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Colonial and Postcolonial Aspects of Polish Borderlands Studies: an Outline.

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Too often literature and culture are presumed to be politically, even historically innocent; it has regularly seemed otherwise to me¹

E.W. Said, *Orientalism*

The explosion of knowledge in Poland about the Eastern "Borderlands"

In this article I shall discuss works of literary theory and cultural theory published in Poland after 1989 and dedicated to the subject of the so-called Eastern "Borderlands," i.e. the territories to the east of Poland's current border, which at various times in history were part of the Polish state. We have already witnessed a great wave of interest in émigré thinking and literature belonging to the so-called "Borderlands" discourse, and we have also seen a period of intense development in "Borderlands" thinking in such areas as history, literary theory, ethnology, and

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1 E.W. Said *Orientalism*, trans. M. Wyrwińska-Wiśniewska, Wydawnictwo Zysk i s-ka. Poznań 2006. 63. [27] Here and further in the essay, page numbers in square brackets refer to the original editions of the quoted texts. [AW]

sociology. Almost everything of worth has been reprinted from those works that arose in émigré circles. It is difficult to count the number of conferences, seminars, collective volumes, and individual works that have dealt with various aspects of this matter. Many new literary texts, memoirs, scientific and academic works related to this field are still appearing. Several tenth websites established by aficionados of the “Borderlands” can be found on the Internet – currently these constitute a separate communication circle. The “Borderlands” surround us on all sides; I would even go so far as to say that their multiplication and hyperbolization in a country the size of Poland are an expression of collective experiences functioning for mythologizing rather than for genuine geographical, political or ethnic reasons.

The vivid fiction of the “Borderlands” in the Polish collective consciousness finds support not only in literary nostalgia. Its real expression is rather the scientific, academic, and recollective literature about the “Borderlands.” From the growing corpus of texts, there appears a characteristic image of the world, form of language, and direction of thinking. It is worth considering in what kind of language the “Borderlands” are spoken of, and in what sources support can be found for the emerging image of the world. The term “Borderlands” belongs to a wider structure of thought and image, possessing a specific magical-mythical nature and exerting a considerable influence on the social and political attitudes of the Polish community. The “Borderlands” seen in this perspective become after all that which is most Polish, although – and precisely because – they have been lost, that which *ennobles ex definitione* everyone who talks about them. And conversely – any criticism encounters a sharp reaction and even the accusation of betraying the nation.

The baseless power of discourse...

Daniel Beauvois, author of the recent book *Trójkąt ukraiński. Szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1793-1914*² [The Ukrainian Triangle: The Nobility, Tsarism, and the Peasants in the Volhynia, Podolia, and Kiev Regions, 1713-1914], reflects on the astonishing vitality of the “Borderlands” myth, where the Ukrainian borderland assumes both an Arcadian and a catastrophic image.³ He indicates the close connection between them: the idyllic note dominated

2 D. Beauvois. *Trójkąt ukraiński: Szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1713-1914* [The Ukrainian Triangle: The Nobility, Tsarism, and the Peasants in the Volhynia, Podolia, and Kiev Regions, 1713-1914] Trans. K. Rutkowski, Towarzystwo Opieki nad Archiwum Instytutu Literackiego w Paryżu and Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2005, 813

3 Ibid. 8-13.

in Polish speaking about Ukraine and it is best to state immediately that it was the source of the, usually catastrophic relations between Ukrainians and Poles.⁴ [Beauvois 2005, 11]

Beauvois, when describing the nostalgic attitudes of Poles, does not hide his surprise: “To tell the truth, it is not clear why Ukraine still filled the soul of the average Pole with nostalgia and enchantment even in Communist times.”⁵

In this context, the role of literature cannot be underestimated. The overriding discourse that fulfilled the role of supplying source knowledge about the “Borderlands” to Polish public opinion over the last hundred years or more was that of literary fiction, which mythologized reality, drove out any rational historical assessment, particularly at the time of the Partitions and then again during the Communist isolation, and created the mythology of a lost homeland, suffering and sacrifice. It is worth noting, however, that the position of literature as the source of historical, political, and patriotic knowledge is not some aberration in the Polish consciousness, maniacally attached to the “Borderlands,” but the psychological effect of a complex of severance, particularly during the Communist period, as well as the need to base that knowledge on a source which could not be entirely falsified – namely the national literature. For *émigrés*, the inevitable idealization of the past created an even stronger impulse, symbolized by the cult of lost lands, irrespective of rational historical circumstances. The results of this literary attachment to the “Borderlands” push the collective consciousness into the sphere of myth, where every claim for restitution is possible. Even today the formula *gente Ruthenus, natione Polonus* still seems to many Poles to be the most beautiful of all possible conceptions of identity in the “Borderlands”⁶ while they entertain no thoughts about its colonial nature.

Beauvois is skeptical about the cognitive value of the “Borderlands” literary discourse in Polish culture. He writes:

The impressive library of books about the “Borderlands” is not capable of providing an imaginative assessment of the sources of misunderstandings. The baseless power of discourse nearly always drowns out the significance of documents, which sometimes leads – as in the case of Ryszard Przybylski’s *Krzemieniec* – to a clear twisting of reality.⁷

4 Ibid. 11.

5 Ibid.

6 “The voluntary Polonisation of a few aristocratic Ruthenian dynasties gave the right to such speculations,” writes Beauvois. Beauvois, 2005. 12.

7 Ibid. 19

This “baseless power of discourse,” constitutes a kind of spiritual power, and becomes the expression of an overriding consciousness that takes the force out of rational arguments.

Beauvois avoids the term “colonialism,” not wanting to encroach on an area of dispute that he finds uncomfortable. He writes:

This is rather about a conscious ignoring of the other side of the coin, about a continuous construction of a myth concerning the harmonious multiculturalism of the former Republic. And it is precisely this kind of literature that has proliferated after 1989. Myth has this feature that it proposes a second nature, sometimes even stronger than reality.⁸

In contrast to Beauvois, I would like to indicate more forcefully certain features of Polish “Borderlands” discourse that are connected with a colonial type of consciousness, although that discourse is now deprived of the object of colonization, situating itself in the sphere of the language used, the images summoned up, the stereotypes and styles of academic and scientific discussion. Fortunately today, the “Borderlands” discourse, which fulfils the role of a specific supranational historical consciousness, does not lead to the subjugation of anyone other than the Poles themselves. This does not mean, however, that it is received only as a harmless Polish obsession. The former “Borderlands” react negatively after all to their continual “Borderlands-ization.”

The Polish Borderlands – a symbol of exclusion

I use the term “Borderlands” in inverted commas because I am aware of the fact that former and, particularly, present inhabitants of this area do not wish to be regarded as Polish “Borderlands” in any sense understood by the Poles and, therefore, that this term is politically incorrect and determines the kind of relations which they might feel as symbolic of Polish colonialism. In times of sensitivity on the subject of history, identity, ethnic, cultural, and political identity, such reactions may be significantly mollified by the use of pragmatic dialogue. No one in Poland asks whether the Lithuanians, Belarusians, or Ukrainians want to be, metonymically, the “Borderlands” of Poland within either its historical or its present borders, or what they think about it. The “Borderlands” discourse loudly proclaimed as a form of dialogue and above all of multiculturalism reveals its emptiness already at the outset. In this discourse there is no discussion. “Borderlands-ness” and “Borderlands studies” are in any case reserved for Poles and only rarely can we find any active Lithuanians, Belarusians, Jews, or Ukrainians here.

8 *ibid.* 17

The well-known and respected researcher, Jacek Kolbuszewski, published in 1996 a popular work entitled *Kresy* [Borderlands] in the series *A to Polska własnie* [This is Poland as a Matter of Fact]. Kolbuszewski writes about the great, although no longer present, Polish culture in the lands now known as Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. There is no significant mention here of the history or culture of these countries. There is only historical Poland. It would come as no surprise if in the opinion of the inhabitants of these countries Kolbuszewski's work were received as an attempt at domination, an exclusion of their cultures, an attempt at subordination and the promotion of a mythologized (un)truth about the splendour of the "Polish Borderlands." The contemporary Ukrainian, Belarusian, or Lithuanian reacts to this type of work emotionally – the world described therein is not in his understanding the "Borderlands," it is not even Poland, particularly "as a matter of fact" – it is not and never has been. It is as if a German researcher were to write a work entitled *Kreisen* in a series entitled *This is Germany as a Matter of Fact* about Silesia, Pomerania or Masuria. One can imagine how much ink and paper would be wasted here on polemics full of righteous indignation. Many traps of this kind, concealed in seemingly stunning mental shortcuts, can still be found in the contemporary Polish language, and not only in its colloquial form but also in its academic form.

