



**“Wildness” as a metaphor for self-definition of the colonised subject in the
Positivist period in Poland**

Anna Kołos
kolos.ann@gmail.com

Abstract

This article discusses the question of the Polish nation's self-definition in the Positivist period both in belles-lettres and in journalism, which were dependent to a great extent on the colonial discourse. It is argued that crucial metaphors of “wildness,” “savageness” or “backwardness” stem from orientalising labels created by the colonisers. Examination of this issue requires some basic introduction to historical and anthropological ideas which date back to the Age of Enlightenment. The aim of this paper is to shed light – by analysing literature examples such as Ludwik Powidaj, Cyprian Kamil Norwid, Maria Konopnicka, Eliza Orzeszkowa and Henryk Sienkiewicz – on the so called “colonial trauma” that has condemned the Polish image to resentful ideology. Furthermore, the paper will provide arguments in favour of subscribing to the postcolonial studies in Central and Eastern Europe.

Key words: Poland, Prussia, Eastern Europe, Ludwik Powidaj, Cyprian Kamil Norwid, Maria Konopnicka, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Henryk Sienkiewicz, literature, positivism, postcolonial theory, orientalisation, otherness, wildness, civilisation

Introduction

During recent years in Polish humanities many efforts have been taken – though still not enough – to postpone C. Cavanagh’s diagnosis calling postcolonial Poland “a blank spot on the map of modern theory” (Cavanagh 2003, p. 60–71). Nevertheless relations with the Russian, and afterwards Soviet, empire attract most of scholars’ attention as is proved by quite a huge interest in E. Thompson’s ideas. Relations to the discourse of other hegemonic powers that carried out partitions of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth or – in other words – had begun colonisation don’t seem to attract such attention. I. Surynt, who examines German national and colonising constructions in the nineteenth century, is the one who introduces some incredibly important clues leading towards the alteration of this fact. In the

face of Prussian, imperial rhetoric, developed within the colonial discourse, some issues in Polish literature, as well as in journalism, in the Positivist period give opportunity to reconsider a certain self-definition of a colonised subject, created by the phenomena of his own voice and mimicry, well known in postcolonial theory. To reconstruct this self-definition we shall examine in this paper texts by Ludwik Powidaj, Cyprian Kamil Norwid, Maria Konopnicka, Eliza Orzeszkowa and Henryk Sienkiewicz.

Let us begin by taking a closer look at the nineteenth century vision of the so called “Osteuropa” and the way this idea existed in German imperial projects. In order to understand the historical concept of colonisation, it is vital to get back to the Age of Enlightenment as the very founder of liberal Europe characterised by the cultural values of progress and civilisation. The never-to-be-ended project began to decline in the first half of the twentieth century, as was proved for instance in such significant works as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer representing the Frankfurt School. However, it needs to be remembered that crucial values have survived in the European identity, meaning the Western European one. An example of deep concern in the geopolitical distinction of the continent, preconditioned by philosophy, which emancipated itself in the Enlightenment, is the work *Inventing Eastern Europe* by L. Wolff. Beginning with the famous Fulton speech, in which Churchill first used the rhetorical construct of the iron curtain, the author rightly suggests that this split between the East and the West, “from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic”, has a much older, historical explanation. As L. Wolff explains: “The distinction is older than Churchill and the Cold War [...]. It was not a natural distinction, or even an innocent one, for it was produced as a cultural creation, of intellectual artifice, of ideological self-interest and self-promotion. Even if Churchill might remove himself to Fulton, Missouri, to produce a semblance of external perspective, discerning from a distance the division of Europe. The original division, however, happened at home. It was Western Europe that invented Eastern Europe as its complementary other half in the eighteenth century, the Age of Enlightenment. It was also the Enlightenment, with its intellectual centers in Western Europe, that cultivated and appropriated the new notion of »civilization,« an eighteenth-century neologism, and civilization discovered its complement, within the same continent, in shadowed lands of backwardness, even barbarism. Such was the invention of Eastern Europe” (Wolff 1994, p. 4).

Starting from the Age of Enlightenment the idea of a divided Europe has thrived and became a reality during the Cold War – further reads Wolff’s conclusion. Again, it survived the fall of the Wall and still organises the mental mapping of contemporary culture. Undoubtedly the idea of the West underlied the nineteenth century nationalisms and the

modern figure of a national country. The question of German debates over the East and, as a consequence, also about Poland is explained by I. Surynt: “the contemporary German discourse about Poland is a function of many consonant and dissonant public debates that have preoccupied German public opinion since the second half of the eighteenth century. [...] What is less well-known is the overlap between the German colonial project and the discourse on Poland and Poles” (Surynt 2008, p. 69).

