hansen saw his role as architect as limited to the creation of a »perceptive background.« Janek's interest in *Musée de l'Homme* follows those of Hansen but also Tadeusz Kantor or Władysław Hasior, witnessing the moment in which Polish post-war avant-garde meets anthropology and tackles the ideas of the self and the other.

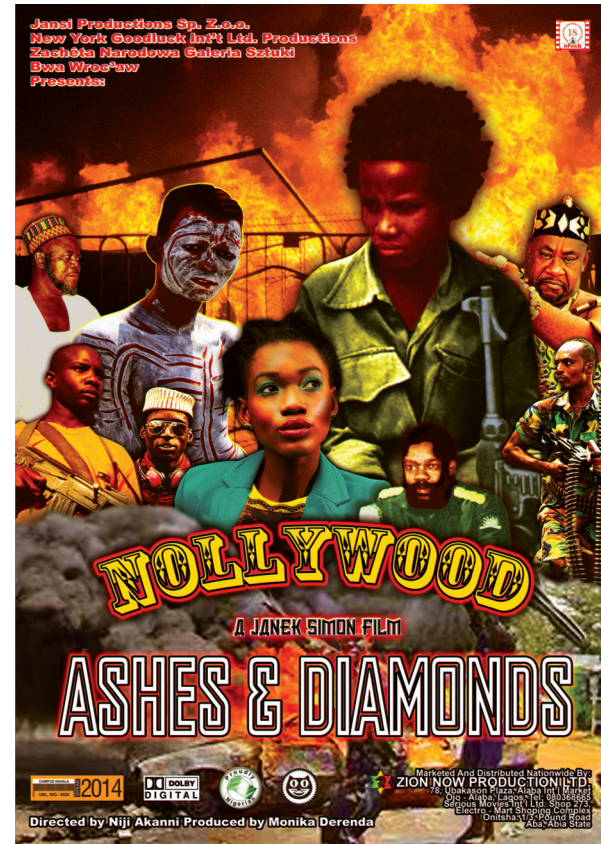
Stockbook 2010

A stockbook presenting a selections of postage stamps from different sub-Saharan countries, commemorating various Winter Olympics Games.

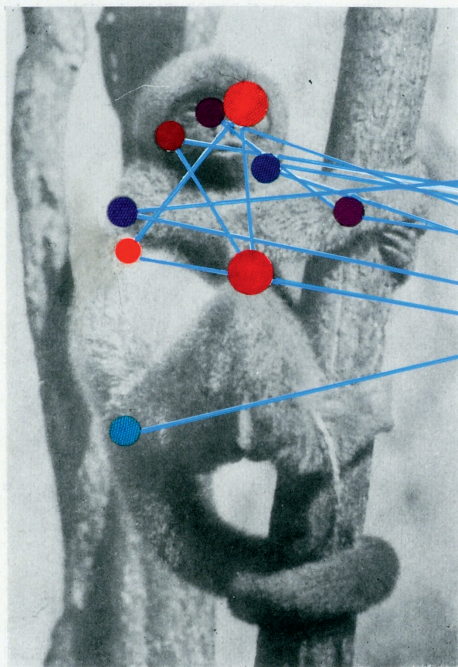
Time-space compression of Trinidad 2010

In this series of works, Janek refers to the concept of geographer David Harvey, describing the shrinking correlation between space and time resulting from technical advancements and which have influenced all spheres of life. The models visualize the actual time needed to travel from one place on the island to the other, and how it is shrinking. Yet another series of works Janek measured how much time it takes

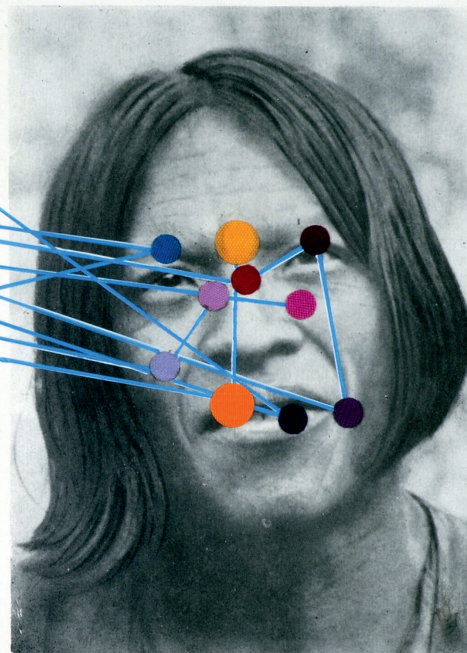
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Janek Simon *Nollywood Ashes and Diamonds* making-off 2013 [ongoing]
Courtesy of the Raster Gallery



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48 to cross the Atlantic and how it was shrinking from the 15th century to the 19th century). Simon's works draw on objective scientific data mapping the acceleration of time, and the shifts in the cultural geography and historical temporality, no longer inscribed in local space and time.

Tristes Tropiques 2009

A centrefold from the famous book by Claude Lévi-Strauss is analysed with the use of a tool for examining eyeball movement. The artist follows the young anthropologist's observations and his disenchantment with the European model of culture, pointing at the automatic and unreflective homogenization of contemporary global civilization. The colour dots, indicating where he focused his eyesight, creates the scheme of the drawing.

Chinese Calculator 2006

This is a reverse-engineered calculator. It was made to give false results, namely to increase the calculation by 7%, which is just below the perceptive limit. The piece was inspired by a real event in China, where artist was cheated by a black market money exchanger, whose calculator would give slightly altered results in favor of the exchanger. The accompanying model of the summer-house from Janek's childhood has been built using the tweaked measurements from the very calculator.

Cycnocephali 2014

A series of sculptures printed on DIY 3D printers inspired by illustrations from 16th century edition of Marco Polo's *Book of the Marvels of the World*, features men with the faces of dogs. What was an attempt to create an objective almanac of the visited sites included these precise

descriptions of men with heads of dogs. Is this how, asks Janek – the mechanisms of exoticisation takes its roots?

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Polyethnic 2016

A series of sculptures printed on DIY 3D printers. Sculptures mix forms and motives from different ethnic art traditions – African, Indian, South American and Polish, in an attempt to merge into a universal folk culture.



Janek Simon *Polyethnic* 2016, *Cycnocephali* 2014
Courtesy of The Raster Gallery

Alang Transfer 2012

Transfer 2012

These framed images were brought from Alang Market in India. Alang – a sea-side village in north-western India is the biggest ship breaking yard in the world. Ships from all over the world end their lives there, cut into pieces of scrap metal by thousands of workers. Everything that is metal and can be removed is then sold at a market that surrounds the village. »I went there several times«, says Janek »to buy different kind of framed pictures. From maritime paintings that used to decorate cabins through portraits of different national leaders to maps and health and safety instructions. I ended up with a collection of more than 150 images coming from more than thirty countries. Before ending up on the market in Alang those images were cruising the globe, going from one port to another for up to thirty or forty years. When you imagine their trajectories and add them up you get a quite precise, non-aligned, relational, geometrical construction of the planet.«

Adventures of Mr. Seven 2013

tures of Mr. Seven 2013

The piece tells the adventurous life of Mr. Seven who claims to have killed Bin Laden, witnessed the murder of J.F. Kennedy and took part in a Beatles recording session and is an expert on Indian culture. His projections gives a sense of possible global amalgamation of meaning in a world, nobody knows the future of.



Janek Simon *Along Transfer* 2012 Courtesy of The Raster Gallery

KAROL RADZISZEWSKI

Ali 2015

In his series of paintings *Ali*,
Karol Radziszewski depicts

August Agbola O'Brown, a Nigerian-born jazz musician and the sole dark-skinned combatant of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. Agbola O'Brown lived in Warsaw from 1922 until 1950. In September 1939 he took active part in defending the capital. During the occupation he distributed underground newspapers and helped those in hiding, while making a living selling electrical equipment. He went by the nickname »Ali« and served in the »lwo« battalion. In 1949 he began working for the Culture and Arts Department of the Municipal Board of Warsaw. By the end of the 1940s and in the 1950s he returned to the stages of Warsaw. In the late 1950s he moved to the UK.

Radziszewski started to work on the life of *Ali* commissioned by the Warsaw Uprising Museum (founded by the late Lech Kaczyński) to create a mural a few years back. His project was rejected and led to pointless scandal, due to the only official and one-dimensional martyr's perspective of those in power. Radziszewski paraphrased the Picasso-like aesthetics as an impetus to change the grand perspectives and fill in for the distinct lack of any kind of Black imagery while pointing to possible tokenization. While it was too much for the museum the project grew in a complex, ongoing series on Ali's life and work.



Karol Radziszewski *Ali* 2015
Courtesy of BWA Warszawa and Office for Art Berlin

LINAS JABLONSKIS

CAC/ŠMC Interviu #13–14 2009
Text by Virginija Januškevičiūtė

An issue of the bilingual art magazine of the Contemporary Art Centre (CAC) in Vilnius which was supposed to be as a matter of routine published in Lithuanian and in English. However, while putting it together part of the editorial crew ran into the artist Linas Jablonskis, known primarily for his relentless practice of drawing; Linas disputed, over a cup of tea, what he called »an ignorant choice« and proposed that the magazine should be published instead in Russian and in Polish. »It hasn't been so long,« he said referring to the tumultuous 20th century history of Vilnius, »when very few people you'd meet on the streets here spoke Lithuanian.« In this way, his proposal-turned-intervention came to illustrate a what-if scenario of a possible present. Besides the post-war Vilnius of the artist's childhood the gesture directly referred also to the four decades in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when the Lithuanian alphabet was banned in print under the rule of Tsar; and was on a symbolic level reinforced by the fact that the artist shares his last name with Jonas Jablonskis (1860s – 1930), a celebrated linguist considered one of the founders of the standard Lithuanian language.

ŠMC/CAC INTERVIU

Nr 13-14

ROZMOWY O SZTUCE

2009

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LAMANIE REGUŁ:
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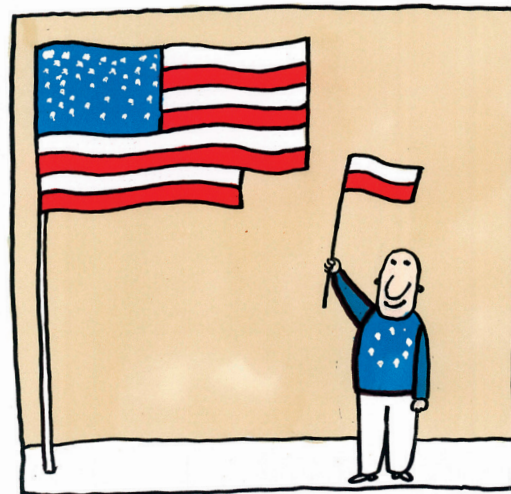
PROJEKT ARTYSTYCZNY
LINAS JABLONSKIS

CENTRUM SZTUKI WSPÓŁCZESNEJ, WILNO

MAREK RACZKOWSKI

Drawings from *Przekrój*
Weekly 2016–2017

Raczkowski is an acute, satirical cartoonist in Poland. His brief and simple drawings reveal the absurdities, dilemmas, fixations and traumas of Polish reality including such hot-button issues like religiousness, lack of tolerance, in vitro, ill-understood patriotism and obviously the current ideological fight that the country is immersed in. Raczkowski shows Poles who they really are and enjoy saying: »Public opinion in Poland is again shaken by series of events that make no sense.« One of his most famous drawings depicts the cultural misunderstanding over a toast. »Let's drink to peace« is immediately interpreted by a politician as »Let's drink to PiS« (Law and Justice, national conservative party led by Jarosław Kaczyński). Since 2003, Raczkowski is associated with the weekly *Przekrój*.



Marek Raczkowski Drawings from *Przekrój* Weekly 2016–2017 C-prints
Courtesy of the artist

OLEKSIY RADINSKY

Troyeschyna Dva 2017

In the run-up to the Euro 2012 football championships in Poland and Ukraine, a new piece of transport infrastructure was launched in the Ukrainian capital. Dubbed *Kyiv City Rail*, it imposed the idea of Berlin-style S-bahn upon the railway system of Kiev, which has long been defined by its military use. A single, circular route was established in Kiev, linking some of its least accessible, run-down neighborhoods with a passenger train branded with shiny Euro 2012 logos. Soon after the football crowds left the city, *Kyiv City Rail* became a barely functioning ghost train. *Troyeschyna Dva* is a name of one of the remote stations of *Kyiv City Rail*, a place where another major infrastructure project, the construction of a gigantic automobile bridge over the Dnieper river came to a halt. In the film, *Troyeschyna Dva* becomes a space of spontaneous reflection on (and occasional resistance to) the failures of capitalist modernization.

In June 2016 Wojciech Balczun, a manager and rock musician from Poland, was appointed as the chief of the Ukrainian Railway agency, a state monopoly that controls railway transportation in Ukraine. In October 2016, another Polish politician Sławomir Nowak followed suit, with a lucrative appointment as a chief of Ukrainian State Agency of Automobile Roads. These foreign technocrats were imported to run vital Ukrainian infrastructure soon after Leszek Balcerowicz, an infamous architect of Polish post-Communist »shock



therapy,» became co-chair of the council of strategic advisers to Ukrainian president Poroshenko in April 2016. *Troyeschyna Dva* represents some of the conundrums of road-building and railway management in the neo-colonial environment of Eastern Europe.

SLAVS AND TATARS

In the Name of God
Cycle Friendship of Nations 2013

An unofficial motto of Poland,
 »W imię Boga za Naszą
 i Waszą Wolność« (»In the

Name of God, For Your Freedom and Ours«) was initially written both Polish and Russian, in support for the victory of Decembrists in St. Petersburg in 1831, which could have influenced the Polish independence from Russia. The slogan got shorter with time and has been appropriated by peoples all around the world in their struggles for self-determination. Featuring both Russian and Polish in its original iteration, the banner is a complex nod to the fate binding two countries whose history has been contentious to say the least. By translating the original into Persian and re-instating the Russian, *W Imię Boga* addresses the transnational, if not transcendental, nature of this phrase, aiming to rescue it from the jaws of parochial or imperial instrumentalizations.

Weeping Window Cycle Friendship
of Nations 2012–2017

Using the rear window of
 a Polski Fiat 125p, a legendary
 car manufactured in

Communist Poland, a franchise of the Italian brand, *Weeping Window* features the antimodernist trope—facing backwards of history but moving forwards towards the future— that has become a trademark of sorts of Slavs and Tatars' practice. From Sartre's description of Baudelaire, driving forward but with an eye on the rear-view mirror to Walter Benjamin's *Angel of History* propelled to the future but facing the rubble of the past, the anti modern is perhaps best exemplified by Molla



Slavs and Tatars *In the Name of God* 2013 Courtesy of the artists

- 62 Nasreddin, the 12th century wise man-cum-fool often depicted riding backward on his donkey. The text in German – *Mmmmmmmorgenländer keine Aaaaaaabendländer* – is an exhortation to moving on despite glancing backwards.

Study for Sarmat surfaces (1–4)
2011

One of the more surprising convergences in Slavs and Tatars' study of convergences

between Iran and Poland's histories has been the visual culture and crafts traditions of their dominant faiths: Shi'a and Catholic, respectively. From passion plays and re-enacting Stations of the Cross to *Ta'zieh*, Carnival floats and Muharram alam, these also include banners and reverse-glass painting. Upending traditional notions of Renaissance perspective, painting behind glass requires beginning with the outer-most layer, say the eyes, and moving inwards towards the background. Composed by crafts women in Nowy Sącz, *Studies for Sarmat Surfaces* feature incidents from the exodus of Polish refugees during World War II to Iran.

I Utter Other 2016 Lect
formance [see page 75]

What does it mean for one east to look to and at another one? Can the romanticized

romanticize? From Poles in the service of the Tsar to Persian Presbyterians, *I Utter Other* looks at the curious case of Slavic Orientalism in the Russian Empire and early USSR as well as its German origins. The study of the East in the East complicates notions of identity politics, knowledge in the service of power, and the secularization of scholarship for a coherent post-colonial critique some 60 years avant-la-lettre, a crucial counterpoint to the received wisdom of Saidian-Orientalism.



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Slavs and Tatars *Study for Sarmat surfaces* 2011 Courtesy of the artists

Bush's Dream 2003
 From *Positives* A series of staged
 photographs
 Text by Łukasz Zaremba

The invasion of Baghdad went well. All Iraqi men perished. On the streets remain only women, who finally, will be able to unveil their faces (while retaining their »exotic« spell). American and Polish soldiers abandoned tanks and armored vehicles to enter the city, where they were greeted by the exceptionally effervescent women-trophies. In the background, Baghdad and oil are burning, or maybe the weather has adapted to the elevated atmosphere. The war was won. Pictures of Zbigniew Libera published on the cover of the weekly *Przekrój* in April 2003, derive from the famous series of *Positives*, which reverses the mood of iconic brutal photographs connected with conflicts. Their »negative« is not, however, a particular photograph. What was broadcast at the time was the bombings of Baghdad and soon afterwards mostly photographs from the illegal prison in Abu Ghraib. Photographic work of *Bush's Dream* refers rather to the images of triumph over evil, liberation, salvation, and gratitude of a Polish colonial dream, which finally materialized in the overseas territories by joining the US army in Iraq.



ZORKA WOLLNY & CHRISTINE SCHÖRKHUBER

Archéologie Marine 2016
From the album *Seven Minatures*
on El Hadji Sy

Zorka Wollny and Christine
Schörkhuber chose seven
works from the exhibition
At first I thought I was dancing

of the Senegalese artist El Hadji Sy, presented at the CCA in Warsaw in the autumn of 2016. The visual syntax of one painting has been translated into a sound. »El Hadji Sy provides particular reasons for such an operation«, wrote Matgorzata Ludwisiak, the exhibition curator »he kicks the canvas, jumps or dances on top of it. He creates a specific, rhythm, based choreography for his paintings. He is interested in the process, not in the object. He is interested in the body of the viewers, not in their sight. He is interested in the performativity of images. Wollny and Schörkhuber added the third, temporal and sensory dimension of works by El Sy, and they have managed to expand the boundaries of his work through musical compositions.« Both works recall the cry of migrants in distress at sea.



El Hadji Sy *Archéologie marine* 2014
Zorka Wollny's sound piece responds to El Hadji Sy paintings

(POST)COLONIALISM IN CENTRAL- EASTERN EUROPE

Introduction to the symposium
Jan Sowa

»Your map of Africa is really quite nice. But my map of Africa lies in Europe. Here is

Russia, and here... is France, and we're in the middle – that's my map of Africa.«¹

According to some thinkers, there's an etymological link between the words »Slav« and »slave«. Scholars such as Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein have shown that the part of the European continent East of the river Elbe and inhabited mostly by Slavs was the first peripheral zone of capitalist world-economy in early modern times. The whole block of countries – the Polish-Lithuanian Union being the most prominent example in the area – was pushed into a state of dependency and underdevelopment, forcing its rural populations into serfdom. Thus Central and Eastern Europe could be seen historically as the first »periphery«. In parallel, the erstwhile kingdom of Poland and its nobility played a key role in extending the enslavement of peasants deep into South-Eastern Europe in its attempt to build its own colonial empire by dominating Lithuania and annexing vast areas of Ukraine in the 16th century. These colonial aspirations reached their apex in the 19th and 20th century with the establishment of the Colonial Maritime League. Today it continues to inspire a post-colonial attitude in Poland, hampering a much-needed critical

reflection over the country's past as well as prolonging confusion over its present status.

This complicated picture has just gone through an interesting turn in recent years. The critical tools of post-colonial theory have been often appropriated in Central and Eastern Europe by the nationalist right and in turn used to reaffirm »traditional identities« and »cultural heritage«: both allegedly colonized and dominated by foreign, liberal ideology. It has led to a form of peculiar »perverted decolonization« to use Ekaterina Degot's expression, where obscurantist attitudes and religious fundamentalism are presented as attempts to preserve one's unique and endangered way of life. Perhaps even more interesting is that the twisted, anti-critical use of critical concepts has provided a platform for widespread populist uprising. Contrary to the prognoses of 20th century theorists of modernity from Daniel Lerner to Francis Fukuyama, the peripheries seem to be coming out ahead of the populist curve, thereby demonstrating to the center their miserable future. Yet another perversion which we may call »de-modernization« as it directly opposes the relation between the center and the (semi)peripheries. Perhaps the futures of the United Kingdom, France and other developed nations are to be found in Poland, Hungary or Russia, not the other way around.

¹ Otto von Bismarck in Eugen Wolf, *Vom Fürsten Bismarck und seinem Haus*, Tagebuchblätter, Berlin, 1904.

SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULE

28.04.2017 15:00–19:30

15:00 JAN SOWA:
INTRODUCTION

15:30 ANDRZEJ LEDER:
RESENTMENT, FANTASY
AND THE MELANCHOLIC FIGURE
OF POLISH NOBLEMAN

16:00 EKATERINA DEGOT:
FROM RACIST EUROPEANISM
TO »PERVERSE DECOLO-
NIZATION«, A FRIGHTENING
PARCOURS, IN RUSSIA AND
ELSEWHERE

16:30 DISCUSSION & BREAK

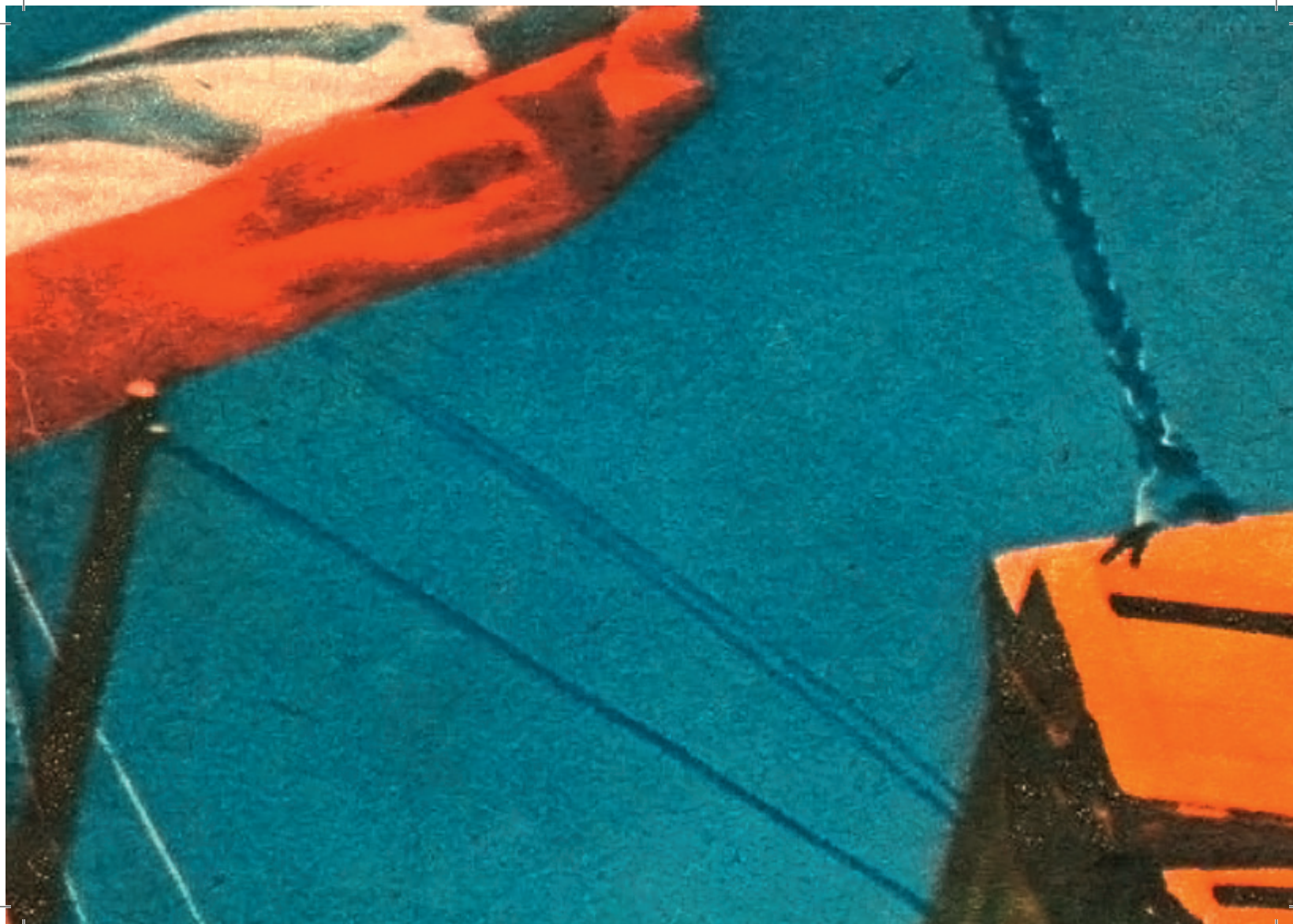
17:00 MONIKA BOBAKO:
SEMI-PERIPHERAL ISLAMOPHO-
BIES, IMMIGRATION AND
THE POLISH COLONIAL COMPLEX

17:30 OLEKSIY RADINSKY:
SOME PROBLEMS OF RAILWAY
MANAGEMENT AND ROAD CON-
STRUCTION IN MODERN-DAY KIEV

18:00 JANEK SIMON IN CONVERSATION
WITH ANA TEIXEIRA PINTO

18:30 DISCUSSION AND CLOSING
REMARKS

19:00 SLAVS AND TATARS:
I UTTER OTHER
LECTURE PERFORMANCE



GEOGRAPHIES OF PRIVILEGE AND EXCLUSION: THE MADAGASCAR THAT NEVER WAS

Janek Simon in conversation
with Ana Teixeira Pinto

Ana Teixeira Pinto How did you
come to develop an interest
in the Polish Maritime and
Colonial League?

Janek Simon I came across the Maritime and Colonial League in 2006 while working on a project called *Polish Cultural Season on Madagascar*. The operation linked current Polish cultural policies with unexpected historical connections between Poland and Madagascar, fueled by colonial aspirations. At that time the main tool used by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute (sort of a Polish Goethe Institute) to promote Polish culture abroad was a series of initiatives called *Polish Cultural Seasons*. They had organised a couple of these starting in 2003 – the most visible ones in France in 2004 and in Germany in 2005. As a cannon-fodder young artist I participated in many exhibitions of that kind. The idea of organising a fake, DIY one on Madagascar rose from my frustration with being part of completely pointless projects conceived for the sole purpose of facilitating meetings amongst local politicians. And I went to Madagascar carrying a couple of pieces by my artist friends in my

backpack. I didn't have any contacts there, didn't really speak French and ended up renting a small shop on the main street of Antananarivo from a Korean businessman. I opened a fake Polish Cultural Institute there and set up a »show«, lasting two weeks. It was exciting because it was located exactly on the other side of the street from the real Goethe Institute. Documentation of this action was mixed with archival research on two historical connections between the island and Poland to form a show that was later installed in *Atlas Sztuki* in Łódź. The first connection is tied to events in the late 18th century when Count Maurycy Beniowski, a traveller and adventurer who, to make a long and fascinating story short, became a pre-colonial King of Madagascar for one year, becoming part of the national mythologies of Poland, Hungary and Slovakia for different reasons when these narratives were taking shape in the second half of the 19th century. The second Polish foray into Madagascar happened in the 1930's. Poland regained independence after the Treaty of Versailles and quite quickly a bevy of imperialistic dreams started to re-emerge. Establishing a colony was one of them. ATP Could you elaborate on Poland's plans for Madagascar? I know that the Polish government toyed with the idea of deporting the Jewish population to the island in 1937... JS Indeed, Poland wanted to be given the island of Madagascar, as a token of friendship from France. This fact has been widely known, both in the mainstream and in the art world left-wing discourse when I started my research, but not really seriously discussed or analysed at that time. Upon further dwelling into the topic, I realised that it's a much more serious subject, with numerous links to the present than I had originally thought. *The Maritime and Colonial League* was the second biggest

76 non-governmental organisation of pre-war Poland. It was established mainly by Polish officers from the Russian navy who that after Independence decided to influence the modernisation agenda underway and to promote the notion of opening the nation's economy (along with it's mental geography) to the sea. Poland was never a sea-faring nation, the expansion vector pointed East toward the steppes of Ukraine and Russia. So the change they proposed was quite fundamental and they were successful to a certain extent: the construction of the port in Gdynia is considered a key achievement in the modernisation of pre-war Poland. Soon after however, megalomaniac dreams about Poland becoming a colonial empire took root. The League lobbied to get the country of Togo (the argument was, as part of what is now Poland was Prussia before WWI, Poland should get a share of German colonial domains). They started a policy of systemic land acquisitions in Parana in Brazil. The idea was to buy land in this chosen area of Brazil and then establish some sort of sovereignty over it, after its inhabitation, mainly by Polish settlers. The League also signed a secret agreement with the government of Liberia, which was supposed to bring African soldiers into Polish army in case of war. Then attempts were made to acquire Madagascar. At the beginning, i.e. in the early 30's, these colonial ideas were not part of the mainstream political scene. But in the late 30's when an the economic crisis befell Poland, and after the British made emigration to Palestine more difficult, the government began to consider some of these proposals seriously. The political pressure to somehow »solve« the Jewish issue also was becoming stronger. The idea of channeling emigration from Poland to a single place, where

de-nationalisation could happen slowly and the urgency to find an alternative to Palestine made the government pick up the League's agendas and an official expedition was sent to the island to examine the situation there in 1937. What is quite puzzling is that the expedition also included members of the Jewish community. So it seems that the plan wasn't really considered hostile, at least by parts of that community. The idea of relocating Jews to Madagascar fluctuated, somewhat in parallel in Germany too. It emerged in the late 19th century and climaxed in the Madagasacar Plan, a pre-holocaust Nazi solution to the Jewish scheme, which was dropped because of logistic problems. The League also had developed a far-reaching educational programme. The main magazine *Morze* sold in more than 150k copies every month. There was even a magazine for children and another one for working-class audiences. Non-Western cultures were obviously presented in a very patronizing and derogatory way. Even if their political projects never got any closer to materialization, their ideas became quite influential and, I think, contributed greatly to shaping the extreme racism that has quite recently become visible in Poland. Racism was in fact never really discussed because of an almost complete absence of people of colour in the country. However in the last few years there has been a veritable explosion in racist behaviour and it's roots can be found in the Liga Morska activities and ideologies, as far back as the 30's. ATP Is your interest in the League extended to your wider work, or perhaps tied to your former exploits as a self-styled »traveller/ explorer«? JS I would never call myself an explorer and have an issue with calling myself a traveller. I see myself more an alternative tourist. I grew up in communist Poland, in the 80's, at the time of a very deep economic

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crisis – the centrally planned economy collapsed, shops were empty and it was difficult to get hold of even the most basic supplies at times (like sugar or toilet paper). I was lucky to be able to travel to Western Europe in the 80's, because of family ties. Seeing the consumer rich countries of Denmark or West Germany made me feel even more alienated, I thought I had been dealt a bad hand. I saw the world as a dichotomy, the poor, excluded East and the rich happy West. This perception only changed when I went to India for the first time in 1998. Later, I spent some time living in South London around that time and felt fascinated by people coming from so many different cultures (often first generation emigrants) to shape a somehow coherent and functional society. I began to wonder about how this objectivity rooted in different beliefs could be produced? The first and obvious answer to me seemed that exchanges at a basic level allowed for these social networks to emerge. We might have completely different worldviews, completely different ethics and politics but everybody buys a piece of bread for the same 90 pence. I am oversimplifying but I found this thought inspiring and I have developed an ongoing interest in small-scale trade, and in the figure of the freelance merchant...

ATP Adam Smith describes this same scenario, in his version it becomes the foundational myth of capitalism, in yours it retains an anarchic quality... JS Yes, a guy buying things in one place and then going to another to sell them. When the centrally planned economies of the Eastern bloc began to collapse in the late seventies, their structures were replaced by something that is now called the Suitcase Trade. In theory the system was supposed to be efficient – each country was meant to specialise in a certain range kind of products and then

there was an official network of exchanges that was supposed to distribute them. The system however was extremely prone to corruption and suddenly there were no painkillers in Romania or cosmetics in the GDR. After that the official system was replaced by an informal network: people doing tourist trips to other countries and taking things to sell in their suitcases. There were certain routes that people would take: You would go from Poland to Romania to sell medicines then buy something there go to East Berlin or Budapest sell it there etc. Gradually that geography expanded and suitcase traders started to go to places like India or Singapore to buy and sell stuff. The global economy was much less networked at that time and it was not uncommon for one to be able to buy something in Poland and sell it in India for ten times the amount it costed. I found that fascinating and developed a number of projects that were inspired by these vectors.

ATP How do you negotiate the tension between the romanticism/nostalgia these identities entail with a critical gaze? JS I think my practice has its emotional roots in curiosity. This is the main driving force behind the motivation to do things and be excited about them. It's both the case with the body of work that is presented in the exhibition at S A V V Y Contemporary exhibition and some other fields that inspire me like mathematics or DIY technology. Probably the cultural construction of curiosity is heavily dependent on highly romanticised narratives like travel books that I read as a child etc. I'm aware of the fact that these narratives can be problematic. What was a challenge for me both personally and artistically was the change of perspective. From being an underprivileged, excluded East European of the 80's and 90's to being a totally

privileged white Global North citizen of now. I think this difficulty of negotiating between these two extremes of economic disparity can also be generalised to explain some weird phenomena of current Polish politics, especially on the international stage. I also always had that sort of process of self-critique somewhere at the back of my head. The Madagascar project, which was the first time I incorporated travel into my practice, included a piece that reflected on the perspective of a tourist as that problematic for me at that time. Afterwards I also developed a project that raised questions about our (i.e. East European) responsibility for the colonial past of Western Europe, which I felt had become an urgent question after Poland joined the EU. How do we deal with this moral legacy that was somehow sold to us in one package with structural funding and all the benefits that came with the EU? That show also included a self-reflective part. Today what is more problematic to me is the way that my practice is legitimised, especially in Poland where post-colonial sensibilities have not really been incorporated into the mainstream mind yet. I am seen as a kind of traveller-adventurer: my agency is placed in the exoticism-globalisation continuum. By exoticism here I mean agencies that try to make places look more far, more unusual, more different than they really are. Like all these mainstream TV travel shows where the protagonists are almost eaten by crocodiles or eats live ants while visiting a tribe in amazon or something. Or the whole construction of Orient in the West. This is problematic of course, and my show from 2015 *People with Heads of Dogs* tried to tackle, and somehow ridicule that interpretation. On the other hand there are those agencies that try to make the world smaller, »flat.«

A good example, and something that I also find very interesting is the *Lonely Planet* guidebook series. What they tell you is that you can book a ticket to Central African Republic or Somaliland and go for holidays there. And you will probably be fine. But what lies at the end of that process is wrong. I have attempted to situate my practice between those two opposing positions.

