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WHOSE DISCOURSE? TELLING THE STORY IN POST-COMMUNIST POLAND

It has become a banality to bemoan the tendency of Western scholars to write about non-Western civilizations and cultures in a reductive and reified manner, one that created negative stereotypes of these cultures. Such shallow generalizations with regard to the so-called Orient were massively produced by European scholars and travelers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the foundation of this “orientalization” of Others were such binary oppositions as we vs. they, West vs. East, Europe vs. the rest of the world, whites vs. blacks, better vs. worse.¹ Recently, scholars have argued that such facile binarism falsifies the realities of other civilizations and drags them onto the Procrustean bed of Western concepts and social customs. In the last several decades, substantial challenges to such ways of writing about non-European countries have multiplied. Thus arose the postcolonial discourse that concerns itself with the ways discursive power is distributed and contested.

Some scholars have argued that non-Western peoples have not only been “orientalized” from the outside, but also from the inside. The non-Western elites internalized the image of themselves supplied by the imperial occupiers and began to perceive themselves according to the precepts of their European conquerors.² One can note here the influence of Marxism on postcolonial discourse; however, there are differences as well. While in Györgi Lukacs’s and Antonio Gramsci’s Marxism the goal was to destroy the “old” culture and introduce a new anti-logocentric worldview, in post-colonialism the goal is to allow suppressed cultures and nations to regain a voice that has been taken away by orientalizing.³

Can Poland and other East Central European countries be regarded as post-colonial countries, and is postcolonial discourse relevant to their history? Many members of the Polish educated classes do not think so.⁴ They associate colonial-

1. This kind of binarism was eloquently rejected in Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* [1994] (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 322-28.

2. Giuseppe Verdi’s *Aida* creates an image of Egypt consistent with European representations of Egypt, rather than with the Egyptian realities. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1994), pp. 111-19.

3. There are several philosophical options in post-colonialism, and some of them are closer to Marxism than others. Most post-colonialists reject essentialism, at least in theory. The kind of generalizations offered by European orientalist are wrong, they say. One hears here echoes of the medieval debates about universals; post-colonialist thinkers declare themselves firmly on the nominalist side, although they are not always consistent in that regard.

4. In June 2007 I participated in the conference titled “The Silent Intelligentsia” at the University of Warsaw. I presented a paper about “colonization of the Polish mind.” Quite a few of my listeners objected to my thesis that political dependency generates intellectual dependency, and that such was the case in Poland under Soviet occupation. On 4 November 2007 I talked about these matters with

ism with the conquest of Africa and orientalism with the Near and Far East. Yet it can hardly be denied that the partitions of Poland in the eighteenth century and occupation of Poland by Soviet Russia after the Second World War were forms of colonialism; that is to say, they included a violent conquest and subsequent efforts to exploit and reeducate the locals who differed from the conquerors linguistically, religiously, and politically.⁵ It is a thesis of this paper that colonialism is not necessarily grounded in racism; it can also be grounded in nationalism, with Russia being a prominent example.⁶

The methods of Russian and German colonialism in Poland differed from those used by the European powers in Asia and Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While the latter have already been theorized and commented on by numerous scholars, the former have received little critical attention and remain an undertheorized proposition.⁷ In some of my previous works I tried to outline the specifics of the process of colonization in Poland;⁸ here I shall attempt to outline the mechanism of acceptance of colonialism by a sizable segment of the Polish elite, as well as the mechanism of the surrogate hegemon used by Polish colonized elite as a kind of crutch that enables the users to carry on discourse in the intellectually limited space of colonial subalterity. It is my contention that the institution

noted Polish movie producer Krzysztof Zanussi, in Houston, Texas. He too was not receptive to the idea of colonialism in Poland. In his opinion, Poland was not colonized because in his view colonialism involves settlements of foreigners in conquered territory. Such settlements did not take place in Poland. In popular usage colonialism continues to be a synonym of "settling in new places." For Zanussi, colonialism was also associated with the conquests of Alexander the Great. I did not have an opportunity to explain to him in this short conversation that contemporary colonialism has more to do with rhetorical conquests and economic exploitation than with sending settlers to the conquered territory.