In these debates “dozens of plans were made for the acquisition and establishment of German overseas colonies by means of purchase and regular settlement by German emigrants” (Surynt 2008, p. 67). It was rooted in the general conviction that Germany was destined for an unique civilising mission and for attainment of world power status. German – or Prussian – imperial pretensions date back to 1814, that is to say – the decline of Napoleon's empire, but an excessive intensity can be noticed in the 1840's. It may be assumed that the driving force of the Prussian aiming at domination was a specific historical situation of German countries before the war with France (which eventually resulted in the unification of Germany). It is commonly stated that this period of German history was crucial for establishing the nationalist project of expansion, premised upon the myth of the Slavonic East. V.G. Liulevicius, who specialises in modern German history with a particular focus on German relations with Eastern Europe, claims: “The middle period of the nineteenth century, from 1830 to 1871, saw dramatic shifts in the German view of Eastern Europe, in which many earlier themes were rearranged in new patterns under the impact of immediate political pressures. The period was especially marked by a change in the character of growing nationalisms in Central and Eastern Europe, in particular in Germany itself” (Liulevicius 2009, p. 71).

Appetites for colonisation, evincing both in the pursuit of conquering overseas territories and in the project of *Drang nach Osten* (Johanek 2001, p. 30), roused by the conviction of a cultural mission and the idea of liberal progress, managed to reinforce Prussian belief in its supremacy over the Austrian lands during the political breakup (Surynt 2008, p. 71). The presupposed colonial efficiency rallied the ambition to establish the German national country as an imperial power.

As a result, colonial impulses, preconditioned by the historical predicament and the need for constructing the sense of “nation” (Surynt 2008, p. 66), overlapped the *longue durée* of the West European idea of civilisation. Such premises decided in favour of the project of colonising the East (meant to be a parallel to European overseas colonisation), which took a rhetorically significant shape.

In reference to J. Osterhammel I. Surynt stresses three general narrative strategies that occur in the colonial discourse: the belief in the civilising mission of an empire, the establishment of “the utopia of apoliticality,” and – what is crucial – the construction of Otherness as a category differentiating the coloniser and the colonised, which fits into the axiology of power.

The rhetorical creation of “difference” between the civilised and the barbaric, in relation to the West and the East, took the form of a constant repertoire of metaphors, which has been canonised by modern anthropology. It is important to begin by taking a closer look at some representative examples of such operations. The next step would be to review its anthropological and intellectual grounds.

It was Frederick II of Prussia who first referred to Poles as Indians. Ludwik Powidaj (1830–1882), a significant Polish historian and publicist of the age, argued that the king had said: “I will make attempts to familiarize these poor Iroquois with the idea of civilisation” (Powidaj 2002, p. 30). The author goes further: “Thenceforth this comparison between Poles and Indians has become a favourite topic amongst the Prussian publicists. A few years ago one of the Prussian democrats, while standing at the tribune, declared in public: Poles, just as Indians (*Rothhäute Amerikas*), are condemned to profound extinction by Providence. Likewise the strong Anglo-American race in the New World is displacing the more and more degenerate and stunted Indian generations deeply into the primeval wilderness, where they are slowly dying of famine and misery – Poles, displaced from the cities and grander landed properties (*Rittergutsbesitz*), brought to indigence, need to surrender to the Prussian civilisation¹” (Powidaj 2002, p. 30)..

Eastern Europe, complementary to what Germany thought was their historic mission, approved by J.G. Fichte, E.M. Arndt, F.L. Jahn, and – last but not least – K.A. Menzel, was characterised by the category of “lack”. M. Heffter wrote in 1847 in the book *Der Weltkampf der Deutschen und Slaven (The World Struggle between Germans and Slavs)* that “prior to the arrival of the German settlers, the Slavs were **nothing more than the nomads in Asia or Indians in America** [*nichts anders gewesen als der wilde Nomade Asiens oder der Indianer Amerikas*]” (qtd. in Surynt 2008, p. 72). In imagological studies M. Beller claims that: “the lexical field around »barbarian« presents a rhetorical topos, a national scheme and thought model whose primary function is to exclude and denigrate the other” (Beller 2007, p. 268).