ATP How does the concept of cultural geography you mentioned earlier become operative in your work?

JS Well, I think there are at least two ways that my practice intersects with the questions raised by the discipline of cultural geography. The first issue that I have tried to address, perhaps naively, is the shape of the space that we live in. It's not really that easy to imagine the planet as a whole. There are certain cartographic tools that help, like the globe, but that's obviously apparently very misleading. Real space is much more complex. You can get from Warsaw to Delhi in ten hours. It will probably take the same amount of time to go to a village in South-Eastern Poland by public transport. Space is compressed not by transportation technologies in different ways, but also by politics and economy. An upper-middle class Nigerian can get to Europe in seven hours by plane, but the same distance can take seven years for working class migrants coming from Sub-Saharan Africa. Trying to imagine what the geometry of such a space was always a fascinating task to me. Or at least imagining the way you can start thinking about it. How is this space actually constructed? Of course there is the traditional, empirical way called triangulation. You start somewhere and triangulate the space around you. What you end up with is the cartographic globe, the problem here is that you have to start somewhere, and that is usually *The West*. And then

the only way you can critically relate to space is in a way dialectically. I consider this to be the problem of post-colonial theory and the in construction of universality in general. So when you think about how certain cultural universality can be constructed there are some purely formal, geometric questions behind it. ATP Did you try to tackle that in the 2012 *Alang Transfer* project also shown at S A V V Y Contemporary? JS Yes, Alang, a beach-side village in the state of Gujarat in North-Western India is the biggest ship breaking yard in the world. Ships from all over the world end their lives there, cut into pieces of scrap metal by thousands of workers. What is not scrap metal is removed and sold at a market that surrounds the beach. I went there several times to buy different kinds of framed pictures. These were predominantly maritime paintings used to decorate cabins but also portraits of different national leaders, maps and health and safety instructions. I ended up with a collection of more than 150 images coming from more than 30 countries. Before ending up on the market in Alang those images were cruising the globe, going from one port to another for up to 30 or 40 years. When you imagine their trajectories and add them up you get a quite precise, non-aligned, relational, geometrical construction of the planet. The other operation that I developed in my practice is something that I call a »geographic experiment«: testing what happens when you move things from one place to another. What kind of meaning or capital can be created through such gestures. In an ongoing- endeavour titled *Nollywood Ashes and Diamonds* I'm trying to produce a remake of a seminal Polish film from 1958 *Ashes and Diamonds* by Andrzej Wajda in Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry. The film deals with the most important

question of Polish post war politics: the evaluation of communism. There are two confronting narratives here. One that comes from the privileged classes of pre-war Poland and sees communism as a Soviet occupation, entailing the loss of sovereignty. Communist Poland was not real Poland. This narrative became hegemonic after 1989. The counter narrative communism depicts communism as a modernising project, the working classes were given access to education, free health care and social housing. The doors to social advancement were opened for people who would never have been given that opportunity in the post-feudal society of pre-war Poland. The conflict between these two narratives is still, I believe, responsible for the dynamics of Polish politics today. It's a central problem but it's also a local problem, only relevant to Eastern Europe. Wajda's film shows this in a very balanced way, the end is so open it could be construed as an ideological Rorschach test. Thus I'm re-staging this story in a place, which has very few historical or cultural links with Poland, which happened to be Nigeria, mainly for practical reasons to see what will be left of the original plot once it gets translated into another social context. What, if any, are the universal dimensions at play here.



SOMETIMES I FEEL POLAND IS DROWNING

Agnieszka Polska in conversation
with Federica Bueti

Federica Bueti How to account
for all those special encounters,
moments and exchanges

that influence the way we think and write about art? I am asking this question as I try to find a good way to introduce the conversation you're about to read. Because the question I am trying to ask here is how to convey in words not only my great appreciation for Polska's work, but the experience of sharing bits and pieces of a life. My encounter with Agnieszka Polska's work signals also the beginning of a friendship. I am writing this while sitting on the couch of Polska's apartment in Athens. This morning, I found a book of prose-poems by poet Lisa Robertson on a pile of books lying on Agnieszka's desk. I opened it to a random page and found a sentence she had underlined that reads: »our emotions are slow enough to be accurate.« This could not have been more to the point, as Agnieszka's work depicts, with great accuracy, subtlety and a unique sense of humour, emotional states of euphoria, depression, alienation, powerful-ness, confusion, melancholia and anxiety that define existence in a neoliberal society. In one of her recent video-works, *What the Sun Has Seen* (2017), a weeping sun sings a song by a children's band called *The Children of Sunshine* about making humanity better, although the sun can clearly see that

things in this world are getting worse. In the video-animation presented at S A V V Y Contemporary *Ask the Siren* (2017), which is the focus of our conversation, a disembodied siren engages in a confuse monologue about her identity. Polska uses the mermaid, the symbol of the city of Warsaw, as an excuse to reflect on the revival of nationalistic sentiments and narratives in Poland today. The work was commissioned by Museum of Modern Art of Warsaw for a group show, *The Beguiling Siren Is Thy Crest*. Agnieszka and I met in Warsaw the day after the opening. We couldn't think of a better place for an interview than a nail salon, which is where our conversation took place. This is an excerpt of a much longer exchange, which involved moments of drift, pauses, silences, telephone calls, and discussions about the choice of the right nail polish colour.

FB How did your video *Ask the Siren* (2017) come about?

Agnieszka Polska The work was commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw for the exhibition *The Beguiling Siren Is Thy Crest* which inaugurates museum's new premises by the Vistula River. The title of the exhibition is a quote from a poem by Romantic Polish poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid, who refers to Warsaw and its symbol, namely the siren. The idea of the exhibition was to consider the siren both as a mythological figure and as the symbol of a city and its identity. The curators asked me to respond to the theme of the show and I was very happy to develop a new work to deal with the history of the city, the current political situation in Poland, through the figure of the siren. Of course, I was interested in the myth of the sirens, in its multiple readings, but more than anything, I was interested in using it to comment on and reflect

upon Polish culture, Polish national identity, its lost pagan past, and the political present. FB So, what was the starting point for the work? AP My research on the figure of the Siren in the Polish context led me all the way back to pre-Christian Poland. This part of the history of the region is obscure and rarely taught. At school, children are told that the history of the country started in the 10th Century, which is partially true, as the official date of the establishment of the Polish state is 966 – with conversion to Christianity. Still, it is obviously false that nothing was there before – which is what you learn at school. The baptism, a result of an expansion of Latin Christianity in the direction of the East, meant the systematic eradication of rich pagan culture; its symbols and rituals had been forbidden, its sacred sites appropriated. This baptism was, one could say, a colonising gesture. But one could also say that without the violent act of baptism the inhabitants of the region would have suffered much more, as the state would not have been recognised by the Western institutions. By accepting the idea of entirely giving up the original traditions and beliefs Mieszko I, the first Polish ruler, constituted Poland as a state. This particular history of erasure of pagan culture is the starting point for the video. FB How does the siren fit in this historical picture? AP I was interested in the formation of Polish identity, especially how the history of the country has led us to the present situation, and to a revival of nationalism. The origins of the figure of a siren in the Polish context are not clear; it is possible that it was appropriated from the pagan imagery of the region. In the video, the siren wonders about her identity; she is confused about the contradictory values she represents. I wanted her to be a metaphor for the confu-

sion surrounding Polish identity, which is very much informed by the understanding of being between the East and West, functioning at the boundary of two different cultures. In general, Polish people prefer to align themselves with the West, like to think of themselves as Westerners, as they think it makes them a more progressive and »civilised« nation. The East, as it's commonly understood, stands for something wild, uncontrollable, maybe even primitive. At the same time, there is a certain resentment towards the West rooted in the feeling of being different and marginalised. FB You mentioned a book by Maria Janion which functioned as a reference for the work... AP My theoretical reference for this film is a book by Polish scholar Maria Janion entitled *Uncanny Slavdom*. In the book, notes the traumatic origins of Poland as a nation. This trauma, which accompanied the development of Slavic identity in general and inscribed in Polish culture is like a curse. This history left Poland with the trauma of colonialism, but also with an emotional confusion which provoked people, especially during Romantic era, into believing that Poles were special, the chosen people. When in the 18th century Poland vanished from the maps and Poles were deprived of their statehood for more than one hundred years, a messianic term was coined which roughly translates into English as »the Christ of the Nations«. People started believing that if we have been suffering so much as a nation it's because we have a special role to play in history. Today this motif is still very present in how kids are being taught about the history of Poland. Maria Janion argues, that this messianic myth of Polish nation, based on contradictory feelings of being deprived of any power, and at the same time supernaturally important, is strongly con-

nected to the general problems with defining the Slavic identity. FB In the video, we listen to the monologue of the Siren, conjured from her double-mouthed face. Then, we see the camera wandering through the streets of what looks like a semi-empty underwater Warsaw. The siren wonders about her identity; the camera wanders around Warsaw. So, does the siren's struggle to make sense of what or who she is reflect the struggle of Polish people to come to term with the peculiar history of the country? AP In a way, yes. There is something quite absurd about this story. Think about it, in our dark times, with the outburst of nationalistic sentiments we have this revival of the idea of great Poland. The Christ of the Nations has resurrected to take the monstrous form. Our identity as Polish is fundamentally schizophrenic. In the video, as in many other works, I tried to not be too literal and deal with this identity issues in a poetic and more layered manner.

I wanted to show this figure, the siren, who is wondering about her identity, not sure about what or who she is – a human or an animal; sad or happy, pagan or Christian; or if her self-esteem is very low or high. This effect of being underwater is also a hint to the present political situation in Poland, which feels very oppressive to me; sometimes I feel Poland is drowning... FB How did you choose the locations to film in Warsaw? AP I didn't really choose the locations; everything was pretty casual. I would say that the locations chose me. An interesting detail, however, is that at the time of the shooting, the government had just passed a law that authorizes property owners to cut trees in their properties without a special permission and without any consequences. This law led to the situation, when an unbelievably high number of trees are being cut all around the country,

a true catastrophe. It is happening now, as we speak, and also while Ewa, my sister, and I were filming, there were all these workers cutting trees all around the city... so in some scenes you see logs or workers transporting tree branches...It was a coincidence, but for me, it adds another layer to the video. FB In the video, we don't see the body of the siren, but only her mouths and what presumably is her eyes. The siren is disembodied, but these body parts keep multiplying on the screen.

AP I was not so much interested in the showing the body of the siren; I was interested in the voice. I thought of this creature as a disembodied voice; her body is not important in the story; I wanted her to speak her mind freely; she is undergoing an identity crisis, so I wrote a monologue to convey that experience, an experience of existential confusion. Does the siren become a mirror that reflects a collective confusion, Polish never-ending identity's crisis? Perhaps. FB Is this the first time that you address the history of Poland so openly? AP There are many Polish cultural references in my work; and it's not the first time that I openly address Poland's history. For instance, once I collaborated with another artist, Witek Orski, on a video about an interesting episode in the history of the anti-government protests in the socialist Poland. In 1968, during the student protests in Warsaw, the government ordered all the guns belonging to the collection of the Museum of Army to be disarmed by drilling little holes in their barrels. The officials feared that the students would get hold of these weapons, many of them manufactured as early as in the 17th century, and use them. Isn't it bizarre? You would need a good knowledge of the guns to use these pistols. I doubt students had that kind of knowledge of gunpowder, projectiles and so on. Still, the government

took this absurd preventive measure, effectively creating a symbolic arsenal out of a museum. I also made other works that refer to some other moments in the history of Poland, but *Ask the Siren* is certainly the most »Polish« work I have made until now. FB What are you working on at the moment? AP I am shooting my first feature film this year, it will happen in the summer. It's a comedy-drama with some references to the political and social climate of Germany in the 70s and 80s, during the social unrest. It tells the story of a commune made of actors and other film professionals, who work with a political avant-garde film director on the production of a film about Rosa Luxemburg. The director is absent in the course of the action, but his co-workers are looking for him everywhere. One day, a member of a leftist terrorist group visits them. She had asked the film-director to hide some money for the terrorist group, but she doesn't know that, in the meantime, the director had invested it into the production of the film on Rosa Luxemburg. The film contemplates two different understanding and possible forms of political activism, one is cultural activism, and the other is violent revolutionary action. The film addresses a pressing question, a question I have been grappling with since I start making videos, that is to say how can art act politically, if at all?



A HISTORICAL MATERIALIST IN NOLLYWOOD

Michał Pospiszyl
Trans. by Katarzyna Bartoszyńska

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The South and the East have long – at least since the dawn of the 16th century when Africa was circumnavigated by Vasco de Gama's sailors – been lain out on the far side of the dividing line of anthropological otherness. Africa – or, more broadly speaking, what lies to the South and East of Europe – used to function in the European imagination as the centre of global civilization.¹ The anthropological machine, which slowly emerged in the early modern period, may have been imperfect but by the 19th century there was no way of stopping it. The South-East was concocted as non-human, savage, but also passive and deprived of history, perfect spot for European colonialism. This process had begun decades before colonialism proper, and it culminated towards the end of the 19th century with the Belgian extermination of slaves from Congo (where no one worries about whether the murdered beings are human beings). However, the effect of the anthropological machine constructed from the 15th century on was never a binary opposition between human and the non-human (such a simplistic dichotomy would doubtless not have lasted so long). What was produced was more

like an assimilating exclusion, a mechanism that was to serve in the production of the cheerfully subjugated (convinced that their situation was the result of honest exchange). Thus with great precision, East and South have long found themselves not so much on the other side of a dividing line of anthropological difference, but rather at the very centre of the production of a field of homogeneity between the human and the non-human.²

The purpose of Janek Simon's most recent *Travels to the East and the South* was to throw a wrench into the workings of the anthropological machine. In India, Madagascar and Nigeria, the Polish artist shattered linear histories of colonial dependence, profaning them or illuminating the possibility of other approaches to thinking them – considering them in a more autonomous fashion. In this sense, projects such as *Polish Year on Madagascar* or *Ashes and Diamonds in Nollywood* express two forms of materialistic-historic Luddism, directed against anthropological machines.³

Only apparently grotesque backdrop of Simon's *Polish Year in Madagascar* is the long history of the island's imagined colonization by Poland. Its beginnings stretch back to Beniowski's coronation as the King of Madagascar in 1776 and his death in 1785 as a result of the General's conflicts with French soldiers. The myth of Polish Madagascar that began at that time resurfaced in the 20th century when millions of Poles joined the Maritime and Colonial League. The initial goal of the organization was to recover the island which had been lost to the French after Beniowski's death. Later the League embarked on the mission of sending Polish Jews to live on the island (a mission supported by the French government).⁴ Taking this ludicrous attempt seriously requires effort, but the force of Simon's

intervention is based precisely on not treating the actions of the Maritime and Colonial League as a joke or an aberration, but rather as a serious, albeit failed, effort – one symptomatic of colonial projects as a whole. *The Polish Year on Madagascar* project was intended above all to take apart the relations between Poland and Madagascar and then recount the story, or more broadly, to retell a story about the relations between centre and periphery, in such a way that colonial ambitions and designs would cease to represent domination and subjugation. The critique of colonialism (particularly pertinent in relation to current Polish conduct in Iraq and Ukraine) is not carried out along moral lines, but strives, through a grotesque recreation of a culture of domination, to deactivate colonialism's violent and hierarchical nature. The constellational character of the Polish Year, in which an old oppressive narrative is told anew and thereby shattered,⁵ was further strengthened by Simon's exhibition at the Atlas Sztuki gallery in Łódź, where the documentation of the project was presented. The exhibition consisted of works of central-European artists, previously only seen in Antananarivo, as well as of amateur videos of the journey or kitschy souvenirs gathered by the artist.

Obviously, a crucial component of Polish Year's success was the specific (semi- peripheral) position it adopted. In the case of a Polish artist, coming from a country that only ever dreamed of being a colonial power, these actions could easily have turned into a joke (by repeating the oppressive partitions, their division and reformulation into new constellations). Undertaken by artists from the West and with the support of major cultural institutions (such as the Albert Camus French Institute, or the Goethe Institut), the project would prob-

ably have quickly gotten out of control. Simon's method could thus either be interpreted as an artistic critique of colonialism, or the critique of the weaker participants of the colonial project (such as Poland), which developed their own colonial fantasies, ones utterly detached from reality and not even nearly as »justified« as the colonial plans of the Western center.

Two other of Simon's works were created in accordance with Benjamin's theories of constellation, collecting what the West had discarded as trash. In the case of *Alang Transfer* these were primarily objects found at the world's largest maritime junkyard: destroyed information plaques, instructions for putting on lifejackets and using lifeboats, or explaining communication via lights, data signals, or flags. *The Alaba Transfer* project arose from a visit to a major junkyard of electronic waste, in which old material is recycled and returned into circulation in Nigeria. But what Simon does is not a straightforwardly messianic halting of the flow of goods and creation of a new collection of garbage, severing the goods from their exchange and use value and giving them a new »connoisseur value.«⁶ Simon does not keep these objects in a gallery - he sells them on Allegro (the biggest Polish online auction site) or out of a booth that he sets up. The transfer in both projects can be understood in two ways: either as a profane repetition in which the oppressive logic is compounded and deactivated, or as an idea for the creation of a new autonomous market for exchange in which the things that capital had demarcated as trash could become the centre of a new, grassroots production.

Simon's plan to remake Andrzej Wajda's 1958 film, *Ashes and Diamonds*, seems to be one such successful transcendence of the logic of profanation.

Nigeria is of course an entirely different country from Madagascar and, unlike that island, has no historical connections to Poland. Lagos, the centre of the African film industry, is a city bursting with contradictions. More than ten million inhabitants of Lagos live on less than a dollar a day, often without running water or electricity. On the other hand, as the capital of a nation whose economy is based on oil, it is brimming with luxury and the cost of living is comparable to that of the richest cities in the world. In a certain sense Nollywood, with a record number of films created each year (over two thousand), can be understood both as a consequence of these contradictions and a specific approach to resolving them. The legendary story of the development of the Nigerian film industry confirms this. In 1992 Kenneth Nnebue came up with an idea for a cheap, amateur cinema, having earlier purchased massive amounts of blank VHS tapes in Taiwan which could not be played in Nigeria. It turned out that the most practical solution to the problem was to fill the tapes with images. This generated an entire wave of amateur film production that rapidly took over not only Nigeria, but the entire region of English-speaking Africa (completely monopolizing it, in fact), and today has spread over the entire globe.

Nollywood not only indicates the possibility of organizing alternative cultural and social circulation,⁷ it also shatters the post-colonial truism about the history of the periphery as dependent on and mimicking the production of the centre. The Nigerian film industry offers an excellent demonstration of the falsity of binary divisions, in which the only active force is hegemonic global capital. As the example of Nollywood proves, capital's might is a reactive one, remaining two steps behind earlier resistance and the production of what is

held in common.⁸ Simon's remake of *Ashes and Diamonds* does not take place in a desert of social production⁹ (in which one can only strive, to greater or lesser effect, to deactivate the anthropological machine), but in a place where the creation of languages, images and the relationships between them, happens on a scale unheard of elsewhere. From this perspective, the machine producing divisions between the human and the non-human is not so much deactivated as it is abandoned by indifferent Nigerians. The Nollywood-organized exodus clearly demonstrates that in order to halt the functioning of the anthropological machine Agamben describes, it is not enough to destroy it and render the divisions created by it meaningless.¹⁰ Above all else, one must exit the age-old dualisms the anthropological machine produces, according to which the natural, the in-human and the wild is simultaneously passive, derivative and dependent.¹¹ In this sense, the filmmakers in Nollywood call to mind modern-day pirates,¹² organizing autonomous networks of cooperation and production, or indentured labourers fleeing farms along with their entire inventory,¹³ rather than passive Nigerians wholly subjected to the divisions produced by modern-day capitalism.

Of course, it is hard to predict what shape the Nigerian version of *Ashes and Diamonds* will finally take, but according to the producer (Simon) and the director it is to be concerned first and foremost with establishing the universality of Polish historical conflicts, which Wajda's film presents without taking a clear position. Regardless of whether Polish conflicts can be translated into Nigerian reality (for example, by recounting the heretofore censored history of the Nigerian civil war, which took place in the 1960's), what remains of this

confrontation is above all the uselessness of historical discussions restricted to narratives created by elites (be they ruling or oppositional). This is especially relevant to the history of Nigerian cinema, created in contrary to the logic of mass capital, with no assistance from the State and in conditions of intense ethnic and religious division. Nollywood, like earlier workers' and student movements established during the times of the Polish People's Republic, culminating in the mass movement of the first Solidarity,¹⁴ indicates the possibility of an alternative current of social production, at the same time providing the opportunity for an alternative – a vision of history against the grain, in which ethnic tensions can be overcome under the auspices of a struggle for the common good.

¹ See: Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before Europe: an Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350*. New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

² Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, 37. See: Kathryn Milun, *The Political Uncommons: The Cross-Cultural Logic of the Global Commons*. Duluth: University of Minnesota Duluth, 2010, 41–45.

³ This is where the task of »brushing history against the grain« of Benjamin's historical materialist comes from. Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, in: idem, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, 1938–1940, ed. H. Eiland,

M.W. Jennings. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003, 392.

⁴ The fact that until 2007 the current Polish President, Bronisław Komorowski, was the leader of the Maritime League (an organization with a historical connection to the Maritime and Colonial League) certainly adds topicality to Simon's project. See: Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, in: idem, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. E. Jephcott, K. Shorter. London: NLB, 1979.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland, K. McLaughlin. London: Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002, 9.

⁷ Simon demonstrates the possibility of mobilizing this kind of escape in his other works, which are based on the idea of an amateur production of knowledge and with subjects similar to that constructed by the artist in his *Homemade Electronic Watch*, as well as during a lecture given in Wolfsburg on Edible Plants and Animals of Lower Saxony or his *Sculptures from the Museum of a Man in Paris Recreated from the Drawings of Oskar Hansen and Lech Kunki and Printed on a Homemade 3D Printer*.

⁸ See: Dorota Kotodziejczyk, *Postkolonialny transfer na Europę Środkowo-Wschodnią*, *Teksty Drugie*, 2010, 22–39; Grażyna

Borkowska, *Perspektywa postkolonialna na gruncie polskim: Pytania sceptyka*, *Teksty Drugie* 5, 2010, 40–52.

⁹ Of course Madagascar was such a desert. Nigeria on the other hand should be perceived as an estuary: a stream that can no longer be blocked, rather than an individual accident. From this perspective, Madagascar's reaction is an effect of the way in which its history is narrated, not of the actual socio-cultural situation on the island. See: Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem. H. R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, 194.

¹⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open*, 92.

¹¹ See: Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: on Nomadic Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006, 37. Of course, Braidotti draws on a long line of philosophical thought. This perspective is most clearly described in its political botany by Marsilius of Padua, and in its political ontology by Spinoza.

¹² On the subject of the autonomy of pirate struggles: Peter Linebaugh, Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000, 143–174. The power of the 18th century pirate nation is

best attested to not only by political or military conflicts with pirates, but also by the philosophical discursive machine mobilized against them, with contributions

from Hobbes, Locke or, many years later, Carl Schmitt. See: Carl

Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974, 143–156.

¹³ Sandro Mezzadra, *The Topicality of Prehistory: A New Reading of Marx's*

Analysis of So-called Primitive Accumulation, *Rethinking Marxism* 23:3, 2011, 302–321.

¹⁴ The first Solidarity is understood here as an element of the people's history, in which the struggle is waged in the name of collective property and thus against

privatization – regardless of whether it is promoted by Communist Party bureaucracy or by neoliberal transformation.

See: Jan Sowa, *An*

Unexpected Twist of

Ideology. Neoliberalism and the Collapse of the Soviet Bloc, *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 1, 2012.

praktykateoretyczna.pl/jan-sowa-an-unexpected-twist-of-ideology January 5, 2014.



I HONESTLY HATE POLISH MESSIANISM! LETTER TO THE CONGRESS OF CULTURE

*A nation unable to live without
suffering must torment itself*
Maria Janon 10.10.2016
Trans. by Grzegorz Czemieli

Professor Maria Janon's letter was
read by Kazimiera Szczuka at the
opening of the 2016 Congress of
Culture in Warsaw

First of all, I wish to apologize
to all gathered here for not
delivering this talk personally.
I hope you can believe me that
it would be a tremendous
pleasure. Now – as Kazimiera
Szczuka is reading these
words – I try to focus my

thoughts and feelings so as to facilitate a transmission of
the phantasmal presence I once wrote about.

Today's opening might transport us into the past,
a part of which is quite familiar thanks to Agnieszka
Arnold. Specifically, it might take us back to the unfin-
ished congress of culture held in 1981. Back then, I
argued for the necessity of transmuting the great
emotional outburst – the formation of Solidarity in
1980 – into an intellectual effort that could prove to be a
more lasting component of change rather than a brief
flight of the spirit. Thirty-six years have passed and the
magical vicious circle of Polishness has made another

turn. There are not many left – like me – who find them-
selves once again confronting the characteristic drama.
Przemysław Czapliński has termed this vicious circle
»antinomic drifting,« indicating the contradiction between
modernization and modernism. The latter demands
intellectual effort and renewal of meanings within the
community, ultimately necessitating desacralization as
the condition of actual subjectivization. Understood in this
way, modernism demands the emancipation of minorities,
respect for individuals' rights, and real gender equality.
This proves irreconcilable with the ambitions of the right
wing. »Some push forward, while others do not wish to
turn backwards,« Czapliński observes, adding that »we are
ball and chain to ourselves.«

The diagnoses formulated under former govern-
ments require only slight corrections to remain valid.
The plan developed by Mateusz Morawiecki amounts to
a 19th-century utopia of modernization. It is strictly
historical and positivistic. Along with it comes an over-
whelming regression in the sphere of myths, symbols and
values. Among the shortcomings of former authorities
was the lack of appreciation for the role of people work-
ing in the area of culture and contributing to it creatively.
What we observe today is an obvious, centrally-managed
turn towards the culture of the fallen, epigonic kind of
Romanticism, represented by a canon of jingoistic stereo-
types and the Smoleńsk cult as the new messianic myth
supposed to unite and assuage those hurt and humiliated
by the previous government. How inefficient and harmful
it is to follow the martyrological pattern that dominates
in Poland! Let me put it simply and directly: messianism,
particularly the national-clerical variant, is Poland's curse
and doom. I honestly hate Polish messianism! It seems
characteristic that what links the unfinished congress of

106 1981 with today's gathering is – aside from the location – a definite aspiration to independence. The two levels on which culture circulated during the Polish People's Republic and the martial law have found their continuation today, albeit one determined by a mocking symmetry in the style of Witold Gombrowicz. On the one hand, there is the culture of the state and the church (also related to the military and hunting), which draws from the »good old« nationalistic story developed by the opposition in the 1980s. On the other we see the critical, composite and open culture, the kind for which this congress speaks. To be frank, I am put off by the call »Poland is here!« and I hope it will not be made today.

However, the vicious circle (or »antinomic drifting«) is something more than the clash between progressives and reactionaries. It involves winning and losing, closing of the community's ranks and its falling apart, as well as the dissolving of bonds, dreams and achievements. I have no doubt that our lasting inability to modernize ourselves has its roots in the phantasmal domain, in the culture where attachment to pain is inscribed in the collective unconscious. The source of this pain can be touched only with greatest difficulty, blindly. A nation unable to live without suffering must torment itself. This is the true origin of the shocking, sadistic fantasies about forcing women to give birth to half-dead children, the decision to dig up graves of those who died in the plane crash, the attempts to attack natural monuments, or – do not be surprised at this – the stubborn cultivation of the coal power industry, which wraps cities in smoke, increasing the threat of imminent collapse of civilization. The excellent book about Polish coal, published by Krytyka Polityczna, greatly inspired me to consider today's relevance of the holistic vision of

»nature's smithy« developed by the German Romantics. It is a pity that Polish Romanticism – anthropocentric, nationalistic and Christianistic – focused on other issues.

It seems to me now that among my reflections in the period after 1989 it was of particular significance that I have focused on the Enlightenment concept of *Bildung*. The education of young people – not only boys, let us add – that shapes personalities through contacts with culture and art, was supposed to accompany professional education and the development of an attitude of social engagement. The true enlightenment, i.e. the democratization of culture by educating not just the prince but all people – the nation – is the legacy of middle-class thought, and the ideal of rational education. The unsettling phrase coined by Goethe – »Die and become!« – spells eternal transforming, the ability to separate personality both from limitations imposed by unequal start, and from the traumatizing experiences of previous generations. This does not mean forgetting. On the contrary, the memory of pain and the reality of what we and others have suffered, of what we saw and still see, cannot be ever erased. By teaching young people how to reason, we communicate to them that outgrowing oneself is an ethical and empathic reaction.

Hard times are upon us, I am aware of this. Still, Olga Tokarczuk's *The Books of Jacob* [*Księgi Jakubowe*] have already been written. They are here to stay. A regenerative vision of history is shaping my hopes for the future.

I am certain that the opening of collective memory, the transformation of mourning into empathy, and the rejection of the »pre-critical consent to technicize the humanities« all involve work with children and adolescents – the kind of work that has to be done, and will be done in the coming difficult years.



Slavs and Tatars

In topsy-turvy times like ours—where people staple their stomachs to lose weight, pets have their own psychiatrists, and dinner guests split a bill eleven ways—we tend to find ourselves in the rear guard rather than in the avant-garde. Call us old-fashioned, or ol' skool *comme disaient les jeunes d'antan*. Like our antimodernist mascot, Molla Nasreddin, riding backwards on his donkey, we often look to the past to anticipate, imagine, or rue an impossible future.

With a heavy emphasis on classical languages and a limited colonial reach (especially compared to the land-grab of the Russians, French, or English), a career in German orientalism was anything but lucrative, and rarely linked to power.¹ Where his counterparts in Paris, Leiden, or London could expect to work as an interpreter or bureaucrat abroad, the German orientalist more often than not chose to study »dead« languages² and spent a dusty, dreary career in the academy.³

Everyone knows, though, that languages don't just die. They go to heaven. Once there, old men with white beards and burly babushkas in lab coats meticulously study them, pamper them, give them the scholarly equivalent of a steam-bath, a hamam, the kind of attention they haven't received in decades, in centuries. These impeccably groomed caretakers imagine how these languages lived, reconstruct their lives. They spend years composing tracts about how one language influenced the other, weaving a genealogical friendship bracelet of sorts, or, perhaps, a chain of transmission

to make even a skeptical Sufi proud. This paradise, this sanatorium, this five-star spa is called Philology.

TOO BIG TO FAIL?

Friends and colleagues squint their eyes, scrunch their noses. As if simply pronouncing | fə'läləjē | were enough to blow a cloud of dust into one's face. What began in classical times as the love of, devotion to and tenderness for (philos) argument, articulation, and the word (logos) by the 14th century swelled to include nothing short of Renaissance humanism: the attempt to restore and translate texts from Greco-Roman antiquity. Some considered philology on equal footing with philosophy. By its peak in the 19th century, it had grown to encompass »all manifestations of the human spirit, in time and in space.«⁴ De Sacy to Humboldt, Renan to Nietzsche, at certain moments, it must have felt like everyone and their grandmother was a philologist.⁵

[...] in Hebrew vowels are not letters. This is why the Hebrews say »vowels are the soul of letters« and that letters without vowels are »bodies without souls« (two images taken from the Zohar). To tell the truth, to better understand the difference between letters and vowels, we turn to the example of the flute, played by the fingers; the vowels are the sounds of the music; the letters are the holes covered by the fingers.⁶

112 What goes up must come crashing down: today, from the perch of the vertiginous 21st century, it seems only inevitable that philology's boom be followed by a bust.

BULL MARKET FOR LINGUISTS

Who would have ever imagined philology to go on the down-low: rendez-vous in the park amongst ascot-ed elders, hand-job hermeneutics in dark alleys? Today, the study of languages through historical sources with an emphasis on literary criticism, literature, and history has been eclipsed by linguistics, a field more befitting our era of hyper-specialization.⁷ Where linguistics prides itself on a scientific, even clinical methodology—think neuro-linguistics, or forensic linguistics—philology can't seem to shake its romantic cloak, steeped as it is in the messier fields of religion, history, and ethnography, to name just a few. Where linguistics zeroes in on the micro, the narrow—voiceless palato-alveolar sibilant, anyone?—we'd like to redeem philology's macro, its pudge, its largesse, its love handles.⁸

To do so, we take particular stock in an unlikely source of excess: an 18th century chock full o' Johanns. A dash of Johann David Michaelis, a drizzle of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, super-size portions of Herder and an all-you-can-eat buffet of Johann Georg Hamann. All four slide between different spots on the slick spectrum of Enlightenment thinking. Herder and Hamann did not sign up whole-heartedly to the excesses of rationalism, the view that reason and faith were incommensurate, or that language was a perfectible tool for transparent communication. Each insisted on the lived character of language (das lebendige Wort), as something fleshy and

unruly, something that doesn't (only) fit in your mouth.

When faced with a choice between the sacred and the profane, the rational and the affective, philology allows us to choose not to choose, to revel in amphiboly, to do the metaphysical splits, each lobe reaching for a union of opposites. Its Germanophone players offer a tonic to what Charles de Foucauld called »la rage laïque de tout savoir« (the secular rage to know all) gripping our societies.⁹ Herder, for example, railed against the false dichotomies, forcing him to take sides between »Moses and Maupertius, Fontenelle and Isaiah.«

Johan Georg Hamann's holism was substantially more abrasive and sneering than the type found in your local smoothie shop. His rejection of any dualism, be it the body and spirit, idealism and realism, faith and reason, is so fierce, you'd be forgiven for taking Hamann, the born-again Lutheran, for a crypto-Muslim: the unicity of God, توحيد (tawhid), is the sine qua non of Islam.¹⁰ What distinguishes him, though, is his method: rude references, grotesque exaggeration and bad taste, in an 18th century of Francophone decorum. »Like worms through children, laws pass through sickly men of letters,« he spits at Mendelssohn, before going on to describe metaphysics as a »hereditary defect and the leprosy of ambiguity« in a jab at Kant.¹¹ He consistently turns to the affective, experiential body to ridicule the division of contemplation and action or the abstraction of thought.¹²

In our *Not Moscow Not Mecca*, we address the need to look to the edges of ideologies, the rims of empires, the margins of faiths rather than the often-rotten center.¹³ Hamann's essays are littered with aphorisms, exclamation marks, citations from the Gospel, quotes in their original Hebrew, Greek or Latin; reading them

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is as rich visually as discursively: the only thing missing, one feels, are emoticons.¹⁴ While our tech-heavy peers celebrate the »disruptive,« reading Hamann reminds us of a more sensuous yet grating term, the »irritant.« With his post-modern pestering, post-secular polemics, and penchant for parody, Johann Georg Hamann was Irritant Extraordinaire, the enfant-terrible of the Counter-Enlightenment.¹⁵ We can only imagine the field day Hamann, the Magus of the North, would have today: drawing a constellation of lines from Descartes and Diderot to Big Oil and GM crops.