5. As I argued in *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 2000) and elsewhere, colonialism in the modern sense of the word began when nationalities or self-conscious ethnicities had already been formed. Thus the conquests of Charlemagne or Alexander the Great did not constitute colonialism; they were imperial but not colonial. See also "Historia Europy Środkowej jako narracja postkolonialna," Seminarium Rzecznika Praw Obywatelskich RP, Nieborów, 7 November 2009. Translated into Hungarian by Pálfalvi Lajos and published in *Nagyítás* (Jan. 2010).

6. After the Second World War Polish children had to learn world history from Soviet textbooks translated from Russian and presenting the world according to Russian interests, while Warsaw had to accept Stalin's "gift" in the form of a consciousness-changing building duplicating similar buildings in Moscow. Both are examples of Russian colonial activity on Polish territory.

7. The rhetorical colonization of Poland is apparent in the conception of "Eastern Europe" that was formulated in the 1840s, and was based on the idea that a kind of western Asia extends east of Germany, rather than a Western culture in its Polish interpretation. This conception later morphed into *Mitteleuropa*, indicating to Germans a territory ripe for colonization and capable of profiting from it (as opposed to Asia proper, where only a totally alien culture existed). Larry Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization in the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1994) ostensibly criticizes the concept of Eastern Europe, but it is in fact grounded in this concept through its failure to present any alternatives to the Enlightenment vision. See also Leonard Neuger, "Central Europe as a Problem," *From Sovietology to Postcoloniality*, ed. by Janusz Korek (Stockholm: Södertörn Academic Studies, 32, 2007), pp. 23-32.

8. Ewa Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge*, pp. 74-81; "Sąd a sprawa polska," *Europa*, no. 26 (65), 29 June 2005; "Anton Chekhov and Russian Colonialism: The Denial of Identity in *Ostrov Sakhalin*," *Studia Rossica* (Warsaw), 16 (2005): 75-86; "Sarmatyzm i postkolonializm," *Europa*, no. 46 (137), 18 November 2006; "W kolejce po aprobatę: kolonialna mentalność polskich elit," *Europa*, no. 37 (180), 15 Sept. 2007.

of the surrogate hegemon has been one of the characteristics of colonialism in Poland, and that it exists to the present day.

One of the results of subaltern status is a gradual acceptance by the conquered population of the interpretation of that population offered by its colonial rulers. One of the goals of colonial discourse is to construe an image of the colonized as degenerate or backward, for this image justifies violence against them and facilitates the execution of power. In *The Location of Culture* [1994], Homi Bhabha analyzes the process of such an image's construction. As far as the colonized are concerned, it involves the closing of access to full knowledge about themselves. They are made into objects of knowledge supplied by the colonizers, who are better able to construct their verbal representations than the colonized.⁹ The population accustomed to the idea that it is somehow "worse" than its conquerors is easier to control and less likely to rebel than the population whose self-esteem has not been damaged and who reason in terms of a fundamental moral and anthropological equality between themselves and the aggressors.

Bhabha was born in India and his examples come mostly from Asia. One of them is the concept of so-called oriental despotism, formulated by Baron de Montesquieu in *De l'Esprit des lois* [1748]. According to Montesquieu, Persia and India were ruled by governments that intimidated their subjects. The populations thus ruled were deprived of private property in the Western sense of the word, and they were unfamiliar with the idea of citizens' rights. This sketchy portrait was accepted as an unquestionable truth and had been so treated for two centuries. Karl Marx's theory of the Asiatic mode of production is based on Montesquieu's interpretation, and other theorists also availed themselves of it to justify colonial wars and conquests.¹⁰ Bhabha argues that this kind of "unquestionable truth" is based on superficial knowledge of the Orient, where a broad range of legal and property rights existed. Reification of the East as permanently in the grip of tyranny is an act of intellectual violence, and its goals include the development of a view among Asians that they are somehow worse or lower than the Europeans. Similarly, Leela Gandhi outlines the portrait of the inhabitants of India in British colonial rhetoric: it is characterized by the attribution of effeminacy, cowardice, and weakness to Bengali men.¹¹ This portrait has been partly internalized by the population in the course of reading English-language descriptions of their country. Since the art of reading was a privilege of the elite, the internalization of this interpretation took root with the help of the Bengali elite whom it diminished, and it became an integral part of the British colonial domination of India. Franz Fanon and Michael Hechter wrote of the elite of other colonized countries: Fanon commented on the African elite, Hechter on the Celtic ones. Dissimilar as they are, both scholars agreed that the elite of conquered countries are subjected to colonizing pressures to a greater degree than the remainder of the population, and they yield to these pressures faster than the rest because their privileged position in society hinges on such

9. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp. 94-97.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40.

11. Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 99-100, 156.

submission.¹² The social class that collaborates with the conqueror is always recruited from the elite that existed before the conquest.

Similar processes were taking place in Poland after 1795, when the military and landowning elite were gradually replaced by so-called intelligentsia, or the group in society possessed of a humanistic education and deriving from diverse social backgrounds. The intelligentsia-based elite has little to lose: the intelligentsia is dependent on those in power because it does not produce material goods but only consumes them. One can therefore tentatively posit that it is easier to subjugate the intelligentsia-based elite than those whose material base is ownership of the land or proven valor and military skills. Such was the case during the Soviet occupation of Poland in 1945-1989. Portions of the intelligentsia collaborated with the colonial occupier, and then took steps to make society forget about it; this sequence of events did not favorably predispose it toward a postcolonial interpretation of its actions. Nor has the formerly pro-Soviet intelligentsia been favorably disposed toward an interpretation of postwar Polish history that has as its central thesis the statement that Poland was a colony of Soviet Russia.

The subjugation of portions of the intelligentsia in the nineteenth century took a different route. After the partition of 1795 that wiped Poland off the map of Europe, portions of the Polish elite gradually began to internalize the criticism of the conquering powers directed at the once-sovereign Polish state. In doing so, however, they tended to transfer the notion of inferiority onto the lower social strata in Poland, or onto those strata that did not subscribe to the Enlightenment slogans about progress and secular development of humanity. They accused the lower strata of society of backwardness, even as they chastised the aristocracy for its selfishness. The privileging of the Roman Catholic religion in pre-partition Poland, peasant illiteracy, lawlessness of some of the big landowners, and other shortcomings of the Polish political system were soon declared to be the reason for the partitions. However, these negative features of the Polish state, while not imaginary, were secondary in importance, as far as the partitions were concerned. Yet they were foregrounded by the respectable Polish historians as reasons for Polish political disasters. This can be regarded as a typical attitude of the defeated, who take on themselves the fullness of guilt for being defeated (although, as noted above, the intelligentsia generally exempted itself from blame, accusing selfish aristocracy and Catholic peasantry instead). G. K. Chesterton noted that similar criticism could have been directed at the British upper classes. Since Great Britain did not have neighbors such as the vigorously expansive Germany and Russia but was instead bordered by seas and oceans, while at the same time was maintaining home control over its finances and vigorously conquering others overseas, it did not suffer the disasters Poland did, and the British elite were only mildly rebuked by British historians.¹³ Furthermore, the stereotype of Polish inability to maintain an independent state was constructed in Germany and Russia as an accompaniment to the

12. Franz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952). In many ways this is a utopian book, but the author's courage is helpful to readers seeking to free themselves from the domination of the real or substitute hegemon. Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1936-1966* (London: Routledge, 1975).

13. G. K. Chesterton, "Preface," *The Un-Divine Comedy by Zygmunt Krasinski*, trans. by Harriette E. Kennedy and Zofia Uminska (London: George Harrap, 1924), pp. Vi-vii.

three consecutive invasions that annexed Polish territory to these states. Catherine II of Russia used her friend Voltaire for that purpose, whose international status made his contemptuous comments about Poland appear trustworthy.¹⁴ Thus intellectual constructs confirmed the situation on the ground, and vice versa. The Polish partitions and the wiping out of the Polish state began to be regarded as a worthy enterprise of two enlightened monarchs, Frederic of Prussia and Catherine of Russia: it put an end to a backward Catholic state. The expression *polnische Wirtschaft* became one of the key stereotypes imposed on the colonized by German colonizers. The self-critical Polish elite hardly noticed that in their critique they were mainly duplicating the stereotypes created by foreign occupiers. When the contemporary Polish politicians and historians write about the “*liberum veto* and anarchization of public life [in Poland] from the mid-seventeenth century on,”¹⁵ they replicate these classically colonizing interpretations that justify the conqueror and condemn the conquered.¹⁶