For at least one hundred years, the word "Borderlands" (understood universally as the "Eastern Borderlands," since other geographical designations, e.g. "Western Borderlands," are of a secondary nature) has occupied a central place in the national and state mythologizing discourse. The "Borderlands" were a place of specific political confrontation and struggles for Polishness, which means that they were *de facto* about maintaining the Polish possession. In the word "Borderlands" there lies the unconcealed great power of local patriotism (transferred in the twenty inter-war years as well as today to the official patriotism of the Polish state), exoticism, otherness, colorfulness, and uncommonness, which are attractive not only to Poles. On the other hand, there is also in this word the hint of a lowering of status, a specific message indicating the peripheral nature of the "Borderlands" as a world far from the Polish centres and, of course, not exclusively Polish (for both reasons the term "Borderlands" was and still is attacked in Ukraine and rejected as absurd in Lithuania).

According to Edward Said in his *Orientalism*,⁹ the word "Borderlands" would be a typical lexeme in the dictionary of colonial discourse, even though the practice of this "colonialism" is now exclusively historical; in other words, it does not possess a *designatum* and its world consists exclusively of words

9 E.W. Said *Orientalism*.

and symbols. This testifies to the power of the construction of mythologizing historical experiences, concealed by the language of social communication, particularly in literature and in documentary and political texts. The anachronistic word "Borderlands" lives on in social emotions. Even a supposedly unquestioned authority, such as John Paul II, comes in for criticism. During the "Borderlands" conference (Warsaw, 26-28.11.1996), Ryszard Kiersnowski criticized the Pope's statement in which he talked about the Lithuanians of Polish descent (namely, the citizens of Lithuania of Polish origin)¹⁰ and not about repressed Poles. Kiersnowski included these Poles in the world of the "Borderlands" and excluded them from Lithuania as their motherland. Meanwhile, the Catholic citizens of the city of Przemyśl, which is not only Catholic, closed the doors of the garrison church to the highest dignitary of this faith when he wanted to hand over the shrine to the Ukrainian Greek Catholics in the name of good-neighborly relations. According to Kiersnowski's manner of thinking, the "Borderlands" are to be exclusively Polish. For example, the churches: if they are not Polish, then they have no right to exist. And no Pope can change that.

The "Borderlands" constitute, therefore, a site of tribal community. A saccharine image of good, paradise, community, harmony. And at the same time a symbol of suffering and sacrifice. The "Borderlands" are the key to national martyrology and the holy, unquestionable truths. Everyone who raises a wistful voice on the matter of the "Borderlands" is a real Pole. Others are simply, well, Others. Speaking out on behalf of the "Borderlands" situates the speaker at the centre of the Polish national discourse and signifies at the same time the confirmation of an identity based almost on some magic spell. The "Polish Borderlands" are, therefore, a definition of identity that excludes Others.

The "Borderlands" and the marches

The issue of the "Borderlands" is obviously connected with the issue of the ethnic and cultural marches. The difference between these consists in the fact that the "Borderlands" are treated as a phenomenon belonging to the

10 "The Borderland renaissance has suffered a severe blow ... from the least expected side. The awful words of John Paul II spoken in the Dominican church in Vilnius about the 'Lithuanians of Polish descent' gathered there sounded like a sentence of death for the identity of the 'Borderlands' Poles. Because if *Roma locuta*, and this in the words of the Polish Pope, then the matter was is definitely closed. This was the end of a the Polish presence in the 'Borderlands' and therefore the end of the "Borderlands" themselves." Kiersnowski, R. "Kresy przez małe i przez wielkie "K" – kryteria tożsamości." *Kresy – pojęcie i rzeczywistość*, Handke, K. (ed.), Warszawa: 1997. 118.

field of collective memory and above all to national axiology,¹¹ while the term “marches... is in essence neutral and does not arouse such associations. The marches are around and about us, in the places where we meet our neighbors, but the ‘Borderlands,’ because they belong to the field of national consciousness and ideology, are central and everywhere. Each march-land may receive today an enhancing package of ideological “Borderlands-ness.”¹² It will then be a frontier, a line of defense of Polishness. In the semantic field of the term, an important role is still played by military elements – battles, the shedding of blood, the chivalric ethos, guarding the borders, like in the scouts’ song about “the knights of the Borderlands’ watchtowers.”¹³ Another paradoxical effect of the ideologization of the “Borderlands” is the situation in which the marches are perceived as common (i.e. multinational) and the “Borderlands” as exclusively Polish – in such terms as “Polish Borderlands,” “our Borderlands,” “the lost Borderlands” they belong only to the Polish dominium, even if today this is merely a symbolic presence.

The sociologist, Krzysztof Kwaśniewski, has isolated those features of the “Borderlands” which, in his opinion, express conquest, expansiveness, aggression:

zonality, understood, however, more as a tendency than an area; 2. emphasis more on the peripheries than on the centre, particularly the strictly ethnic; 3. aggressiveness and the increasing of the state’s possessions (the advantage of state thinking over national thinking, state assimilation

11 J. Kolbuszewski. *Kresy*. Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 1996. 128.

12 From the scientific point of view, it [‘it’ refers to what?] is different. As M. Koter writes: “Not all marches, however, deserve to be called Borderlands, just the opposite quite the contrary in fact.” (M Koter “Kresy państwowe – geneza i właściwości w świetle doświadczeń geografii politycznej” *Kresy – pojęcie i rzeczywistość* [Borderlands – the notion and reality] Warszawa 1997. 9) Uliasz sees this differently: “The Borderlands appear because of this as a community of the suffering and the exiled, as an entrenchment of Polishness or, just the opposite [or quite the contrary], as an Arcadian world; they are also regarded as a community of communities.” (S Uliasz “Kresy jako przestrzeń kulturowa.” *Ibid.* 136.)

13 The Borderlands ethos – “the ethos of enduring on at a threatened border-post in the defense of fatherland and faith” (Koter 1997. 31); the myth of the bulwark of Christianity: “the myth of national unity within the Republic in the matter of Polish consciousness, as if integrating, like the children of one mother – the Crown of Poland – the various nations living there, whose consequence was the stubborn dreams dream about of Poland stretching “from sea to sea.” (Koter 1997. 31); “From the time of the nineteenth century, there took place in Poland an interference merging [an integration?] in the notions of the Borderlands and Ukraine and they became almost synonymous. But the sphere of meanings and values of surrounding the notion of “Polish state borderlands” should be broadened to include other areas with similar features and historical pedigrees.” (Koter 1997. 31)

over national counter-culturization); 4. one-sidedness and the feeling of strength, advantage, the automatic sense of belonging to a higher ethno-class, entitled even to arrogance; 5. satisfaction derived from acquisition; 6. a primeval attachment to youth and masculinity and adventure; 7. satisfaction from gaining foreign but loyal followers who will realize one's own aspirations. In contrast to the marches, the Borderlands are not recognized by both sides as Borderlands and they do not even have to neighbor directly onto the central ethnic territory. Their mythologizing effects can, however, modify the imaginings and the aspirations connected with defining the national territory externally and with defining one's own centre of culture internally.¹⁴

The author indicates also the peculiar mental attitude of "Borderlands" identity:

For this are needed a feeling of superiority, advantage, aggressiveness, one-sided aspirations of appropriation, annexation or aggressiveness, a disproportion in the use of force to the resistance encountered.¹⁵

A Polish colonial discourse?

For over one hundred years, the Republic disappeared completely from the map of Europe, existing solely – as Said would say – in 'imagined geography'. The greater part of the last two centuries was spent by Poland, therefore, in bondage to one or other power. It would be difficult to find more impressive postcolonial references¹⁶

So writes the American Polish Studies specialist Clare Cavanagh. Poland experienced this side of the coin deeply and painfully. The other side is shown to us by Beauvois in the previously cited work, *Trójkąt ukraiński*. It is not stated anywhere, after all, that a colonized community cannot display colonizing features. That is why Poles know very well what the world both of the colonized and of the colonizing looks like. They know, but they are not interested in thinking in the categories of responsibility for this dichotomy.