»WITHOUT A WORD, NO REASON – NO WORLD«

The Reformation impulse to return to the source, to the book, to scripture, to discover the original languages of the Old Testament and the Bible, set the tone for the early generations of German philologists. Philosophers, theologians, and linguists produced Aramaic exegesis, studies of Hebrew mythology, Demotic discourses and the like in an attempt to further penetrate the mystery of the revelation.¹⁶ Despite our more gnostic leanings, we celebrate the Protestant fixation with the text, and the drive to bring people back to the book (though ours feature more Abkhaz than Aramaic, Slovak than Syriac). We never anticipated, though, that such Byzantine sensuality or (pardon the pun) catholicism, with a small »c,« would stem from an otherwise lean and mean, largely Kulturprotestantismus machine.

Slavs and Tatars, Chaldeans and Kurds, Assyrians and Baluch among others, identify in this theological impulse a means of elaborating the performativity

of language. As we discuss in our *Khhhhhhh* (Moravian Gallery / Mousse, 2012), a look at the phoneme [kh] across Arabic, Hebrew and Russian, language is never merely a form of transaction, communication or purely rational system. It obscures as much as reveals. For Hamann and Herder, it was always tied, through scripture and the Word, to a social participation of community, and an interior experience of the numinous, or the wholly Other.

If Herder believed grammar to be the philosophy of language, Hamann went one step further ... back, to Luther himself, to declare that grammar = theology. To engage with divinity, though, one must first allow for transmogrification, à la Fred Madison to Pete Dayton, in David Lynch's *Lost Highway*. Hamann decides to defend the letter h from an assault by reformers intent to rid German orthography of the redundant letter by becoming the h itself. His essay: *New apology of the letter h by Itself*.

You little prophets of Böh-misch-Breda! Be not amazed that I speak unto you with a human voice like that dumb beast of burden, to punish your transgression. Your life is what I am – a breath. Do not think that I should crawl before you, whine and beg to be preserved, or lament if I am altogether banished or eliminated from your writings. I view it as an honor and a favor to be subject to the bondage of your vanity less than my vocalizing and consonating brothers¹⁷

It is no coincidence that the 19th century saw a turn to language: the discipline provided the mana of origins to the binge-eating appetite of nationalism.¹⁸ While the search for origins and the *Ursprache* certainly played a significant role in the racial determinism and nationalism of the Wilhelmine and Weimar periods, it would be a mistake to reduce philology to a mere precursor of National Socialism. Slopes slide both ways: there are ample cases of scholars, and even missionaries, whose study of languages were supposed to help understand foreign cultures, but led instead to question their own identity, nation, and faith.¹⁹

Appalled by the proselytizing of his fellow Christians, Sinologist and former missionary Richard Wilhelm (1873–1930) looked to Confucius as a combination of Goethe and Christ. Ignác Goldziher (1850–1921), Hungarian Jewish scholar of Islamic Jurisprudence aka Edward Said's *bête noire* was the first non-Muslim allowed to study at the very elite Al-Azhar University in Cairo.²⁰ Such was his dedication to Islam that he became known as the sheikh az-Zarawi, the Golden Sheikh to his fellow students and faculty.²¹ Before enrolling, though, Goldziher had to demonstrate a solid fluency in the faith to the »notoriously severe« mufti, the sheikh al-Azhar, Muhammad Mahdi al-'Abbasi. After several hours of examination, imagine Goldziher's surprise, the contagious grin inching from one face to another, and back again, upon discovering that al-'Abbasi's father had been a Jewish convert to Islam.

Multilingualism pleads for a productive form of schizophrenia: being multiple people, with different sensibilities and distinct senses of humour in different languages. Against the tyranny of identity politics and the reductive singularity of you and me, languages offer a way out, via an accumulation of identities of many we. With Wilhelm von Humboldt, Herder was among the first to demonstrate the role language plays in forming national consciousness; yet he collapses the distinction between himself and other in a collision of the Abrahamic and the analytical:

You see, my friend, how holy these books are to me, and how much I (according to Voltaire's ridicule) am a Jew, when I read them: for should we not be Greeks and Romans, when we read Greeks and Romans? Every book must be read in its own spirit, and so too the book of books, the Bible.²³

As the 20th century recedes in our rear-view mirror, it appears more and more like an exception in history rather than its continuation. Nationalism re-rears its ugly heads, curtains cool down, and cold wars are cryogenized: perhaps it is best we revisit language as a form of sacred hospitality, of inviting the other into our language as well as exiling ourselves into the language of the other.²⁴ Only then can we declare, once again, ever more, that *nous sommes tous des philo-philologues*.

- 1 Edward Said acknowledged himself to have neglected to take into account German orientology in his sweeping study.
- 2 Comparable weight was given to Syriac, Aramaic, and Ancient Greek as to Arabic or Persian. Further evidence of German Orientalists's antimodernist stance, or interest is their interest in the ancient Orient over the contemporary peoples, traditions or life of the region.
- 3 Today's critics of creeping corporatization in academia, especially its problematic hiring policy, will find little comfort in history: throughout the 18th and much of the 19th century, university appointments in Prussian received little if any compensation. Lecturers were
- expected to be individually wealthy or seek private funding. Another brick to be thrown at the exception of the 20th century? See: Sarah Kendzior: aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/04/2013419156459616.html.
- 4 Salomon Reinach, *Manuel de Philologie classique*, Paris, 1884.
- 5 Those few who weren't certainly did not hesitate to weigh in on the matter: from J. J. Rousseau's claim that the origin of language was »due not to need but to passion« to Rudolf Steiner's lectures on sacred language. The term's over-reach – its »franchising« to borrow a term from the spurious vocabulary of retail-corresponded with a heightened understanding of
- the fundamental role of language in all areas of scholarship, from anthropology to history, art history to literature to theology.
- 6 Spinoza, *Abbrégé de grammaire hébraïque*, edited by J. Askenazi and J. Askenazi-Gerson, Paris: Librairie Philosophie J. Vrin, 1968, 35–36.
- 7 Rest assured: the Warsaw Pact is still alive when it comes to the affection for (or affliction of) language, in all its paleographic, literary, historical and theological opulence. If Western Europeans and North Americans, save Germany, have largely abandoned philology, opting for the more dispassionate linguistics, universities across Eastern Europe continue to bat
- their Very Much Aligned eyelashes at the discipline. Renan claimed the true philologist was »at once linguist, historian, archaeologist, artist, philosopher...: Philology is not an end in and of itself. Its value is a necessary condition for the history of the human spirit.« *Avenir de la Science*, 3: 832. Herder argued a true language scholar would be a man of three heads, combining philosophy, history, and philology. »Über die neue Deutsche Literature.« 2:13. Our ongoing series of work – *Long Legged Linguistics* – investigates language as a source of political, metaphysical, even sexual emancipation. The Love Letter carpets, for example, address the march of alphabets

that accompany empires: Latin with the rise of Christianity, Arabic with Islam and Cyrillic with the Orthodox faith and later Communism.

- 9 A Cistercian Trappist monk, De Foucauld led a hermetic life in Algeria and lived among the Touaregs, producing the first Touareg-French dictionary, published posthumously in four volumes. actual socio-cultural situation on the island. About the estuary see: Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, H. R. Lane, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, 194.
- 10 »The list of closeted converts to Islam is a long and storied one: from the

tique on the Purism of Reason, 212.

- 13 Slavs and Tatars, *Moscow Not Mecca*, Vienna: Secession, 2012.
- 14 »The purity of language dispossesses it of its wealth; a correctness that is all too rigid takes away its strength and manhood.« Hamann, *Word Order in the French language*, 31.
- 15 His heavy use of prosopela anticipated the post-modern decentering of an author's subjectivity by three centuries. The dedications and annotations to his essays clearly indicate that Hamann was not from his time if even from this planet. The subtitle to Socratic Memorabilia reads: »Collected for the Boredom of the Public by a Lover of
- Boredom. With a Double Dedication to Nobody and to Two« before continuing with a quote in Latin from Persius' *Satire*.
- 16 Scholars' fixation with the original language of the Hebrew Bible, the challenge of Aramaic, and other lines of flight led to a seismic discovery. As Suzanne Marchand in her magisterial study puts it: »What finally forced open the sluice gates at the bottom of conventional human history was, however, the next generation of orientalist scholars. We have, heretofore, failed to appreciate the colossal scale of their discoveries, decipherments, and specialized studies, and the effect of this new material in opening up the ancient Orient to European view in

the period between 1880 and 1914. As scholars ransacked a vast quantity of new textual and archaeological documents, they discovered the powerful influence of Zoroastrian Persia, the esoteric depths of ancient India, and the primeval innovations of the Assyrians and Sumerians. These new cultures, appealing in their antiquity, spirituality, and apparent purity, made the well-known »orientals« – especially the ancient Israelites and Egyptians – seem derivative, corrupt, and banal. Assyriology, in particular, worked a destructive magic on older forms of orientalism, allowing scholars to tread with philologically supported security into the non-biblical ancient East. The

discovery of pre-biblical accounts of »God,« »the Flood,« and »the Sabbath« generated new mythographic speculation, some of it innovative and some of it bizarre, but all of it unflattering from the point of view of conventional classicists and Christians. Thanks to the Assyriological discoveries between about 1885 and 1908, the great historian Eduard Meyer testified, everything he and his contemporaries had known about the ancient Orient from the Old Testament and the Greeks had been called into question, and indeed mostly destroyed. *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, Scholarship*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

¹⁷ Hamann, *New Apology of the Letter h by Itself*, His heavy use of prosopoeia anticipated the post-modern decentering of an author's subjectivity by three centuries. The dedications and annotations to his essays clearly indicate that Hamann was not from his time if even from this planet. The subtitle to Socratic Memorabilia reads: »Collected for the Boredom of the Public by a Lover of Boredom. With a Double Dedication to Nobody and to Two« before continuing with a quote in Latin from Persius' *Satire*.

¹⁸ Alas, German philologists were the first to outline the relationship between language and nationality. The sometimes farcical attempts in the 19th cen-

tury to link Bavarian with Sanskrit or Prussia with Sparta laid the groundwork for the devastations in the following century. The list of Oriental scholars whose criticism of Eurocentrism in their field led to a re-assessment of their own cultures is long: Nikolai Marr's coupling of Indo-European linguistics with imperial ideologies sobered his take on Soviet policies in the Caucasus; Louis Massignon's advocacy of Arabic as the language of Christian prayer was an attempt to return the faith to its Eastern, communal origins, against what he saw as its consumerist, individualist Western iterations; Vasily Bartold, the eminent Russian Iranologist,

claimed that medieval Turkestan was a significantly more advanced culture than Kievan Rus'. Our lecture-performance *Utter Other* (2014) looks at the curious case of imperial Russian and Soviet Oriental studies as an antidote to the consensus of Saldian critique. What happens when the East looks East?

²⁰ See Robert Irwin's *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies*, London: Penguin, 2006.

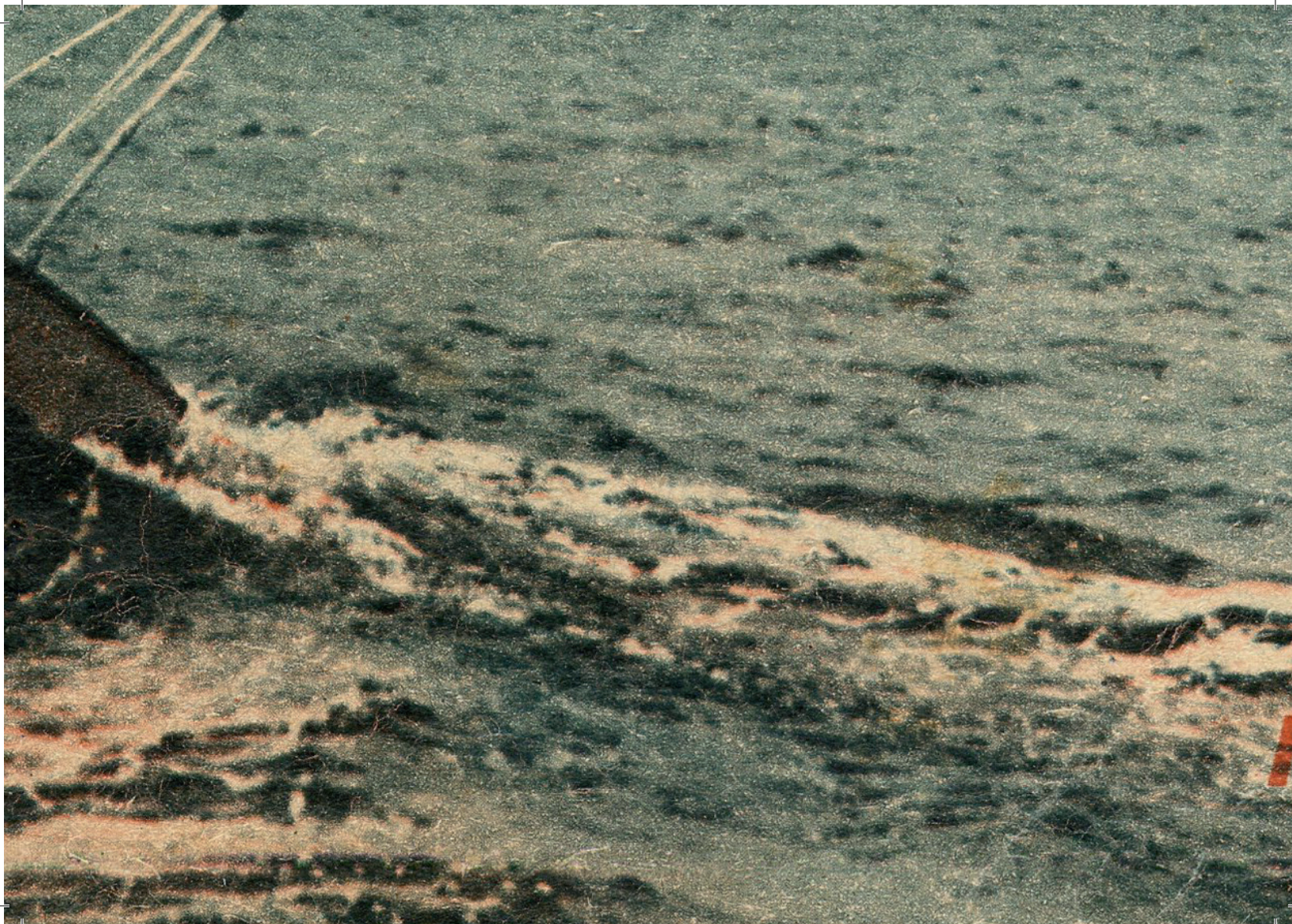
²¹ Robert Simon, Ignác Goldziher: *His Life and Scholarship as Reflected in his Works and Correspondence*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986, 45.

²² Hamann, *Aesthetica in Nuce Writings on Philosophy and Language* translated by Kenneth

Haynes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 66.

²³ Herder, *Brief das Studium der Theologie betreffend*, in Herders *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan, Berlin, 33 vols., 1879–1913, 143–44.

²⁴ Refuting the traditional exegesis of Babel as a cautionary tale of human division due to the excesses of linguistic diversity or the impossibility of translation, Paul Ricoeur turns to another Biblical precedent, the pact of sacred hospitality, shared amongst the three Abrahamic faiths, to redeem the »pleasure of dwelling in the other's language... balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home.«



CARGO CULTS IN POST-COMMUNIST SPHERES

Oleksiy Radynski

In June 2016 Wojciech
Balczun, a manager and rock

musician from Poland, was appointed as chief of the Ukrainian Railway agency, a state monopoly that controls railway transportation in Ukraine. This was followed in October 2016 by the appointment of the Polish politician Sławomir Nowak as the head of the Ukrainian State Agency of Automobile Roads. These foreign technocrats were imported to run vital Ukrainian infrastructure soon after Leszek Balcerowicz, an infamous architect of Polish post-Communist »shock therapy«, became co-chair of the council of strategic advisers to Ukrainian president Poroshenko in April 2016.

It is not clear whether there is a direct connection between the new appointees and Balcerowicz himself. He is largely discredited in native Poland but still hailed as a hero of »market transformation« by neoliberals as well as by »public opinion« in Ukraine, which tends to uncritically accept whatever arrives from across the country's Western border. What is crystal clear, though, is that the new iteration of »Polish Prometheism« regarding Ukraine – a school of thought that sees Poland as a pioneer on the European path that other Eastern nations should follow – has been effectively taken over by market dogmatism. It has also led to controversies caused by disregard towards Ukrainian legal procedures

by these foreign nationals (while Sławomir Nowak has switched to Ukrainian citizenship, which is required of officials of his rank either by the letter of law or by its spirit, Wojciech Balczun did not). One of Balczun's previous jobs in the Polish company PKP Kargo, provides a hint about how to think about Ukraine's current obsession with foreign »effective managers«: it's a *cargo cult*.

The Polish are not the only ones to strike a Promethean pose of miracle-driven market colonialism. In May 2015, the former Georgian pro-market president Mikhail Saakashvili was appointed as a governor of the region of Odessa; after briefly holding a job similar to the current Ukrainian status of Balcerowicz. By that time, three other Georgians held ministerial positions in Ukrainian government, in addition to one Lithuanian and one US national. The significant presence of foreigners in decision-making bodies would undoubtedly lead many to decry the foreign takeover of the Ukrainian state and its ultimate transformation into »a modern-day colony of the West.«

This view, however, should be nuanced by the fact that before the Maidan uprising in 2014, Ukraine saw a huge migration of political decision-makers from across its border with Russia. This process reached its climax when Aleksandr Yakymenko, who officially served in the Russian military until at least 1998, was shortly before the outbreak of Maidan, appointed Head of Security Service of Ukraine. There's no official information confirming he ever became Ukrainian citizen.

Historically, the status of Ukraine as a colony of Russia was reiterated by the master/slave dialectic known from former colonial contexts. One instance, both Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev, who ran the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1982, were Ukrainians. Both

126 imposed harsh exploitative policies and cultural assimilation on Ukraine – just like on the rest of non-Russian republics of the USSR. Ukraine's colonial status underwent significant upgrades since the country gained formal »independence« in 1991: rather than being a subject to a singular colonial ruler, it became a battleground for competing colonialisms. But it would be a grave mistake to imply that this »competition« is somehow symmetrical. An example of »Head of Security Service who is actually a Russian military officer« versus »Polish entrepreneur running a railway monopoly« reflects this profound asymmetry.

In 2014, I wrote a column for the Polish website *Krytyka Polityczna* titled *Let's Recognize Ukraine as a Polish Colony*. I wanted to comment on the scandal that was provoked by Grzegorz Schetyna, then-minister of foreign affairs of Poland when he stated that talking about Ukraine without Poland's participation is like talking about Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco without participation of Italy, France or Spain. His remarks were widely condemned as arrogant, supremacist, and short-sighted – which they actually were (from today's perspective, though, it's funny to recall a time when the Polish foreign affairs minister could produce a scandal by a statement that sounds fairly innocent in comparison to the current minister's promises to »start negative politics« towards the EU). What I actually liked in Schetyna's troubled message was that in between its lines you could read the recognition of the fact that Ukraine used to be – or maybe still is – a colony of Poland. And to recognize historical (or present) reality is a first step to overcome it. Historically, huge parts of Ukraine used to be Polish colonies. As long as this fact is not recognized and not accounted for, modern-day colonizers

from Poland would be able to disguise themselves as Prometheuses.

Some time after this text was published, Joanna Warsza asked me about Polish colonial politics in present-day Ukraine. I thought I could provide her with numerous examples from the field of contemporary art where the spirit of Henryk Jozewski – a Polish interwar spy who happened to be an artist and a Prometheist trying to draw Soviet Ukraine into Poland's orbit – is very much alive. I also thought that whatever happens in the field of contemporary art in this regard is totally overshadowed by the remarkable fact that basically all of Ukrainian transport infrastructure is now actually run by the Poles. The field of contemporary art may pioneer the future colonization of our lives by capital, but the reality of modern-day colonialism is much more crude and seemingly old-fashioned. Just as in the good old Age of Discovery, it is the transportation nodes and links that are of the greatest significance. It is the nation's roads and railways that have been brought under foreign control.

I started to contemplate the conundrums of present-day road-building and railway management in Ukraine. This took me to a place in Kiev where a gigantic unfinished motorway bridge was supposed to meet the urban train route that was meant to solve the city's transportation disaster, but unfortunately never did. I thought this place should be filmed. In the meantime, I've learnt that the bridge might be completed at some point in future with the money from German investors.

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UGANDA: A SAFE HAVEN FOR POLISH REFUGEES: 1942 – 1951

D.Kiyaga-Mulindwa

When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, millions fled Eastern Poland in the wake of the invasions. On 17th September, exactly three weeks after the German invasion, Soviet troops marched into Poland from the East, occupying almost half of the pre-war country. At the time of the Russian invasion, eastern Poland was inhabited not by ethnic Poles but mostly by Byelorussians. Many Polish soldiers joined the French and British forces to help liberate their country. Families of these soldiers were promptly arrested and exiled to Siberia.

When Germany attacked Russia, the Russians offered amnesty to the Poles held in forced exile in her territory. Men of military age were allowed to join Polish forces in the Middle East, while their families, especially women, children and men over military age were allowed to leave Russia and seek refuge in Allied countries. Some 17,000 Polish citizens, mostly women and children, were given asylum in the three East Africa colonies and in Northern and Southern Rhodesia. The Nairobi-based East African Refugee Administration, headed by a Commissioner for Refugees, made arrangements for their settlement in East Africa. The Polish Government took financial responsibility for transporting the refugees, establishing settlement camps, and overseeing the refugees final settlement and upkeep. The refugees had first fled to Eastern Poland, then to Russia where they were interned for at least two years, moved to East Africa via Iraq, Iran, India and finally to Mombasa, Kenya.

The first group of 492 Polish refugees arrived in Uganda by train from Kenya on 8th September, 1942, three years after they fled Poland. They disembarked at Namasagali where they were received by three housewives of Jinja District Administration officers. From Namasagali, the refugees boarded barges which took them down the Nile to Masindi Port. Trucks transported them from Masindi Port to their “new home”: a settlement camp established at Nabyeya, some 35 kms from Lake Albert and Masindi town.

Another camp had also been established at Kojja, about 35 kms from Mukono railway station on the shore of Lake Victoria. The Kojja settlement covered an area measuring over 700 acres and was located on several hills overlooking the lake. Care had been taken in planning the settlement to avoid giving it the look of a military camp or barracks. The settlement was com-

posed of several villages of mud and wattle houses thatched in Polish fashion, which had been constructed around a central square. The square contained a village well, and later, other communal services points, such as tapped water points and communal shower baths. The houses consisted of three rooms and a kitchen with a porch, and prettily arranged flower gardens. All the separate village units focussed on the centre of the settlement, where Kojja Cathedral was located. This church was built of local materials with a thatched roof, but from the front, stately pillars of wooden poles covered in *keiganda*-style woven reeds, gave the church an appearance of a real Gothic church. The church was the focal point of the refugees' lives. The centre also contained a Camp Commandant's office, an officers' mess and two flag masts flying the Union Jack and the Polish national flag.

Within two years of the refugees' arrival, both Masindi (Nabyeya) and Kojja settlements had primary schools, secondary schools and a secondary economic school. The Polish Examination Board established examinations for students. Both settlements had hospital facilities run by Polish doctors and nurses. The Kojja hospital subsequently grew in size and by 1943 was able to admit up to 250 patients. It had electricity as well as a waterborne sanitation system. The Kojja hospital had a Polish referral section at the Kampala European hospital in Nakasero (currently Uganda Television headquarters) which was also run by Polish doctors and nurses. Quite a number of the Polish medics had been trained in tropical diseases at Masaka¹. Trainee nurses normally took Nurses Examinations set by the Polish Ministry of Welfare and supervised by a local Examination Board.² Since many of the Masindi Polish refugees were orphans, there were several orphanages in the Masindi settlement. At the end of 1943, the orphanages were re-grouped into a Children's village.

Each settlement had a Recreation Hall (15x150 feet) where concerts were performed and films shown. Artisans among the refugees eventually set up shops and workshops, and by 1946 a very well run Co-operative Society had taken over some of the major trading activities in the Kojja settlement. It is said that the contents of this Co-operative's store would “excite the envy among Kampala shoppers.”³ He wishes to thank his informants and to acknowledge invaluable assistance, especially during oral interviews, by Mr. Samuel Mujjegu of Mukono and Mrs. F. K. Mulindwa. The Kojja settlement also managed a Polish Rest House in Kampala where Polish visitors to Kampala

could get rest and refreshments.

Masindi was the larger of the two settlements, although Kojja appears to have been better organised. Uganda had offered refuge to at least 6,200 Polish refugees by 1944. Of these, 2,645 were school age children. By March 1943, Masindi settlement had 3,200 refugees of whom 1,528 were children and only 267 men, most of whom were either old or unwell.

Each settlement was under the command of a British Camp Commandant and a Polish Camp leader. The Camp Commandant reported to the Director of Refugees, who in turn reported to the Commissioner of Refugees (East Africa). Each settlement had a democratically elected Settlement Committee. The Settlement Committee appointed other subordinate bodies to manage or organise various activities. It was very similar to a modern Municipal Council.

Once settled, it seems that there was enough for everyone to do within each of the two settlements. From the start, the objective was to make these settlements as self-sufficient as possible. There are limited reports of refugees being employed outside the settlement apart from those working at the Kampala European Hospital. Women made up the majority of teachers, orphanage matrons, and nurses. The head of the Kojja hospital a woman, Dr. Kaluska. Women generally were engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry. Starting with kitchen gardens for each home, the settlements, especially Kojja, had agricultural farms and large-scale poultry and piggery projects. Kojja settlement was able to produce seasoned meat such as ham and sausages on a permanent basis and these products were always available at the Co-operative Society's canteen. Women also did a lot of weaving, making "Scotch" homespun from Kenyan wool for which they were using local dyes. They also made a rare linen cloth from Ugandan cotton which was reported "to wear forever"⁴. The majority of men were artisans such as locksmiths, carpenters and joiners, shoemakers and brick makers. There were two brick kilns at Masindi and one at Kojja.

The Polish refugees were generally well behaved and caused no concern to the host government. Africans who lived near the camp confirm that they remember no misdemeanors committed by their refugee neighbours.⁵ Mr. Musambansiko, who worked as an *arkari* at the Kojja camp agrees. He notes that access to the camp was restricted and could only be granted by the Camp Commandant's permission. Also, permission to leave the settlement for a

day's trip to Kampala was normally handled by the village Settlement Committee. There was a bus to Kampala once a week for those who wished to visit the town on a day's pass. The majority of disciplinary cases handled by the Settlement Committee involved fighting by the youth.⁶ Research has revealed only one case (a Josef Komarshi of Kojja settlement) of breaching the Price Control Regulations in 1945. Socially and economically therefore, these settlements, having remained completely self-sufficient, appear to have existed for over nine years without being overtly felt by those who lived around them. Unconfirmed reports indicate that there were only two cases when men (an Indian and a white man) from outside the settlement married Polish women from the camps.⁷ A few elderly men, such as F. Ziobrowski and a Mr. Jalowiecki, themselves refugees, are reported to have married younger Polish women from the settlement at Kojja.⁸

Although the war ended in 1945, as late as June 1951, there were still Polish refugees in Uganda. They had originally arrived in groups and they also eventually left in groups and at different times. For example, in December 1943 a contingent of young Polish girls and women, trained in Uganda, left the country to join Polish Section of WAAF under the auspices of the Polish Ministry of Welfare. When the war ended, the majority of Polish refugees were resettled in 1948 in the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. The Refugee Office in Nairobi handled the resettlement arrangements as well as transport from Uganda to the country of resettlement. A few remaining refugees took up temporary employment in Uganda. In December 1951, the Kojja settlement was finally closed and the two blocks in the centre of the settlement were turned into a Polish Memorial School. By mid 1952 the entire settlement had been dismantled and all the assets sold to bidders. These included Kibuli Muslim Association, NAC, Namirembe, Government Chemist, Provincial Engineer/Buganda, Government Printer and the Police Department. One headmaster of the New Approved School at Mpunge had been granted unlimited access to the Kojja camp. He dismantled as many as 130,000 bricks and other house items such as iron sheets. The Education Officer issued vouchers for payment.⁹ All the proceeds from sales were collected by the Accountant General and deposited into the Polish Refugee Disposal Account. The proceeds were finally divided between the Uganda Colonial Administration and the Polish Civic Committee.¹⁰

By May 1952 when Mr. W.F. Dawson, an officer from the Colonial Office

in London, visited Uganda to make final settlement of the Polish Refugee Affairs, there were only a few outstanding cases. These included three deportation cases, still in Uganda, and four mentally ill women waiting to be moved to the Tanganyika settlement in Dodoma. There were also two military ex-internees, Skrbensky and Bickskey, and the "infamous lady", Winogrocka, who was deported to the USA and later repatriated to South Africa.¹¹ In 1952, there still remained "three bad lads" staying at the [Polish] Guest House in Kampala. They were employed at the time "but still held that attitude that the world owes them a living".¹²

From the foregoing, the Masindi (Nabyeya) and Kojja settlements were vital communities bustling with human activity. This author has recently visited the site of Kojja settlement but apart from the 80 graves on one of the hill slopes (where three of Pope John Paul's relatives are interred¹³) there is absolutely nothing to show for what was once a settlement for over 3,000 people. The entire area is overgrown with vegetation and there is neither ruin nor brick to stand witness to this one-time massive refugee settlement. Historical archaeologists would find this an exciting site. They would expose tangible evidence, now covered in sediment, of this extensive settlement site which, to a casual observer, sounds like a fairly tale.

Lastly, it is interesting that nearly 7,000 Poles lived almost ten years in Uganda, at the time out-numbering the European population in the Protectorate three fold. In spite of this, there appears to be little trace or legacy left behind by the Polish refugees in Uganda. Through the colonial period, Uganda's immigration policy had remained open, but favoured African immigrants and/or refugees. It purposely discouraged white immigration and settlement. It is probably this deliberate policy by the British colonial government that was invoked in planning the organisation and control of the Polish refugees' asylum in Uganda. The government ensured that the Polish people had minimum or no social interaction with Ugandans. While African refugees such as the Banyarwanda and the Sudanese have integrated well among Ugandan communities, the British policy against white settlement in Uganda must account for the apparent lack of impact or impression of ten years of Polish presence in Uganda.

Endnotes:

- ¹ M.Szyskowski, "Polish Settlements in Uganda", *Uganda Herald*, 9/6/1943.
- ² "Polish Nurses Exam", *Uganda Herald*, 20/10/1943.
- ³ Reporter, "From Siberia to Uganda: Life at Kojja Settlement", *Uganda Herald*, 13/11/1946.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ Interview (23/10/2000) with Mr. James Mutaya of the Mamba clan and resident at Ntanzi village. Mr. Mutaya was at Mpunge Primary School at the time, aged about 6 years.
- ⁶ Interview (23/10/2000) with Mr. George William Musambansiko (Nsikoteyomba) of the Hippo clan, now aged 85.
- ⁷ Interview (23/8/2000), Mr. James Mutaya, *op.cit.*
- ⁸ Uganda National Archives (hereafter UN.A) DR 49/A Affairs, Polish.
- ⁹ UNA – General 12187 Polish Refugees.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ Ofwono-Opondo, "Pope has relatives buried in Kyagwe," *The New Vision*, 11/2/1994.

SOME INTERESTING SIDE NOTES

1. German Internment Camp in Entebbe*

Did you know that there was a German Internment Camp in Entebbe during the war years? Apparently local people saw real danger in a German presence in Uganda at the time that two people took up a pen to write in the *Uganda Herald* of 25/3/42 and 1/4/42 complaining about the lenient treatment and freedoms that were being given to the German internees by government.

* Submitted by D.Kiyaga-Mulindwa

INTERMARIUM, OR AN IMAGINED POLYAMORY

Jan Sowa
Trans. by Grzegorz Czemiel

There is one highly iconic
image from Polish history –
the Marriage to the Sea. In

the 20th century Poland partook in such nuptials more than once: in 1920 the said marriage was celebrated with pomp and ceremony in Gdynia, and then in 1945 in Kołobrzeg. Later, it was often restaged since historical reconstructions seem to be Poland's national sport, which was proven beyond any doubt by Artur Żmijewski, who recreated an episode from the 1945 capturing of Germany's capital at the 7th Berlin Biennale.

Nevertheless, maritime monogamy never really satisfied Poland's seafaring aspirations. After all, it is a country whose trademarks are virility and willfulness. Accordingly, despite having sworn allegiance to the Baltic Sea, Poles kept sneaking glances at another bride – a more dusky, southern one, therefore wild and mysterious – namely the Black Sea. One sea would be enough for the dull »lemmings« – as the new Polish middle class is called by right-wing nationalists – infected by Western cultural patterns, especially because they need it just as a place to drown, as befits these creatures. So-called »real Poles« – on the contrary – always wanted to have two seas at their disposal, between which they could

stretch the mighty and muscular body of the Sarmatian tribe. It is only such maritime polyamory that would facilitate developing the full potential of what contemporary nationalists call the »Jagiellonian idea«: to reign over the entire Central-Eastern Europe, just like their ancestors did, from sea to sea!

THE EYE IS EAGER BUT THE LIVER FALLS BEHIND

It remains a mystery where the Polish love for sea originates from. Poles basically dislike water, with the exception of holy water and firewater. The kind that flows in rivers or seas has never been a real inspiration to them. In contrast to other urban centres created west of Poland, Polish cities were built with their backs to the rivers. Vistula in Warsaw and Kraków, Warta in Poznań or Wisłok in Rzeszów all lie outside the historic city centres. Today, Polish cities are forced to make efforts in order to come closer to their rivers, only gradually incorporating them into their urban fabric, although the rivers are usually already within these cities' administrative boundaries. On the other hand, German cities, or ones generally shaped by German influences such as Wrocław (Breslau) or Bydgoszcz (Bromberg), have integrated rivers into their urban structure relatively early.

The Baltic Sea was similarly disregarded in traditional Polish culture. At the onset of the 16th century, after Poland's final victories over Prussia, it was decided to not formally incorporate Pomerania, settling instead for Albrecht Hohenzollern's liege homage to Sigismund I the Old. One hundred years later, the Republic of Poland decided that it has no use for a fleet. The Parliament

136 dissolved the navy after peace with Sweden was made in Sztumska Wieś in 1635. In the middle of the 17th century, a law was passed prohibiting Polish merchants from conducting international trade, thus leaving Baltic-related business entirely in the hands of the Dutch.