¹ Unless regarded to an Anglophone source, all the quotes from Polish literature are translated philologically by Anna Kołos. Artistic, non-denotative aspects of the text are not considered and the language may have been updated in some cases.

The idea of a barbarian, defined in the Renaissance in the essay *De Cannibales* by Michel de Montaigne, appeared in nineteenth century in such representative claims as the one by J.C. Hare in the book *Guesses at truth*, published in 1827: “A barbarian is a person, who does not talk as we talk, or dress as we dress, or eat as we eat; in short, who is so audacious as not to follow our practice in all trivialities of manners” (qtd. in Beller 2007, p. 268).

The concept got actualized in cultural experience as a result of eighteenth century travels that put in motion the phenomenon of mental geography, mapping “empirical” space. Exploration of the area labelled as Eastern Europe was mediated by modern anthropology and fascination for archaeology and history, which did not necessarily lead to scientifically verifiable conclusions. From the perspective of geopoetics it may be argued that – again in reference to L. Wolff – travellers were condemned to “collapsing of chronology between their contemporary observations and the barbarian background” (Wolff 1994, p. 285).

A fine example may be found in travel narratives written by the Comte de Ségur, a French diplomat, on his way to the court of Catherine the Great in Saint Petersburg. Crossing Polish territories he remarked: “one finds oneself amid hordes of Huns, Scythians, Veneti, Slavs, and Sarmatians” and already in the Russian empire he believed that local peasants “bring to life before your eyes those Scythians, Dacians, Roxolands, Goths, once the terror of the Roman world” (Wolff 1994, p. 286).

Remarks like above were indebted to works which pretended to be science, such as the famous *Historical and Geographical Observations on the Barbarian People who Inhabited the Banks of the Danube and the Black Sea* (1765) by C. de Peyssonell, incidentally a French consul in Crimea. In this work traditional chronology gave way to the idea of geography extended both in the domain of space and time and let the author consider ancient history and the contemporary one in a syncretic manner. As L. Wolff concludes: “Eastern Europe was precisely that part of Europe where such vestiges were in evidence, where ancient history met anthropology. The categories of ancient history that identified the barbarians of Eastern Europe, in Peyssonell and above all in Gibbon, not only corresponded to the impressions of contemporary travellers, but also entered directly into the emerging social science of anthropology, most fundamentally in Herder’s discovery of the Slavs” (Wolff 1994, p. 286).

On such grounds not only science, history or anthropology but also travel accounts corresponded to the publicists’ nationalist discourse whose important feature was “the colonial application of »allegory«” (Buchholtz, Koneczniak 2009, p. 47). In general it may be argued that such allegories have remained within the borders of the semantic field of the opposition “civilisation versus wildness”, which happened to reproduce itself in numerous

secondary opposite pairs in order to characterise the West and the East. Nevertheless, the postcolonial theory claims that such allegory, as a form of narrative, is appropriated by the colonised subject, who may apply it either to the rebellious counter-discourse or to the self-colonising constructions of identity (Kiossev 1995, p. 114–155) and – finally – to the act of orientalising the Other.

M. Bakić-Hayden, who coined the term “nesting orientalism,” belongs to Balkan scholars who pay increased attention to the process of reproducing labels of otherness in the colonial counter-discourse of “the Easterners”. As Bakić-Hayden argues: “cultures and ideologies tacitly presuppose the valorized dichotomy between east and west, and have incorporated various »essences« into the patterns of representation used to describe them. Thus, eastern Europe has been commonly associated with »backwardness,« the Balkans with »violence,« India with »idealism« or »mysticism,« while the west has identified itself consistently with the »civilized world«” (Bakić-Hayden 1995, p. 917).

These “essences”, understood as entirely arbitrary labels constructing the mode of representation, appear to succumb to the differentiation of what is the imperial metropolis and what is its colonial outskirts. It depends only on the subject which incidentally manages to gain control over defining the Other. In reference to what E. Said proved years ago in his world-famous works, M. Bakić-Hayden considers one of such easily-reached labels to be “Orient.” “The gradation of »Orients« that I call »nesting orientalism« is a pattern of reproduction of the original dichotomy upon which Orientalism is premised” (Bakić-Hayden 1995, p. 918).

Therefore it comes to “nesting orientalism” in counter-discourse appropriating allegories and categorisations in order to establish one’s identity and to define the otherness in terms of own interest.