14 K. Kwaśniewski. "Społeczne rozumienie relacji kresów i terytorium narodowego." *Kresy – pojęcie...* 80.

15 Ibid. 69. Elsewhere, Kwaśniewski observes: "There appears the mentality of the sahib, namely of the lord and master (of his country), and the defender (usually, however, against the same people whom he has conquered but sometimes also against a rival conqueror)." Ibid. 72.

16 C. Cavanagh "Postkolonialna Polska. Biała plama na mapie współczesnej historii." *Teksty Dru-gie* 2003 Vol. 2-3.

On the basis of works by Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, a broad definition of “colonial discourse” can be formulated which will take into account the abovementioned experiences. This would be a combination of linguistic, colloquial and institutional (literary, scientific, political) convictions indicating the justified (within its own discourse) feeling of superiority and the right to rule over other areas, peoples, and cultures and also a sense of mission towards them. Quite often these convictions are combined with a refusal to allow the colonized community or people the capacity for independent existence (because of their social and political immaturity, so-called ahistoricity, low civilizational level). Colonial discourse is characterized by paternalism, the conviction of the indisputable domination of one’s own world, which nevertheless gives a voice to so-called multiculturalism, namely controlled multiculturalism. Said states that colonial discourse does not refer to the corpus of texts directly expressing colonial ideology, but rather to the arrangements of practices and rules which produce texts and which make up the methodological organization governing their intellectual content.

To date no one in Poland has directly asked the question as to whether the so-called “Borderlands novel” or the mass-produced “Borderlands” memoirs from before 1939 and published by émigrés were a symptom of colonial consciousness. Were there any reactions at that time anticipating today’s thinking in postcolonial categories? If the question was never asked, then there can be no answers. As early as the inter-war period we were confronted by tensions expressed in the relations represented in texts such as *Požoga* [Conflagration] (1922) by Zofia Kossak-Szczucka or *Bunt rojstów* [The Revolt of the Marshes] (1938) by Józef Mackiewicz. The first of these expresses a colonial attitude and the second a weaker, because less audible, anti-colonial attitude. Similarly, if the later poem by Andrzej Kuśniewicz *Słowa o nienawiści* [Words about Hatred] (1956) can be seen to constitute an ideological (and therefore false) representation of an anti-colonial attitude, then the émigré memoirs of Father Walerian Meysztowicz *Poszło z dymem* [Up in Smoke] (1973), or the artistic prose of Zbigniew Haupt, could be said to belong to the territory settled by the émigré colonial discourse. I am deliberately not including nineteenth-century writing, e.g. *Nad Niemenem* [On the Banks of the Niemen] by Eliza Orzeszkowa, since the understanding of Polishness and its right to exist is represented differently there from in the period of Polish state independence. Between these extremes is situated *Wysoki Zamek* [High Castle] (1966) by Stanisław Lem – one of the few Polish novels set in Lviv or Galicia to be accepted by Ukrainian readers.

The vast array of “Borderlands” memoirs is a separate and specific problem. A typical example might be the introduction to the memoirs of the

well-known film director, Janusz Majewski, whose roots were in Lviv, *Retrospektywka* [Retrospective]. In particular this fragment:

our next servant was Ukrainian. I think she was called Witka, or maybe Olena. In any case she was definitely a 'Ruthenian malanka' – as my father called those women who passed through our house. The one whom I remembered tried to reach me to read – but unfortunately she muddled up Latin letters with Cyrillic ones. [...] I suspect that my undoubted dependence on Wikta had a subconsciously erotic foundation, because I liked it when she pressed me to her breasts, which were as enormous as loaves of rustic bread.¹⁷

This is a colonial image in an almost crystalline form: The young master from the city, and beside him, the servant, a Ukrainian, initiating him not only into the wealth of culture or civilization, but also into the mysteries of biological, erotic experiences (albeit subconscious ones). We can see here the influence of the literary, artistic and social stereotypes of the "lordly" literature dating back several decades. Perhaps Majewski's imagination had been influenced by nineteenth-century literary stereotypes? The narrator could not remember the woman's name accurately but he did remember her low level of education, the scornful description of the woman as a "Ruthenian malanka," suggestive of unsophisticated entertainment (malanka in Ukrainian is a New Year's Eve party), and the stereotypical erotic experience. The image is full of kindness but it is a kindness which is directed towards lower beings; it is patronizing, and with the necessary dose of superiority for the author to establish his own self-confidence, and to show the hierarchy in the family home, in the social environment, in the multinational city of Lviv.

Said has described the features of colonial consciousness produced in the nineteenth century by scholars and writers, who successfully created an image of the Orient perceived more as a component of Western knowledge than as a society and a culture functioning in its own conditions. The image of the Orient was produced in such a way so as to confirm the positive image of British society, and not the other way round. So what was the aim behind the creation of the Polish image of the "Borderlands," particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Was the aim not the same? And why was the portrait of the Ukrainian servant in *Retrospektywka* so clearly stereotypical? Because it confirms the stereotype of Polish superiority – in Poland.

The presentation of the East in Anglo-Saxon literature, according to Said, was constructed to suit the expected values of the colonizers. Authors showed idyllic nature, antiquity, intimacy, the eternal nature of relations

17 J. Majewski. *Retrospektywka*. Muza, Warszawa 2001. 8.

between the colonizer and the colonized, which always remains the same, while at the same time there is the familiar intimacy and the existence of uncrossable barriers. The colonized culture was also differentiated from the colonizing culture by representing it as existing on a different spatial-temporal plane. By locating the colonized country in distant times, or to one side somewhere (e.g. in the Ukrainian or Belarusian countryside), the authors of the colonial texts applied a particular kind of time, which Said calls the “ethnographic present.” This might be compared to an open-air museum. A similar space-and-time surrounds the figure of the Ukrainian woman in Majewski’s memoirs.

From such elements, claims Said, arises a national epic about a civilizing mission, about the superiority of one’s own culture, about the defense of values and moral norms, about the duty to propagate one’s own religious beliefs and about a higher style of life than that of the colonized.

Postcolonial criticism

In Poland postcolonial criticism does not have its own tradition.¹⁸ Yet we can see here not so much a scientific weakness as a mental one. The Poles – who in their own national ideology have a powerful feeling of being victims of history, of being underappreciated, of defeat; who eagerly remain in regressive utopias talking about their historical greatness; who are doggedly reconstructing their shattered historical discourse, do not accept the voices which might weaken this reconstructed edifice. Postcolonial criticism, meanwhile, is first and foremost an unmasking of language, including the deeper structures of the collective consciousness hidden in literary and non-literary texts. We know well how difficult it is to rid ourselves of such strong structures, even in science, which usually takes a more critical attitude. The literary tradition of scoffers, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century (Gombrowicz, Mrożek, Kisielewski, and others), gives these issues a wide berth. No one wished to “scoff” at “Borderlands” history and no one could. It would simply be too painful.

The fundamental task of postcolonial theory in Poland would be to reveal those forms of language, image, and text used in public life (in literature, science, politics etc.), which in a more or less veiled manner store and accept

18 It seems that it was the translation of E. M. Thompson’s *Troubadours of the Empire: Russian Literature and Colonialism* by A. Sierszulska (Universitas, Kraków 2000) that stirred in Poland the discussion of postcolonial theories and provided it with methodological support. In the context of this reflection, one should also mention an interesting work by E. Konończuk *Literatura i pamięć na pograniczu kultur. (Erwin Kruk – Ernst Wiechert – Johannes Bobrowski)* Towarzystwo Literackie im. Adama Mickiewicza, Białystok 2000.

convictions that disable, differentiate, exclude Others, or accept ethnic or cultural domination. Postcolonial criticism emphasizes in detail the following: 1. the verification of a priori demands made by way of literature, criticism, the humanities, which expect recognition of the dominant position of their world in the face of other ethnic groups or cultures; 2. research into the prejudice about the inferiority of the East, i.e. everything that is east of us; 3. exposure of the prejudices that allow the presentation of anyone apart from Western Europeans as exotic or immoral Others; 4. research into the language of literature and science, which includes within it the above convictions and hides a priori, colonial structures of thinking; 5. an approach to the individual person and to personality as possessing a split or mixed identity, composed as if of parts of the colonizer and of the colonized; 6. cultural interaction, and research into the representation of other cultures in literature and science; 7. the revelation of the linguistic hypocrisy of literature and the humanistic sciences, which apply different criteria to themselves and to Others; 8. investigation into the foregrounding of differences in culture and of diversity; 9. analysis of the celebrated hybridity and multiculturalism, particularly in situations where persons or groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture; 10. research into the states of marginality of the Other, seen as a source of energy and potential change.