Such a course of action proved to be irrational. After Poland disbanded its fleet, the country was literally flooded by the rivalling Swedes, who crossed the Baltic Sea without facing any resistance at all... Polish nobility was perfectly aware that the neighbouring superpowers were not the only competitor in the race for power in the Republic. There was another enemy – an internal, class one, namely the Polish bourgeoisie. Since establishing a closer relationship with the sea would entail the rise of this social group as a result of increased mercantile activity, the Sarmatians preferred to keep their distance, transferring the handling of business to Dutch merchants and the half-foreign city of Gdańsk. In contrast to the Polish bourgeoisie, the Dutch one did not pose a threat to the Polish nobility because it had no ambitions to send its representatives to the Polish Parliament. Making strategic choices can be difficult indeed. The Sarmatians weakened their potential to defend the country from foreign military forces in order to protect themselves from the internal class enemy. Such choices, made in the 16th and 17th century, also determined the basic parameters of Poland's geopolitical dreams and ambitions. Attention shifted east and south-east, towards the Black Sea. What use would the Sarmatians have from the second maritime spouse given that they were even incapable of handling the first one? This leads us to the heart of the matter: it was not a question of this or that sea, but rather of the territories extending between the two: the Intermarium, a huge and sparsely populat-

ed area of Central-Eastern Europe, abounding in some of the richest agricultural lands on the continent.

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AFTERLIFE OF THE STILLBORN EMPIRE

Adherence to Polish exceptionalism constitutes one of the fundamental problems with Poland's perception of its history. As early as in primary school, Poles are taught about the unique fate of the nation and its special condition, including its unprecedented suffering and the distinctive role this country is supposed to play in history. Within such an account, Poland does not participate in any broader historical processes that shaped the West and that have led to the development of current geopolitical relations. One widely-held opinion, for example, is that Poland never had any colonies. It had the »borderlands.« However, contrary to some magical beliefs, it is impossible to put reality under a spell, or – to employ more professional terms – ideology is incapable of entirely covering up the real. A matter-of-fact and disinterested analysis of Polish history allows to discern something else, namely that Poland's imagined intermarium, extending from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, would be its still-born colonial Commonwealth; a vast domain inviting imperial expansion similar to the colonial efforts of Western powers, with the exception that it would not be located overseas but in Poland's vicinity.

I have written a book-length study demonstrating the similarities between Polish borderlands expansion and colonial endeavours known from European history. The following is a summary of some of its major points –

138 for a detailed discussion please consult the work itself. The Polish attitude towards the Eastern-most parts of the Republic – especially Ukraine – and the history of Polish relations with inhabitants of these regions all feature key elements of a model colonial project. Polish political writers of the 16th and 17th century – e.g., Paweł Palcowski, Stanisław Witkowski, Kasper Miaskowski or Marcin Paszkowski – systematically developed a special discourse on the purposes and aims of Polish expansion in the said territories. The subjects they address as well as their argumentation perfectly match the tradition of colonial literature, and can be read alongside such Western texts as *Travail sur l'Algérie* by Alexis de Tocqueville, or the parliamentary speeches by Edmund Burke on the situation in British India (The Nabob of Arcot's Debts, and Article of Charge of High Crimes and Misdemeanors against Warren Hastings). Ukraine was supposed to provide spoils of war, and occasions to make fortunes from growing crops; moreover, it would act as a buffer zone making it possible to resettle surplus population. At the same time, it was strongly emphasized that Poland would »carry the light of culture« and introduce the »wild steppes« of Eastern Europe into the mainstream of European civilization, which neatly corresponds to the French idea of mission civilisatrice, and the British figure of the »white man's burden« as sketched in the poem by Rudyard Kipling under that title. In the first half of the 17th century – before the Khmelnytsky Uprising, which thwarted the Polish colonial project – Poles settled in Ukraine in large numbers. There is only one way to call this process: colonization.

Colonial figures are still very much alive in the Polish collective imagination, functioning today under

the banner of the above-mentioned »Jagiellonian idea.« According to it, Poland is predestined to assume the role of a local superpower operating in the Intermarium of Central-Eastern Europe, i.e. the area between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. Therefore, supporters of this project argue that Polish foreign policy ought to make this idea its main goal instead of pursuing deeper integration with the political and economic structures of the continent's western parts (this agenda is sometimes also called the »Piast idea« because it follows in the political footsteps of Poland's first historical rulers from the Piast dynasty). This perspective was also adopted by the late Polish president Lech Kaczyński as part of his foreign policy in the region – hence his deep engagement in the 2008 conflict in Georgia.

Thus, Poland willingly destroyed its bourgeoisie and merchants at a time when overseas trade served as the foundation on which worldwide empires were being built. In this way, Poland scored an own goal and sentenced itself to economic backwardness, which it has still not overcome. What is more, the Republic did not gain anything from eastern expansion in the long run. Newly acquired fertile lands made agriculture and exporting of unprocessed produce the dominant branches of Poland's economy, thus deepening its backwardness and lack of innovation. The eastern expansion also led to conflicts with Turkey and Russia. It was especially the latter that proved to be an unbeatable foe – in the three hundred years between mid-17th and mid-20th century Poland lost literally all of the Intermarium to Russia, including all the territories it gained during the eastern expansion between the 14th and 16th century. Territorial gains and losses balanced one another overall, but the entire affair consumed millions

140 of lives in a series of eastern conflicts, and made Poland suffer huge material losses.

This demise did not have its roots solely in military inefficiency. Poland simply did not have the tools necessary to support such a vast empire. Poles found themselves in the proverbial situation of having bitten more than they could chew. Managing a large empire demands huge administrative capabilities, which the Sarmatians lacked because they concentrated their efforts to limit and weaken Poland's central authorities and administration. For example, they opposed raising taxes – a practice that went hand in hand with the necessity for improved management in ever expanding cities, and was among decisive factors in the rapid development of administrative systems in the West. In contrast to the belief in the absolute superiority of Polish culture (widespread among Polish patriots), the Polish »model of civilization« was not really that attractive to those who lived in the Republic's colonial dominion. For the peasants, the arrival of the Poles meant primarily the intensification of serfdom. For the Cossacks – often occupying higher social strata, and sometimes even forming a quasi-aristocracy – Polish rule entailed a whole series of humiliations since the Polish nobility refused to accept them as equals, even though Cossacks sought to form a »Union of Three Nations,« which would involve accepting Ukrainians as equals of Poles and Lithuanians. However, this idea must have appeared to Poles as far too multi-cultural; For this they paid the highest price. It was the destabilization of this particular region following the Cossack rebellions that allowed Russia to easily expand in the Intermarium. The Khmelnytsky Uprising aborted, as it were, the Polish imperial project, whose develop-

ment was stopped only several decades after its possibility emerged following the Union of Lublin. It never even had the time to take full shape.

This is perhaps the crucial reason why I consider the »Jagiellonian idea« to be counterproductive. In Central-Eastern Europe it is only the Poles who believe that the expansion of Polish power could benefit this region in any way. Such aspirations are decidedly and actively opposed by Poland's eastern neighbours: Lithuanians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. Especially the last have no intention of living in a Polish Intermarium, which is something that Polish patriots ought to understand well insofar as the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) is simply the counterpart to Polish »cursed soldiers« (a term referring to guerrilla formations fighting the Soviet rule in Poland into the late 40's.)

Therefore, the only road towards the actual construction of the imagined Intermarium leads through war. As a matter of fact, this path is always taken when someone comes up with the idea that it would be easy and painless to iron out the folds on the undulating solid formed by assembling together the imperial dreams of different nations.

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ON YOUR KNEES BEFORE YOUR MASTER: DREAMS OF COLONIAL POWER AS THE SOURCE OF POLISH RACISM

Maciej Malicki
Trans. Grzegorz Czerniel

The current wave of Polish racism is usually interpreted in terms of either the fear of the unknown or the threatening Other. Today it has the face of an Islamist terrorist, represented – as it turns out – by a kebab shop. Political capital is made out of this fear by right-wing politicians, while the left is still trying to comprehend it. However, we tend to overlook another aspect of this subject, namely Poland's very own, unfulfilled dreams of power and domination. The narrative featuring Poles as eternal victims has only seemingly supplanted a more perfect one, in which they are themselves the dominators, the exploiting ones, the actual masters...

Perhaps it is worth to remember that the proudly repeated point about Poland not having had any overseas colonies stems from the fact that it simply could not capture any despite such intentions and efforts. Incidentally, over a decade ago Poland took part in the colonial »Arab

affair,« this time in Iraq. As the press enthusiastically reported, participation in this war was supposed to give Poland control over one of the oil-rich occupied zones, subsequently securing multi-billion dollar deals and increasing the country's international status. More recently, some customers of the »Prince Kebab« shop in Etł (in north-east Poland) tried to fulfil their colonial fantasies by addressing the staff with the words: »Paki, get down on your knees before your master!« The argument resulted in one Tunisian employee killing the offender.

Polish racism is neither new nor uniform. Racial stereotypes can be traced not just in the adventures of Staś and Nel – protagonists of the novel *In Desert and Wilderness* by Henryk Sienkiewicz, the most famous Polish colonial literary piece published in 1911. Beyond fiction, colonial discourse was heavily present in the public sphere and officially supported by the authorities in many state institutions and social organizations before the Second World War. One of the chief forces responsible for its promotion and cultivation was the Maritime and Colonial League, an organization which was established in order to acquire overseas colonies for Poland.

MARITIME AND COLONIAL LEAGUE

Admittedly, the League never achieved its main goal, while some of its endeavours were not only ineffective, but also comical at times. As part of a pioneering trade expedition, the League shipped to Liberia a careful selection of Polish prime export products including salt, cement, quilts and five hundred enamel chamber pots. Astonished Liberians reluctantly examined these products, concluding that they must come from a rather

144 uncivilized country if its people are not bothered by the odour of urine coming from the lidless pots.

However, lack of colonial success did not diminish the popularity of the League at home. At the height of its power during the 1930s, the League boasted over a million members. It founded the Institute of Maritime and Exotic Hygiene, as well as the Interdepartmental Colonial Study Unit at the Jagiellonian University. Other activities included raising funds for the Polish fleet, establishing school circles and summer camps for children, and organizing Colonial Days, which attracted huge crowds. First and foremost, however, the League published magazines, the total circulation of which amounted to over 600,000 copies (in comparison, the popular *Tajny detektyw* [*Secret Detective*], published in the same period, reached 150,000). These publications, geared to a wide range of audiences, included the academic quarterly *Sprawy morskie i kolonialne* [*Maritime and Colonial Affairs*], as well as magazines *Morze* [*Sea*] and *Polska na morzu* [*Poland at Sea*] propagating colonialist ideas among the working classes and school children. The following excerpts from the popular magazines published by the League feature key components picturing the image of colonies:

Colonies are countries ruled by stronger and more cultured states. Colonies are usually populated by primitive, wild peoples, unable to govern themselves, or by the ones unwilling to accommodate themselves to changes occurring worldwide, and rejecting modern inventions. Thus, they must yield to more progressive states. Negroes

are an example of the former group, while Indians – of the latter.

We did our job: we cleared the way to West Africa. In the eyes of the blacks and whites inhabiting the Gulf of Guinea we were different and unfamiliar.

The blacks glanced at us with curiosity, because they became acquainted with a new breed of the world's masters. The white men, on the other hand, were for the most part reluctant. As they felt that our arrival was a harbinger of further trade expeditions, and of Polish settlement in this milk-and-honey-flowing land, which they were the only ones to profit from so far. [...] Who shall follow in our footsteps? [...] This thought keeps haunting us as we have seen other nations earn fortunes in colonies, allowing the blacks to profit too, insofar as they become good consumers of wares produced by the European industry.

Life in Africa is stripped of all platitudes: here, people talk little and act plenty. Here, the individual and national struggle for survival is open and clear.

It is worth noting that the accounts featured in the publications for the educated did not substantially differ from

146 the ones for the working classes. Publications targeting the elites simply contained more detailed information about the climate, agricultural techniques, or issues related to transportation. Some texts would be longer, occasionally containing theoretical discussions of legal and political questions. Nevertheless, the core message was exactly the same: blacks are depicted as perennial children, invariably cheerful (»when Negroes get sad, they die«) yet unable to govern themselves (»the black race has not matured enough to rule a country«). Hence the need of a white master who would guide them.

COLONIAL FANTASIES AND STEREOTYPES ABOUT JEWS

The belief that the Poles are uniquely predestined to rule over peoples representing lower stages of development appeared in many publications. An account of the expedition led by Stefan Szolc-Rogosiński features the claim that the Polish travellers' »bearing made the blacks take such a great liking to them that – as it is worth remembering – in 1883 Janikowski was able to host on the »Polish« island of Mondoleh, off the shores of Cameroon, [...] a patriotic celebration of the anniversary of the Viennese Victory, with black enthusiasts cheering Poland. The confidence they put in our explorers was so great that ultimately the black caciques sold them their countries and implored Rogosiński to lead and govern them.«

The wide influence of the Maritime and Colonial League as well as the lucidity of its message lead to the conjecture that this organization significantly contributed to the spreading of racial stereotypes. What is more,

the effects of such activities also surfaced when Poland was under the communist regime. After the Second World War, the League was reactivated as the Maritime League. Its management included representatives of various political factions – Hilary Minc (a high-ranking official in the communist party), Stanisław Mikołajczyk (leader of the oppositional peasant party), and even Cardinal August Hlond. Within a short period of time, the organization managed to attract large numbers of supporters. Already towards the end of the 1940s it had ca half a million members. More recently, in the years 1990–2007, the League (which in the meantime returned to its original name: Maritime and River League) was chaired by Bronisław Komorowski who became President of Poland in 2010. Here, it is probably worthwhile to examine the relationships between the stereotypes spread by the League and the patterns shaping the image of other social, ethnic or religious groups in Poland. Why towards the end of the 1930s did the League intensively lobby in favour of forced emigration of Polish Jews to colonies, mainly Madagascar and Angola? What unravels in the opinion of minister Beck laughing off Polish aspirations to overseas territories? Beck pointed out that Polish colonies begin already in Rembertów, a town just outside Warsaw (now a district in its outskirts).

Even a brief glance at the Polish press from the interwar period allows to discern relationships between colonial notions and stereotypes about Jews. Magazines propagating the line of the National Democratic Party – which did not support projects of colonial expansion due to the risk of diluting and weakening the »Polish element« – contain comparisons that speak volumes. In one issue of *Myśl Narodowa* [*National Thought*], an anonymous author negatively assesses the ability of a

148 Jewish poet to master Polish literary language, comparing his faculties to that of a black man: »Mr Tuwim has provided solid testimony to the poverty that characterizes both him and crypto-Jewish poetry. This is rather obvious. Neither cries of arrogance, nor even a lifetime of hard work could allow a Jew to fully master the Polish language, just like they could not make a black man white, or the other way around. Wouldn't it be more reasonable for them to return to their jargon?« A similar opinion on the intellectual inferiority of the Jews – akin to that of blacks – was expressed in relation to Józef Wittlin: »Style closely corresponds to the author's imagination, sensibility and mind. [...] When it comes to questions of war and peace, morality and conscience, culture and barbarity, spirit and nature, Mr Wittlin approaches them with the mindset of a butcher gutting calves, the sensibility of a tick feeding peacefully on animal blood, the mindset of a Negro incapable of penetrating beyond the surface of all phenomena.«

References to blackness as a sign of inferiority and backwardness can be also found far from positions associated with typical interwar anti-Semitism. In 1934, *Wiadomości Literackie* [*Literary News*] – a generally anti-racist weekly magazine, which even supported the struggle for independence in colonies like India, a rare opinion in this period – published a series of reportages titled *Czarny Łąd – Warszawa* [*Warsaw's Black Continent*]. The author describes the impoverished and ignorant society of Warsaw's Jews. In a discussion of traditional education, she gives an account of a visit she paid to a cheder, which she compares to an African jungle: »On the ceiling and stained walls, painted in the colour of set blood, there winds a complex weaving of electric cords and gas pipes, resembling a fantastic arabesque whose

monstrous, subtropical tangle has spawned the tiny fruit of a single small light bulb hanging over the cathedral among loosely hanging ropes reminiscent of lianas.« 149

IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN POLISH RACIAL STEREOTYPES AND EASTERN EXPANSION?

Analogical calques were also used by pre-WWII press in descriptions of people from the borderlands. First of all, eastern territorial expansion was openly presented in colonial categories both before the partitioning of Poland and in the interwar period. A columnist for *Myśl Narodowa* remarks that »the same bond to mother-earth gave a boost of energy to the Polish landowners in the borderlands, especially when the Russian authorities began to force them out. It provided the spur that uplifted our forefathers, already centuries ago making them fly far into the east, lured by the black-earth soil of Podolia and Ukraine. If our colonization of the eastern territories is not marked by passivity or pastoralism, but by the winged cavalry's dash, a significant role was played in this by the feverish pursuit of land by the landowners.«

Similarly to the imagined expansion overseas, the hunger for borderland territories was always accompanied by a desire to carry out a mission of bringing civilization to the conquered, thus helping them to lift themselves from barbarity: »Before WWII, it was the Polish who were considered by the current borderland »minorities« as the cultured ones, avatars of »westernization« standing in direct opposition to the period's universal rule of »coarseness.« Although this »coarseness«

150 refers here to Russian influences, another dangerous enemy was the »rife« Jewish community: »every Polish colonist, merchant or craftsman becomes an important factor in Polonizing cities and changing their character set so far by the Jews – in establishing Polish social and cultural circles.« On certain occasions the people living in the borderlands would be also branded as both primitive and Jewish. The latter characteristic would be typically contrasted with the Polish creative spirit: »Nowadays the civilizing efforts of the Polish state encounter numerous obstacles because the Polish mode of thinkin needs to be implemented into the psyche of eastern people, in whom the natural and primitive character is combined directly with the Jewish socialist doctrine of opposition to any national form of organization, which is seen as endangering individual happiness.«

Is there any link between Polish racial stereotypes and Poland's eastern expansion, or – to employ a broader framework – the class relations dominant in Poland? To what extent the stereotypical characteristics of peasantry – drunkenness, laziness, lack of hygiene, and the inability to achieve self-reliance – corresponded to the features of the blacks as described in publications of the Maritime and Colonial League, ultimately matching the racist pattern? Perhaps it is no accident that a Pole dressed as a black or Arab man was a frequent sight at the Colonial Days organized by the League. As *Morze* reported in 1938, during a parade in the city of Radom »the boy scouts formed a colourful caravan of Arab merchants.« On another occasion, the town of Włodzimierz Wołyński served as an African village. The nearby river Ługa was explored by travellers wearing cork helmets while steering a raft. The crew comprised local people, whose faces were painted black, accompanied by a papier-mache crocodile.

It is equally puzzling to note that the confederate Maurycy Beniowski – one of the crucial heroes of Polish Romanticism and protagonist of the long poem by Juliusz Stowacki – does not primarily engage the Russian invaders, but rather the insurgents of the *Koliyivshchyna* [»impaling«], a bloody rebellion of Ukrainian serfs. His later fate, not accounted for by Stowacki, involved a journey to Madagascar after the fall of the Confederacy of Bar, where he became a king among the blacks.

This theme was often used in the interwar period, when Beniowski was regarded as the forerunner of colonial conquest. In a play titled *Pieśń o Beniowskim (narodziny wodza)* [*Song of Beniowski (birth of a leader)*], staged in Kraków by Władysław Smólski just several months before the outbreak of WWII, rebellious Polish exiles cry out: »General, we shall work such wonders that will put to shame the achievements of Cortés and Yermak (conqueror of Siberia).«

Before WWII, prejudices similar to those of racist character were certainly used in Poland not only in relation to »them,« but also to describe some of »us.« In the popular imagination of the period, the black people of Africa had a lot in common with the backward peasants from the borderlands, or the sidelock-wearing Jews of Warsaw. It seems that differences in religion or skin colour were not as important as the dimension of hierarchy- and class-dependent relations. They validated classifying various social groups by utilizing the category of inferiority, which was only later provided with further details such as laziness or ignorance. This probably sheds some light on the recently debated category of the »manor farm relation,« which is part of the collective heritage still passed on in societies shaped by the serfdom-based regime that survived in

152 Poland almost until modern times. Someone who is treated as an uncouth lout by others – and apparently all Poles treat each other in this way – will eagerly find someone else who occupies an even lower rung and – by his or her very nature – deserves to be treated as inferior. Accordingly, if it is true that the form of Polish racism is filled with the content of Polish social and class relations, then everyone in Poland should be seen as facing a serious problem.



WHO TOOK THE REVOLUTION AWAY FROM US?

Andrzej Leder

Trans. by Grzegorz Czemiel

A social revolution swept through Poland in the years 1939–1956. Although it was

viciously brutal and imposed from outside, it was nevertheless a revolution. It fundamentally remodelled the Polish society, paving the way for today's expansion of the middle classes, or to put it bluntly, the bourgeoisie. It means that this revolution conditions the changes occurring today, causing the greatest shift in the mentality of Poles, perhaps since centuries: the transition from a mentality determined by the rural tradition and manor house economics to one defined by the city and an urban lifestyle.

However, this revolution has not been properly addressed in intellectual terms.

This unacknowledged historical breakthrough whose repression nevertheless has significant and understandable reasons prevents the middle classes from acquiring self-awareness. Without any knowledge of its own origins and having a guilty conscience about the violence linked to its emergence, the currently strongest Polish social class evades defining its identity in clear terms. Despite being a new and powerful force, it basks in nostalgia driven fantasies about its quasi-noble past, manors and lands, uprisings and cemeteries, or »takes flight« by embracing global trends, which is best

exemplified by the staggering consumption among the middle classes of sushi. However, by avoiding cultural and ideological responsibility for itself and others; a responsibility corresponding to the social role it plays and the political power it represents, the new middle class has failed to enter public life as a self-conscious political subject.

With the greatest Polish social force being devoid of an adequate identity, the entire society appears lost in historical images of itself, unable to answer the simplest question: Who are we, and who do we want to be today and tomorrow?

I

No revolution can be reduced to a mere change of the political system and the transfer of power from one group to another. After all, such changes could be simply called a »coup.« Revolutions entail a stormy and thorough remodelling of the social substance, a shift in the economic and cultural hierarchies, as well as a mass redistribution of former ownership titles. Finally, revolutions are usually facilitated by the application of violence on a huge scale. It is precisely one such revolution that took place in Poland in the years 1939–1956. Typically, revolutions unleash massive and brutal forces in the newly emerging, amorphous society. Again, this is exactly what we see happening in Poland today. By breaking away from former cultural paradigms, revolutions create their own, novel symbolical universes and original mythologies, which somehow channel the free-flowing energies. However, this is something we find missing in today's Poland.

156 This revolution began when Nazi Germany invaded Poland, and was thus provided with a specific character: Polish society was not an active party in it. This does not mean that a large part of the population would shun the changes that followed, on the contrary many readily embraced them with all their hearts. However, their desire was realized by Others, not allowing the most subjectivized portions of the nation to identify with many decisions or actions, and to take responsibility for what happened. As a result, the Polish experience of the revolution resembles a nightmare: one in which the deepest and worst dreams and anxieties come true. In this dream, where fantasies and fears are realized passively, without subjective engagement, events unfold as it were, by themselves. »I did not sign the sentence.« »I did not see death.« »I did not speak foul.« »I did not enter somebody else's house.« It all happened by itself ...

This de-subjectivization began already in 1939 as the September Campaign turned into an absolute defeat, both factually and symbolically. To a large extent it was determined by the character of the invaders; however, to some degree it was also affected by the course taken by the Polish elites. Neither Germans nor Russians signed with the Polish government any capitulation agreement that would acknowledge whatever was left of the former state's subjectivity. What is more, neither of the two aggressors wished to respect former hierarchies and the order that defined the Polish political reality. Instead, both occupying forces began to implement revolutionary measures that irreversibly altered the face of the Polish society. This was primarily achieved by the obliteration of all vehicles of the symbolic order. Examples of such practices include Nazi-led arrests of professors from the University of Łódź already

in November 1939, and mass deportations from Lviv conducted by the NKVD.

The flight of the Polish government through the town of Żalishchyky (Zaleszczyki, in today's Ukraine) may have been politically justifiable but nevertheless left a painful void in the society's experience of its subjectivity. Large numbers of people felt abandoned by those supposed to order their lives and make them meaningful.

II

In the economic and social dimension, the key aspect of the revolution conducted in Poland by Nazi Germany was the Shoah. Becoming conscious of this may not be an easy task since today's absence of Jews in Poland makes it difficult to imagine their pervading presence before the Shoah. Supposedly everyone knows that »they« were a three million strong community, amounting to ten per cent of the society, and that they had their own towns, businesses, and large districts in Warsaw or Łódź ... However, it is impossible to imagine from today's perspective the complex and difficult consequences of this state of affairs, which is further obscured by stereotypes associated with anti-Semitism (frequently) or philo-Semitism (rarely).

What is more, it remains very hard to address both the Shoah and its actual consequences. Those who dislike Jews prefer not to speak of this, considering it to be a subject that already focuses too much attention. On the other hand, those who despair over the »murdering of the Jewish nation« can often sanctify the Shoah. Neither of the two approaches to this matter allows to conduct an analysis of its social consequences.

In order to grasp the terrible yet revolutionary effects of the Shoah, it becomes necessary to imagine that Jews constituted over a half of the population in most cities and towns in central and eastern Poland. Moreover, since they were a par excellence urban force for centuries, their commercial activity comprised a large portion of both small and large scale economic activity within the Polish society. As we know, this is something that Roman Dmowski pitied in his *Thoughts of a Modern Pole* [*Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka*].

One of the immensely difficult consequences of this situation is that the actual bourgeoisie did not have any symbolic legitimization in Poland, which entailed a lack of strong political position. Nor would this group make efforts to gain one. The book by Dmowski is a perfect example, perhaps not even the most radical, of how the potential of the Jewish »middle class« was disavowed. Probably it could not have been otherwise – collectively, Jews were not closely tied to Poland, and certainly did not feel like a Polish »political subject.« However, one consequence of the said disavowal of the most economically active, and most urban social group was that the Polish identity remained firmly rooted in an agrarian, peasant and manor-house poetic. It was only this type of Polishness that had political legitimization. Even though socialists, who were politically active wherever industry spread and culturally influential in high society strongly opposed the conservative and nationalist political rhetoric, paradoxically they did not strengthen urban identity because of their deep criticism of the bourgeois force.

Ultimately, given that sixty per cent of people lived often in striking poverty in the countryside; that social education was provided mainly by the Catholic

Church; that the intelligentsia, the offices, and the military were dominated by people originating from the gentry or closely connected with landed estates, the odds were against change.

The murdering of Jews, largely by the Nazis, but not only left a huge void in the social and economic fabric of the Polish society. However, it was filled soon enough. Primarily, Jewish property rights were granted to other citizens. If approximately sixty per cent of houses in hundreds of towns were occupied by Jews, their disappearance meant that these premises could be taken over by new owners. Similarly, all other Jewish property, the proverbial pillows and quilts, tableware and clothes was repossessed. The tastiest bits were naturally stolen by the Nazis, but there was still plenty left.

These facts have been recently acknowledged and described. It is important to recognize the scale of this phenomenon: it concerned hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people. Before the Second World War there were three million landless peasants, who were practically homeless. After peace was made, at least some of them could find a place of their own. Such a shift in terms of property rights was truly revolutionary.

Still, from the perspective of such revolutionary changes it was perhaps most important that ethnic Poles have taken over the economic positions formerly occupied by Jews. A previously Jewish workplace would come under the control of a Pole. Similarly, wholesale companies, distilleries or lumber mills would naturally be taken over, along with their clientele, by Poles. As disagreeable as it sounds, in the entire eastern part of Poland the elimination of the Jewish bourgeoisie paved the way for the formation of a new middle class that would be ethnically Polish.

160 Let us add, however, that ethnic terms are not employed here to partake in the nationalist obsessions of Roman Dmowski, not even a *rebours*. In a modern society, the Jewish middle class, just like any other, could constitute a part of the collective cultural or political subjectivity. Nevertheless, the Polish society before the revolution of 1939–1956 was not a modern one. The Polish *Imaginarium* did not facilitate such a position for the Jews, who themselves did not aspire to any such place in their imagination. The few yet influential socialists and liberals who formulated such an agenda could not change this on a larger scale.

Today, the described genesis of the small-town middle class casts a shadow on its self-awareness and sense of identity. It is not a historical analysis, but a purely logical one that teaches us despite there being many people whose grandparents would set up their own workshops and businesses without »borrowing« Jewish property that many people simply adopted whatever was left abandoned by former owners who died in gas chambers, were shot or basically hacked to death with an axe in a nearby grove. Obviously, such genealogies are seldom openly articulated. This is why a large portion of the Polish revolution remains forgotten, negated and ultimately ignored.

III

This amnesia was exacerbated by further events. The question of property origins was put aside along with the Red Army's entry into Poland. Together with the Polish communists, the Soviets immediately called into question all property: both that inherited from ancestors and the new acquisitions.

The onslaught arriving from east combined revolutionary ardour with the force of Russian imperialism, which was resurrected by Stalin. Both of these factors led to a complete restructuring of the Polish society and the annihilation of its former symbolic order.

Every society is organized around a system of symbols and images. They have their actual vehicles: people who personify them, representing the state, faith, tradition, institutions and all that is related to them; people who act as officials in this system; and finally, the largest group, the people who make this *imaginarium* meaningful through their everyday practices. The new Polish authorities installed by Stalin decided to actually obliterate the first and second group, in this way entirely depriving the third of any orientation in the world, consequently eliminating it in symbolic terms. Steps taken to achieve this goal are well known and include: mass killings in Katyń, lack of intervention during the Warsaw Uprising, arrests and frequent deportations of older Polish political elites as well as members of the resistance, and finally, the eradication of the political parties PSL [Polish People's Party] and PPS [Polish Socialist Party], the latter by assimilation. I would add to this list also one less obvious point: the murders of people associated with KPP [Communist Party of Poland] already in 1937.

The least brutal course of action was assumed probably in relation to the Church, although the new authorities made attempts to drive it out from the country's symbolic sphere, and blackmail its hierarchy.

Naturally, this was accompanied by truly revolutionary steps in the area of property rights. To shatter the previous order it was enough to displace hundreds of thousands of people from their »homes« in the east-

162 ern part of the country to the western, formerly German parts. However, a more fundamental change came with the agrarian reform, which deprived the »heirs« of their advantage over peasants in a society whose character had been determined for centuries by the relation between the manor house and the serfs or subjects, a relationship that has come to be deeply internalized. This new space was filled by millions of people, who thus began the process of developing an entirely new mentality. This process it ought to be emphasized, has not concluded yet.

This is not only a question of economic space, the many hectares that the agrarian reform handed over to the peasants, who still do not want to let go of them. It is also a matter of institutional and again symbolic space. After WWII, the position of the old elites was greatly weakened. Some emigrated, while those who stayed were affected by the physical repressions introduced by both invaders, and enfeebled by their own helplessness in the face of danger. After its eastern territories were torn away from Poland, many of their inhabitants were displaced to central and western (formerly German) parts. These people were often considered as ones representing the bastion of those-who-had-history, so their forced movement further delegitimized them as »guardians of identity.« This was augmented by direct and brutal discrimination implemented against them using political, legal and economic means, both with physical and symbolic violence.

The demise of the centuries old, deeply rooted dominance of the elites of noble descent, which occurred in Poland in the 1940s, stands next to the Shoah as the most decisive element of the Polish revolution. It

was the result of both physical displacement or repossession, as well as legal and symbolic oppression and humiliation. Although cruel and ruthless in the individual dimension, it nevertheless annihilated the mighty structure of images governing all layers of the Polish society, images that shaped social relations for centuries but stood in the way of changing that society.

Today's nostalgic fantasies about the landed estates of ancestors, often encountered among the middle classes, are mere daydreams. However, they do have their specific causes and explanations.

It is paradoxical that in this crucial area of the revolution the Polish society was again relatively weakly subjectivized. There was surely potential for rebellion among the »dispossessed« groups, primarily peasants. Dreams of a possible revolt certainly kindled deep inside. After all, not much time had passed since »economics« was based on the principle formulated by Anzelm Gostomski, according to which »the foundation of a solid economy comprises two things: serfdom and gallows.« Thus, when the authorities gave consent, or even encouraged peasants to »dance with their masters,« the latter would eagerly jump at the opportunity. The atrocities of the »Galician slaughter,« or the peasant attitude to uprisings are sufficient proof of this. However, in the 1940s this potential lay dormant as most people were either exhausted by the occupation or intimidated. The revolution carried out by the authorities that were installed with the help of Russian tanks was experienced by most as something external, something that one partakes in without conscious will or decision. Although such »participation« allowed to fulfil the hungry and vindictive dreams, it was accomplished without actual identification with one's actions, an identification

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that would be conditioned by a positive vision of the future, a consciously shaped set of dreams, goals and ideals, which would lend an aura of sense and justice to all the brutality.

Naturally, the Polish People's Republic [PPR] attempted to create such legitimization and convince a maximum number of people that it brought compensation for historical injustice. Some actually believed this, while many others saw it as a solid justification of their personal careers. The latter attitude was much more common, and seems to be more important from today's perspective.

The rapid industrialization subordinated to Soviet military interests does not seem to have really laid the material foundations for today's capitalism. However, it certainly enforced further movement of great masses to new urban industrial centres, extracting them from the agricultural context that comprised the entire horizon of the lives led by those people. They turned into high-rise dwellers, with all the ambiguity this entailed. All in all, it meant that, at the beginning of the 1990s, less than a half of all Poles lived in the countryside down from the post-war numbers of almost two-thirds of the population.

The post-war dispossession of »foreign capital« seems to be the least important effect of the 1940s revolution in social terms. The capital returned quickly and effectively as soon as it could. However, the remodelling of the society would be perhaps impossible without that step.

To conclude, the consequence of the two crucial events in the Polish revolution, i.e. the murdering of the Jewish middle class by the Nazis during the occupation, and Stalin's destructive, communist campaign against

the dominant clerical, military and intellectual elites of noble birth led to the creation of a vast space in which social advance was possible. That space was soon occupied by those ready to accept Soviet political domination. Just like the appropriation of post-Jewish »social space,« the advance into the area vacated by pre-war elites of the top and middle tier had a mass character, mobilizing the energy of large numbers of people. Those people, or more specifically: their children and grandchildren constitute today's »backbone« of Polish social structure.

An attempt to reverse this historical process lies at the foundation of Jarosław Kaczyński's political agenda. He has rightly diagnosed that the Poland of the 1940's and 1950's saw a revolution whose social effects have not been really annulled by the 1989 transformation. What is more, he equally aptly recognized that the systemic change which allowed the elites formed in post-revolutionary PPR to become the bourgeoisie actually completed this revolution. Therefore, he has assumed that by eliminating large portions of those elites it would become possible to return to the social architecture of the interwar period's Second Polish Republic.