The purpose of the following part of this paper is to examine the parallel phenomenon of the self-colonising identity in Polish literary fiction and opinion journalism during the Positivist period, premised upon metaphors and labels conceived within colonial discourse.

Metaphorising the “wildness” in Polish literature

Ludwik Powidaj

In his famous and controversial article *Polacy i Indianie (Poles and Indians)* in 1864 Ludwik Powidaj introduced a positivist work programme in favour of material enrichment of the nation that appeared to him the only reasonable counterbalance for Prussian colonial aspirations. Raising critique against the model of education and social life in Poland after partitions, which remained constantly under the highly destructive influence of romantic

tradition, Ludwik Powidaj claimed: “Under such circumstances it must seem to our neighbours, i.e. Prussians, that the decline of our national individuality is just a matter of time” (Powidaj 2002, p. 35).

The author intercepted in an entirely indiscriminate way the ideas of civilisation and progress, funded in the West European liberal project, and – what is more – assented to the right of the strongest in international policy. Ferdinand Lassalle, a significant political thinker of the age, remarked: “With this law on its side, the Anglo-Saxon race conquered America, France – Algeria, England – India, and the Germanic peoples took over the lands of Slavic-speaking peoples” (qtd. in Surynt 2008, p. 73).

The belief that the stronger nation has a natural historical right to conquer a weaker one – in terms of eurocentrism – was not called into question by Ludwik Powidaj. According to the phenomenon of “nesting orientalisms” he featured the expansion into the East as **essential**. In his article he even implied that the French would have had a potential right to orientalise Germans, if the latter hadn’t had such an efficient policy, which enabled them to protect themselves: “The French for their part could also view Germans as redskins, destined by Providence to condemnation, but the situation of Germans, if compared to Frenchmen, is not that miserable” (Powidaj 2002, p. 31).

But in the meantime the Prussians with their civilising supremacy over Poland “feel somewhat entitled to compare us to Indians”. As a result: “we are threatened with the fate of hornets, that is to say – exile caused by sedulous and hard-working bees. Logic of facts, even with no malevolence of neighbours, must necessarily lead us to such a state” (Powidaj 2002, p. 32).

The logic of the right of the stronger to denationalise the weaker may not be discussed; and the target that Poland should consider itself tasked to do is only to accept the rules of the game and to get – only under these exact circumstances – into the circle of civilised nations that may distinguish themselves from the **wild** ones. According to a different kind of “logic,” the one presented by M. Bakić-Hayden in the conception of “nesting orientalisms”, Ludwik Powidaj labelled nations regarded as “poorer” with definitions, such as “backward,” “barbarian” or “wild”. As it is claimed in the article: “Up to now our standpoint is featureless – neither are we a powerful enough civilisation to impress our enemies, nor are we so barbarian as to not reckon with any material interests, like for example Montenegrins who only have their lives to lose” (Powidaj 2002, p. 34–35).

Poland is therefore – according to the author – “a qualified civilisation”. In relation to Prussians Poles are nothing but “oriental” Indians who – by “logic of facts” – are allowed to

be conquered. But in the meantime Poles are “not that wild” (not as wild as Montenegrins for God’s sake!) to let this happen and are able to do whatever they can in order to become **more civilised**. In his conclusion Ludwik Powidaj once again affirms “admittedly we are not wild just like the others” (Powidaj 2002, p. 35).

Hence it may be argued that the positivist thinker establishes self-definition of his nation in reference to categories and values belonging to the colonial discourse with no attempt to refuse its validity. What is more, in such a counter-discourse the inclination to self-colonisation goes hand in hand with orientalising and denigrating the Other.

Cyprian Kamil Norwid. Wild Indians and white democrats

Presumably the most significant polemic with Ludwik Powidaj’s concept was a poem entitled *The Work* written by the indisputably finest Polish poet of the age, Cyprian Kamil Norwid. The poem, full of irony, attempts at mocking the tyrannous and materialist dictate to work, repeating like a mantra the single line “You will be working by the sweat of your BROW”. In the third strophe definition of Indians is introduced, obviously associated with the quality “wild”:

“I have seen wild Indians in America
 In their own homeland they became what?
 After they had despised the craft and the work
 Hunting and painting their faces
 Speaking the language of exanimate generations
 The speech bound by own pride
 Being insidiously silent about prickly truths
 Just because it cannot express them.
 I know well why they have lost their language and why
 They are throwing their spears towards the clouds – they,
 Wicked – heroic, but serving the evil [...]”