The theorists of postcolonial criticism underline the significance of research that aims to expose established and naturalized systems of representation, which are in fact attempts to create reality from the perspective of the dominant – and regarded as natural – ethnic, cultural, and political discourse; to undermine totally the ideologemes of that discourse, such as ethnos, history or identity; to distrust the language constructions devised on one's own ground and to reject those categories in which there appears the intention of marginalizing other cultures; to emphasize the local nature of every culture. "The basis of postcolonialism is the decolonization of thought,"¹⁹ writes Dorota Kołodziejczyk in her excellent essay. This is probably the most difficult task that awaits every Polish user of the national discourse, at the center of which we find the magic word "Borderlands."

Between colonial and postcolonial discourse

I would like to discuss at some length one of the works by Władysław Panas (1947-2005), a widely respected author of monographs on Polish-Jewish literature, scholar of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania whom I personally believe

19 D. Kołodziejczyk "Trawerses przez glob: studia postkolonialne i teoria globalizacji". *Er(r)go* 2004 Vol. 1 (8). 22.

to be one of the most extraordinary personages of the Polish Studies of the last quarter of the century. At the 1995 Polish Studies Congress (Zjazd Polonistów) in Warsaw, in other words, at the most important summit of Polish Studies in the country, one that determines directions for the developments in the field, Panas gave a presentation entitled "O pograniczu etnicznym w badaniach literackich" [On the Ethnic Borderland in Literary Studies]²⁰ Published later in the conference volume, Panas's presentation illustrates a certain state of scholarly consciousness, both postulated and realized, where two contrasting attitudes to the problem of "Borderlands" oppose each other. Panas opens with an observation that in Poland

there has increased and, in the recent years, culminated, a historical-cultural process of revindication that could be described provisionally as a reclaiming of a context, and a great context, too. Its common, most general and broadest name is the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. ... In literature and literary criticism, in journalism and historical scholarship, in the discourse of culture and art history, and in the truly comprehensive "Borderlands"-themed fashion (also referred to as an "epidemic"!), there take place reminiscence and rediscovery of the abovementioned political organism, its member-states, the Crown and the Great Duchy of Lithuania, as well as her, its, their individual and collective peoples, languages, religions, cultures.²¹

Panas claims that this "process of revindication" and the "discourse" bring back a certain truth: "Today, one could safely say that the most obvious of the unobvious that has been discovered – and continue to be discovered – by this discourse is seeing in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth the 'homeland of not Poles only.'"²² Consequently, noticing the Other and the recognition of Otherness "appear to be one of the most important achievements within the Polish humanities, not only of the recent period and not only in the purely cognitive dimension."²³ And while Panas's claim about one of the "most important achievement within the Polish humanities" may astound, the interest in "Borderlands" has become a fact. In the key instances, the author uses the term "*pogranicze*" [to refer to borderlands]

20 W. Panas. "O pograniczu etnicznym w badaniach literackich." *Wiedza o literaturze i edukacja. Księga referatów Zjazdu Polonistów. Warszawa 1995*. Ed. T. Michałowska, Z. Goliński, Z. Jarosiński. Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, Warszawa 1996. 603-613.

21 *Ibid.* 605.

22 *Ibid.* 606.

23 *Ibid.*

instead of “*kresy*,”²⁴ treating the latter as a weaker, auxiliary synonym. He probably sensed the ambiguous semantics of the word (briefly mentioned earlier in the present essay), but he does not elaborate on this fact. However, elsewhere, his phrasing seems to suggest that he used both terms interchangeably.

Panas discusses the culture of the “Commonwealth of many nations”²⁵ as an ideal of multiculturalism and an example of historical perfection: “Shortly, literature in the perspective of familial Commonwealth ... Among various neighboring spaces and correspondences where literature is positioned, there is also a space that derives from the ethnic borderland, especially one enclosed by a single cultural system.”²⁶ We should remember the claim, very popular in Poland, that the history of Poles, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Jews, as well as other Others constituting the ethnic borderland, was “enclosed by a single cultural system.” The proposal to enclose the histories and cultures of Belarusians, Ukrainians, Jews, and Poles within one system of culture, supported only in Poland, today does not stand the test of criticism. Yet, Panas notices and emphasizes the fact that the discovery of the reality of ethnic and cultural borderland has had enormous and positive impact on Polish literature, its study and interpretation. Elsewhere, he presents a weighty idea, one that is crucial for the purport of his text:

On the one hand there appears the possibility of broadening the notion of Polish literature and through this the notion of Polish culture beyond the boundaries defined by language. It could be said that this would be the perspective of the *Polonisation* of Others, including the *Polonisation* of utterances in a language other than Polish.²⁷

One could not have been stated this more clearly. From the postcolonial perspective, the postulate of Polonization of Others is one of the strongest programmatic theses of colonial discourse found in Panas’s essay. The author elaborates:

I am speaking of those instances when the Other speaks Polish in literature, and of the ways it manifests its Otherness, more or less noticeably,

24 [PL *kres* (noun, singular) designates the “end of” or “fringe of,” implying a hierarchy of the center and its peripheries, contrastingly, *pogranicze* may appear to be a more value-neutral term to refer to borderlands as an intermediary space – AW]

25 [Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, *Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów*, may also be translated as the “commonwealth of both nations.” – AW]

26 W. Panas. “O pograniczu...” 607.

27 Ibid. Emphasis B.B.

when its Polish creation recalls, in several ways, the reality it “comes from.” ... The creator declares writing in Polish but not being Polish. It seems that those are the instances when one may speak directly about the literature of ethnic borderlands.²⁸

In other words, an author writing in Ukrainian, Belarusian, Lithuanian or Yiddish is excluded from the literature of borderlands, represented by

Polish-Ukrainian writers, such as Metropolitan Peter or Saint Dimitry of Rostov, the only Orthodox Saint who wrote in Polish,. There is also Polish-Lithuanian literature and Polish-Belarusian literature. There is the “discovery” of the decade: the Polish-Jewish literature. One can (and should) expand this enumeration to include other ethnic borderlands, especially the Polish-German ones.²⁹

The author follows with a statement that seems to belong downright to classical colonial discourse whose most effective instrument was language. For historical reasons, as the former masters of the “Borderlands,” Polands were left with nothing but the language and in Panas this is of key importance for the constituting of the image of borderlands:

The emergence of an intellectual formation that does identify Polish as the national option is the basic indicator for this phenomenon. Or, in other words, the separation of language from nationality and the acknowledgment that it is possible to express one’s identity, also one’s national identity, in a different language – in this case in Polish.³⁰

Panas considers Polish the “*lingua franca* of the Borderlands,” a universal and unifying code. As a result, he excludes those great writers who, living in the “Borderlands,” continued to write in their national languages and whose works have never been translated to Polish. Naturally, scholars specializing in Polish Studies do not have to be interested in their work but those who look toward Borderlands – should. I should propose to separate the “Borderlands” as a form of Polish ideologization of the past and Borderlands as a multicultural, fully valid form of co-existence of nations in the lands of the former Commonwealth, and later, at the junction of states and nations intermingled to the extreme in the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century.

28 *Ibid.* 608.

29 *Ibid.* 609.

30 *Ibid.* 610.