In this, however, he is entirely mistaken. It is impossible to return to something that does not exist anymore. As has been verified on numerous occasions, the best teacher in this regard being Joseph de Maistre, a late counter-revolution in fact constitutes another revolution. It amounts to taking revenge on those who benefited from the revolution, and to the creation of space for another generation of »Red Guards.«

The proper function of the thirty years that followed the revolution, the period from 1956–1989 appears paradoxical for many reasons. In symbolic terms, this time was supposed to be a continuation of the revolutionary changes introduced beforehand. References were still made to Marx, Engels and Lenin (but not Stalin), while the political system was still based on the dominance of the communist party, closely connected to the USSR and fully controlling the key paths of social advance. However, when it came to more particular messages, a compromise was struck with the needs expressed by large parts of the Polish society. It was of crucial and symbolic significance for the remains of the pre-war elites to see the acknowledgment of the Warsaw Uprising mythology towards the end of the 1960s. For big groups of peasant origin it was important that public space was becoming increasingly accessible to the Catholic Church. Finally, the call for a »little stabilization« which involved settling down and focusing on the everyday allowed to develop a specifically middle-class, entirely unrevolutionary compromise of Edward Gierek's era.

In the social and economic dimension, the role of those thirty-three years appears even more paradoxical. If we consider, on the one hand, a static agricultural society, ossified and based on a safe hierarchy and an »inherited« division of roles, and on the other the feverish, fluid and competition-based urban capitalism, then the »later« period of the communist regime appears to be a transitory stage between the two. It was a sort of an incubator in which the »extended Middle Ages« of the Eastern European countryside no longer prevailed, but the Western »fluid modernity« was not yet fully implemented.

During this »transitory stage,« huge workplaces formed largely independent economic units, just like manor farms in the past. They would be governed, in patriarchal style, by directors and secretaries; the newly appointed »high and mighty,« arbitrarily granting privileges to the meek, and marginalizing the insubordinate. Workers, entirely deprived of any influence over the social reality, and relieved of any responsibility did not really differ much in terms of social status from former landless »workhorses.« Anyway, in most cases they originated from that class, and were not much different as far as mentality is concerned. Among the most solid guarantors of social position there were personal ties: either links based on loyalty to the new elites, i.e. the party and the security apparatus or the eternal bonds of family and friendship.

It is the »transitory« character that explains the specific stability and social peace that marked »real socialism.« Although forms of property rights and the symbolic hierarchy that lay at their foundation radically differed from the historical ones, and although the entire state was becoming westernized, with the industrial revolution resulting in the movement of huge numbers of Poles to cities, the social relations created in the late stages of the PPR mobilized the most traditional features of the »manor farm« character. In a nutshell, those relations acted as a protective measure against subjectivity and responsibility, against competition and the ruthlessness of economic failure. Ultimately, they provided a sense of stabilization and up to a certain point security.

The long duration of this hybrid political system allowed for a generational shift, as a result of which this organization of life became something obvious. In the

168 social dimension this consolidated the effects of the 1939–1956 revolution. The process in which this hybrid went into crisis and fell apart began in 1980 when masses of people started to demand political subjectivity, often not realizing what this entails.



In 1989 the middle-class revolution was complete. As is known, the transformation's greatest victims were Solidarity's »sans-culottes«; workers from large plants, and peasants, whose quality of life began to suddenly diverge from that enjoyed by the urban population. Paradoxically, this group also includes private businessmen operating in PPR, whose fortunes were often made by parasitizing the weaknesses of the hybrid system that married the manor farm to the factory. Despite grand emoluments and profits gained in the first twenty years that followed the transformation, the losing party will probably also include the traditionalist Church.

It is the new middle class that turned out to be the winner. This group has its origins in the elites of PPR: its intelligentsia, middle-tier office workers and party officials, and to some degree, though probably a lesser one than the theorists of »the clique« claim the security apparatus. These elites are the children of the 1939–1956 revolution. Of course, the »new« middle class would also include people representing the »old« one, whose genealogies go back to Poland's interwar period. They would be either ones returning from a several-generation-long emigration, or ones whose families remained faithful to the tradition, ethos and mentality of the pre-war bourgeoisie. However, they would not

be able to decide about the shape of the »new middle class,« nor would they constitute its substance. Consequently, they would not be the ones providing the new social hegemon with its symbolic identity.

The problem lies in the fact that this hegemon; the fruit of the revolution experienced »as if in a dream« is fundamentally unsure of its identity. Because the symbolic matter of the revolution; leftist ideology was brought by the Russian invaders, it had to be rejected after the transformation facilitated the liberation from the long dominance of communist ideology. Today it is eagerly erased or even used as a kind of »anti-symbolism,« i.e. as a negative term employed to refer to something supposedly positive. The weaker and more undefined this symbolic »positive,« the more emphasis is placed on the »negativity« of revolutionary symbolism.

It is quite interesting whether the ideological and symbolic justification provided by the communists in the Stalinist period (and later) has been entirely de-legitimized by today's discourse, or perhaps remains deeply repressed and covered up. Will anyone read works like Kruczkowski's *Kordian i cham* [*Kordian and the Boor*]? Does it define any element of today's imagination?

Unable to use the cursed anti-symbolism as an identity-defining term, and lacking any strong symbolism that would be autonomously developed in an act of revolutionary subjectivization, the middle-class hegemon seems to be still »dreaming.« As stated above, its fantasies might revolve around settling in mythical manor houses, or being part of an international elite extending from New York and London to Tokyo (sushi!). However, these daydreams make up for a certain lack, filling the void related to the absence of the act of political subjectivization; the act of revolution.

170 Some politicians of the Third Polish Republic attempt to make the Round Table Agreement and the democratic elections of 4 July 1989 into symbols of the new identity. These efforts are not entirely successful and the reasons for this are compelling. The attack on those memories, led by circles associated with the party PiS [Law and Justice], questions their legitimacy and precludes turning them into a symbolic asset shared by a great majority. The effectiveness of such attacks stems from a correct intuition about one significant truth, namely that these events and their symbols complete the meaning of the 1939–1956 revolution, marking a compromise between two factions within the dominant class, which was shaped in the course of that revolution. Without naming and determining the meaning of the historical turn that occurred in the 1940s, the democratic transformation from the early 1990s will appear as something incomplete, not fully rooted in the historical process.

Elevation of the transformation years (1989–1990) to the rank of a political ideal, or the second stage of the middle-class revolution, all the while remaining oblivious to, or symbolically dissociated from its first stage (1939–1956), leads to disorientation, ultimately making the entire series of events unfolding in the last fifty years seem ambiguous, or perhaps even inclining one to develop an aversion towards it.

VI

The above considerations provoke asking a broader question about the status of the kind of political (revolutionary) engagement that became the fate of the Polish

»political subject« in the years 1939–1956. It is also a question about the moral and political status of millions of gestures and actions that made this revolution possible. This pertains to every murder and denunciation paving the way to acquisition of wealth, every shot fired in the civil war, every decision about the taking over of property, every document signed, every consent and every instance in which someone turned away their eyes... However, it also pertains to every act of courage to enter the path of change, the hardships of social advance, the efforts to overcome former ways of thinking, all work done in the name of a nebulous vision of the future...

Furthermore, it becomes necessary to pose the following questions: Is it really possible to experience revolution and emancipation passively? Can one really become »emancipated« in the state of dream? Can such an experience lay the foundation for a project of a new political subjectivity? Can it help to develop, acquire and legitimize the kind of a set of symbols that would allow to orient oneself in the emerging global environment, where we need to find our place?

Wrong answers to these questions may prove to be very costly in social and political terms. One of the diagnoses attempting to explicate the fall of the 19th-century Germany; a country that boasted not only a huge economic and political success, but also one measured in terms of civilization and its spiralling into the abyss of war in the first half of the 20th century, ultimately leading to probably the greatest mass atrocity in history, draws attention to a deep dissonance between the actual sources of the success and power of German middle class, and its striking aversion to acknowledge them. This negation bred fantasies about Hermann's heritage of Teutoburger Wald, where he vanquished the

172 Romans, as well as about the causative power of spiritual acts and the special role to be played by Germans in this world.

Polish fantasies about the manor houses, left »over yonder,« are probably less dangerous to the country's neighbours, but they can profoundly infect people's minds. As a result, the Polish society loses the awareness of its place in the world, fashioning false identities and last but not least distorting the hierarchy of goals set both by individual representatives of the strongest social groups, and by these entire groups as collective political subjects.


However, becoming aware of one's place demands acknowledging one's troublesome genealogy. It requires from us that we ascertain the fact that we are all children of this ill-fated and cruel revolution carried out by others, and that it deeply remodelled the Polish society.

Moreover, it entails taking responsibility for what happened back then, and acknowledging that it was our fathers or grandfathers who were taking over, adopting, turning a blind eye, and even killing, denouncing or betraying. At the same time, however, they were taking decisions and accepting challenges, marching into the future and building, both materially and by laying the foundations for a new society. This is the contemporary, future-oriented, not merely moral function of acts that involves taking responsibility for what happened in Jedwabne. A strictly moral one would be limited to doing justice. A future-oriented one, however, involves taking responsibility for oneself.

At the same time, it becomes paramount to take responsibility for many other matters such as the post-war fate of the Germans, the Masurians and the

Silesians, the civil war of 1944–1948 and other, often unrecognized matters. It is vital to wake from the dream in which the greatest historical transformation of the Polish society seems a nightmare that frightens and yet sates secret appetites, one that is experienced without self-consciousness.

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ACCORDING TO MARIA JANION
RECLAIMING BEING SLAVIC WOULD
APPROACH POLAND TO RUSSIA, THEREFORE
ITS SLAVDOM IS DISTANT. THE SAME
DETACHMENT MAKES POLES ASPIRE
TO THE WESTERN UNIVERSALISM,
DEFENDING THE LATIN, CATHOLIC AND
MEDITERRANEAN VALUES (BUT ALWAYS
WITH AN ELEMENT OF SELF-COLONISATION).
POLISH IDENTITY IS THEREFORE
BASED ON THE TRAUMA OF INFERIORITY
AND ALIENATION FROM WHAT IS 
UNIVERSAL (THE WESTERN WORLD);
THE SUPERIORITY TOWARDS OTHER SLAVS
AND FINALLY THE PERMANENT SELF-
VICTIMISATION, WHICH DISABLES A PROPER
CRITICAL SELF-EXAMINATION.

NO WOMEN
NO **KRAJ**

#czarnyponiedzialek

W

17

SEEKING THE AUTHENTIC: POLISH CULTURE AND THE NATURE OF POST- COLONIAL THEORY

Stanley Bill



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The notion of post-colonial theory has been floating around the Polish intellectual scene for the last ten years like a colorful balloon that nobody can ever quite capture or claim. Given the country's experience of foreign occupation and domination

throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – and an earlier quasi-colonial history of its own in present-day Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine – post-colonial theory seems at first glance to open some intriguing possibilities in Polish historical, political, sociological, cultural and literary studies. Indeed, various scholars in all these fields have advocated a turn towards it, though the discussion has generally failed to advance far beyond repeated prefatory remarks and prolegomena. Postcolonial theory in Poland increasingly resembles an unrealized possibility that has somehow already exhausted its creative potential – a stillborn theory. Nevertheless, the slogan of »post-colonialism« contin-

ues to crop up in the Polish academy – and especially in public discourse – with increasing regularity. In many cases, the thinkers and writers applying the concepts of post-colonial theory have openly associated themselves with the Polish conservative right. This is surprising when we consider that post-colonial theory in its canonical forms owes a great deal to Marxist, postmodernist and feminist theories – none of which are especially dear to Polish conservatives. In this paper, I shall begin by examining this paradox, assessing why the theory might be so appealing to conservative intellectuals and how they have employed it. Yet post-colonial theory has also appeared in a very different ideological context in Poland – namely, in the work of Maria Janion, an eminent literary critic who belongs to the opposing side of the ideological divide in Poland's contemporary »culture wars« between »traditionalist« and »progressive« factions. In my analysis of her work, I shall suggest that the fundamental imaginative repertoires fueling quite disparate visions of Poland's past and future may turn out to have a great deal in common. On this basis, I shall bring the Polish case into broader discussions on the very nature of post-colonial theory, with particular reference to Vivek Chibber's recent study, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (2013).

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CONSERVATIVE DISCOURSE

First of all, I would like to briefly reconstruct a general outline of the Polish conservative version of post-colonial theory. Clearly there are important distinctions between diverse thinkers, but the theory tends to appear in

180 a surprisingly consistent and homogeneous form. In my reconstruction, I shall refer primarily to the thought of four leading figures: the two literary scholars currently providing the main intellectual impetus, Ewa Thompson (Rice University) and Dariusz Skórczewski (John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin); the influential conservative magazine columnist and author, Rafał Ziemkiewicz; and the eminent poet, Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz.¹

The basic shared assumption of all four thinkers is that Poland's nineteenth- and twentieth-century history of domination, partition and conquest by foreign powers is essentially comparable with the colonization experienced by the peoples of Africa, Asia, the Americas and Australia. According to this narrative, the empires of Russia, Prussia and Austria »colonized« the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the end of the eighteenth century, dividing it into three »partitions.« A century and a half later – after two decades of renewed independent existence between the wars – the Soviet Union »colonized« the Second Polish Republic in 1944.² These historical experiences imprinted themselves deeply in Polish thought, politics, culture, art and literature throughout these periods. Today the imprints are still evident in all these cultural spheres – and in a general Polish »mentality« – since Poland is now a classically »post-colonial« culture. From this point of departure, the authors of the narrative set about applying the highly developed apparatus of post-colonial theory to the Polish case, using its key concepts as ready-made explanatory tools, introducing certain adjustments only where the specific context necessitates them.

According to Skórczewski, the Western European powers »orientalized« Polish culture in a fashion similar to the operations first described by Edward Said in re-

lation to the Middle East – feminizing Polish men and assigning a lower level of cultural development to the entire region.³ Poles subsequently interiorized these judgments, and now they suffer from a typically post-colonial inferiority complex. Thompson argues that Homi Bhabha's concepts of »mimicry« and »hybridity« are also relevant to the Polish case, since an orientalized, denigrated and devalued Polish culture has sought slavishly to mimic the patterns of its colonizers, thus giving rise to a new hybrid culture characterized by a mingling of native and foreign elements.⁴ All four thinkers agree that this hybridity and deferential mimicry now find expression above all in the ideology of Poland's cosmopolitan »elites,« which include members of the »liberal« ruling Civic Platform party, as well as journalists associated with Adam Michnik's *Gazeta Wyborcza* newspaper and with TVN television. These »elites« supposedly deny the native soil from which they have sprung, always looking to Western Europe and the United States for cultural, political and artistic models to follow, disdaining everything naturally »Polish« as inferior. On this basis, Ziemkiewicz characterizes the primary political and cultural fault line in contemporary Poland as a division between »creoles« and »natives,« between those whose minds are captive to the post-colonial mentality and those who have freed themselves of it in a return to an original »Polishness.«⁵

In general, the Polish conservative post-colonial theorists simply apply Said's and Bhabha's most famous slogans without much discussion of their nuances or local specificities. At the same time, certain troubling inconsistencies inevitably demand theoretical solutions more precisely adapted to Polish circumstances. For instance, Russia – in both its imperial and Soviet mani-

182 festations – has been the major colonizer in the Polish case, yet it would be difficult to find examples of Polish cultural phenomena consciously mimicking Russian models, since Poles have tended to view themselves as civilizationally superior to the »barbarian Mongols« to their east. Accordingly, Russian political domination of Poland has never implied the accompanying cultural hegemony so typical of other colonial contexts. Today this fact is also evident in post-communist Poland. Indeed, none of the theorists claim that the so-called »creole« elites look to Russia for their cultural models. The most recent colonial experience is Soviet and eastern, yet the hybridized culture looks longingly to the west.

The conservative theorists develop two solutions to this problem. First, we find a certain conflation of the structures and ideology of European integration with those of the Soviet Union under the broad banner of political »leftism.« For instance, Rymkiewicz insists that »the European Union was invented precisely [...] in the period of early communism.«⁶ Thompson does not support such excessive claims. Instead, she devises a second solution to the problem: the notion of the »surrogate hegemon.«⁷ In short, since the oppressed Poles could not find a cultural hegemon in their barbaric eastern colonizers, they had to search elsewhere to satisfy their need to be subordinate. The west became the shining ideal for post-communist Polish elites, whose members were already accustomed to obediently following instructions from outside the country.

I do not wish to discuss the specific validity of this application of post-colonial theory here, though various other Polish scholars have pointed to what they regard as fundamental differences between Poland's situation and the circumstances of the post-colonial

Global South. Some have proposed the term »post-dependency« as more appropriate to the Polish situation.⁸ However, I am more interested in examining how the Polish conservative post-colonial theory functions in order to make some broader points about the question of »culture« in Poland and about post-colonial theory more generally. Above all, post-colonial theory is useful to Polish conservatives because in its most simplified form it fundamentally represents an ethical and political project with strongly essentializing tendencies. As Skórczewski puts it, the central issue here is »the ethical project of post-colonial redefinition of Poles' identity.«⁹

The most important function of post-colonial theory in this sense is not to describe the reality of Polish cultural history – insofar as this could ever be possible – but rather to diagnose and evaluate the political and cultural order of contemporary Poland. Indeed, when the word »post-colonial« appears in Polish public discourse, it inevitably imposes a value judgment. I shall argue that this is not only the case when conservatives use it, though – by and large – conservatives have found the term most conducive to their aims of defending traditional, Catholic values and a »primordialist« understanding of nation against new multiculturalist, individualist and civic models of identity.

Here the post-colonial theory comes into play on an immediately political level. The »creoles« are the liberal political and intellectual elites, supposedly holding themselves scornfully above the backward masses, while the »natives« are the rest of the Polish nation, whose interests are represented by the socially conservative Law and Justice opposition party, the Catholic Church or various neo-nationalist groups – with whom Thompson, Rymkiewicz and Ziemkiewicz, respectively,

184 identify.¹⁰ The division between »creoles« and »natives« is axiological. The »creoles« are self-hating Poles, internally divided, pretentious, artificial, inauthentic, smitten with the West and its alien values, incapable of thinking for themselves, »lemmings« – as the conservative press likes to call them – haunted by complexes resulting from an interiorized sense of inferiority inculcated by the western »surrogate hegemons.« The »natives« are simple, authentic, deeply committed to Christian values, proud of their own traditions, devoid of any complexes before the West. As Leszek Koczanowicz characterizes it, the basic opposition is between »the real Poland« and the »fake or inauthentic Poland.«¹¹

Postcolonial theory lends this opposition between alleged authenticity and inauthenticity a strongly ethical dimension, as well as a sense of historical telos. The creole elite is on the wrong side of history, trapped within its own colonized mentality, while the masses of the Polish nation – perhaps lulled to sleep or partly colonized by creole propaganda – must eventually rise to reclaim their authentic identity. This is unmistakably a rhetoric of emancipation, or even of revolution – a conservative revolution. Various conservative writers, including the poet Rymkiewicz, have employed the classic metaphor from Adam Mickiewicz's national mystery play *Forefather's Eve*, Part III to describe the current historical phase. The nation is like lava, with a cold crust as its upper layer and fire deep within.¹² Eventually, the revolutionary volcanic eruption will occur, and indeed many conservative commentators welcomed the surge in activism around the 2010 Smoleńsk catastrophe as the first rumblings of revolution.

Here the Polish case sheds a particularly stark light on the general potential of post-colonial theory

to essentialize and exclude. In this sense, it may make a key contribution to important debates taking place within the broader field. As early as 1993, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak backed away from her earlier concept of a »strategic use of essentialism,« lamenting that her notion »simply became the union ticket for essentialism.«¹³ More recently, in 2013, Vivek Chibber has advanced a more radical argument in his book, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, claiming that post-colonial theories, particularly those of the so-called »subalternist school,« ultimately promote a strongly essentializing vision of culture, especially in the case of non-Western societies. Consequently, such theories have obscured the global reach or relevance of capitalism, class and the universalist Enlightenment projects of emancipation. According to Chibber: »The lasting contribution of post-colonial theory [...] will be its revival of cultural essentialism and its acting as an endorsement of orientalism, rather than being an antidote to it.«¹⁴ To put the problem in other terms, post-colonial theory defends the specificity of local cultures, but in doing so it risks falling into a form of »culturalism,« placing illegitimate limitations on the repertoire of emancipatory action available to individuals in specific places. The emphasis on essential cultural difference obscures both the universal power of capital and the universal human needs forming the basis of any potential resistance to it: »The core thesis of post-colonial studies is that a deep structural chasm separates East and West, so much so that it undermines any framework claiming universal applicability.«¹⁵

Chibber seems particularly astonished that post-colonial discourse has become so prevalent on the left: »For two hundred years, anybody who called herself

progressive embraced [...] universalism. It was simply understood that the reason workers or peasants could unite across national boundaries is because they shared certain material interests. This is now being called into question by subaltern studies, and it's quite remarkable that so many people on the Left have accepted it.¹⁶ The subalternist project of emancipation is fundamentally anti-leftist in its attack on the concept of common class interests across cultures and the accompanying underestimation of capital's universalizing power. Therefore, the theory's popularity among ostensibly »leftist« intellectuals appears to Chibber as a terrible misunderstanding: »The irony of the project is that, while it presents itself as the new face of radical critique, as the leading edge of criticism in an age of global capitalism, its arguments resurrect key pillars of conservative ideology.«¹⁷

In this context, the Polish case seems tailor-made for Chibber's claims, effectively exposing the true nature of post-colonial theory as he understands it. There is nothing ironic or inconsistent about the Polish conservative post-colonial project. After all, its aim is quite explicitly to »resurrect key pillars of conservative ideology.« The Polish conservative theorists evince a strong positive interest in promoting cultural essentialism and anti-universalism, since they wish to propagate a particular vision of exclusive and integral »Polishness.« More important, the resulting incapacity to launch a critique of global capitalism is a perfect fit with Polish conservatism, because its critical project is not directed at capitalism, but rather at Eastern European communism and its supposed remnants as a post-colonial system.

Chibber attacks the subalternists for their poorly supported claims that »the forms of domination that

obtain in post-colonial formations are not capitalist, and that they cannot therefore be analyzed through categories developed by political economy.«¹⁸ Yet in the Polish case, the post-colonial formations condemned by conservative theorists may genuinely not be capitalist at all. Indeed, the most recent »colonizer« in Poland was the Soviet Union, whose military power installed a government that dismantled private capital in the country and introduced a system of centralized economic planning. These colonizers were at least ostensibly communists. Accordingly, it comes as no surprise that the leader of the conservative Law and Justice party, Jarosław Kaczyński, would accuse the ruling elites in contemporary Poland of presiding over a system that is both »post-colonial« and »post-communist,« where these terms are almost synonymous.¹⁹ For many Polish conservatives, including Ziemkiewicz and Rymkiewicz, post-colonial emancipation partly continues to mean liberation from a dominant leftist agenda which they still perceive in the political structures of post-1989 Poland and even of the European Union. In other words, the Polish conservative post-colonial theory negatively confirms Chibber's hypothesis by uniting fierce anti-leftism with a powerful emancipatory political project rooted in visions of authentic culture.

»AUTHENTIC CULTURE« AND THE BLACK HOLE OF HISTORY

The question immediately arises: if contemporary Poland is post-colonial, culturally hybridized and inauthentic, then when did the authentic Poland exist? There are various responses to this question, but Ewa Thompson's

is clearly the most prevalent. She finds the authentic Poland in the pre-partition era of Sarmatianism – the peculiar gentry culture of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that dominated from its golden age in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to its long decline over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to Thompson, the historical and literary documents from this period reveal a fiercely independent and self-reliant republican culture, comfortable in its own skin, justly proud of its own productions, somewhat disinterested in the outside world, unselfconsciously taking its place as an equal among other European cultures.²⁰ Yet here the argument begins to break down, as essentializing claims about authentic culture are perhaps bound to do.

The Sarmatian era in Polish culture was precisely characterized by an extraordinarily high level of hybridity and mimicry of foreign models. We need only walk the streets of Krakow – the former royal capital – to appreciate this fact. The original medieval core of the city was laid out according to a German framework for urban planning and legal regulation dictated by the Magdeburg Rights. Many of the city's distinctive structures and interiors were built in Italian styles by Italian architects during the Polish Renaissance. Thompson herself concedes that most Polish noblemen of the era received their educations in Western Europe. For instance, the greatest poet of the time, Jan Kochanowski, had his university education partly in Ducal Prussia and Italy. His lyric poetry borrowed substantially from the work of Pierre de Ronsard, whom he met in France, while his famous drama – *The Dismissal of the Grecian Envoys* (1578) – was heavily indebted to the innovations of the Italian Gian Giorgio Trissino's earlier tragedy,

Sophonisba (1524).²¹ Kochanowski wrote with equal facility in Latin and Polish, and the majority of the poetic forms he employed were seamless adaptations of earlier Latin and Italian models. His magnificent literary achievements were precisely the hybridized products of a fruitful transplantation of foreign poetic conventions into the soil of the native language.

Admittedly, Sarmatian culture became more inward looking as the seventeenth century began, but even the most xenophobic Sarmatian noblemen continued to flaunt Western European luxuries and to wear styles borrowed directly from Tatar and Turkish antecedents. The very names of the classic items of clothing and decorative weaponry betrayed their foreign origins – for example, the *żupan* (long cloak), *kontusz* (outer garment) and *karabela* (curved saber). More importantly, Sarmatian noblemen enthusiastically emphasized their own foreign lineage in stories and myths about themselves. Thompson and Skórczewski both refer to the post-colonial concept of »necessary fictions« constructed by nations afflicted by a cultural inferiority complex – myths hailing an ancient and glorious past. Yet Thompson does not consider the necessarily fictional function of the Sarmatian myth itself, founded on the claim that Polish noblemen were descendants of the ancient Iranian Sarmatian tribe.

The Sarmatian theory led to a peculiar self-orientation, expressed via the adoption of various extravagant styles of Eastern custom and dress, perhaps in an attempt to define a glorious Polish historical identity separate from the dominating influence of Western European cultural forms. Moreover, the specific content of the myth itself imposed a highly colonial interpretation of Polish history, according to which an Iranian



192 tribe had swept into Slavic lands and conquered the native population.²² The ensuing divide between the ruling Sarmatian szlachta²³ and the downtrodden Slavic peasantry was far more severe than any contemporary division between »creoles« and »natives.« So where is the authentic Poland?

In fact, the problem of authenticity runs much deeper than these specific observations. Clearly all cultures are hybridized and dynamic, since no human culture has developed without any contact whatsoever with other cultures. Nevertheless, in the canonical post-colonial cases, one can – at least in principle – draw a relatively clear line between »native« cultural content and the aggressive incursions of the colonizing cultural hegemon. This is especially clear in the Americas and Australia, where fully formed and developed local cultures encountered Western cultures they had never previously seen. So the line between »authentic« and »inauthentic« content in the post-colonial context of contemporary Australian Aboriginal cultures is often not difficult to locate, though even here the idea of cultural authenticity is problematic, once again throwing the essentializing tendencies of post-colonial theory into a stark light.²⁴ Things are even more complex in the South Asian and African spheres – which had often seen varying degrees of earlier contact with European cultures – though undoubtedly certain crucial and identifiable political, religious and economic distinctions remained.

The Polish situation is nothing like these classic post-colonial cases. From its symbolic beginnings with the baptism of Mieszko I in 966 A.D., Polish culture has always been a hybridized culture developing under the influence of Western and Southern European »colo-

nizing« influences. In fact, the symbolic beginning is above all an irruption of hybridity, the dragging of Slavic lands along the Warta and Vistula Rivers into the orbit of Western Christianity and its associated culture. The symbolic origin of Polish nationhood lies in an act of cultural colonization willingly accepted by a tribal elite for immediate political gain, as the nascent state adopted the Christian religion from Rome in order to stymy the aggressive intentions of the Germanic Holy Roman Empire. According to this theory, Mieszko I would become the first »creole,« betraying the earlier »authentic« elements of his own pagan culture.

The distinguished literary scholar Maria Janion – who is renowned as a strong critic of traditionalist versions of Polish culture – has developed her own post-colonial theory based on a similar vision of history in her book, *Uncanny Slavdom* (2006). Her project unites multiple threads, yet an important part of her argument is that Polish culture is still deeply scarred by an original colonial encounter with Latin civilization via an often brutal conversion to Christianity. The Western Slavs lost their mythology, and thus their cultural identity, extinguished by the missionary zeal of the new cultural masters.²⁵ Janion finds the traces of this deep wound in certain classic works of Polish literature, particularly from the Romantic era, where Slavic mythological motifs frequently appear, almost like the return of the repressed. From 966 A.D. onward, Poles have been alienated from themselves, feeling inferior to the colonizing West, as peripheral latecomers to Latin civilization, and superior to the Slavic East, where they have often entertained a colonial sense of civilizing mission. As the playwright Sławomir Mrożek once formulated the dilemma, Poland has been east of the West and west of

194 the East.²⁶ For Janion, the contemporary Polish imagination must struggle against the ghosts of this originary colonization, which express themselves in what she calls the »messianism of national megalomania.«²⁷ Janion complains that Poland in its current form is »a shallow monolith, mostly national and Catholic.«²⁸ In order to join Europe on truly equal terms, it must first throw off this restrictive monolithic identity, embrace diversity and its own uncanny eastern Slavicness – its »niesamowita słowiańszczyzna.« In other words, it must overcome the legacy of its original colonization by Latin Christianity.

What strikes me most here is that Janion essentially uses the »post-colonial« moniker for the same distinctly political purposes as the conservative theorists – namely, to draw a fundamental line between authentic and inauthentic identity. While Thompson draws the line at the close of the Sarmatian era, Janion simply goes further back in time to the tenth-century Christianization and the beginnings of the Polish nation within the Latin Christian political system, where an alien new religion and mythology imposed themselves on an authentic pre-Christian Slavic proto-Poland. Accordingly, those who would support the model of a national and Catholic Poland today – that is, the opposition Law and Justice Party, the conservative media and the more radical nationalist political options – stand for an inauthentic Poland, an alienated and complex-ridden Poland, a post-colonial Poland. Once again, the argument is primarily political rather than historical, and its aim is to exclude. History appears only as a useful tool in an ongoing ideological struggle over the political and cultural shape of contemporary Poland.

Postcolonial theory in its diverse Polish forms inevitably returns to the contemporary political question

of authenticity: what or who is the real Poland? With her account of the Latin colonization of the Western Slavs, Janion unwittingly reproduces the narrative of Polish martyrdom and exceptionalism she is so keen to oppose, since she does not acknowledge that this history – in diverse forms – is common to all European nations, all of which have their own pre-Christian repressed. After all, Europe as a whole is essentially the product of the encounter between southern Latin Christianity, with its classical civilizational foundations, and various northern and western pagan cultures. Admittedly, Poland came into existence relatively late on the geographical periphery of this European scene, and it has historically tended to be a net consumer rather than producer of influential cultural models. Therefore, as Ryszard Nycz observes, we can only come to appreciate the originality and uniqueness of Polish cultural productions after a full recognition of this peripheral status.²⁹

Postcolonial theory is of little use in this context. Both the putative colonization and peripherality of Polish culture are inscribed into its very origin, which ultimately cannot be separated from the symbolic moment of 966, since everything before this moment is practically inaccessible to historiographical reflection – a black hole or cultural unconscious that betrays its existence only in traces. We shall never uncover the »authentic« Poland, so we are left with a peripheral, hybridized and dynamic Poland whose political existence has been fragile and whose participation in European culture has often been characterized by what we might alternatively describe as »belatedness.« Yet scholars and public intellectuals on both sides of the Polish culture wars continue their search for »the authentic.«

Liberal critiques of the essentializing »right-wing« version of post-colonial theory in Poland are potentially susceptible to the same trap of fetishizing certain »authentic« visions of Polishness to the exclusion of others. In this sense, when Maria Janion argues for the shaping of a »new Polish imaginary« in the face of what she calls a »crisis in Polish identity,« she seems to be saying that a new »Polish identity« can be imagined that would somehow be more coherent with the »authentic« nature of its Slavic origins.³⁰ Instead of orientalizing Russia by insisting on its inferiority to a European Poland, Poles should embrace their own non-»European,« »Slavic« identity. Only in this way will Poland be able to take its independent place – unfettered by complexes or narrow parochialism – at the political and cultural table of a redefined and united Europe. Janion wishes to point to an »alternative way of thinking about (Poland's) place in Europe.«³¹ In her solution, we find echoes of Witold Gombrowicz's arguments from half a century earlier in the first volume of his *Diary*: »We will not be a truly European people until we separate ourselves from Europe because being European does not mean fusing with Europe, but being one of its integral parts, a very distinct, integral part.«³²

What is most surprising here is that Janion – famous as a sworn enemy of integral nationalist visions of culture – turn out to be a »nationalist« herself, at least in the ethno-symbolist understanding of this term outlined by Anthony D. Smith: »The nationalist's overall aim is to ground the nation on firm and »authentic« foundations [...] to unite the community, restore its autonomy and

self-expression and, in this way, to prepare it to take its rightful place in the concert of nations.«³³ According to Smith, ethnicity provides the most typical foundation for such narratives. This would certainly appear to be the case in Janion's theory of »uncanny Slaviness,« where cultural identity is bound up with an original ethnic identity that cannot easily be dismissed or excluded from the collective »ego.«

Undoubtedly, Janion offers a broader and more inclusive model of Polishness than the primordial nationalists of the right wing. However, she still reveals an essentializing sense of a singular cultural history that can and perhaps should dictate how people imagining themselves as »Poles« – and this remains a largely unexamined category within her argument – are to define themselves in contemporary times. Consequently, the present situation of young Polish citizens emigrating, or saying »farewell to Poland,« for a more liberated European identity appears to Janion as a cultural crisis in need of creative cultural solutions. Poles must rediscover or perhaps even recreate the authentic dimensions of their own natural culture, which remains hidden in the primordial mists of ethnic origin. For Janion, authentic »Polish culture« seems to exist above all for those who can imaginatively trace their identity – and their identity troubles – back to the time of the pagan Slavic tribes before the crucial moment of Christianization.

One way or another, such arguments exhibit a species of »culturalism,« or what Leszek Koczanowicz describes as the »culturological illusion,« assuming »a continuity of culture and its tropes [...] that goes beyond any economic, political or social changes.«³⁴ But where does this illusion find support in such a self-evidently mutable reality? In the very different context of the cul-

198 turally pluralist United States of America, Walter Benn Michaels argues that »the question of which culture we belong to is relevant only if culture is anchored in race.«³⁵ His point is that any sense that particular people have a right or responsibility to attach themselves to particular cultures is ultimately grounded on the assumption of essential racial distinctions. Therefore, the supposedly progressive ethos of cultural pluralism is at heart a racist doctrine, since it is »the appeal to race that makes culture an object of affect and that gives notions like losing our culture, preserving it, stealing someone else's culture, restoring people's culture to them, and so on, their pathos.«³⁶ At the same time, this focus on race obscures the operation of economic inequality across racial boundaries.