(Norwid, *The work*, lines 53–64)

These lines may be understood as a direct critique of Ludwik Powidaj’s idea of nations and tribes destined by Providence to damnation as a result of the “sin” of despising craft and work, obviously in terms of European positivist ideals. The description of heroic and proud Indians, who “speak the language of exanimate generations” and “throw their spears towards the clouds” instead of accommodating to the “universal” requirements of civilisation, is intended to resemble the Polish romantic attitude, so implicitly discredited by the positivists

due to the non-utilitarian worship of the past and tradition. Although Cyprian Kamil Norwid – just like Ludwik Powidaj – claims that Poles are “Indian-like”, this parallel is not thought to mean the same. The poet, opposed to the publicist, does not target reproducing and accepting evolutionist – still arbitrary – laws of Western civilisations and does not approve of the necessity of familiarising nations in accordance with positivist ideals.

“These – are laughing at Indians... but both these and those

Fly in the teeth of eagle-like history

That, being on the wing over the mankind, calls

You will be working by the sweat of your BROW!”

(Norwid, *The Work*, lines 83–86) Norwid’s analogy to the colonised and “wild” Indians was also incorporated in self-definition of Poles, but strongly orientalisising the dichotomy between “civilisation”, identified with white democracy, and non-white “barbarism” was suspended in face of ruthless egalitarianism of eagle-like history.

Maria Konopnicka. “It is *sclavus saltans* – a half-wild Slav”

Beside the comparison to the wild, Polish self-definition constructions in the examined period the theme of slaves’ identity also developed. Maria Konopnicka was a poetess who, in the poem *Sclavus saltans*, set her vision of romantic struggles with national inactivity in the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity, an idea diametrically different to the mainstream of positivist philosophy of labour. The first elaborate work, which gained wide reception in the period of Romanticism and set action in Roman Late Antiquity, was *Irydion* by Zygmunt Krasiński. Its initial sentence reads: “The ancient world is now drawing nigh its end. All that dwelt therein is rotting, is dissolving, is demented” (qtd. in Gardner 1918, p. 142).

In accordance to the romantic tradition Maria Konopnicka created in the very beginning of the poem a messianic perspective of the decline of Rome, reconsidering the heroism of *Irydion* in a spirit of anti-imperialism:

“It may be heard that somewhere arises

a vengeance that one day will encompass the world

from afar a growling abyss is being heard

Tremble! A slave is bringing down Rome!”

(Konopnicka, *Sclavus saltans*, lines 21–24)

A slave rebellion in ancient Rome should be considered a resentful vision of liberating the outskirts from the hegemony of the centre. In a self-orientalising view the author

demonstrates an inclination for – now positively connoted – “barbarians” causing the decay of the empire. Romantic narration is set against the critique of passive attitude that may be regarded as a result of the idea of rural, peace-loving life of the Slavic peoples according to J.G. Herder’s widely influential concept adapted to the Polish thought by a poet, Kazimierz Brodziński. In Maria Konopnicka’s poem in spite of the common sense of apocalypse something odd and unexpected occurs:

“Aside some joyful note is coming
It is *slavus saltans* – a half-wild Slav
Anywhere happy anywhere feeling at home
Does only need to frolic and have some music!
After having slit branches from the youthful willow
He made himself a plaything
While leaping he has forgotten being put in chains...
Oh! A slave the one has been and – will be!”

(Konopnicka, *Slavus saltans*, lines 45–52)

The poetic text may correspond to L. Wolff’s thesis about the overlap between ancient history and modern anthropology. For Maria Konopnicka has actualized the figure of the “half-wild” Slav, a Roman slave, in order to raise a critique against contemporary society by an ironic comment on Kazimierz Brodziński’s most famous sentence, attempting to gain the status of Polish self-definition, “we are the Slavs, we’re fond of pastorals”. It may be argued that the positivist poetess is repeating the message of the famous scene at a Warsaw Salon in the third part of Adam Mickiewicz’s *Forefathers’ Eve (Dziady)*, undoubtedly the most important Romantic drama in Polish literature. Maria Konopnicka’s punch line “A slave the one has been and – will be!”, as a blame upon positivist pragmatism causing social inactivity, may be compared to ecstatic sentences defining “the essence” of Poles:

“[...] We’re a lava field
With surface cold and dirty, hard, congealed;
But here are fires beneath, no years can end;
Let’s spit on this foul crust, and then descend.” (qtd. in: Segel 1997)