Having described his project for Polish Studies and Borderlands Studies from the position of the dominant, Polish culture, Panas turns away from the proposals he had just formulated, acknowledging the need for a different solution. "In practice, this means that a scholar of Polish Studies must also develop an appropriate Lithuanian, Ruthenian (both Belarusian and Ukrainian), Jewish competence etc."³¹ It is a truly great postulate, an ideal one. But there are no more scholars of this kind in contemporary Poland (not anymore). None of the Borderlands scholars that I know of reads literature in Yiddish (except for the late lamented Panas). Very few among those publishing widely on the topic of Central-Eastern Europe can fluently compare works representing even only two "Borderland" languages and literatures: Belarusian, Ukrainian, Jewish, Lithuanian, and – on the top of that – place them in the context of Polish literature. The Borderlands *pars pro toto* seems, thus, inevitable. Most scholars, unknowingly, Polishize the multicultural perspective of the Borderlands and fringes. In Poland, writing about those subjects is easy. It is enough to know the Polish language. What is problematic, however, is the fact that similarly few representatives of Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Belarusian Studies have so far moved beyond this barrier. The obstacle lies in the national, restricted nature of their research – officially under the label of multiculturalism. Panas crosses this border carefully in the second part of his work.³² He presents two approaches and two research postulates regarding the heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: to Polishize, to search for a common denominator – or to recognize Otherness, to learn its diversity, to accept it even when it evades the Polish denominator. The former proposal situates itself within the range of classical colonial discourse, the latter, on the side of postcolonial criticism.

The works of "Borderland" studies

The large number of works dealing with the "Borderlands" constitutes a challenge to the reader. I propose to look at a number of these works in which the word "Borderlands" appears, from the perspective of postcolonial theory. Naturally, I can present only my own conclusions. These are the established classics: *Kresy w literaturze. Twórcy dwudziestowieczni* [The Borderlands in Literature: Twentieth-century Authors.] edited by Edward Kasperski and Eugeniusz

³¹ *Ibid.* 612.

³² The methodological question of utmost importance, namely, what scholarly means should be used to represent the literature of a multicultural and multilingual country, state and area, for obvious reasons exceeds the scope of my essay.

Czaplejewicz³³; *Królestwo różnorodności. Teoria i literatura w sytuacji ponowoczesności*. [The Kingdom of Diversity: Theory and Literature in the Postmodern Situation] also by Eugeniusz Czaplejewicz and Edward Kasperski³⁴; Jacek Kolbuszewski's *Od Pigalle po Kresy. Krajobrazy literatury* [From Pigalle to the Borderlands: Landscapes of Literature]³⁵ and, from the same author, *Kresy* [The Borderlands]³⁶; *O dialogu kultur wspólnot kresowych* [On the Dialogue of the Cultures of the Borderlands Communities] edited by Stanisław Uliasz³⁷; *Galicja* [Galicia] by Zbigniew Fras³⁸; *Literatura kresów – kresy literatury. Fenomen kresów wschodnich w literaturze polskiej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* [The Literature of the Borderlands – The Borderlands of Literature: The Phenomenon of the Eastern Borderlands in Polish Literature in the Twenty Years between the Wars] by Stanisław Uliasz³⁹; Bolesław Hadaczek's *Kresy w literaturze polskiej. Studia i szkice* [The Borderlands in Polish Literature: Studies and Essays]⁴⁰; *Kresy, czyli obszary tęsknot* [The Borderlands, or Lands of Longing] by Tadeusz Chrzanowski.⁴¹ One of the earliest works on the “southern school,” as it used to be called euphemistically, Ewa Wiegandt's *Austria felix, czyli o micie Galicji w polskiej prozie współczesnej* [Austria felix, or The Myth of Galicia in Polish Contemporary Prose]⁴², rarely makes use

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- 33 *Kresy w literaturze. Twórcy dwudziestowieczni*. [The Borderlands in Literature: Twentieth-century Authors.] Ed. E. Kasperski, E. Czaplejewicz. Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa. 1996.
- 34 E. Czaplejewicz, E. Kasperski. *Królestwo różnorodności. Teoria i literatura w sytuacji ponowoczesności*. [The Kingdom of Diversity: Theory and Literature in the Postmodern Situation]. DiG, Warszawa. 1996.
- 35 J. Kolbuszewski. *Od Pigalle po Kresy. Krajobrazy literatury*. [From Pigalle to the Borderlands: Landscapes of Literature] Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław. 1994.
- 36 J. Kolbuszewski. *Kresy*. [The Borderlands] Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław. 1999.
- 37 *O dialogu kultur wspólnot kresowych* [On the Dialogue of the Cultures of the Borderlands Communities] Ed. S. Uliasz. Wydawnictwo WSP w Rzeszowie, Rzeszów. 1998.
- 38 Z. Fras. *Galicja*. [Galicia] Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław. 1999.
- 39 S. Uliasz. *Literatura kresów – kresy literatury. Fenomen kresów wschodnich w literaturze polskiej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* [The Literature of the Borderlands – The Borderlands of Literature: The Phenomenon of the Eastern Borderlands in Polish Literature in the Twenty Years between the Wars] Wydawnictwo WSP w Rzeszowie, Rzeszów. 1994.
- 40 B. Hadaczek. *Kresy w literaturze polskiej. Studia i szkice* [The Borderlands in Polish literature. Studies and essays] Wojewódzki Ośrodek Metodyczny, Gorzów Wielkopolski. 1999.
- 41 T. Chrzanowski. *Kresy, czyli obszary tęsknot* [The Borderlands, or Lands of longing] Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków. 2001.
- 42 E. Wiegandt. *Austria felix, czyli o micie Galicji w polskiej prozie współczesnej* [Austria felix, or The myth of Galicia in Polish contemporary prose] Wydawnictwo UAM, Poznań. 1988.

of the term "Borderlands." The place of Polish colonial discourse is occupied in Wiegandt's book by the Habsburg myth, which was devoid of the feature of desiring to regain possession and which tended to be aesthetic, decadent and catastrophic. For reasons of censorship, 1988 was far too early to make open use of "Borderlands" epiphanies. It was only the 1990s that brought the boom in "Borderlands-mania," which is still current today.

As there is no space here to discuss the content of these works, I will summarize their common features, which together constitute the formula for the "Borderlands" discourse after 1989. These works are characterized by: 1. the idealization of multiculturalism with Poland as the centre and as the only key to explaining that world in its entirety; 2. the rejection of languages recognized as "Borderlands" or minority ones, even if a minority constituted a majority in the Borderlands and marches; 3. the demonizing, exoticizing, or idealizing of the Other, the non-Pole; 4. the treatment of the phenomenon of "Borderlands-ness" as a component of the Polish historical and civilizational mission; 5. the avoidance of actual real contact with the Other (the non-Pole) through the erection of a barrier of apparent dialogue, that is of a dialogue which in essence is a monologue of superior Polishness; 6. "Borderlands-ness" as a pluralism that is only apparent, because it is concentrated around the most important value, which is perceived to be Polish culture; 7. paternalism; 8. the Polonisation of the cultural diversity of the marches and the "Borderlands"; 9. the imposing on Others of one's own perspective, terminology and "Borderlands" culture.

Generalizations always falsify the perspective and it must be added that not all of the abovementioned works fit neatly into the model I have just outlined. However, in none of these works can we find any concrete references to other cultures existing alongside Polish "Borderlands" culture. We will not find any footnotes in which the researchers refer to the views of Other researchers, even though the term "multiculturalism" features in their works as an important research category. Polish culture is considered to be fully sufficient in this matter, offering from one side only the images of the Other which it devised and stored. It is surprising to see such an ostentatious lack of interest in how this "multiculturalism," written about so many times from the Polish perspective, might look through the eyes of the Others, in their research and in their dialogue with Polish literature and culture.

It is not surprising that the Others, our neighbors, do not want to participate in the multicultural "Borderlands adventure," because it is not their "adventure," and that they so eagerly participate in projects concerning Galicia and Central Europe.

There is probably no single work of literary or cultural theory at least touching on the subject of the “Borderlands” which does not mention the word “multiculturalism,” and yet there is probably no contemporary work which makes this multiculturalism the real subject of accurate research, with a knowledge of the various languages, history, and customs, and taking into account these Other perspectives, which would make the discourse credible and reliable.