Can we discern a similarly racialized doctrine in today's distinctly non-multicultural Polish case? Clearly the conservative »post-colonial« theorists assume that »Polishness« is the right culture for »Poles.« But do they understand the word »Pole« in an ethnic, political, religious or geopolitical context? Would Jewish Poles have the same right to this culture? Perhaps not, since Thompson concedes that her Sarmatian myth would be »hard to imagine without Catholicism in its background,«³⁷ while Skórczewski advocates a current of thought that would find »the core of national self-identification in Christianity.«³⁸ Janion undoubtedly offers broader possibilities, arguing that young Poles would not feel so inclined to renounce their Polishness in favor of a liberating European identity if Polish culture were more »diverse« and »colorful.« In this way, she follows other more liberal scholars in seeking to forge »broader communities that would offer a secular plane for people to come together.«³⁹ Yet this still suggests a cultural

solution to a cultural problem, while crucial questions remain as to which specific characteristics would then define the borders of this broader culture and for whom it would exist.

Perhaps »Polish culture« would denote a purely linguistic territory, so that Polishness would reduce itself to a certain rootedness in the Polish language and its products. But then what about culturally self-identifying »Poles« who do not speak Polish, like so many Polish Americans or the descendants of people deported from Poland's former eastern territories to Soviet Central Asia? And what of Polish-speaking people in Israel who feel irrevocably cut off from »Polish culture«? Janion speaks of »Poles« as if this term in itself constituted a perfectly natural classification. The challenge for her is to create a more modern and inclusive »Polish culture« to replace the outmoded patriarchal, national and Catholic model. The new culture would find space for women, non-Catholics, sexual minorities and its own »Slavic« roots. Yet the very notion of »Poles« still remains a strongly essentialized category in this schema, perhaps despite Janion's intentions, and the new culture would predominantly exist for them.

Although Janion never says so explicitly, it is difficult not to conclude from her argument that the unspoken foundations of »Polishness,« especially with its »Slavic« provenance restored, are ultimately ethnic. This is especially clear at moments when this identity is not the direct focus of attention. For example, Janion writes in passing about the mixed emotions of superiority and inferiority that have haunted the attitudes of »Poles towards Jews.«⁴⁰ Such a statement makes little sense if we assume, as the multicultural narrative of Polish identity theoretically does, that a person may be both Polish

200 and Jewish at the same time. Perhaps we might define the tension as a clash between Jewish Poles and Catholic Poles, or between cultural Poles and ethnic Poles. Either way, Polish culture would appear as a choice, or at best a single element within a hybridized identity, for members of the merely cultural group, while it would seem naturally destined for or rooted in the very nature of those belonging to the ethnic category. Janion implies that the truly authentic Poles are ethnic Poles, or perhaps »Slavic Poles.« The surest connection with culture ultimately lies in ethnic identity.

The persuasive power of Janion's argument lies in the outraged sense that patriarchal, Latin Christian, »anti-Slavic,« racist and homophobic distortions have robbed »Poles« of their »authentic culture.« Admittedly, this authenticity appears in her writings more as a provisional or imaginary construct than as a lost historical reality. Yet ethnicity emerges very clearly as the essential measure of cultural identity, as Janion focuses her central thesis on the powerful claims supposedly flowing from the cultural unconscious of »uncanny Slaviness« – the hidden call of ethnic origin, which returns like a collective repressed in literature and art.

Janion's post-colonial project, like those of the conservative theorists, consistently ignores the potential significance of other social structures, including class, in favor of an emancipatory project that emphasizes cultural specificity, authenticity and continuity. By focusing on culture and ethnicity, Janion's argument falls into the »subalternist« pattern outlined by Vivek Chibber in *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*. The forces of international capitalism occasionally appear in the background of her discussion, but their significance remains strangely indeterminate. For

instance, she mentions in passing that young Poles first began to emigrate »after the opening of the European job markets,« and yet she focuses almost exclusively on cultural rather than economic explanations of this phenomenon.⁴¹ In Chibber's terms, »the most powerful social and structural force in the world becomes a wisp of smoke, something so ghostly that one becomes not quite sure it exists.«⁴²

Jan Sowa has provided a partial explanation for the general paucity of reflections on class, capitalism and political economy in the Polish humanities and social sciences by pointing to »an historically determined aversion« to Marxist thought.⁴³ Initially, as Sowa observes, this inhibited the development of post-colonial theory in Poland. However, I would argue that various conservative intellectuals have eventually made the same discovery as Vivek Chibber – namely, that post-colonial theory is at odds with leftist intellectual traditions of universalism and the defense of class interests across cultural boundaries. Within Chibber's framework, Maria Janion simply falls into the same contradictions as the »subalternists,« defending cultural specificity at the unintended expense of universal interests. Yet the right-wing Polish thinkers produce a much more ideologically consistent argument – whatever its logical flaws. Postcolonial theory offers a ready-made instrument for pursuing the explicitly conservative objective of defending exclusionary and essentialist visions of authentic culture against universalist claims, including those based on Marxist understandings of capitalism or class. The peculiarities of the Polish case make this patently clear.

In post-communist Poland, it has thus far proven extraordinarily difficult to forge a vision of culture and

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society independent of ethnicity, where the essence of ethnicity lies in imagined ties of ancestry and kinship stretching back into the mists of history. Even the most inclusive models imply that Polish culture – though it should seek to welcome members of other ethnic groups – is above all the natural inheritance of ethnic Poles, the imagined descendants of the West Slavic tribes that moved into the area between the Oder and Vistula rivers during the first millennium. As Poland grows wealthier and begins to attract greater numbers of immigrants from other parts of the world, two crucial questions will increasingly arise. Will the new arrivals on the diversifying labor market become »Poles«? And will »Poles« embrace hybridity and abandon the claims of »authentic« culture?

Porównania 6 (2009): 96–105.

- 4 See: Ewa Thompson, *Sarmatyzm i postkolonializm: o naturze polskich resentymentów*, Dziennik (11 May 2007); *A jednak kolonializm: Uwagi epistemologiczne*, Teksty Drugie 6 (2011), 303–314.
- 5 See: Rafał Ziembkiewicz, *W Polsce, jak w krajach postkolonialnych, funkcjonuje podział na »kreoli« i »tubylców«*, Polska Times (10 July 2011).

- 6 Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, *Elity nie potrzebują Polski – wywiad z Jarosławem Markiem Rymkiewiczem*. Bibuła: Pismo niezależne (11 December 2010).
- 7 Ewa Thompson, *Postkolonialne refleksje: Na marginesie pracy zbiorowej*

- 1 Here it is worth pointing out that Jarosław Kaczyński – the leader of the main conservative opposition party, Law and Justice (PiS) – has also referred to the concept of »post-colonialism« on numerous occasions.
- 2 In July 1944 – as the Red Army steadily drove the Wehrmacht back to Berlin – the Soviets established a provisional government in Lublin to oppose the London-based Polish government in exile. The communist successors of this government were effectively to rule Poland under Soviet auspices until 1989.

- 3 See: Dariusz Skórczewski, *Polska kolonizowana, polska zorientalizowana: Teoria postkolonialna wobec »Innej Europy«*

- [From *Sovietology to Postcoloniality: Poland and Ukraine from a Post-colonial Perspective*, pod redakcją Janusza Korcia, Porównania 5 (2008), 117.
- 8 See: Dorota Kołodziejczyk, *Postkolonialny transfer na Europę Środkowo-Wschodnią*, Teksty Drugie 5 (2010): 22–39; Grażyna Borkowska, *Perspektywa postkolonialna na gruncie polskim: Pytania sceptyka*, Teksty Drugie 5 (2010): 40–52.

- 9 Dariusz Skórczewski, *Towards a Better Understanding of the Self: Polish Literature in the Light of Postcolonial Theory*, *The Task of Interpretation: Hermeneutics, Psychoanalysis and Literary Studies*, eds. Dariusz Skórczewski, Andrzej Wierciński and Edward

Fiata (Lublin: The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, 2009), 194.

- 10 Thompson and Rymkiewicz have expressed sympathies with the Law and Justice party, while Ziembkiewicz has associated himself with a reactivation of the interwar nationalist tradition.

- 11 Leszek Koczanowicz, *Post-postkomunizm a kulturowe wojny*, Teksty Drugie 5 (2010), 11.

- 12 See: Joanna Lichocka's interview with Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, *Czy to już koniec Jarosława Kaczyńskiego? Rymkiewicz woli wierzyć w niepodległość*, Newsweek (22 November 2010).

- 13 See: Sara Danius, Stefan Jonsson and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Interview with Gayatri*

Chakravorty Spivak, *boundary 2*, 2.20 (Summer 1993), 35. Spivak described this strategy in her essay

- Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography* as follows: »I would read as a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest.« See: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Words: Essays in Cultural Politics*, New York: Methuen, 1987, 205.

- 14 Vivek Chibber, *How Does the Subaltern Speak?* Jacobin (April 2013).
- 15 Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, London: Verso, 2013, 284.

- 16 Chibber, *How Does the Subaltern Speak?*
- 17 Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, 286.

- 18 Ibid. Chibber supplies considerable evidence throughout his book in support of this critique, claiming that post-colonial theorists have generally misunderstood the role of the bourgeoisie within capitalist systems and failed to appreciate the general capacity of capital to subordinate diverse cultural systems without necessarily changing every aspect of them.

- 19 See: Kaczyński, *PO jest główną formacją postkomunistyczną*, *Gazeta.pl* (22 October 2013). Ewa Thompson has strongly supported Kaczyński as an opponent of both post-colonial and post-communist formations in Poland: »For the first time in the

- postcommunist reality, somebody in Poland has shown some political common sense and built a party without people associated with Polish or international 'fellow travelers' of communism.« See: Ewa Thompson, »W kolejce po aprobatę.« *Dziennik*.pl (11 May 2007).
- ²⁰ Ewa Thompson, »Sarmatyzm i postkolonializm: o naturze polskich resentymentów.« *Dziennik* (11 May 2007).
- ²¹ Reul K. Wilson, Kochanowski and Ronsard: *Contemporaries and Kindred Spirits*, *Polish Review* 22.1 (1977), 20.
- ²² Jan Sowa refers to the »cryptocolonial lineage of the Sarmatians.« See: Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciała króla: Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną*
- formą, Kraków: Universitas, 2011, 273.
- ²³ Of course, this word – which refers to the noble class – is also clearly of foreign origin, probably from Old High German, though the precise etymology is disputed.
- ²⁴ Apart from the great diversity of distinct Aboriginal cultures inhabiting the Australian continent at the time of the European arrival, scholars have pointed to likely cultural influence in the north from the nearby islands of present-day Indonesia and Melanesia. For instance, see: Tony Swain, *A Place for Strangers: Towards a History of Australian Aboriginal Being*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- ²⁵ Maria Janion, *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna: Fantazmaty literatury*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006, 17.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 329.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 330.
- ²⁹ See: Ryszard Nycz, *Możliwa historia literatury*, *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2010), 178. Nycz is speaking specifically of Polish literature here.
- ³⁰ Janion, *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna*, 329.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 179.
- ³² Witold Gombrowicz, *Dziary: Volume One*, trans. Lilian Vallee, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988, 121.
- ³³ Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*, London: Routledge, 2009, 66.
- ³⁴ Koczanowicz, *Postkolonializm a kulturowe wojny*, 20.
- ³⁵ Walter Benn Michaels, *Race into Culture: A Critical Genealogy of Cultural Identity*, *Critical Inquiry* 18.4 (Summer 1992), 684.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 685.
- ³⁷ Ewa Thompson, *Stefan Żeromski's Ashes as a Postcolonial Narrative*, *Historyka: Studia Metodologiczne* T. XLII (2012), 83.
- ³⁸ Skórczewski, *Trudności z tożsamością*, 142.
- ³⁹ Janion, *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna*, 330.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 328.
- ⁴¹ Janion, *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna*, 330.
- ⁴² Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, 288.
- ⁴² Sowa, *Fantomowe ciała króla*, 445.



FROM RACIST EUROPEANISM TO »PERVERSE DECOLONIZATION« A FRIGHTENING PARCOURS, IN RUSSIA AND ELSEWHERE

Ekaterina Degot and David Riff

In the early 1980s, Andrei Monastyrski, the spiritual leader of a group of Moscow conceptual artists, developed a narrative imagining himself and his colleagues as members of a »Central Geographical Club« with its headquarters somewhere in the West. These members were allegedly once sent on a research mission to an obscure isolated country behind the Iron Curtain, only to be forgotten there. They would collect anthropological materials, data and anecdotes to send to the center as regular reports via émigré friends, diplomats or foreign correspondents, though these would hardly be acknowledged.

What Monastyrski voiced here was the well-known position of local cosmopolitan elites in the colonies. Their fierce Europeanism obscures an ardent and

profoundly depressive desire for assimilation, one that, as Albert Memmi writes in his *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, is never fulfilled, never accepted as legitimate by the object of that desire, the colonizer. The specific thing about Monastyrski's statement is that the colonization here is fictitious, as is the Central Geographical Club. What is at stake here is »self-colonization« described by Aleksander Kiossev as the politics of (mostly, but not exclusively, Eastern European) peripheral cultures »having succumbed to the cultural power of Europe and the west without having been invaded and turned into colonies in actual fact.« Foreign cultural supremacy is willingly accepted and imposed by an enlightening elite seeking to enter a larger Western Europe modernity.

Kiossev calls the result »hegemony without domination«, but in fact auto-colonial self-deprecation always implies a not-so-hidden dominance over »them«, the majority of the non-Europeanized (not self-colonized) population, from whom the artists feel alienated and whom they describe, more or less openly, as »primitives«. In fact, another name for Monastyrski's theory was »Livingstones in Africa.« Monastyrski is rather terrified of the unknown continent unfolding right outside his door on the outskirts of Moscow. Only a few years later, in the late 1980s, another artist, Konstantin Zvezdochetov, rather welcomes and identifies with the »pseudo-African« identity of Russians. In his whimsical »Perdo« series of paintings he tells a highly metaphorical fairy-tale story of a fictitious country (presumably, Russia) as a »white Africa« stripped not only of white privilege, but, being white itself, of a post-colonial privilege to present itself as a victim. Were these risky comparisons with Africa cryptoracist?

208 (After all, it was around same time that the West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt allegedly called the Soviet Union »Upper Volta with rockets«, killing two birds, i.e. insulting two countries, with one stone.) And yet, no: to the credit of Moscow artists, stripped of the right to travel abroad till late 1980s, one can say that for them (but not for Helmut Schmidt), Africa remained a pure and sheer abstraction, much like the West with its promises, not unlike the Moon.

The situation changed a decade later. The West became terrifyingly real, as did the perspective of being despised and humiliated by the same West in a clearly neocolonial way. Even Africa became more real (and Zvezdochetov visited it). What also appeared on the horizon were reparations for all the damage done. It was a moment when the entire cultural paradigm was defined by the notion of victimhood.

As usual, artists were the first to attempt to »decolonize« themselves from the real or self-imposed dominance of the West. Only, this decolonization was often also imposed by the dominant cultural industry and orchestrated in the system of global multi-national biennials. The geography they inhabited was no longer phantasmagoric but real: it was for the sake of their careers that the next generation of artists had to represent themselves as »others«, different from the West. Over the course of the 1990s, the Perestroika's cosmopolitan diversity of ideas and ideologies presented ample material for artists to work with. But in the country's discourse of power it gradually crystallized into the one-dimensional theme of »Russianness,« a strategically identitarian particularism. This was in the spirit of that neoliberal doctrine of multiculturalism which replaced the economic and political differences of the Cold War

era with cultural and even civilization differences (as in Huntington's famous text), still peaceful, at least for now. Until recently, artists had imagined themselves as a critical part of the Soviet internationalist world. Now, after the end of the USSR, they found themselves forced to represent themselves as unambiguously Russian. In his performances of the early 1990s, such as »I Bite America, America Bites Me« and others, Oleg Kulik would become a dog-man, staging the media-hyped idea of a »clash of civilizations« and the image of an aggressive, unpredictable, huge country, resisting Western hegemony.

Ironical art projects from 1990's like Kulik's and many others became real in the 2010s as a frightening new politics of the state. Contemporary Putinist Russia defines itself as a proudly self-liberated victim of Western colonization, while at the same time ignoring its own imperial habits and colonial sweeps towards other countries. (The same logic can be also be diagnosed, however, in other Eastern European countries like Ukraine or Latvia, where decolonization from Russia's imperial grip involves the denial of the right to identitarian decolonizing insurrections for their own minorities.) And even artists who used to defy the Putinist state on the political level suddenly become its faithful acolytes on the level of ideology, reproducing and radicalizing its identitarian, pseudo-decolonizing discourse of »liberation« from Western domination; this is what one can read in recent media statements by members of the Voyna group.

How to describe the ironies and twists of such historical developments? One option might be to elaborate the idea »perverse decolonization,« in the sense of an emancipative process gone wrong, twisted

210 out of shape, but also bent to fit the rage of new, transgressive appetites. A problematic very urgent in Europe today is how former colonizer or white majorities mourn for lost empire and affect the pose of colonial victimhood. One of the heights of perversion in colonial logic is when an empire loses some or even all of its colonies and suddenly begins to imagine that it itself is being colonized. Such argumentations emerged in the wake of British and French decolonization after the Second World War, and also today in post-Soviet Russia of today. Most notoriously, such arguments were deployed in Germany by Adolf Hitler during his rise to power, ultimately leading to the reorientation of the German colonial endeavor toward Eastern Europe, as historian Jürgen Zimmerer has shown in his fascinating book on the interrelation between German colonialism in Africa and National Socialism. Today's alt-right is heir to this strategy, which it updates by resorting to the left liberal rhetoric of identity politics.

Franz Fanon famously referred to the »perverse logic« of colonialism that »turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts it, disfigures and destroys it« (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961). Clearly, this perverse logic persists beyond direct colonial domination. It comes to define the experience of decolonization, too, as new nationalisms arise, distorting, disfiguring, and destroying the past, reproducing and radicalizing structures of domination. Today, we can see such a distortion underway, as the political dimension is denied to post-colonial subjects. All over the world today, political histories and social struggles are erased and essentialized as conflicts of race, ethnicity and religion: the past is rewritten and perverted, just like in Fanon's quote above. One particularly tragic example can be

found in the case of the Middle East and its political history: strong communist connections across ethnic and sectarian divides are denied and erased, from both left and right, in favor of a totally different narrative, based on ethnicity and race, on »pure victimhood« of refugees or the »pure evil« of terrorists. This flattens complex post-colonial histories and hybrid post-imperialist identities, important to reclaim in an increasingly polarized world playing out the hackneyed yet no less tragic drama of a »clash of civilizations.«

In fact, what makes matters so complex is that post-colonial identities reproduce colonial violence. Structures of domination infiltrate and distort emancipative struggles, as one sees in even the very earliest decolonizing endeavors, as in Liberia, where freed African-American slaves reproduced the plantation system of the ante-bellum US South, enslaving the indigenous Liberian population. In the case of Israel, now commonly decried as a colonial power, it is also important that Zionism originally understood itself as an emancipative, anti-imperialist, anti-colonial project, almost impossible to remember when one looks at the current state of affairs and the ongoing shift of Israeli politics to the ultra-right. How to untangle such contradictions, themselves the result of colonialism's perverse logic?

What seems crucial in the formation of post-colonial national identities is a second step of decolonization, which at the same time might be a misstep with perverse consequences, namely when »silent« majorities rise against local cosmopolitan self-colonized elites. National projects are reinvented on exclusionist-populist lines with an expansionist agenda. National-imperial reinvention can involve the takeover of colonial logic and the development of alternative colonial

212 projects exporting a non-Western modernity. In these new colonialisms, older imperialisms are now hybridized and mixed.

All over the world now, isolationist tendencies, particularisms and identitarian populisms perform their »discursive cleansings« reclaiming »pure« identities, triumphing at lightening speed everywhere from semi-peripheries like Turkey or Russia, in South and South-East Asia, and in the former centers like United States or Britain. Germany, too, is affected by this global shift. Ultra-right and even centrists in Germany dream of the revival of patriotism and of the notion of the »Volk« and völkisch culture, poised to strike in a clash of civilizations. To paraphrase Bruno Latour, the utopia of the globe gives way to the utopia of the nation.

To resist new nationalisms seems an absolute urgency, but it also raises difficult questions for those cultural producers and theorists who, since decades, have been committed to post-colonial critique in the frame of the liberal system that is currently in crisis. For a long time, post-colonial theory appeared as the best way to insist upon the distinctive singularity of identities threatened by globalizing normalization, to evince their resistance to structural adjustment and cultural flattening, and to proclaim their right to self-determination.

Today, the emancipative agenda of post-colonial studies is more urgent than ever: as people flee turmoil all over the world, they find themselves facing a resurgence of xenophobia and colonial relations. Yet at the same time, it is precisely the particularization of struggles has made it almost impossible to confront the unified, nationalist »we« that now arises with such frightening force. As Vivek Chibber has noted, post-colonial studies (and decolonizing cultural production) shares with iden-

tity politics a profound anti-universalist bias that often goes hand in hand with blindness to issues of social justice extending beyond identitarian boundaries.

What seems equally dangerous, in an age of cultural appropriation, fusions, and cultural crossovers, is that the new nationalism takes over sensibilities and self-understandings from what used to be the left, and that includes availing itself of strategies developed in the frame of left-liberal post-colonial critique. The New Right, or alt-right, not only benefits from the left's ongoing fragmentation; it steals discursive weapons including the rhetorical repertoire of identity politics and post-colonial theory. Suddenly, the politics of identity becomes the purview of a not-so-silent (white) majority, who imagines itself resisting »colonization« by its own neoliberal, cosmopolitan elites. Indeed, looking at the new right's rhetoric, we can sometimes recognize the uncanny return of rhetorical elements from the context of decolonization, where the diversification of universalism (Walter Dignolo) and the »strategic essentialism« of the subaltern (Gayatri Spivak) are argumentative strategies to overcome the remnants of the colonial system. Now they become arguments of new nationalist agendas insisting upon the right to essentialize their ways into a parallel dimension.

The primary guilty party or author of perverse decolonization is the very structure of the state as it was exported from Europe to the rest of the world. Indeed, today's developments give a new value to the notion of statelessness. A starting point to think about this might be Hannah Arendt's theory of a politics always-already beyond any location, to be thought as a counter-model to Carl Schmitt's fiercely territorial theory of the partisan. Facing the massive deterritorializations of

214 today, it becomes important to stress positive moments of trans-territorial locality or spatialized statelessness and their cultural implications, and to explore the dimension of a subaltern cosmopolitanism, a cultural fluidity of hybridizations beyond the grasp of the elitist, self-colonizing version of cosmopolitan wordliness.

One of the places where one finds such subaltern cosmopolitanism most strongly is on the margins on the former socialist world, perhaps as an unintended result of the failure and dissolution of a global socialist modernity, whose many untapped possibilities and unacknowledged pitfalls it is important to remember. The regions of formerly Soviet Central Asia become a battlefield between three forces: global and allegedly »un-national« neoliberal corporations, radical religious and nationalist fundamentalism and gradually vanishing internationalism. The position of artists is especially difficult here. How can solidarity and internationalism be reinvented under such dramatic circumstances? How can we critically re-think communist internationalism, without idealizing its often cryptocolonial role?

We are convinced that it is possible to overcome the particularization and relativism often criticized in identity politics by insisting upon a communicability of struggles across seeming irreconcilable regions or sections of the political landscape. The new universalism should be a »dirty« one, radically heterogeneous rather than pure. Phenomena like this »perverse decolonization« we are describing can be found almost everywhere, as an articulation of what previous generations of universalists might have called the world spirit, and perhaps a »wile of reason« leading humanity to a future without colonies.



FORGET POST-COLONIALISM, THERE'S A CLASS WAR AHEAD

Jan Sowa

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In his inspiring book, *A Singular Modernity*, Frederic Jameson offers a notion of modernity that is particularly useful when it comes to paradoxes of post-colonial theory (such as those that Stanley Bill presented in his text).

Jameson claims that modernity is an interplay between two distinct notions operating separately on the level of material base and of cultural superstructure: there is *modernization* which accounts for all that falls into the realm of material economy: highways, stock exchange, supermarkets, cellular phones, the internet, computers etc. But there is also *modernity* – a set of values, norms and ideals operating in the socio-cultural sphere and linked with the legacy of Enlightenment: equality, social justice, emancipation, rational organization of society etc. Modernity should not be – Jameson claims – reduced to any of these two aspects or components. It is a complex combination of both.¹

This is a good starting point when talking about a reception of post-colonial theory in Poland and in the region of Central-Eastern Europe that used to fall within

the sphere of domination of the Soviet Russia. Stanley Bill is quite right in exposing the paradoxes, inconsistencies and impostures associated with this process. I agree with his general diagnosis of post-colonial theory as an attitude cunningly camouflaging its inherent conservatism that gets exposed in its peripheral applications. However, I believe these phenomena should be put into a more general frame and be cast against the background of troubled and traumatic relations with modernity that Poland and the entire region has had for the last couple of centuries. The ideas and convictions expressed by the Polish conservative adherents to post-colonial theory that Bill so eloquently analyzes are just a new articulation of an attitude long established in Polish culture: the one of an alternative and indigenous modernity sharply contrasting with the content of Western modernism, to use above-mentioned Jameson's notion. What the Polish adherents of the post-colonial studies advocate is not a simple rejection of modernity *tout court*, an attitude that can nowadays be found in such places as Bhutan, but rather a perverse deviation from modernity: modernization without modernism.

The fate of post-colonial theory in Central and Eastern Europe is a kind of symptom – not an autonomous phenomenon stemming solely from this theory's logic, but rather a complex articulation of local ideological content through the conceptual framework of an imported theory. Saying this I do not mean to question Bill's assertions but rather to give them an additional angle. It is perfectly true that conservative urge to look for authenticity beyond any cultural influences is contradictory with history of Polish, sarmatian culture that borrowed heavily from foreign traditions. On the other hand it is also true that between the 16th and

218 18th century Poland developed a peculiar and singular socio- cultural regime that offered an alternative to the Western world. One could trace these differences quite a long way back in history as the Marxist historian Perry Anderson does in his seminal books *Passages from Antiquity to the Feudalism and Lineages of the Absolutist States*.² Different proprietary relations of nobles to the land (allod in the East as opposed to fief in the West) combined with a different, much more horizontal organization of Eastern European aristocracy led in the early modern times (the 16th century) to a regime radically opposing the Western absolutism. It evolved in an autonomous way into a peculiar kind of democracy, very distant from Western parliamentary system based on representative institution. It resembled much more the ancient, Greek democracy with its emphasis on participation and direct elections of government. As in ancient times this participation was restricted to an elite group of free citizens (the nobility called *szlachta*), however it gave them collective powers incomparable to these of western aristocracy. From the late 16th onwards kings of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (a country covering much of Central-Eastern Europe and stretching at that time from the Baltic to the Black Sea on what is much of today's Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus and Ukraine) were elected directly by the entire body of nobility gathering in person on election field in Wola, now a district of Warsaw. Every nobleman had a right to come there and vote for any person he regarded suitable for the job; not everybody could afford such a trip and in practice these events gathered around 50–70 thousand participants; still a huge number for any democratic proceedings. It was called *electio viritum* and should be distinguished from other forms of elec-

tions that functioned at the time in places such as The Holy Roman Empire or Italian Republics in the Western Europe. The latter was exercised by a very narrow body of top aristocrats and had little to do with a popular sovereignty of Polish *szlachta*. The Polish parliament – Sejm – was equally under full control of aristocrats and did not function as an institution of class compromise as it did in Western Europe. Bourgeoisie was completely excluded from any part in the government and Sejm was used as solely aristocratic instrument of exercising power in the interest of the nobility. This political regime was combined with an agrarian lifestyle of *szlachta* who remained utterly hostile to the city and deeply in love with their rural estates. The material base for their existence was provided by a manorial economy producing grain for the nascent capitalistic market. A form of slave labor was used for this purpose. It was called serfdom, however it functioned very much like slavery (with an important difference that individuals were not sold or bought; human trafficking took form of wholesale exchanges of entire villages with their peasant populations). Polish aristocrats believed themselves utterly superior or even racially different from the peasants. That was expressed by the myth of Sarmatian origins of the *szlachta*; a myth of colonial nature and I will go back to this point later on. A reader familiar with social history of the United States would probably spot a resemblance with social, cultural and economic landscape of the American South before the Civil War. It's a legitimate and accurate analogy. In general, Polish society – with its emphasis on family life, implication of religion in the public life and eager use of the word »God« on political occasions, its agrarian ideology, blatant individualism and some other traces – resembles much more to some

220 aspects of the US society than it does to the mainstream of European culture, especially its French, republican and secular ethos.

Traditional, Sarmatian Polish culture shaped by this kind of social relations believed itself to be not only different, but also superior to the West. *Szlachta* looked with a particular despise on the elements of nascent modernity and its main protagonist – capitalistic bourgeoisie. They believed it to be a degeneration and degradation, they felt proud not to be a part of this evolution and to keep their peculiar form of social organization. They particularly cherished their liberties, describing Poland, opposed to absolutist West, as the land of genuine freedom. Although this liberty was rather a class privilege than freedom in modern sense, they were surely right in one respect – their social and cultural world offered a genuine alternative to the Western culture. Poland was a part of Europe with close ties with other European countries and – what is very important – remained a part of the capitalist world-economy from its very beginning, on the other hand it was culturally exotic and it occupied a peripheral economic position structurally comparable to the place the overseas colonies. Thus Central and Eastern Europe was historically first Third World.³

I devoted so much place to the matters that seem quite far historically, because they form the Sarmatian kernel of Polish post-colonial conservative illusion that boils down to a conviction that we – Poles – do not need to look up to the West or the EU to find an inspiration or a model and we should rather go back to our glorious, Sarmatian past. The temporal distance that separates us from this epoch does not seem to matter. Polish society has got a peculiar attitude towards time

and distant past is much closer for us that it is for an average citizen of the Western world. In this respect we resemble the Islamic societies, where crusades dating back to the Middle Ages may very well serve as a justification for today's politics.

Western modernism – in the sense given to this term by Jameson – remains disgusting and repugnant to most of the Polish adherents to post-colonial theory. But not the Western modernization. Their plan, called »a conservative modernization«, can be accurately described and deconstructed with the pair of notions put forward by Jameson: highways, smartphones, ATMs, the internet, the Dreamliners – YES! Equality, emancipation, diversity, social justice, women and gay rights – NO! Again – in their embrace of capitalism they resemble much more to the American neocons than to the oldschool continental conservatives who tried to somehow curb the free market.

Although they verbally defend the lower classes, their policies, while in power, did not differ from neoliberalism – two governments led by the conservative Prawo i Sprawiedliwość party between 2005 and 2007 made Zyta Gilowska, an outspoken neoliberal economist, the ministry of finance, lowered the taxes for the rich and diminished the obligatory contributions for social insurance that employers are required to pay.

There is, of course, a blind spot in this nostalgic, neosarmatian discourse. It does not seem to notice, that while the old, Sarmatian regime did offer an alternative to the West, it utterly failed to withstand a confrontation with it. The timeframe and crucial moments of its existence coincide with a developing modernity in the West in a very peculiar way. Sarmatism, like Western absolutism that paved the way to modern statehood,

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222 develops from 15th century, however the very same year 1648 when the modern international order takes shape with the Peace of Westphalia at the end of Thirty Years' War marks the first major failure of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: the Ukrainian Revolution led by Bohdan Chmielnitsky (an uprising of Ukrainian warrior nobility – Cossacks – and peasantry against Polish colonial rule). Actually, its aftermath was the Russian conquest of Eastern Ukraine, thus the beginning of a process that we can still see developing today. What is even more pertinent is that the final end of the Sarmatian order in the second half of the 18th century closely coincides with the three major triumphs of modernity: The American, French and Industrial Revolutions. It's not a mere coincidence. Poland disappears from the map precisely because it was not able to function within the political and social framework of modernity.⁴ Even Russia, regarded by the Poles as eternally backward, had developed at the time some essential traits of the modern state such as a strong central administration, efficient taxation system and powerful army all of which Poland lacked. From that moment on the relation to modernity of every traditionally and truly Polish soul – I'm not talking here of a rotten cosmopolitan intellectual like myself – is an antagonistic one: »modernity« is the name of force that eliminated our traditional way of life, destroying the most precious aspects of our social order; including its material base, peasant's slavery, as serfdom was abolished by colonizers in the 19th century (the final reform of Polish agriculture was done, again, by the foreigners, i.e. Soviet sponsored government at the end of Second World War that liquidated large estates and distributed the land among small, individual farmers in 1944). Pragmatic, material efficiency of the

Western world is difficult to deny nowadays and the conservatives are very willing to copy it, however not in order to further modernism, but precisely to fight it. So, ironically, modernization is regarded as an efficient way of resisting modernity in its full scope (i.e. modernization combined with modernism).

The conservatives, that embraced the post-colonial theory did it in a very particular way.⁵ What they refuse to acknowledge is that the culture that they cherish so much, Sarmatism, was in itself a deeply colonial cultural entity. Firstly in its description of the Sarmatian origins – they were supposed to be an alien tribe of warriors that came from the East (or the South in some variants of the legend) and conquered the agrarian populations of Central Eastern Europe. Thus the Polish *szlachta* believed there was an essential, ethnic difference between themselves, deriving from these Asian warriors, and peasant population descending from the tribes that the Sarmatians believed to have had enslaved. This aspect of »post-colonial imaginary« is, of course, skillfully omitted by contemporary Polish post-colonial »thinkers« (I put the word in quotation mark, because I doubt if a mere repetition of someone else's concepts can be rightfully called »thinking«). Their even bigger omission is a colonial practice of the Polish mobility in the East. The so called Union of Lublin that created the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569 cut a huge chunk of land – what is a present day Ukraine – from the Great Princehood of Lithuania and put it, within the union, under a direct administrative control of the Kingdom of Poland. One does not need to be a Marxist zealot to see a material motivation for such a move – Ukraine is blessed with one of the richest soils in Europe, perfect for grain cultivation; Polish

224 nobility needed it in order to further and extend its material base – the manorial economy. And that's what they did. The so called *Kresy* (the Ends – a Polish term referring to the Eastern ends of the empire, i.e. contemporary Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine) just like the British Raj gave birth to formidable fortunes. There is no anachronism in calling *Kresy* *Polish colonies* as the term itself was literary used by the Polish political writers in 16th and 17th century (for example in *Polska Niżna Albo Osada Polska* by Piotr Grabowski dating from 1596; Paweł Palczowski in his *Kołąda moskiewska* published in 1609 likens *Polish expansion* in the East with colonial domination of European powers over the West Indies). There was also a whole discourse surrounding *Kresy* devoted to the proper use that Poland could and should have made of these lands. It can be easily compared to Alexis de Tocqueville's *Travail sur l'Algérie* or to Edmund Burke's discourses such as *Speech on The Nabob of Arcot's Debts* or *Articles of Charge of High Crimes and Misdemeanors against Warren Hastings*. We'll find all major elements of a colonial discourse in the Polish political thought of the time: a myth of *terra nullius*, of *mission civilisatrice*, of natural longing of the savages for progress, of racial and religious superiority of the colonizers and inferiority of the colonized (called, to make ironical »coincidences« even more poignant, *Czerń* which means »Blacks«) etc. It comes as no surprise that today's relations between Poland and Ukraine bear a strong post-colonial traits as it can be observed in conflicting evaluation of national heroes (Bohdan Chmielnitsky, but even more Stepan Bandera – a hero for many Ukrainians and a bandit, or a terrorist, to use a more fashionable term, for the Poles), to places of memory (such as cemeteries in Lviv and other Ukrainian cities

that used to have a considerable Polish community all the way until the Second World War) and in a general nostalgia that penetrates a lot of Polish discourses on *Kresy*, a very similar to the British nostalgia for the Raj.