(Mickiewicz, *Forefathers’ Eve*, Part III, scene VII)

The title of Maria Konopnicka’s poem is a play on words that reminds us of the resemblance between the Latin terms for “slave” and “Slav”, an analogy intended to postpone the pastoral vision of what it is to be a Slav of Herderian provenance. Furthermore, it may be

argued that Maria Konopnicka introduced a kind of poetic deconstruction of the discourse on Slavonic identity – thought to be an ironic critique against conceiving of “essences” in terms of M. Bakić-Hayden’s theory. The author seems to imply: if German discourse and Polish representatives thinking the very same way, just like Kazimierz Brodziński, are to accept the construction of the idyllic vision of Slavs as the foundation for the nation, then – as a result – the nation will be forever condemned to mental dependence or – so to say – slavery. To allow the identity to close itself in such a mode of representation is to make any action impossible. “Sclavus saltans”, meaning a dancing Slav, in the lyrical situation created in the poem turns out to behave ridiculously and unconcernedly in face of historic events in Rome. As Maria Konopnicka suggests, emerging into such hermetical self-narration leads to loss of contact with reality and malaise condemned to resentment.

Eliza Orzeszkowa. Wildness as homeliness

In the positivist literature we may also find examples of appropriation of the category of wildness, which were given entirely positive connotations. In such forms of metaphorisation the quality of being barbarian aims against the discourse of modernisation, which is considered a Western value. The best illustration of the inclination to construct the idea of “wildness,” identified with affirmative “homeliness” or “ownness”, against the pejorative idea of civilisation is provided by a late novel *Dwa bieguny (The two poles)* (1893) by the most famous woman writer in the examined age, Eliza Orzeszkowa. Immediately it is necessary to affirm that the author’s positivist programme, included in a number of writings, beginning with early journalism and tendentious novels, may on no account be perceived in the same perspective. Just as in the case of Ludwik Powidaj Eliza Orzeszkowa’s dedication to positivist ideals of labour presumed the Western way of understanding the processes of liberal progress and the term of “civilisation”. Its finest example may be found in the introduction to one of her most renowned books, *Meir Ezofowicz* (also translated as *An obscure apostle*), a narration on a Jewish village. Yet in *The two poles* the binary model of the world mapped on the dichotomy between what is civilised and what is savage claims to reverse these relations in Western modern axiology. The idea of civilisation became a trivialised cosmopolitan attitude understood as hollow idolatry of modernity and salon gatherings. On the contrary, organic work and attachment to land and traditional values got appraised by what – in the eyes of Western worship of progress – had been considered backward-looking and simply “wild”. Already in the beginning of retrospective confessions of the viewpoint character we may find an orientalisng description of the entirely positive protagonist, Seweryna

Zdrojowska, who herself speaks: “A doubt comes to my mind, if a man, who was reasonably called by you a Bushman, does not come from a bush”. “Cause you see... if he does come from a bush... then who knows, if he’s not in possession of some extraordinary kind of civilisation, so to say, a bushy civilisation. And I’m wondering, if it wouldn’t be advisable, just out of interest, to take a closer look at this. It happens from time to time that some very funny specimens of mankind are being sent from the bush to the larger cities. And after they have passed, we may smell a fragrance of resin and longing for milky ways”. Afterwards the viewpoint character adds: “Oh, she also was a bushwoman! But can you feel the smell of pinewood, peppermint, thyme, and the freshly tilled fields?” (Orzeszkowa 1977, p. 7–8).

The woman character, consequently called in the novel “the wild one”, represents valorised “homeliness” that becomes associated with such bucolic images as “pinewood”, “a fragrance of resin”, or “thyme”. The dichotomy of the world is not called into question by Eliza Orzeszkowa – cosmopolitan approach to the civilising discourse only got reversed, which resulted in the approval of “the life of the honest man”, a leitmotif for ages well known in Polish literature and incidentally parallel to Kazimierz Brodziński’s idea. What is more, it may be argued that Eliza Orzeszkowa’s solution for the need for rejecting the occidental idea of civilisation by an apologia of “the second pole” has remained valid in literature of successive ages. Most notably A. Stasiuk seems to benefit from Eliza Orzeszkowa’s idea in the Polish contemporary literary world. The author of *Jadąc do Badabag* (*Going to Babadag*) or *Opowieści galicyjskie* (*Tales of Galicia*) similarly valorises a concept of “uncivilised” – in terms coined by Western Europe – “Easterners,” or Central Europeans, who may be compared to Eliza Orzeszkowa’s “Bushman”.