Any attempts to state that Polish culture, in certain situations, still behaves as if it were a colonizing culture are at best made timidly. But since it is a long time since there has been an object of colonization, then we are dealing here with a nostalgic theater of gestures, a theater of shadows in which we celebrate the rite of Remembering, resulting in nothing more than a revival of a fading memory. The colonial discourse, based in Poland on recalling the past, depends in this situation upon centralization and upon bringing the whole multiculturalism of the “Borderlands” into the Polish perspective, as the one that can universally explain the entirety of the matter with an almost total disregard for other perspectives and sources. This is accompanied by nostalgia, paternalism, and idealization. If, however, this seems to us to be just an innocent game with memory, then we are mistaken. Above all for this reason: that it makes the dialogue between Polish culture and the neighboring ones more difficult or even impossible and as a result weakens its own position.

Postcolonial Theory and the Polish Determinants

Until recently, the phenomena of colonial discourse and postcolonial theory were perceived in Poland as exotic. Today, the works of Ewa M. Thompson, Marek Pawłyszyn, and Mykola Riabczuk have raised awareness of the importance of the problem from the Ukrainian and Russian perspective.⁴³ The need to apply the postcolonial perspective to the Polish history of the “Borderlands” becomes necessary. Poles see in the “Borderlands” an important element of their identity and history; they write the history of their literary empire in a linear fashion, in the categories of ethnic progress understood as a development of the state and national interest, as a way leading from

43 M. Pawłyszyn *Kanon ta ikonostas*. Kiev 1997. Translation of selected passages were published as “Ukraiński postkolonialny postmodernizm.” [Ukrainian postcolonial postmodernism] in *Odkrywanie modernizmu*. [Discovering modernism] Ed. R. Nyc, Universitas, Kraków 2004. The work of M. Riabczuk includes *Od Małoroski do Ukrainy* [From Little Russia to Ukraine] with an introduction by B. Berdyczowska (ed.), trans. by O. Hnatiuk, K. Kotyńska. Universitas, Kraków 2003; *Dylemy ukraińskiego Fausta: hromadianskr suspiłstwp i “rozbudowa derżawy”*, Kiev 2000; *Dwie Ukrainy* [Two Ukraines] trans. M. Dyhas et. al. Kolegium Europy Wschodniej, Wrocław 2006.

and toward freedom of the Polish nation in the “Borderlands.” This entails a reluctance to verify the canon of their own judgments and attitudes toward “Borderlands.” In the perspective of postcolonial theory, attempts are made at a revision of canonical history and its collateral threads and currents, revealing other aspects of the past. The question of *map*, or in the words of Guattari, of “deterritorialization and reterritorialization,” is another important postcolonial topic, as is the notion of the *border*, not necessarily in the political sense. “Borderlands” seen as *kresy* represents a world oriented at a canonization of the map and a fixing of boundaries, at eliminating the difference, *kresy* is the opposite of *pogranicze*.

Polish culture has created an image whose fictionality it disregards, it is an image still discussed as a real, objective reality. But fictions have their force. They represent a variety of power discourse that relies on solidifying myths and presiding through them over collective imagination and emotions. In this perspective, our Borderlands Studies allow to dominate restructure and retain our lost power in the “Borderlands,” to reminisce about this power and to confirm it symbolically in collective memory. The history of “Borderlands” reveals a convergence with the goals of Polish historiography, and a divergence from the historiographies of Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. There are Romantic Borderlands, Sienkiewicz’s Borderlands, Borderlands of Piłsudski and the 5th Infantry Division, finally the Borderlands of the “Borderlands prose,” but there have never been Borderlands as such, as an “idea” of Borderlands, there were and there are no Shevchenko’s Borderlands, no Borderlands of Maironis, Kupala, Aleichem. One should also add that the structure of a discourse as dense as the Borderlands discourse, survived through memory and power. Those two factors elevated it to the level of knowledge which, in turn, endowed it with high status and allowed it to reconnect with the level of power that it also legitimized. Borderlands Studies assume the order of objective explanation, existence of laws of history, regularities, cultural patterns, in other words, they confirm the so called theoretical order, exhibiting at the same time certain characteristics of a colonial perspective, indicating a domination (intellectual, ideological, political, even moral) of the Polish “center” over the “peripheries” inhabited by the Others.

Two key notions and terms appear in the Borderlands discourse, namely, authenticity, understood as national identity, and multiculturalism. Both, as the postcolonial theory has proved, constitute important elements of colonial discourse. In the Borderlands discourse, identity is always threatened, never triumphant, and so it requires special efforts and means that justify any actions taken. The sense of threat absolves from sins, allows to treat the cultural difference as a dangerous phenomenon eroding national and state unity. Today, “Borderlands” relate to multiculturalism in a rather peculiar way,

one that seems to include a certain patronization as an expression of the politics of majority toward minority and otherness. The overuse of the notion of multiculturalism (in its Polish version transformed to *wielokulturowość*) reveals the existence of divisions that we are aware of, but not the ways to amend them. In a way, "multiculturalism" stands for accepting the division between the majority and the minority, the familiar and the other, the better and the worse in the supposedly culturally neutral sphere of humanist reflection. This is probably an undesirable effect of "giving attention" to the Other, often seen as humiliating from their perspective.

Thus, the final conclusion: "Borderlands" as a term, further supported by the notion of national identity on the one hand, and the notion of multiculturalism on the other, has lost its geographical sense a long time ago, gaining mostly an ideological status.

Others on the Polish "Borderlands" discourse

In this discourse, the concept of "exclusion" is crucial. Exclusion from identity and therefore, in principle, assimilation. Is it not the case that in many propositions put forward by Polish "Borderlands" scholars the Other inhabitants of the "East" are treated as members of a formation that is superior to all others – namely, the "Polish Borderlands"? This means that all the other non-"Borderlands," because non-Polish, literary worlds, such as those of Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, and Latvia, face exclusion from the world of the "Borderlands." It seems that this is where Kwiryna Ziemia locates a space for her "project of internal comparativism."⁴⁴ Said says of this: "the written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such real thing as "the Orient."⁴⁵ "Borderlands" studies are the product of Polish culture and Polish thinking about "community." They realize the ideological purpose of this culture and at the same time hide its more or less conscious aim: subordination.⁴⁶

Just how reluctant the reactions of Poland's neighbors are to the Polish myth of the "Borderlands" and to Polish notions connected with this ideological project of existence in the East, can be seen from the Ukrainian reactions in recent years. In 1995, the Ukrainian émigré writer, Ostep

44 K. Ziemia. "Projekt komparatystyki wewnętrznej." *Teksty Drugie* 2005 Vol. 1-2. 72-82.

45 E. W. Said. *Orientalizm*. 56 [21]

46 "Orientalism responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object, which was also produced by the West. Thus the history of Orientalism has both an internal consistency and a highly articulated set of relationships to the dominant culture surrounding it." *Ibid.* 56. [22]

Tarnavsky published his memoirs of World War II, entitled *Literaturnyi Lviv 1939-1944* [Literary Lviv], which are also now available in Polish.⁴⁷ These memoirs completely deny the idyllic charm of “Borderlands-ness” as recalled by Polish writers and essayists (leaving aside the fact that Lviv is not exactly part of the “Borderlands”). The Ukrainian writer mentions only in passing the forms of exclusion experienced by the Ukrainian community, the lack of perspectives, the feeling of hopelessness, the tendency of Western Ukrainian intellectuals towards anti-Polonism. This explains their attitude during the war. Poles in their assessment of these events usually confuse causes with effects.