Interestingly enough, this kind of post-colonial critique is completely lacking from the Polish »post-colonial studies« that focus on rewriting Polish historical defeats (partitions in the 19th century, the second world war, the soviet period) in the language of post-colonial theory. For this reason they should not be called »studies« in any academic or intellectual sense of the word. As it was shown by many scholars, Ewa Thompson's conceptual frame is self-contradictory and full of blind spots. Claudia Snochowska- Gonzalez was quite right to point out that the notion of »surrogate hegemon« supposedly explaining, why Poland tries to mimic the West, while it was colonized by Russia is an unjustified and unnecessary conceptual complication and its main purpose is to maintain the ideological message and not to account for the facts. As she argues, a much more plausible explication is that, just like many other societies who do not need to look for a surrogate hegemon, we like the West, because we like the West – or at least the West the way it is perceived: as rich and full of opportunities that lack elsewhere.⁶ The function of the local, Polish post-colonial discourse, although formally associated with the academia is primarily socio-political: it serves as a way to manage collective traumas of Polish history and to use them for specific political aims. It's hostility towards the cultural mainstream of the Western world and ceaseless efforts to emphasize that »we are not inferior and we have our own patterns of social and cultural development« should not be mistaken with a self-pride. It's rather

226 a sign of profound complex of inferiority, much larger than that of the Western style liberal modernizers who are accused of lack of dignity. With all reservations that I have against liberalism, the liberals are at least historically more sober – they realize that »our own dear patterns of social and cultural development« are, as a matter of fact, patterns of lack of development and we should not look for inspiration in our own socio-cultural tradition.

Now, a question more interesting for an international reader: how the entire process of this conservative use made of the post-colonial studies changes our perception of post-colonial theory as such and how it puts into questions its supposedly subversive or emancipatory character. First of all, the entire obsession of authenticity and essence penetrating decolonizing world had been described before post-colonial critics started to develop their insights into the souls of the colonized. Clifford Geertz was writing back in 1969 of what he called a tension between »epochalism« and »essentialism« in the new, post-colonial states.⁷ He found the contradiction between going with the spirit of the epoch – liberal democracy, free market, social emancipation etc. – and cherishing one's one particular past or essence to be defining for peripheral socio-cultural debates that followed the demise of colonial empires. From this point of view the case of Poland is just another story that repeats what Geertz witnessed in Indonesia or Morocco. What lies between the contemporary post-colonial »thinkers« in the peripheries and the time when Geertz made his observation is not only »post-colonial theory«, but also and mainly postmodernism, or to be more precise poststructuralism (or whatever one wants to call the whole body of texts

227 that many, for instance Slavoj Žižek, refer to as »French bullshit«). In this particular point I do not agree with Stanley Bill – postmodernism received in the 1990's and early 2000's a quite a warm welcome from the Polish conservatives. One of its first Polish proponents was Zdzisław Krasnodębski, a philosopher and leading intellectual supporting Kaczyński brothers that just got himself elected to the European Parliament. What Polish conservatives saw in postmodernism was mainly its hostility towards Enlightenment, a denial of master narrations (including any form of emancipatory politics), affirmation of the »other of reason« – religion, local customs, alternative cultural logics (all that in the good old times would just be called by one word: »superstitions«) – and, last but not least, prizing of diversity that got to be automatically interpreted in the peripheries as our right to be different from the mainstream of modernity/enlightenment. It's not surprising that the communitarian ideas of Will Kymlicka, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel or Charles Taylor received quite an attention from Polish intellectuals in the 1990-ties. Poststructuralist roots of post-colonial studies are well known and we can see an easy passage here. How close is it to the original intent of the post-colonial studies? One can argue that it's a false interpretation, a kind of Karamazov complex: Ivan makes a purely theoretical, philosophical comment at the family table (the center) and his semi-retarded bastard brother (the peripheries) goes on to murder their father. The one who would like to defend the post-colonial studies could easily point to the figure of Franz Fanon as an important protagonist, who was a Marxist revolutionary and could not be held accountable for conservative reaction. It would not be intellectually fair to completely deny a Marxist origins of

228 post-colonial studies and to focus solely on postmodernism. However, besides intellectual debates there is also social and political practice. And it's in this sphere that Marxism suffered a huge blow in the 1990's as a result of the fall of the USSR. One could complain it's been somehow unjust as there is a vast Marxist narration that criticized the entire Soviet experiment and it would be difficult to find any major Marx's work that logically leads to the Bolshevism of early 20th century Russia (one letter to Vera Zasulich from 1881 cannot account for such a foundation). That is, unfortunately, an academic approach, wrongly focusing, despite an insightful advice from Wittgenstein, on the meaning and not on the use. And the use of Marxism as well as of its defeat, was such that it delegitimized any forms of its existence in the mainstream of public life all the way until the crisis of 2008.⁸ In the East even far more than in the West. That is, in my opinion, a crucial circumstance that tilted the balance and made post-colonialism – in compliance with its poststructuralist and despite its Marxist roots – a deeply conservative and not a progressive discourse. The need for such a discourse – at the same time conservative and fashionable enough to pose as a vanguard of intellectual life, thus conquering the position that had been monopolized by the academic left since the 1960ties – existed before it, as I tried to show and what the abovementioned analysis of Clifford Geertz also proves. It was a need to articulate resentment in an intellectually acceptable way. Post-colonialism perfectly suited this urge and hence it's carrier in the peripheries.

So, what do we do with the legacy of the post-colonial thought, now that its conservative intend has been proved beyond any reasonable doubt? Theoretically, there is a place for it. As I argued before, a sincere and

systematic exploration of the colonial nature of the Polish relation to Ukraine (and Belarus) would be very needed. Especially know, that the fatal triangle Russia-Poland-Ukraine that haunted the history of the region for many centuries seems to be coming back to life. It's a matter of tactical assessment whether maintaining the post-colonial studies, with their strongly conservative undertone, for such purposes is worth it or not (and whether we need post-colonial theory to do it – maybe classical history of culture could do?). Even a person not as convinced of the uselessness of the post-colonial thought as Vivek Chibber has to admit, that this branch of thought has not produced any major literature that would make quarreled nations reconcile over their troubled past. What's worse and far more important in the contemporary world, it is even more obvious that no one has become materially better off thanks to the post-colonial theory. It just puts too much stress on recognition and not enough – if any – on redistribution. The major problem of poor post-colonial states is not to have the injustices done to them recognized, but to stop being poor. Unfortunately, a class issue comes into play here – post-colonial recognition is mainly the question for a given nation's elites that do not need to care about how to make the ends meet. In this respect the post-colonial discourse, despite its apparently anti-establishment stand it has got in Poland, is as elitist as any other academic fashion. The main problem that Polish state should face is not how to stop pleasing to the Western world, but how to start pleasing to its own citizens, that clearly do not show post-colonial admiration with Polish traditions: in the first decade of our membership in the EU (2004 – 2014) almost 3 million people used the opportunities of the open European job market and es-

caped the country; that's surely one of the biggest waves of emigration Poland has ever known in its troubled history, if not the biggest one. The last hype of Polish conservative thought, meant to address this problem, is something called »economical patriotism« that should be more rightly called »national capitalism« and regarded as an unfortunate variation of »national socialism« – a conviction that Poland could be better off if we had some Polish capital (and not only »capital in Poland«, as they say).⁹ One could think it's a progress, because at least they realized that capitalism is not a system that benefits everyone, but mainly those who own capital. One could also see, how it goes hand in hand with the revindications of post-colonial theory, so we should not be surprised it includes imperialist claims and advocates for »a global expansion of Polish capital«. Would it somehow benefit people, who live in Poland? It's doubtful as we can see huge groups of Western societies that have never benefited from the expansion of Western capital. If they ever got any crumbs, it's only thanks to the struggle they have maintained – on the street and in the factories. Would this expansion benefit anyone outside Poland? Surely not. Even the contrary. Polish garment company LPP was among those that located their production in the infamous Rana Plaza complex in Bangladesh that collapsed last year killing around 1300 people. LPP behaved much worse than major international companies and declined to pay any compensation to the workers. They argued that international brands, like Primark, are well established and rich, so are able to pay, while LPP is a rising company from a poorer country and cannot afford such compensations.¹⁰ As one would expect – the capital remains the capital and follows the logic that it finds the most profitable for itself.

We can clearly see the main problem behind the post-colonial discourse: again it all comes down to identity and recognition. If we believe, like many critics of post-colonial thought, including myself, that the main challenge for contemporary progressive politics is to develop a universal emancipatory narration that could conquer people's imagination the way Marxism did a century ago, than post-colonial theory, despite the legacy of Franz Fanon often quoted in post-colonial text,¹¹ is not a useful tool, but rather an obstacle. There are people, who like Peter Hallward, believe that there is a room for universalism within post-colonial theory.¹² Maybe, theoretically, there is. But, again: don't look at meaning, look at use. Given the entire conservative bias in the way post-colonial theory has been used, it would require a formidable effort to turn the tables. And if we succeeded, would it be a very useful tool? Even the wars between nations are not won by successfully convincing the public of one's moral superiority and unjust suffering. There is no reason to believe that the class war ever will.

¹ Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*. London: Verso, 2002.

² See Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to the Feudalism*. London: New Left Books, 1974 and Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist States*, London: Verso, 1979.

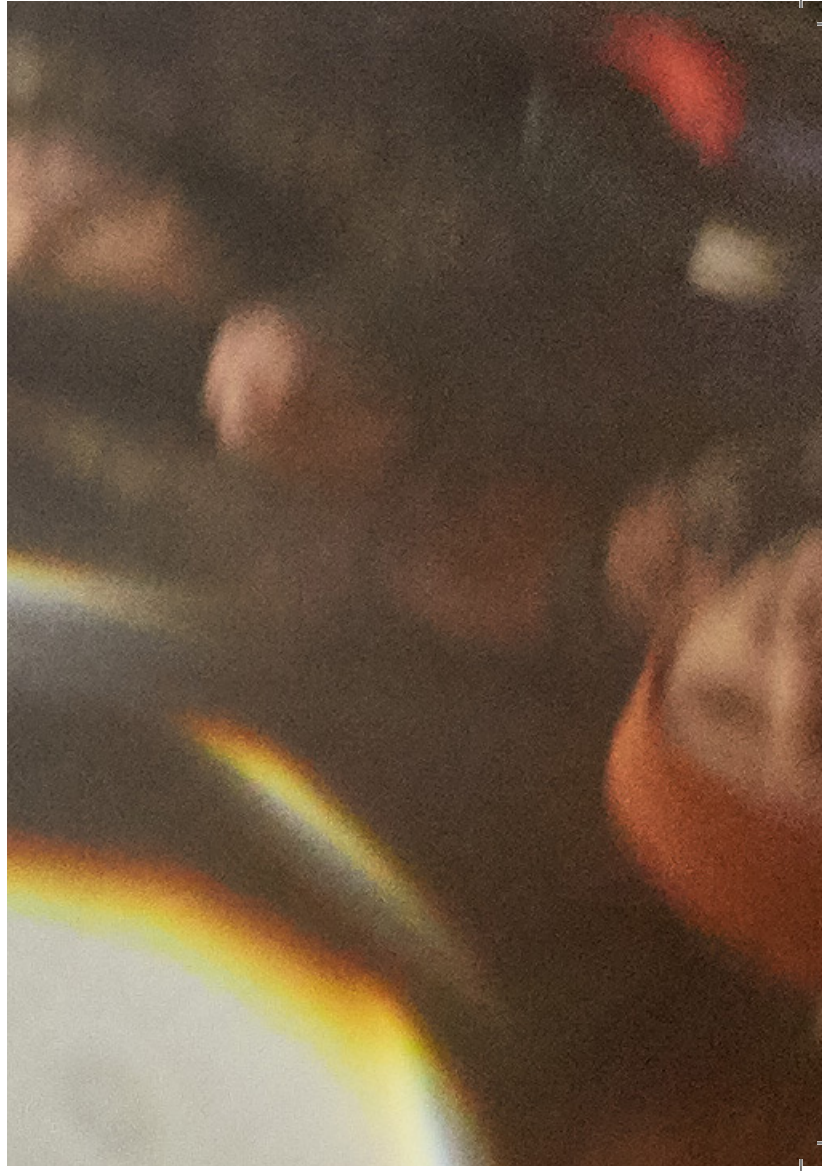
³ More on this point see the first volume of Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World System* Oakland: University of California Press, 2011. The issue is also analyzed in detail in Fernand's Braudel *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XVe-XVIIe siècle*, vol. 2: *Les jeux de l'échange*, Warszawa, Par-

- is: Armand Colin, 1979.
- 4 I realize it's an assertion that requires an elaborate proof – the one I developed elsewhere and I cannot repeat in detail here as it requires an extensive historical analysis (see Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą, Universitas*, Kraków 2011).
- 5 I skip enumerating their names and summarizing their point of view as that was skillfully done by Stanley Bill, so I'd have to refer to the same names and texts.
- 6 Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez, *Czy jesteście postkolonialni. O pewnym wrogiu przejęciu*, in: Joanna Tokarska Bakir (ed.), *PL: Tożsamość wyobrażona*, Czarna

- Owca, 2013.
- It's an extended version of the text *On an Unavoidable Misuse published in East European Politics & Societies* (vol. 26, no 4, 708–723).
- 7 Clifford Geertz, *After the Revolution: The Fate of Nationalism in the New States*, in: Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- 8 I wrote extensively on this issue on a different occasion. See my text *An Unexpected Twist of Ideology. Neoliberalism and the Collapse of the Soviet Bloc*, *Praktyka Teoretyczna*, no 5, 2012.
- Available on-line: praktykateoretyczna.pl/PT_nr5_2012_Logika_sensu/13.Sowa.pdf.

- 9 A classic example here is Jan Szmberg, a neoliberal intellectual from Gdańsk, Head of the Instytut Badań nad Gospodarką Rynekową.
- 10 They only changed their minds when an activist campaign by *Clean Clothes Poland* ashamed them so much that *Café Kulturalna*, a major youth night-club in Warsaw refused to host a concert sponsored by LPP, citing the company's attitude towards the disaster at Rana Plaza as the reason.
- 11 References to *Black Skin, White Masks* outnumber by far references to *The Wretched of The Earth*, which is in itself a good illustration of the tilt that post-colonial theory has got itself into.

- 12 See Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001.



Jörg Heiser

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Looking back over the grim year that was 2016, two incidents sparked a glimmer of hope. On Sunday 3 April 2016, in churches across Poland, priests read out a letter from their bishops calling for the prohibition of abortion, without any exceptions. The minute they did so, women of all ages – and some men, too – stood up and walked out. The clips that appeared online were powerful: proof of a simple, silent act of protest that resonated around the country and beyond. Nevertheless, a proposal for a blanket ban on abortion was brought before the Polish parliament. On 3 October 2016, thousands of Polish women boycotted work and study and – dressed in black – marched in protest. The wind stirred by the April action had turned into a mighty storm, hashtagged #CzarnyProtest [#BlackProtest]. And the storm was so vast and all-encompassing that the ruling right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS) had to back down on the proposed anti-abortion bill.

Two things struck me about these protests. Firstly, they employed strong performative elements, such as co-ordinated acts of standing up and leaving, or visual markers, such as everyone wearing clothes of the same colour. Secondly, I can't think of comparable protests in Germany in the wake of far-right mobs agitating against refugees, nor in Britain after the sharp rise of hate crimes post-Brexit. Why was the struggle in Poland so politically and aesthetically effective? The concerted



Lucy Lippard in support of #blackprotest 2016 From the resources of Konsorcium Praktyk Postartystycznych

236 church action reminded me of an event co-organized in December 1989 by *ACT UP*, the AIDS awareness activist group founded two years earlier. Thousands gathered outside St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York to demonstrate against the Catholic church and its condemnation of homosexuality, HIV prevention and the right to abortion. During mass, dozens of activists lay down silently in the aisles for a »die-in«. Documented on video, the scene is a palpable reminder of how the church's opposition to safe-sex education had a very real impact on people's mortality. Equally symbolic was the *Ashes Action* that took place in Washington D.C. in 1992, which involved protestors hurling the ashes of their loved ones who had died of AIDS over the fence onto the White House lawn.

ACT UP created striking scenes and images, which were recorded on video and disseminated via media channels. It was also an inclusive movement: street kids, go-go dancers, Wall Street brokers and social workers all took part alongside artists and intellectuals. A generation later, in the introduction to her book *The Gentrification of the Mind* (2012), the writer Sarah Schulman, a key figure in *ACT UP*, talks about going out for a drink with six young queer writers and artists. She shares a sobering observation: »As artists, as well as queers, these people wanted to be able to think in radical ways [...] They admired their predecessors who had created change through confrontation, alienation and truth-telling. But their professional instincts led them in different directions: accommodation, social positioning, even unconscious manoeuvring of the queer content they did have so that it was depoliticized, personalized and not about power.« It is encounters like these that led Schulman to write her book, positing that it is gentrifi-

cation – the homogenization of neighbourhoods – which has fuelled »an internal replacement that alienated people from the concrete process of social and artistic change.« It's hard to verify whether Schulman's assertion about those young artists (she doesn't mention their names) is fair; but, more generally, she certainly has a point, thinking about how – in the face of the dramatic swing to the right that many countries have experienced lately – counter-protests have not been sufficiently sustained and concerted. Except in the US, following Trump's election, and in Poland.

So who actually co-ordinated the Polish protests? By all accounts, they were instigated, in collaboration with other groups, by a young progressive party, *Razem [Together]*, which was founded in May 2015 out of dissatisfaction with the postcommunist left. According to the British economist Guy Standing, in a recent interview, it is »the first authentic movement in Poland that is representing the precariat«. From what I can gather, a number of Polish artists are sympathetic to, if not actively working with, *Razem*. Though the party has an anti-hierarchical policy of not naming members or leaders, it is not unreasonable to suggest that artists may have contributed substantially to the way these protests were organized. Perhaps, despite Schulman's pessimism, the historic knowledge of how to create silent acts and potent images of disobedience that mobilize people has not been entirely lost. At a time when civil and minority rights seem more at stake than we might have anticipated only a few years back, that wisdom is sorely needed. If you have it, why not share it?

SO FAR, SO GOOD: CONTEMPORARY FASCISM, WEAK RESISTANCE, AND POSTARTISTIC PRACTICES IN TODAY'S POLAND

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»Our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agree-

ment between past generations and the present one.«¹

In the 1995 movie *La Haine*, Mathieu Kassovitz's stinging vision of the plight of the Parisian suburbs, one of the characters tells a joke: »Heard about the guy who fell off a skyscraper? On his way down past each floor, he kept saying to reassure himself: 'so far, so good ... so far, so good ... so far, so good. How you fall doesn't matter. It's how you land.'« In Warsaw, this joke has recently come back in style. We repeat it at numerous

social occasions, though the majority of our friends do not find it funny. It is too accurate.

So far, so good. The axe has not fallen yet. A majority of art institutions remain active. New museums are planned. Some are already under construction. Grants and stipends are still distributed. Censorship is rare, and, as of now, only two state-run theaters have new directors imposed by the government. Gallery weekends are still organized. Nobody has yet been imprisoned or assassinated. Artists, curators, and intellectuals plan projects, produce artworks, write texts.

Yet, the hard landing is approaching. The fall began in October 2015, when the hard-right Law and Justice Party upset the Civic Platform in parliamentary elections. Since then, the Polish constitutional court has been dismantled. The central courts have been staffed with judges approved by the ruling party, after the former judges were sent away. Publicly owned media outlets – now rebranded »the national media« – have been taken over by nationalists installed by the government. Racial hatred is on the rise and receives official blessing in the government's tirades against refugees. When the Pope speaks against gender, he is applauded. When he speaks about refugees, he is corrected. There are laws debated in Parliament which, if enacted, would result in the penalization of women for any attempt to terminate pregnancies or even for accidental miscarriages. Fascist marches are organized to celebrate any occasion, most recently to commemorate the anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, when 200,000 Poles lost their lives. It is hard to imagine what the father of the Kaczyński twins, a fighter in the Uprising, would feel seeing his own son, Jarosław, reinstalling fascism in the city he once defended against fascist

240 Germany. Mr. Jarosław Kaczyński is now continuing the conservative model first imposed on Poland by his twin brother, Lech, who died in a famous plane crash in Russia in 2010. For legal inspiration the ruling party turns to Carl Schmitt, the major ideologue of Nazi Germany. Mr. Marek Cichocki, the conservative political philosopher, translator of Carl Schmitt into Polish, and active propagator of his thought, was among the deceased president's main advisors. In Schmitt's political doctrine the sovereign is beyond, or above, the law. There is no possibility of negotiation and no such thing as *accountability* for sovereign power. We see this very clearly in Poland today.

Even in the cultural sector, people feel the first breeze of the wind of change. The Ministry of Culture has completely withdrawn from subsidizing contemporary art collections. Slowly but surely, government cultural agencies are taken over by nationalistically inclined cadres, both in Poland and abroad. Cultural policies are reoriented towards so called »historical policy,« a euphemism for the nationalistic rewriting of history. Instructions are being passed to the Institutes of Polish Culture that films such as *Ida*, our recent Oscar-winning production about trying to cope with the trauma of Polish anti-Semitism, should not be publicly screened.

IS THERE ANYTHING »POST-« IN CONTEMPORARY FASCISM?

It is no surprise that this situation provokes a sense of urgency among cultural producers. We do not anticipate a soft landing. The majority of us do not have

golden parachutes. But we will not go without a fight. Most people working in culture are trying to do something about the looming catastrophe, even if this is too little, too late – we demonstrate, discuss, disseminate, organize, act. In other words, we struggle against the coming fascism.

A recent discussion on post-fascisms at the Berlin Volksbühne, initiated by Boris Buden, aptly summarized the preconditions for the contemporary return of a political climate similar to that of the 1930s.² However, it also undermined and questioned any attempt to equate those times with our own. The choice of using the term »post-fascism« rather than simply »fascism« suggests some change or difference in emphasis typical for a progressive, linear vision of time and experience. While this perspective seems correct, it is also important to question this emphasis on difference, which logically leads to claiming an exceptional character for contemporary fascism. This understanding is at odds with descriptions of fascism as a reactionary fixation of desires on a revanchist phallic fantasy, as offered by thinkers like Wilhelm Reich, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and Klaus Theweleit.

We understand fascism as a machine which re-territorializes the social forces destabilized by neoliberalism, without attempting to overcome capitalism as such. However, it is misleading to regard fascism as solely a misguided protest against neoliberal inequality. Without a doubt, economic conditions and the injustice inherent to class societies are key factors behind the energies propelling fascism. Yet, considering fascism as simply a misled expression of the egalitarian impulses of the contemporary demos is intellectually inadequate and politically futile.

242 Fascism operates on many levels. According to its own nationalistic, militaristic, and patriarchal fantasies, it rearranges the social as if it were a patriarchal family. It takes over the state apparatus, reasserts control over women's bodies, eradicates the public sphere, subsumes the judiciary, and rearranges distribution in order to gratify its supporters and exclude its opponents. The suddenly muscular, bold, masculine bodies of those promoting racism in the streets of Warsaw – the city of antifascist resistance during World War II – are today's war machines fuelled by a misguided identification with the heroes of the Second World War, who, if given a chance, would reject the xenophobic, resentment-driven, misogynist ideology of those who preach fascism in today's Warsaw.

Wilhelm Reich was right: the masses desire fascism. Merely saying that »they choose it« is founded on a false notion of rational politics, which denies the role of the subconscious. Fascism today is neither *neo-* nor *post-*. It is the old friend of despair, a resentful phantasm of masculine power over the feminine body – over actual women and all those identified with them, including whole groups and societies – that has always existed in modernity, especially when modernity is kicked out of its progressive safety-zones and confronted with what it expels: the unmediated myth.³ The decentralized and diffuse character of current fascist insurgencies is puzzling, especially for liberal elites, but also for some on the Left. Nationalists present themselves as right-wing populists, as new voices of »the people,« vocalizing their grievances and articulating new national pride. They rewrite history from below, organize self-proclaimed »antiterrorist cells,« take over historical celebrations. Outside of metropolitan corridors and larger cities, the stranglehold of micro-fascisms on daily life becomes

suffocating. Urban, liberal elites are in shock. Even though for over three decades they have dismissed all critical warnings about the growing gap between the urban center and the provinces, they cannot detach themselves from the city. It is only due to the hard work of many people who actively oppose fascism that Poland has not been entirely swallowed by bottom-up fascisms. It remains a field of struggle.

What is new in contemporary fascism? It seems that fascist agents are not entirely fixated on the state and its institutions. It is not a top-down movement. It is a kind of right-wing insurgency, organized from below. This molecular movement rewires fascism's former articulations, in which hierarchical forms of organization played a major role. Obviously, the state remains the central stake in fascists' drive to power. However, the Polish version of homemade fascism started long before the Law and Justice Party took over power. Nascent state-fascism is aligned with fascisms-from-below, or with what Deleuze and Guattari called micro-fascisms.⁴

THE RHIZOMATICS OF CONTEMPORARY FASCISM

Fascism is frequently portrayed as a backlash against globalization, as a protest of the localized, ergodisenfranchised, classes against ultra-mobile elites and forces of capital. The same refrain resurfaces in the liberal commentariat's rationalizations of Brexit, Trumpism, Orbainism, and the Polish version of nationalism. We do not subscribe to these explanations, finding them entrenched in the liberal ideology of »enlightened globalization.« We consider fascism to be not an attempt

244 to block the lines of flight supposedly opened up by neoliberalism, but rather a dynamic machine propelled by global flows.

Many Polish people know the experience of migration first hand. They either joined the most recent wave of economic migration to the UK, Ireland, and Iceland, or participated in earlier migrations, primarily to the US, Germany, and other Western countries. It is therefore astonishing to see the extent of the hatred towards refugees, as well as towards Poles who escape the traditional, predominantly white image of the »Polish citizen« which permeates our daily lives. We could say that what is happening in Poland is a fascist revolution at the level of everyday life.

In *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed rightly warns against investing too much hope in love. She argues that in nationalist, exclusive groups, love is the principal element – love of a phantasmagorical, imagined, homogenous homeland inhabited solely by those who »are just like me.« Love of the »same« as opposed to love of the other. The latter is a love that dare not speak its name, not because it is unconventional, but because it is hated.

To *détourne* Simone de Beauvoir's famous maxim into an antinationalist statement: Europe, with Poland at its core, did not *become* multicultural, it was born that way. Indeed, migrating Poles demand inclusion anywhere they go. And they seem to go everywhere. Yet at the same time, they deny all non-Europeans entry to Poland (which they consider to be a bastion of »Fortress Europe«). Probably, they would gladly expel half of the Polish population, chasing out Jews, queers, ecologists, leftists, and emancipated women. When we say »In Poland, meaning everywhere,« we are twisting a phrase

from Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*. Nevertheless, wherever we turn, the pictures we see are strikingly similar to what has happened already in our homeland. People seem to be enjoying colonial mock-multiculturalism abroad (think: expats, cheap properties in warmer yet poorer countries, mass tourism) while turning into outright xenophobes in their own backyards.

In 2015, Isabell Lorey delivered a lecture in Warsaw as part of the Former West project. In the lecture she claimed that the Western model of the autonomous subject has always required keeping all of Europe's »others« in precarity. This is not only a reminder of how and why we should geopolitically contextualize and historicize precarity. This is also a necessary component of any analysis of fascism. Both fascism and precarity can be seen as two sides of the same coin – of the alienated part of European heritage, the dystopia of the supposedly enlightened civilization of the West.

Considering the insidious nature of micro-fascism, the old alternative between socialism and barbarism resonates more than ever. Fascism, perceived from Warsaw, seems to be a politically conservative and authoritarian articulation of the same sentiments of fear, cynicism, and opportunism that Paolo Virno identified as intrinsic to the precarious conditions imposed by neoliberal capitalism.⁵ Despite their claims to be or do otherwise, fascists are cynical and opportunistic, and their popularity is motivated by anxiety. The masculine and patriarchal power-drive of fascism articulates these sentiments, providing a false reconciliation of the desires aroused by consumer capitalism – false, because it fails to undermine inequality or to address the systemic impossibility of satisfying those desires, which capitalism endlessly provokes. Paradoxically, this fallacy

246 is a condition of fascism's popularity, as fascists do not need to challenge the contradictions of neoliberal common sense; they rather cynically ride on its wave of dissatisfaction. For this reason, fascism »spontaneously« permeates social desires and penetrates the public sphere, even before being superimposed by the state apparatus.

As Isabell Lorey suggests, presentist democracy could provide an alternative to the perils of the precarious multitude.⁶ We would add to this, after Virno and Hardt and Negri, that a solidarity of the multitudes, the emancipation of the general intellect, and the emergence of a commons could also provide such an alternative.⁷ However, we also agree with Gayatri Spivak when she suggests that the subaltern cannot speak.⁸ The epistemic violence that results from the constant process of reinstalling the subject of the West as the universal subject proceeds as a constant erasure of excluded voices whenever they even approach the possibility of gaining visibility. The colonial process of representation works as a »catachresis,« always producing a shadow that dissimulates the excluded voice. The Polish case, however, clearly shows that one does not need an external colonizer to exclude subaltern classes. One can be colonized from inside by comprador neoliberal elites. Contemporary fascism sometimes claims to be a voice of subaltern resentment. In fact, it only replaces international neoliberal elites with local ones, without changing the structure of public discourse. In a structurally similar yet distinct way, progressives, due to our anticapitalist politics, are being eradicated from public discourse not only by fascists, but first and foremost by defenders of the neoliberal utopia of productivity, meritocracy, and consumerism.

Fascism is a direct result of the crisis of the bourgeois public sphere and the systems of distributing authority and expertise inherent to (neo) liberalism. It fills the discursive power vacuum created by the eradication of leftist political positions and systems of solidarity. In Poland – similar to what has happened worldwide – the Left has been viciously ravaged, ridiculed, dismissed, and erased by (neo) liberal media for the last thirty years. After this onslaught, fascism is the only populism left standing.

For many years now the media spectacle of phantasmagorical symmetry has presented the remaining antifascists as leftist radicals, equally ridiculous as their fascist counterparts. According to this narrative, the only reasonable fellow is a neoliberal expert (it is no surprise, then, that people have been rebelling against »expertise«). According to this logic, a good talk show would feature Hannah Arendt and Adolf Hitler as misguided lunatics, with the middle ground held firmly by Margaret Thatcher. This perturbed logic of supposed symmetry regards fascism as yet another legitimate point of view, foreclosing the possibility of the sort of non-platform strategy necessary for genuine antifascist politics.

WEAK RESISTANCE AND POSTARTISTIC ANTIFASCISM

Responses to the complex character of contemporary fascism are equally multidimensional. There are many battle lines and thousands of antifascist fronts. Antifascist struggles unfold variously as political mobilizations, interventions in public space, and everyday non-heroic disobedience, or »weak resistance.«

248 Already in 1976, a Czech philosopher, Jan Patočka, wondered about the experience of a world in transition.⁹ Although politically persecuted for his active opposition to the Communist Party, he did not limit his perspective to the local situation of his country. In 1968 and after, he conceptualized the »solidarity of the shaken« and asked how the phenomena of decolonization and resistance would impact future generations. In 1978, another Czech, Vaclav Havel, wrote the essay *Power of the Powerless*, where he discussed the rebellion of the everyday that was so important in the events of May 1968. He argued that the powerless have political power and bring change through everyday gestures of disobedience.¹⁰ This logic of the political agency of the weak is what makes it possible to understand today's excluded as those who, even if they »cannot speak,« can have an impact on the political, sometimes even changing it without planning to. This scenario – a new beginning from a place of fear and uncertainty – is similar to the conditions for the appearance of a territory as described by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*. Importantly, the core of artistic creativity is found in the same place: a place of fear and weakness, not of power. The political agency of the weak – *weak resistance* – is therefore much more appropriate than traditional forms of resistance for discussing artistic responses to the micro-fascist takeover of desires and souls.

Our interest in weak resistance merges with our fascination with the realm of postartistic practices, which unfold beyond the narrow confines of the gallery-exhibition nexus. In our discussion, we will follow in the footsteps of the research begun during the recent exhibition *Making Use: Life in Postartistic Times* (curated by Sebastian Cichocki and Kuba Szreder for the Museum

of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2016).¹¹ »Postartistic« practices should not be read as some sort of pessimistic »end-of-art« scenario. On the contrary, this term, coined already in the 1970s by the Polish theoretician of conceptual art Jerzy Ludwiński, denotes a realm of expanded artistic practice.¹² Karen van der Berg and Ursula Pasero, following Rosalind Krauss, call it an »expanded field of art«; Gregory Sholette talks about »artistic dark matter«; Stephen Wright and Basecamp explore »plausible art worlds«; and John Roberts analyzes »art's secondary economy.«¹³ This is not a »new« tendency either; the Museum of Arte Útil, initiated by Tania Bruguera, has traced forms of socially actualized art back to the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Such practices, developed outside the gallery-exhibition nexus, do not only rearticulate what it means to make art contemporarily. They also enable us to rethink the role of art in antifascist struggles. They embody the universalist, progressive, emancipatory, and antiauthoritarian legacy of the artistic avant-gardes.