Yet in *The two poles* there comes a riveting reversal of the label “wild”, when Seweryna Zdrojowska compares sophisticated Western fashion to the image of African Zulu people. While the protagonist is having a conversation with her posh cousin, Idalka, she comments on book illustrations depicting African women: “[Fashion] tends to turn civilised people into wild ones... A lady fashionably dressed may sometimes be the spitting image of a Zulu woman... A travel through Africa – she went on – there are the prototypes... of majesty. Hold on, hold on! Here are... the Zulu woman. Look, Idalka, at their hair... at the back of their heads somewhat bulging, bristly on top ... And this one? Don’t these clothes enshroud her legs so tightly... tightly? But there’s one more depiction, the most similar of all ... I’m just finding it... And she was indeed searching, finding, and making comparisons entirely hilarious due to the fact that they were actually accurate and that it was her, the wild one, who compared us to the wild” (Orzeszkowa 1977, p. 61–62).

Eliza Orzeszkowa in this thought-provoking conversation piece manages to prove, how simple it is to revise the direction of orientalisation and to encounter a hidden “wildness” in civilisation, an obscure otherness in the very heart of what claims to be absolute identity. A similar inclination to resentful counter-discourse orientalising the empire may be found in the writings of Józef Kraszewski, who wrote ironically in 1877 in Dresden that also among Germans quasi-civilised Indians can be met: “Believe it or not, one often encounters such Indians in Germany. They possess all the external signs of a civilized nation, they can even read and write, and some have actually come across the *Conversations-Lexicon*, but when you get to talk with them, believe me – they are Indians. In my lifetime I have met many of our own boys who were illiterate, and didn’t know the time of day, but who were much more knowledgeable than those pseudo-civilized people produced in a hurry by some obscure schools” (qtd. in Surynt 2008, p. 82).

Henryk Sienkiewicz. *Sachem* and the irony of Wild West

In all above-mentioned examples metaphors of “wildness” were meant to deal with building up national identity, which led either to self-orientalisation or to orientalising both “the others” and “the empire”. In each case it was a result of accepting a foreign idea of civilisation. Yet among the most significant positivist writers it was Henryk Sienkiewicz who dared to overturn this vicious circle owing to irony that was intended to lampoon not only colonisers but also the colonised – in a short story *Sachem*. In the narration it comes to a clear escalation of the quality of savageness ascribed to the only representative of an Indian tribe in the town of Antilopa. Finally it proves to be obvious that the protagonist’s creation served as a means of aesthetic presentation of German colonisers’ exotic desires. A deeply ironic punch line, in which Sachem’s reputed genuineness turns out to be humbug, unearths the colonised subject’s pursuit of profound mimicry of the dominating culture. Final sentences of the story read: “After the performance was over, Sachem was drinking beer and eating Knödel at »Under the Golden Sun«. Seemingly the setting must have had its influence. He’s gained huge popularity in Antilopa and was especially praised by women. There were even gossips that...”

In spite of reproducing the coloniser’s behaviour and wishing to blur the “difference” the subject – in reference to H. Bhabha’s renowned idea of mimicry – becomes “almost the same but not white”. As the scholar explains: “the visibility of mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction. It is a form of colonial discourse that is uttered *inter dicta*: a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be

concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them” (Bhabha 2005, p. 128). Indelible difference turns into an aesthetic sign, a fetish for exoticism identified with familiarized otherness under control. Therefore Henryk Sienkiewicz seems to have raised a question of the struggle between “authenticity” and “commercialization”, which assumed the proportions of a severe dilemma only in the 20th century caused by the thriving of mass culture and global tourism. Last but not least, it may be argued that the story about “ambivalent otherness” has much in common with contemporary postcolonial fiction, which depicts the same need for reified otherness within the colonial discourse. The best example may be claimed Hanif Kureishi’s novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

Summary

Granted, many more literary examples of colonial allegories remain unexamined (especially in case of parabolic references to ancient history), nevertheless these vital metaphors for self-identity, premised upon resentful ideas, already manage to enhance academic understanding of the Polish colonial trauma. The presented revision leads to a conclusion about the need for postcolonial studies in the (so called) Central and Eastern Europe, a topic still controversial in contemporary humanities.

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