The distinguished Harvard expert of Ukrainian and Slavic studies, George G. Grabowicz published a gloss on Polish “Borderlands” discourse, namely an article entitled “Mythologizing Lviv/Lwów: Echoes of Presence and Absence.” Grabowicz isolates two perspectives in Polish views of Lviv: the first is the conciliatory, empathic perspective of *Mój Lwów* [My Lviv] (1946) by Józef Wittlin, *Wysoki zamek* by Stanisław Lem and Adam Zagajewski’s volume *Jechać do Lwowa* [Going to Lviv] (1985), while the second writes the city exclusively into a Polish national context to the total exclusion of other nations and cultures: the studies by Stanisław Jaworski, Stanisław Wasylewski, Witold Szolginia, Kazimierz Schleyen, and dozens of their imitators who exploit the national myth of Lviv, Galicia and the “Borderlands.” “We can see here the fundamental task of the essentialist approach: dematerializing the Other. In time this will become harsher and more brutal”⁴⁸ writes Grabowicz having in mind Poland’s policy towards Ukrainians in Małopolska, particularly in the inter-war period. A certain weakness in Grabowicz’s article, however, is that he attacks certain Polish mythologists of Lviv from the beginning of the twentieth-century and then certain Polish émigrés for their, it would seem, understandable nostalgia for Lviv, particularly those groups of émigrés who never recognised the division of Central and Eastern Europe agreed at Yalta; that he forgets that the years 1939-1989 were a time of unavoidable degeneration caused by the political situation; and that he does not probe the enormous state of research that has been growing since 1989 in

47 See the Polish edition: O. Tarnawski. *Literacki Lwów. Wspomnienia ukraińskiego pisarza z lat 1939-1944*. [Literary Lviv. Memoir of a Ukrainian writer from 1939-1944] Trans. A. Achraniuk, with an introduction by B. Bakuła (ed.) Bonami, Poznań. 2004.

48 G. G. Grabowicz. “Mythologizing Lviv.Lwów: Echoes of Presence and Absence.” Quoted after trans. from Ukrainian by B. Bakuła, *Porównania* 2004 Vol. 1. 51. The article was first published as “Mythologizing Lviv/Lwów: Echoes of Presence and Absence. Lviv: A City in the Cross-currents of Culture.” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*. 2000 [2002] Vol. 24. 313-342, an later in the Kiev *Krytyka* (2002 Vol. 7-8. 11-17) as well as in Grabowicz’s book *Teksty i maski*. [Texts and masks]. Kiev 2005.

Poland, since he would undoubtedly find there not so few confirmations and support for his theses. Grabowicz does, however, notice the contemporary Polish feeling for Galicia and treats it almost as a symptom of revisionism. The American-Ukrainian researcher finds it reprehensible that Poles should be interested in Lviv, that their interest is so deep and emotional and that, unfortunately, it eliminates from the field of vision today's inhabitants. He does, however, accept the exclusion of all Polish traditions in Lviv in Ukrainian literary and scientific works. So we are dealing here with a particular kind of revenge – the expulsion of the Other (the Pole) finds understanding in the work of a literary historian who accepts exclusively the Ukrainian myth of Lviv.

The authors of the work "*Schidni kresy*" – *pid znakom pol'skoho orla*,⁴⁹ which is about the 1919-1939 period but which is presented from the perspective of the contemporary Ukrainian assessments and needs, see the problem of the "Borderlands" in terms of a sharp political polemic. The note on the title-page already says much about the leanings of the work. It talks about the battle "against the Polish occupying regime in the 'Eastern Borderlands'" and about "the liberation from social and national pressure and from foreign bondage." The work is a typical work of propaganda and it combines national and Communist elements in an image of "pressure on the Ukrainian nation" which is decidedly inimical towards Poland and the Poles. It emphasizes the assimilation policies of the Second Republic and its exploitation to this end of the Orthodox Church and its cooperation with Russia: "Both the reborn Poland and the White Guards of Russia to an equal degree were interested in removing an independent Ukraine from the map once and for all."⁵⁰ Later the authors indicate the cooperation between Poles and Bolshevik Russia in the suppression of Ukrainian independence aspirations. The authors conduct a polemic with Poland's inter-war policy as if it were contemporary policy, zealous in pursuit of its aims and dangerous for Ukraine's existence. This is all the more surprising in that in Poland's recent historiography there have been no serious attempts to justify the actions of Pilsudski's governments regarding the Ukrainian question. The history of the Ukrainian minority, meanwhile, is presented in the Kiev work as the actions of a national liberation movement with all the features of Marxist, anti-colonial discourse: i.e., in terms of nation and class. The term "Eastern Borderlands," quoted in inverted commas, is used to emphasize the usurpation and occupation of the Ukrainian lands, such as

49 O. V. Vlasjuk, B. J. Sidoruk, W. M. Ciatko, W.M. *Schidni kresy pid znakom pol'skoho orla*. Rivne, 2005. 135.

50 *Ibid.* 13. Based on the translation from Ukrainian by B. Bakula.

Volhynia, Podolia, and Galicia; the terms “occupiers,” “Polish chauvinism” etc. are all too eagerly used here.

The attitude of Ukrainian researchers, both historians and literary theorists, particularly from Western Ukraine, is decidedly against the loaded meaning of the term “Borderlands,” which is identified with colonizing discourse. When it appears in Ukrainian publications, the (at best) ironic use of the term is intended to undermine its value as a category in the field of historiography or literary studies. However different their research or worldview, Ukrainian researchers decidedly reject the term “Borderlands,” just as they reject the majority of studies on the “Borderlands,” which make of their culture an abstract exemplum serving exclusively Polish culture.

Stefania Andrusiv’s *Modus nacjonalnoji identyczności: Lwivśkyj tekst 30-ch rokiw XX st.* (Lviv, 2000) is a different case. It annoyed even Grabowicz, who himself is highly critical of the Polish – and, in particular, the émigré – fascination with Lviv. In Andrusiv’s book, essentially programmatic exclusion of the Polish elements from Lviv’s history was taken to extremes. Interestingly, in the particularly anti-Polish passages, the author refers to the views of the Ukrainian emigration. But more important than the emigration is the perspective of semiotic identity and semiotic multiculturalism a la “Lvivian text” Andrusiv writes:

We can speak of a “Lvivian text” in the Ukrainian culture. Lviv “speaks” through the names of its streets (and the very history of changing street names in Lviv constitutes a text), through its alleys, buildings, statues, history, and ideas, and may be perceived as a heterogenous text in two ways: city as a space, and city as a name. Lviv as a space found itself in a difficult relation with the Land; on the one hand, it was isomorphic with the Ukrainian Land in a non-Ukrainian state, embodying in a sense, or representing, this non-existent state (it was a state of the soul), the entire Galicia and, generally, Western Ukraine, it was an idealized model of the Ukrainian universe, at that time fulfilling the role of the center (instead of Kiev). On the other hand, it stayed outside the space it belonged to – that is Poland – remaining at the same time a Polish Lviv (and, to an extent, Jewish), which in itself could have fostered a synthesis of cultures but in that particular political and psychological-social moment resulted only in their opposition and a sharpening of the existential code of the Lvivian text, of the familiar . strange binary (both in the Ukrainian and Polish semiosis of the city that exists even today.)

“Lviv is Ukrainian! Lviv is ours! – not only because we refer to it as such. Lviv is not Polish and will never be Polish, regardless of the fact that Poles continue to usurp it!

Ukrainian scholar closes the paragraph above with a quotation from an émigré author.⁵¹ This is also the end of her discussion of Lviv's any relation to Poland. One may notice a similarity to a "Lvivian text" by a Polish historian, Witold Szolginia, who eradicated the slightest suggestions of a Ukrainian Lviv.

Borderlands and martyrdom

"Polish Borderlands" are not a pertinent Ukrainian issue today inasmuch as after the Volhynia massacre and the post-war resettlements of Poles there is neither an ethnic problem behind it (Poles live dispersed in the area and organize themselves into a federation of Polish organizations rather discreetly), nor a political one (Poland seeks possibly positive relations with its eastern neighbor). Meanwhile, for Poles living in Poland, it is a question of a national myth that permeates culture and consciousness, as well as deep memory. It seems that among many contentious issues, this one is most painful to the Polish community. The Ukrainians have so far refused to address the matter scholarly and openly. But the Volhynia tragedy is not entirely unspoken of in today's Ukraine, there have been a few journalistic and academic articles approaching the subject from the perspective of the Ukrainian historical experience and its own political perspective.⁵² For now, there is no agreement between the parties as to the origin, nature and extent of the crime. It influences the perception of the "Borderlands" as a world of Polish martyrdom, which affects an analogous Ukrainian interpretation, one that points to the colonial historical heritage and the incursive policy of the Second Polish Republic as, among others, the reason for the tragedy.