A SUMMER OF NOMADISM

The summer of 2016 in Poland was a season for nomadic, postartistic, weak resistance. The artist and architect Natalia Romik ventured to southeastern Poland with her Nomadic Shtetl Archive, visiting over ten formerly Jewish towns.¹⁵ The archive was conceived, constructed, and operated in close partnership with local NGOs and residents. They joined forces in order to hold a vigil for the communities of murdered Jews who lived in these towns before 1939, maintaining their heritage. During her travels, Romik took the Nomadic Shtetl Archive to local cultural houses, staying in every town for a day and



Crazy Gallery was organized in the summer of 2016 by Kuba de Barbaro, Janek Simon, and Agnieszka Polska, touring the country to present pop-up exhibitions Photo Kuba de Barbaro

252 displaying reminders of Jewish history. She collected scattered memories, pictures, and stories of the inhabitants. She also organized walks to formerly Jewish places, screenings about Jewish heritage, and discussions about its current status. The mirror-covered, synagogue-shaped façade of the Nomadic Shtetl Archive blended into the landscape of small towns, haunting the field of vision, just as the skeletons of formerly Jewish buildings refuse to let go of tragic memories. The main function of Nomadic Shtetl Archive was to weave a spectral Jewish presence back into the social fabric, without imposing a ready-made version of this past/presence – thereby avoiding archivistic violence and combining stored knowledges with storytelling and lived histories. It joined what is out of joint, mediating between the living and the gone, them and us, then and now. As Jacques Derrida argued, the archive has a power over the future. It does not only regulate the past.¹⁶ The Nomadic Shtetl Archive is a mobile center of weak resistance against the nationalist rewriting of history that is intrinsic to a fascist program. It materializes memories and hybridizes identities in a non-heroic act of refusal against the whitewashing of Polish anti-Semitism. Everyday racism is an effect of these manipulations, just as a perpetrator who refuses to expiate for his sins is eager to commit them again.

Crazy Gallery is another example of postartistic antifascist nomadism.¹⁷ It is organized by a core team consisting of Kuba de Barbaro, Janek Simon, and Agnieszka Polska, known from the notorious anarcho-artistic cooperative Goldex Poldex. They are joined by a crew of designers, artists, and curators (such as Katarzyna Przezwańska, who helped design the project). Crazy Gallery visited small towns and villages all around

Poland, setting up impromptu exhibits of contemporary art, occasional lectures, and concerts. Its curatorial program was ironically modeled after propagandistic travelling Soviet exhibitions. However, instead of presenting state propaganda, Crazy Gallery was a manifestation of rebellious, dadaist humor – a demonstration of the everyday power of artistic imagination. The gallery presented works by numerous artists who infuse daily reality with poetic gestures, such as Adam Rzepecki, a Polish artist from Łódź who vowed to raise Poland's highest mountain, Rysy, by one meter, so that it would reach a height of 2500 meters above sea level (currently it is »just« 2499 meters tall). Documentation of this and other »actions« and projects was presented to audiences unaccustomed to the language of contemporary art, winning them over through ironic idealism and a mixture of perseverance and lighthearted humor. Rzepecki's piece epitomizes Crazy Gallery, which fashions itself as a mobile center for an anarcho-artistic gospel – living proof that another world is possible and that artists can help subvert the fascist stranglehold on social desires.

Similar ideas guided the artists and activists who organized the collective performance *Polacy! Refugees and Citizens*, an intervention staged in August 2016 at the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising and outside the Warsaw headquarters of Frontex, the EU border agency.¹⁸ When planning the action, artists Dorian Batycka and Ehsan Fardjadniya had proposed a performative historical montage that would remix the fraught memory of the Warsaw Uprising – the ultimate fight against a fascist occupier – with the current plight of refugees. The performative intervention in the museum consisted of a nonviolent reenactment of PTSD symptoms (fainting, screams, repetitive body movements) and the

254 secret placement of a *détourned* pamphlet about the Warsaw Uprising. Afterward, participants marched to the nearby Frontex headquarters while carrying a small coffin and singing a Kaddish song.

During the action Ehsan, who was born in Iran, was »arrested« by the private security personnel who guard the skyscraper that Frontex calls home. No surprise there – he was the only one of us with a dark complexion. Later, real policemen arrived and briefly detained Ehsan, until they verified his Dutch citizenship and released him. In the meantime, several lawyers on hand informed us that under an »antiterrorist« law passed in January 2016, any person deemed by the police to be a potential »risk to our country« can be held without charges for up to two weeks. (Certainly, a person of Iranian descent is considered such a threat by default.) Poland is not a safe country for people of Arab and Persian descent, with the government's racist statements echoed by football fans, neo-Nazis, and ordinary »patriots« – or even sometimes by our neighbors and fellow academics. It seems that only art spaces, whether state-run or private, remain free of these influences.

INSTITUTIONS OF THE COMMONS

Our interest in weak resistance and the extra-institutional realm of postartistic practice should not be read as a disdain for public art institutions. On the contrary, we vehemently believe in the necessity of protecting public art institutions, as they frequently serve as public outlets for antifascist struggles. For this reason, art spaces might actually become important sites of antifascist re-

sistance, if they can overcome their inaccessibility to the masses, which frequently contradicts this noble goal. In order to bridge this gap, we want to think about public institutions as institutions of the commons-under-construction.

From our perspective – which is definitely a situated one – the question of whether we can *institutionalize the commons* does not sound absurd. It is a relevant question in a context shaken by the brutal reintroduction of private property in 1990, but not stirred by any serious negotiation of capitalist privilege. As many cases show, public art institutions established during »real socialism« and not dismantled in the post-1989 wave of neoliberal euphoria seem to preserve democratic principles of participation and inclusion. It is not our intent to idealize these organizations – they suffer from many pathologies, especially when it comes to relationships with artists and employees. However, it seems relevant to discuss whether transformative practices of the commons can rearrange institutional territories. As freelancers, we are only too aware of the risks of self-organization. Our temporary autonomous zones are so ephemeral. Too often we feel doomed to merely dream about a progressive future, unable to achieve a general revolution of the everyday, which requires stability and time. The urgent need for social change prompts our reflections on artistic institutions as potential hosts of a radicalized commons.

We imagine future institutions of the commons as fulfilling a double role. On the one hand, they could become active agents in moderating a (counter-) public sphere, thus undermining the fascist takeover of public discourse. On the other, they could respond to and sustain self-organized forces acting from below,

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256 countering micro-fascisms. Borrowing a phrase from Antonio Negri and Judith Revel, we call such progressive institutional practices the »common in revolt.«¹⁹

Exemplifying this kind of institutional practice, the preparations for the upcoming Polish Congress of Culture demonstrate that antifascist resistance need not take the form of a defense of the (neoliberal) status quo; rather, it can lead to a reinvention of public institutions as institutions of the commons.²⁰ In Poland, the legacy of cultural congresses reaches back decades. They were usually organized at times of historical and political urgency, like the Congress of 1981, which concluded the *Carnival of Solidarity* and was disrupted by the introduction of martial law on December 13, 1981. The most recent Congress of Culture was organized in 2009. It was a top-down event with a distinctive neo-liberal agenda. The luminaries of Polish transformation converged to celebrate what they perceived as the success of the past two decades of freedom and prosperity. (Today their toasts and boasts ring especially hollow.) The organizers sought to privatize the cultural sector and demote public institutions. These manipulations provoked sector-wide resistance. Together with our friends and colleagues from the independent research cluster Free/Slow University of Warsaw and Goldex Poldex, we joined this movement.²¹ We formulated our own »blueprint« for a progressive transformation of the culture sector, and published the *Manifesto of the Committee for Radical Change in Culture*, in which a group of artists, curators, and academics wrote:

»For the Polish authorities, culture appears to be just another life-sphere ready to be colonized by neoliberal capitalism. Attempts are being made to persuade us that the »free« market, productivity, and

income-oriented activities are the only rational, feasible, 257 and universal laws for social development. This is a lie [...] It is not culture that needs 'business exercises,' it is the market that needs a cultural revolution.«²²

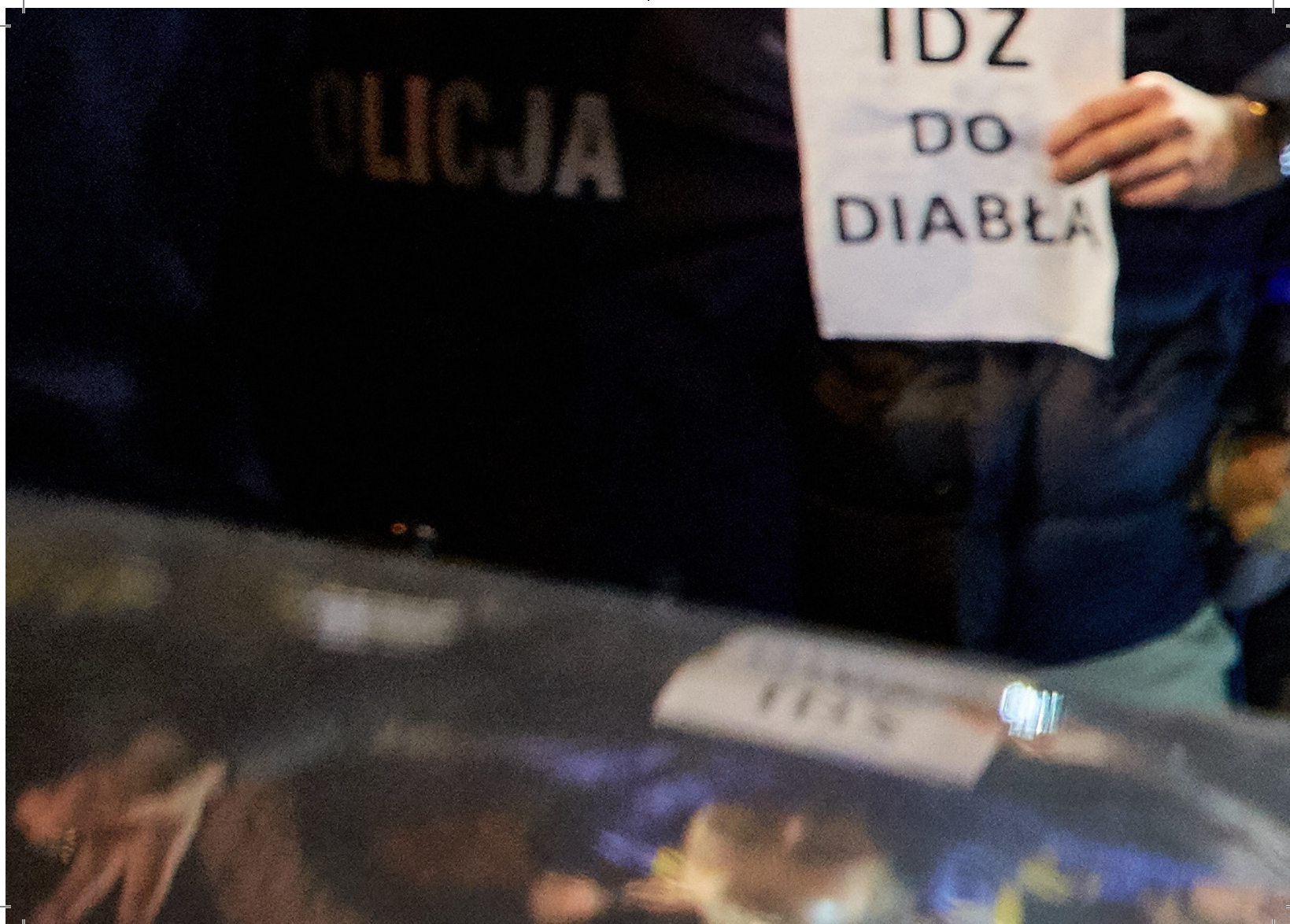
Additionally, we self-organized alternative summits, conferences, and barcamps. Collectively, we also published articles and books which contributed to a growing critique of neoliberal cultural policies and attempted to convince both the Ministry of Culture and cultural producers to defend the not-for-profit character of culture.

After seven years of hard organizational work by initiatives such as the Trade Union for Art Workers, the Citizens Forum for Contemporary Art, and Citizens for Culture, our marginal stance has become the new normal. Responding to the fascist threat, the 2016 Congress will take an entirely different approach from the one organized in 2009. It is co-organized by artistic trade unions and programmed from below, by the demos of cultural producers, three hundred of whom formulated proposals for discussion topics and panels. Based on these discussions and panels, a new, democratic charter for culture will be drafted. It will aim to reformulate cultural policies by making a big leap forward, beyond the false alternative between fascism and neoliberalism. Even more importantly, the directly democratic mode of organizing the Congress promises to build trust, forge solidarity, and enhance labor relations within the cultural sector, which has been haunted by poverty, precarity, and inequality. At the very least the Congress will provide a forum for discussing such issues – a forum which, in a time of emerging fascism, we so desperately need.

We wrote this field report from Poland – that is, everywhere – during a time marked by two significant anniversaries. Thirty-six years ago, in late August 1980, the independent workers' union Solidarność emerged. And September 1 marks the seventy-seventh anniversary of a tragedy which every Pole is painfully aware of. It is precisely in this non-time of our present that weak resistance resonates so loudly. Between the future past and the present future, the fundamental alternative »socialism or barbarism« remains vital. Only the common in revolt can lead us out of this situation, without losing what we hold dear. To the Spanish slogan »No Pasaran« [»None shall pass«] the Polish therefore add »Nie ma wolności bez Solidarności« [»There is no freedom without solidarity«], artistic or otherwise.

The massive protests of women in Poland on October 3 this year gathered some 150 000 participants in 103 public demonstrations throughout the whole country. On October 6 the Parliament rejected the barbarian anti-abortion law. While celebrating this first major victory over the ruling authorities, As the ruling party wants to add more restrictions to the access to abortion, pre-natal care and contraceptives we plan to further mobilize for a Women's Strike on the October 23.

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- 2 See: Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- 3 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- 4 Paolo Vimo, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Los Angeles: Semiotext[e] 2004.
- 5 Isabella Lorey, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, London: Verso, 2015.
- 6 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.
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- 9 Václav Havel, *Power of the Powerless, in Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. J. Keane, New York: Routledge, 2010.
- 10 Jerzy Ludwiński, *Notes from the Future of Art: Selected Writings of Jerzy Ludwiński*, Eindhoven and Rotterdam: Van Abbe-museum and Veenman Publishers, 2007.
- 11 Rosalind Krauss, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, October 8, 1979: 30–44; *Art Production Beyond the Art Market?* eds. Karen van den Berg and Ursula Paschen, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013; Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, London: Pluto Press, 2011; Basecamp Group & Friends, *Plausible Artworlds*, 2013; John Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, London: Verso, 2015.
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- 16 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- 17 facebook.com/szalonnageria/?href=ts
- 18 The artists involved, who called themselves Anonymous Stateless Immigrants Collective, were Dorian Batoryka, Ehsan Fardjadjniya, Aleka Polis, Edyta Jarzab, Damian Cholewiński, Łukasz Wójcicki, and Ewa Majewska.
- 19 Antonio Negri and Judith Revel, *The Common in Revolt*, UniNomade, July 12, 2011.
- 20 kongreskultury2016.pl
- 21 wuw-warsaw.pl/index.php?lang=eng
- 22 The manifesto was written and signed by Roman Dziadkiewicz, Grzegorz Jankowicz, Zbigniew Libera, Ewa Majewska, Lidia Makowska, Natalia Romik, Janek Simon, Jan Sowa, Kuba Szreder, Bogna Świątkowska, and Joanna Warsza. variant.org.uk/37_38texts/1ed_2manifest.html



Agnieszka Polska

Agnieszka Polska lives and works in Berlin. Solo exhibitions have been organized by the New Museum in New York, the National Gallery in Prague, Nottingham Contemporary in the UK, and the Salzburger Kunstverein in Austria. Polska's work has been included in exhibitions and screenings at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington DC, the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt, the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, the 19th Biennale of Sydney, the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, the 13th Istanbul Biennial, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, and the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin. Polska's work was featured in the 11th Gwangju Biennale in Korea and this spring will be included in the 57th Venice Biennale.

Ana Teixeira Pinto

Ana Teixeira Pinto is writer and cultural theorist based in Berlin. She is a lecturer at Universität der Künste, Berlin, and a research fellow at Leuphana University, Lüneburg. Her writings have appeared in publications such as *e-flux* journal, *art-agenda*, *Mousse*, *Frieze/de*, *Domus*, *Inaesthetics*, *Manifesta Journal*, and *Texte zur Kunst*. She is the editor of *The Reluctant Narrator* (Sternberg Press, 2014) and has recently contributed to *Alleys of Your Mind: Augmented Intelligence and its Traumas* (edited by Matteo Pasquinelli, 2015) and *Nervöse Systeme* (edited by Anselm Franke, Stephanie Hankey and Marek Tuszynski, 2016)

Andrzej Leder

Andrzej Leder studied philosophy in the Warsaw University and in the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He works on the political philosophy and philosophy of culture, applying phenomenological and psychoanalytical tools, especially Lacanian psychoanalysis. His published books in Polish: *Unconsciousness Seen as the Void* (2001), *The Teaching of Freud in the Time of Sein und Zeit* (2007), *The Scratch on the Glass* (2016) and two collections of philosophical essays, and published in English as *The Changing Guise of Myths*. His main work in political philosophy *Sleepwalking the Revolution. Exercise in Historical Logics* (2014) was vastly discussed in Poland. He has also published articles in English and French philosophical journals.

Bonaventure
Soh Bejeng Ndikung

Curator at Large for documenta 14. An independent art curator and biotechnologist.

He is Founder and Artistic Director of S A V V Y Contemporary Berlin and Editor-in-Chief of S A V V Y, *Journal for critical texts on contemporary African art*. Recent curatorial projects include *The Conundrum of Imagination*, 2017; *An Age of our Own Making*, 2016–17; *Unlearning the Given: Exercises in Demodernity and Decoloniality*, 2016; and *The Incantation of the Disquieting Muse*, 2016. Ndikung has lectured at Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia; Deutsche Bank Kunsthalle, Berlin; Aalto University, Helsinki; Art Basel; Villa Arson, Nice; Spichtig, New Theatre, Berlin, 2014; S.S.O.R., for Adriana Lara, Kunsthalle Basel, 2012; and a featured performance in Alexandra Bachzetsis's *Etude*, dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, 2012. He is Sound and Music

264 Advisor for documenta 14, as well as the curator of *Listening Space*, Athens, and co-curator of the documenta 14 concert series at Megaron – the Athens Concert Hall.

Club of Polish Losers

Club of Polish Losers is an association founded by Adam Gusowski and Piotr Mordel in 2001 in Berlin. The Club propagates interpersonal communication and empathy among Poles and Germans people by hosting cultural events in line with the *Treaty of Good Neighbourship and Friendly Cooperation* from 1991. It addresses in particular protagonists from the cultural field, who do not fit in place and time, as well as those, who are dismissed or disregarded. Apart from that, Adam Gusowski and Piotr Mordel are working as independent authors, filmmakers, and actors. They contribute to numerous satirical programs and host a you tube channel with self-produced videos. In 2016 they succeeded in organizing a premiere screening of the propagandistic film *Smolensk* in Berlin, an undertaking, which the current ambassador failed to pursue. The Club of Polish Losers is located at Ackerstraße 168 in Berlin.

David Kinyaga-Mulindwa

David Kinyaga-Mulindwa was a curator of History and Archeology at the Uganda National Museum in Kampala, Uganda from 1970 –72. From 1974–1976 he was a Research Assistant in the Department of Archeology at the University of Legon in Ghana. Between 1976 and 1993 Prof DKM as he was fondly known, worked and held a number of positions at the University of Botswana, where he was Lecturer and was promoted to Senior lecturer. He was a Founder and Coordinator of the

Archeology Unit of the University of Botswana from 1985–1993. Between 1993 and 1996 he was a Consultant and Research Affiliate at the Centre for Basic Research in Kampala, Uganda. Between 1996 and 1997 he was a Visiting Professor at the University of Fort Hare, until his untimely death in 2007. DKM was an Associate Professor and Chairman of the Programme Committee, History Department, Kyambogo University Kampala.

El Hadji Sy

El Hadji Sy was born in 1954 in Dakar, Senegal. As an artist and founder of cultural initiatives he also facilitates numerous international workshops. He studied at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Dakar. Together with Djibril Diop Mambety and Youssoupha Dione he founded the Laboratoire AGIT'ART in 1974, an iconoclastic collective that formed as an antithesis to Senghor's cultural policy and strove for heterogeneity in the established art world. Hence, in 1977 the Village des Arts was established on an island off the coast of Dakar, where 70 artists, actors, musicians, filmmakers and writers live and work. Furthermore, EL SY was responsible for the founding of the artist group HUIT FACETTES which presented their work in 2002 at documenta 11 in Kassel. El Hadji Sy has been invited to participate in documenta 14 in 2017.

Elena Agudio

Elena Agudio, PhD, is since 2013 co-artistic director at S A V V Y Contemporary, where she is curating exhibition, discursive programmes such as currently *Speaking Feminisms* dedicated to an exploration of current feminist practices and alliances, *That, Around Which The Universe Revolves* investigating rhythm analysis and

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266 the interrelations of space and time, memory, architecture and urban space, *How Does The World Breathe Now*, a film screening series critically reflecting on our now and the role of art in the society, and *S A V V Y Funk*, a radio programme for Documenta 14. As an art historian and curator, her research is focused on the sharing and exchange of knowledge and skills across disciplines and cultures. She is also artistic director of the non profit association *AoN_Platform for Art and Neuroscience*, a project in collaboration with the Medical University of Charité, The School of Mind and Brain of the Humboldt University and Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences. Recently she was curator in residence at CRIS (Curatorial Residency in Stockholm) and in autumn 2017 is a guest at HIAP in Helsinki.

Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa

Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa
studied Literature at Cam-

bridge University and Art at the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London. She is Research Fellow in Fine Art at the University of Bergen, Norway and Convener of the Africa Cluster of the Another Roadmap School. Wolukau-Wanambwa works in a wide range of media, formats and contexts. Recent and upcoming exhibitions and events include: *You Must Make Your Death Public* (De Appel, Amsterdam, NL), *Kabbo Ka Muwala* (National Gallery of Zimbabwe, ZW), *Makerere University Art Gallery*, UG & Kunsthalle Bremen, DE), *The Society of Exclusion* (tranzitsk Gallery, Bratislava, SK), *Greetings To Those Who Asked About Me* (Contemporary Image Collective, Cairo, EG. Her essay, *Margaret Trowell's School of Art or How to Keep the Children's Work Really African* will be published later

this year in the Palgrave Handbook on Race and the Arts in Education. wolukau-wanambwa.net

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Ewa Majewska

Ewa Majewska is a feminist
philosopher of culture.

She has been teaching at the Gender Studies at the University of Warsaw since 2003. In 2014–16 she was a fellow at ICI Berlin with whom she continues her association as a researcher. She is the author of two monographs: *Feminizm jako filozofia społeczna*, about feminism as social philosophy; and *Sztuka jako pozór?*, about art and censorship. She has written for *e-flux*, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *Widow, Praktyka Teoretyczna*, *Kultura Współczesna*, and *Le Monde diplomatique*, among others. She is an adjunct professor at the Artes Liberales Department at the University of Warsaw.

Federica Buetti

Federica Buetti is a writer and
editor based in Berlin. She

is the editor of *...ment*, Journal for Contemporary Culture, Art and Politics (journalment.org). Her writing on art and cultural theory has appeared in magazines such as *frieze*, *BOMB*, *Ibraaz*, *Ocula*, *Makhzin*, *Flash Art*, *Carla*, *X-TRA*, a.o., as well as in several critical anthologies and artist monographs. She is part of the curatorial team of *S A V V Y Contemporary*, where she co-curates the series *Speaking Feminisms*. She is currently completing her PhD on the feminist politics of writing in the first person at the Royal College of Art, London (Critical Writing Programme).

Jan Sowa

Jan Sowa is a dialectical materialist social theorist and researcher. He studied literature, philosophy and psychology at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland and University Paris VIII in Saint-Denis, France. He holds a PhD in sociology and a habilitation in cultural studies. His research and teaching assignments have taken him to several universities in Poland and abroad, most recently, at Warsaw University and the University of São Paulo respectively. He is a member of the Committee on Cultural Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Jan Sowa has edited and authored several books and published numerous articles in Poland and abroad (in France, United States, Mexico, Czech Republic and others). A collection of essays *A Joy Forever: Political Economy of Social Creativity*, that he co-edited, including articles by Luc Boltanski, Massimiliano Tomba, Isabelle Graw and Gigi Roggero appeared with MayFly Books (London) in 2015.

Janek Simon

Janek Simon is a conceptual artist, curator and a wannabe documentary filmmaker based in Warsaw. Guided by curiosity and inspired by travel, the history of science and political ideas, and the practice and ethics of the DIY culture, he has in recent years developed a body of work investigating notions of distance and difference between place; working on projects that try to remap the semi-peripheral position of Eastern Europe through geographical experiments. He ran a project space called Goldex Poldex in Krakow between 2008 and 2012. The space's programme dealt with issues of autonomy and it's contemporary meaning, the influence of funding bodies on artistic production and the politics of the

presentation of marginalised positions in the art system. Most recently, he has started developing large scale conceptual projects that are made public through documentary films in recent years. The first one *Mission Auropol* which tells the story of a group of Polish artist working on an exhibition in an utopian community in India is in its last stages of postproduction. His works was shown, among others, at Manifesta 7, Liverpool Biennale, Prague Biennale, and numerous solo shows in major public art institutions in Poland and elsewhere (Arnolfini Bristol, Casino Luxembourg, Zacheta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw and others).

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Joanna Warsza

Joanna Warsza is a curator and researcher in the fields of visual and performing arts and architecture. Currently she is the artistic director of Public Art Munich 2018 and Head of CuratorLab at Konstfack University in Stockholm. Her recent curatorial commissions include the Georgian pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale, the public program of Manifesta 10 in St. Petersburg, and the exhibition *Finnish Landscape* in Helsinki. Warsza has also edited several publications including *I Can't Work Like This: A Reader on Recent Boycotts and Contemporary Art* (2017), as well as *Stadium X: A Place That Never Was* (2009), *Forget Fear* (2012), *Ministry of Highways: A Guide to the Performative Architecture of Tbilisi* (2013).

Jörg Heiser

Jörg Heiser is co-editor of *frieze* magazine, writes for the national daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and is a frequent contributor to art catalogues and publications. He curated the exhibitions *Romantic Conceptualism* (2007, Kunsthalle Nürnberg, BAWAG Foundation Vienna) and *Funky*

270 *Lessons* (2004/2005, BüroFriedrich Berlin, BAWAG Foundation Vienna). He is the author of *All of a Sudden: Things that Matter in Contemporary Art* (Sternberg Press, Berlin and New York, 2008)

Karol Radziszewski

Karol Radziszewski lives and works in Warsaw, where he received his MFA from the Academy of Fine Arts in 2004. He works with film, photography, and installations and creates interdisciplinary projects. His archive-based methodology crosses multiple cultural, historical, religious, social and gender references. Since 2005 he is publisher and editor-in-chief of *DIK Fagazine*. He is also a Founder of the Queer Archives Institute. His work has been presented in institutions such as the National Museum, Museum of Modern Art, Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw; Whitechapel Gallery, London; Kunst-halle Wien, Vienna; New Museum, New York; VideoBrasil, Sao Paulo; Cobra Museum, Amsterdam; Wrocław Contemporary Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow and Muzeum Sztuki in Lodz. He has participated in several international biennales including PERFORMA 13, New York; 7th Göteborg Biennial; 4th Prague Biennial and 15th WRO Media Art Biennale.

Kuba Szreder

Kuba Szreder holds a practice-based PhD from the School of the Arts at Loughborough University (2015). He works as an independent curator and researcher. In 2009 he initiated the Free/Slow University of Warsaw. In his theoretical research he critically reflects upon the contemporary apparatus of cultural production and its socio-economic context. He is the editor and author of several catalogs, readers, book chapters, and articles.

Linias Jablonskis

Linias Jablonskis graduated from Vilnius Institute of Art in 1982 and works at the Graphic Art Centre of Vilnius University ever since. His art practice consists primarily of drawing.

Maciej Malicki

Maciej Malicki is an associate professor at the Chair of Mathematics and Mathematical Economics of Warsaw School of Economics. He studied mathematics and philosophy at Warsaw University, and holds a PhD in mathematics from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His mathematical research includes descriptive set theory, topological group theory and mathematical biology. He also writes about connections between mathematics and philosophy, e.g. in the writings of Alain Badiou and cognitive science. In his spare time, he researches topics such as Polish colonialism, the ideas of Darwinism in social sciences or Herman Melville's prose. He is an activist of the Citizens of Academia movement.

Marek Raczkowski

Marek Raczkowski, who hails from a family of artists, is himself a visual artist and a cartoonist, associated with the weekly *Przekrój* since 2003. Graduating from the Department of Interior Design at Warsaw's Academy of Fine Arts, he took up painting and set design. In 1992 he debuted as a cartoonist in *Obserwator Codzienny*. He worked with *Życie*, *Polityka*, *Zwierciadło*, and the portal *Gazeta.pl*. In 2003 he won the Grand Press award in the category of social, political and cultural journalism. In 2004 he received the Polish Culture Foundation prize from Sławomir Mrożek. Magda Żakowska's interview

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272 with Raczkowski (2013) under the title *Książka, którą napisałem, żeby mieć na dziwki i narkotyki* [A book I wrote to afford whores and drugs], which was followed in 2015 by a continuation titled *Książka, którą napisałem, żeby mieć na odwyk* [A book I wrote to afford rehab].

Maria Janion

Maria Janion is a distinguished Polish scholar, critic and theoretician of literature as well as a renowned feminist. She is a Professor at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, specializing in literary Romanticism. Janion is also a member of the Polish Academy of Learning. She has an honorary degree of the Gdańsk University. Between the years 1948–1978 she was an active member of Polish United Workers' Party. She is an author of, among others, *Uncanny Slavdom*, untranslated seminal volume for the understanding of post-coloniality in Poland.

Michał Pospiszyl

Michał Pospiszyl is a philosopher and culture theoretician. He is assistant at the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, editor of *Praktyka Teoretyczna* – responsible for the social philosophy section – and the author of the monograph entitled *Zatrzymać historię. Walter Benjamin i miejszościowy materializm* [To Stop the History: Walter Benjamin and Minority Materialism].

Oleksiy Radynski

Oleksiy Radynski is a filmmaker and writer based in Kyiv. He is a participant of Visual Culture Research Center, an initiative for art, knowledge, and politics founded in Kyiv, 2008. His latest films include *Landslide* (2016) and *People Who Came To Power* (2015, with Tomas Rafa),

which won the main prize in the national competition at Docudays International Film Festival in Kyiv. His films have been screened at Oberhausen IFF, Leipzig Doc IFF, e-flux (New York), the Academy of the Arts of the World (Cologne), and other venues. His talks and presentations have recently taken place at Berlinale Forum Expanded, Museum of Modern Art (New York), Shtab (Bishkek), Institute for Contemporary Arts (London), and UdK (Berlin). His texts have recently been published in e-flux journal, *Political Critique*, *Regarding Spectatorship*, *Raznoglasiya* and other publications.



Slavs and Tatars

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and unexpected affinities across cultures through three axes: publications, lecture performances, and exhibition-making. Originally set up as an informal book-club, the collective explores a literary and political geography known as Eurasia, defined by themselves as »east of the former Berlin Wall and west of the Great Wall of China.« The artists work across cycles, where extended periods of research give life to an eco-system of installations, sculptures, lectures, and printed matter that question our understanding of language, ritual and identity. In this context, viewers are invited to perform the »metaphysical splits« by trying to accommodate conflicting ideas and sensations drawn from opposite ends of the cultural, religious, historical, or emotional spectrum. Imbued with humor and a generosity of spirit, their work commonly blends pop visuals with esoteric traditions, oral rituals with scholarly analysis in a way that opens new paths of contemporary discourse.

Stanley Bill

Stanley Bill is Lecturer in Polish Studies at the University of Cambridge. He works largely on twentieth-century Polish literature and culture, with particular interests in religion, secularization theory, Polish-Ukrainian relations, and post-colonial interpretations of Polish cultural history. He has written on Czesław Miłosz, Bruno Schulz, post-colonial theory in the Polish context, as well as on religious problems in the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky.

Tomáš Rafa

Tomáš Rafa is a young slovak visual artist, laureate of the Oscar Čepan award 2011. After studies in Banská Bystrica and Warsaw, he is collecting visual material in the V4 countries on a long-term basis, focusing on a key question: where is the boundary between patriotism and nationalism? Racism, xenophobia, protests, demonstrations and blockades are his topics. He rather presents the material »as it is,« without declaring his attitude, thus implicitly criticizing the common manipulation of media.

Zbigniew Libera


Zbigniew Libera is one of the leading contemporary artists in Poland . His works—photographs, video films, installations, objects and drawings—piercingly and subversively play with the stereotypes of contemporary culture. His video works from the 80s (among others *Intimate Rites* and *Mystical Perseverance*) considered shocking by some, preceded body art by ten years. In mid-90s Libera began to create *Correcting Devices* (*Universal Penis Expander* and *Body Master. A Play Kit For Children* among others) which were modifications of already existing products and objects of mass consumption. One of his works which sought to reveal the mecha-

nisms of upbringing, education and cultural conditioning, in the form of transformed toys, was the famous *Lego Concentration Camp*. A pillar of so called *Critical-Art*, he is still closely connected with independent circles in Poland. In recent years he has also been preoccupied with photography, especially the specificity of press photography and the ways in which the media shape our visual memory and manipulate the image of history (works from the series *Positives* and *Masters*, 2003).

Zorka Wollny

Zorka Wollny is an artist and composer. Her musical and theatrical performances are created in direct reference to architecture, and her works are presented in the context of contemporary art, theatre, as well as contemporary music (CTM Festival in Berlin, Warsaw Autumn Festival, Jazz & Experimental Music from Poland: Istanbul and London, Audio Art Festival, Krakow). She works at the Academy of Fine Arts in Szczecin and lives in Berlin.

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MANY OF THE PEOPLE BEHIND THIS PROJECT,
ARE FRIENDS WHO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED
WITH EACH OTHER'S WORK AS FELLOW 
ARTISTS AND CRITICS, LIVING IN AND OUT OF
POLAND INVESTIGATING ITS OPAQUE PRESENT
AND THE PAST, READING THE NEWS TODAY,
ONE MIGHT HAVE A FEELING THAT ART IN
THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION MIGHT
FEEL UNNECESSARY AND THEN YOU
ASK YOURSELF CAN ART BECOME MORE THAN
ART? DON'T WE OVERESTIMATE ITS CAPACI-
TIES, ONLY BECAUSE IT MAKES US FEEL
BETTER? WE BELIEVE THAT ART IS MORE
RESILIENT THAT WE THINK, AND NEEDS TO
BECOME MORE POWERFUL IN ITS OWN RECO-
GNITION AS A PART OF A LARGER SOCIETAL
LANDSCAPE, ESPECIALLY NOW,



Tomaś Rafa Poland 2015–2016 from the project *New Nationalism*
Courtesy of the artist









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