Ukrainian national mythology is dominated by the image of martyrdom, suffering, and slavery to an even larger degree than the Polish one. It is still believed that Ukrainians have always been victimized by Poles (or Muscovites, or Germans, or Tatars) and as a peasant folk they have never hurt anyone themselves. The Volhynia massacre shatters this idyllic-naïve picture, strongly ingrained in the Ukrainian consciousness, and as such, it is given little attention. Abovementioned image is perpetuated by literature, including, among others, *Volyn*, a famous epic novel by Ulas Samchuk (Vol. 1-3, publ. 1934-1937, translated to Polish in 1938), describing the hard but honest and industrious life of a Ukrainian peasant, abused at the beginning of the 20th century as a result of the solidarity of the gentry (Russian, Polish, and other). Despite several

51 Stefania Andrusiv. *Modus nacjonalnoji identyczności: Lwiwśkyj tekst 30-ch rokiv XX*. Lviv 2000. 123. (Based on the Polish translation of the passage by B.B.)

52 See for instance: Bogdan Gud', *Ukrajintsi – Polaky, Khto vynen? U poshuku pershoprychyny ukrajinsko-polskykh konfliktiv porshoi polovyny XX stolittia*. Lviv, Kalvaria 2000. 189.

obstacles, the Ukrainian Volhynian in the novel retains his national and cultural awareness, which later leads to his social and intellectual advancement. Samchuk's *Volyn* is a novel about growing into the Ukrainian identity, about the peasant ethos that allows for a fight for survival and victimization but not for crime. The publication of the already mentioned *Trójkąt ukraiński* by Daniel Beauvois contributed to the development of similarly oriented interpretations of the Ukrainian history and fate in the last decade.

The issue of martyrdom perceived by both nations as an element of collective identity and an argument in the in the debate over "whom to blame," is raised in the Polish postcolonial perspective without a reflection on the legitimacy of the use of "Borderlands" as a term and the ideology behind it. In the Ukrainian scholarship it functions as an element of postcolonial discourse with a national orientation, national interpretation of postcolonial scholarship is proposed by Petro Ivanshyn, a literary historian from western Ukraine. In "Dwa postkolonializmu: nacionalno-ekzystencialna dyferenciacia"⁵³ Ivanshyn rejects the liberal concept of postcolonial theory, associated with postmodernism, and tends to relate the postcolonial perspective to essentialism, anti-imperialism and natio-centrism. Essentialism, anti-imperialism and natio-centrism are meant here as an assumption of the existence of and a need to look for the truth about the fate of the Ukrainian nation, gradually erased by the anti-national forces, anti-imperialism, as well as a firm political struggle with the colonial past (i.e. Poland and her "Borderlands," the Russian rule and her decrees banning the use of the Ukrainian language), and with the contemporary situation characterized by the imperialistic attack of Russia on the Ukrainian political independence and its culture. Natio-centrism means an existential "fight for the revival and the retaining of the national-cultural identity." The author describes this view as a type of "cultural nationalism" that serves as the origin of this theory of "natiological postcolonialism."⁵⁴ He separates this type of postcolonialism from the postmodernist one. In a confrontation with the Polish Borderlands discourse it becomes clear that the past Polish presence in the Ukrainian territories and the contemporary views actualizing the "Borderlands" as a form of memory will be identified with an "anti-national imperialism" and as such, subject to strong criticism. The majority of Ukrainian authors whose research could support Ivanshyn,

53 Petro Ivanshyn, "Dwa postkolonializmu: nacionalno-ekzystentsialna dyferentsiatia" *Visnyk Lvivskogo Universytetu*, Ser. Filol. 2004. Vyp. 33. Ch. 2. 191-198. See also: *Natsionalano-ekzystentsialna dyferentsiatsia (osnovni teoretychni ta pragmatychni aspekty)*. Monografia. Drogobych, Vydavnycha firma "Vidrodzhennia" 2005. 308 as well as *Ukrajinske literaturoznavstvo postkolonialnogo periodu*. Kiev, Vyd. Centr "Akademia" 2014.190.

54 Petro Ivanshyn, op. cit., s. 197.

develop mostly the postulate of the revival of national identity and of creating “cultural nationalism” on the basis of domestic traditions. Consequently, what is criticized is not only the notion of “Borderlands” as a symbol of Polish imperialism but also the concept of “Borderland” multiculturalism as a ground for common tradition promoted by Poles. Several Ukrainian authors believe that the Polish support for Ukraine’s multiculturalism is a veiled attempt to disturb the stability and integrity of the Ukrainian culture in the territories that are ethnically Ukrainian. Nonetheless, in both countries postcolonial debate acknowledges the interests and sensitivity of the other party. This is undoubtedly a clear advantage in the context of the failed Polish-Lithuanian and Polish-Belarusian attempts at dialogue.

New proposals

In his article, Panas unknowingly formulated theses belonging to colonial discourse on the one hand, invalidating and undermining them on the other, by expressing opinions and postulates derived from postcolonial theory. It could be said that this reflects a characteristic way of thinking in Poland today, which tries to reconcile, to use the language of semiotics, the fear of appropriation with the shame caused by its consequences. This is a state typical of the majority of Polish “Borderlands” studies, which find themselves caught halfway between two discourses.

Polish isolationism in “Borderlands” studies (particularly ennobled by references to the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, which are used to legitimize the reflections undertaken), which accepts the Polish perspective as central, is still popular, but I have no doubt whatsoever that knowledge of postcolonial theories in research about the “Borderlands,” the borderlands and the marches will alter the balance, thus allowing Polish scholars to become more aware of something they have so far not recognized in their thinking, their language, their collective and individual identity. If someone were to tell these researchers, who are serious and worthy of respect, that their works bear the traces of colonial discourse, I am sure they would feel incensed and even insulted. “Personally, we are friends of Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Jewish tradition,” they would state firmly. And there is no reason to doubt this. So where does the problem lie? It lies not in declarations, whose sincerity no one doubts, but in the structures of their language, in the images, in defined research routes, in the methodology, in the consciousness that continues to store the same postulate of the “Polonization” of a multinational historical heritage.

In Poland there are only a few experts in the field of Polish literature and culture with competence in Lithuanian, and a few also make use of Ukrainian sources (but not to research into the “Borderlands,” because as soon as they

enter the consciousness of Ukrainian literature, they lose their will to continue). To date, no well-known Polish studies expert has tried to address the question of Belarusian literature and culture in the context of “Borderlands” studies. In my own academic milieu the view is quietly propounded that in writing about Ukrainian literature I am dealing with “second-rate literature.” This expression in itself proves how strong the stereotype is of the colonial conception of the “Borderlands” with its “first-rate” Polish literature to the fore. To date, no one in Poland has attempted to confront the several different perspectives of the “Borderlands.”

I am convinced that the matter of the borderlands and the marches requires a new scientific language in Poland. Postcolonial discourse is in principle a comparative theory and also in principle, an interdisciplinary one. The idea of integrated comparative studies, which I proposed in my work *Historia i komparatystyka*. [History and Comparative Studies]⁵⁵ comes close to this. Comparative studies today impose new methodological and educational standards; they democratize, teach parallel thinking and thinking deprived of national solipsism. We will not change our post-Soviet world if we continue to live in a zone contaminated by colonial ideology and with a feeling of distrust and fear in the face of the Other. This fear will pass if the language in which we communicate enables authentic dialogue to take place. Polish “Borderlands” discourse remains an ostensible dialogue, but and in essence it is a monologue with images of the past in which the Other play the role of extras. Recent research studies merely repeat this situation. Meanwhile only a common reading of the Borderlands makes sense – without mutual exclusions and treated as the recognition of a common heritage on the basis of integrated comparative studies. In order to achieve this, it will be necessary to wait for a new language, in which the contradictory experiences of all the subjects of the history of the Borderlands will not turn away from one another but will be enabled to reach understanding. Much depends on those who, instead of trying to regain the “Polish Borderlands” on paper or constantly renegotiate Ukrainian, Belarusian etc. injustices, could create an authentic space for dialogue about the Borderlands - in a future language of comparative studies and postcolonial theory.

Translation: Tadeusz Z. Wolański, Anna Warso

55 B. Bakuła. *Historia i komparatystyka. Szkice o literaturze i kulturze Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej XX wieku* [History and Comparative Studies. Essays on the literature and culture of Central and Eastern Europe in the 20th century] Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne, Poznań 2000.