At issue here is not whether the Polish aristocracy and landowners had destructive habits, but whether these habits rather than the initiative of Poland’s bigger and more aggressive neighbors led to the loss of statehood in 1795. It should be remembered that in different circumstances the very same shortcomings did not lead to a catastrophe. Postcolonial scholars encourage the subalterns to shift their attention from self-flagellation to the narration of the colonizing countries, and find there a key to the discourse that condemns the colonized to the position of pupil of the colonizers. Just as some Asians internalized British representation of their cultures, so do the Poles often internalize the discourse of the conquerors and blame themselves for what was in fact a well-planned and executed military and intellectual aggression against a weaker neighbor. In other words, it was not the lameness of the rabbit that caused its downfall, but rather the fact that it was surrounded by hunting hounds. It goes without saying that in the twenty-first century the old colonizing discourse about *liberum veto* and other excesses of Sarmatian Poland cannot be the kind of accusatory weapon it was two centuries earlier; therefore, those members of the Polish elite who have tuned in to the discourse of the colonizer speak rather of Polish culture’s “backwardness” in comparison to the “leading” countries. At stake is not the obvious technological backwardness, lack of infrastructure, or the scarcity of capital, but rather the allegedly outmoded social customs and religious beliefs.

In the process of bowing one’s head before Western and Eastern rhetoric that committed Poles to the category of “defective” nations, there appeared in Polish discourse a concept unknown in classical colonialism: that of the surrogate hegemon. What does this phrase signify? To explain it, one has to start with the “real” hegemon in Poland in the twentieth century: the USSR. Even though the Soviets wielded power over Poland, they were not respected there. Unlike the Brit-

14. *Voltaire and Catherine the Great: Selected Correspondence*, trans. by A. Lentin (Cambridge: Oriental Research Partners, 1974).

15. Speaker of the Sejm Bronisław Komorowski (**elected President in 2010**) in an interview given to *Rzeczpospolita*, 7 Nov. 2007.

16. This kind of self-accusation does not encourage reforms of public life but rather pessimism with regard to one’s own society. It also neutralizes a healthy distrust of one’s neighbors whose discursive and political activity over the centuries has been conducted to Poland’s distinct disadvantage.

ish, whose civilizational prestige was rooted in their ability to provide material well-being and citizens' rights to the inhabitants of the British Isles,¹⁷ the Soviet hegemon did not offer many rights to its own citizens, nor did it offer the people of the metropolis (i.e., Russians) a material status commensurate with the vast colonial possessions of the Soviet Russian state. The Soviets were feared, but they were not respected.¹⁸ The Russian-speaking Soviets demonstrated a remarkable talent for subjugating a variety of countries and territories, but they have not succeeded in generating respect for themselves among the conquered. Thus the Polish elite dependent on the Soviets did not respect their foreign hegemon in a way comparable to that in which the Anglo-Saxon hegemon was respected in Ireland or India.¹⁹

On the other hand, after the partitions a tradition developed in Poland of emigration of the elite to countries that allowed émigrés to conduct their own political discourse, especially when the émigrés footed their own bills and were not at odds with the politics of the host country. The Great Emigration in France (after the 1830 rising in Poland) is the best-known example of this phenomenon. Some one hundred years later, Jerzy Giedroyc and the Polish-language monthly *Kultura* continued this tradition.²⁰ In the course of time the émigré narrative began to be seen in Poland as the model discourse. In Polish intellectual life one finds frequent mention of books and periodicals published abroad, as well as expressions of respect toward those who conducted their Eastern-Europe-oriented political activity abroad. These people became authorities for those living in Poland. Out of this practice there emerged a view that Western countries are a model to follow in every way, that one travels westward to enjoy liberty and well-being, and to learn how to interpret history and the present. To this day, the Polish national anthem contains a naïve phrase “Napoleon Bonaparte gave us an example of how to win.” While under the circumstances some of this reverence was justified, in the long run it ceded to foreigners the right to interpret the world and society, including Polish society.²¹ This shift was grounded in an awareness that Western societies had at their disposal not only military strength, but also intellectual prowess that dominated the world and represented it in categories articulated by German, French, and English thinkers. However, acceptance of the intellectual primacy of France, Germany, Great Britain, or the United States inscribed a sense of “being worse,” or at least being less developed intellectually, into the consciousness of the Polish elite, thus confirming the hegemon's narrative about the primacy of metropolis over periphery. The fact that the surrogate hegemon was freely accepted, as it were, made

17. “My home is my castle” summarizes citizens' rights in Great Britain. While material well-being had been enjoyed by only a fraction of society, the legal system guarantees private property and thus offers a hope of well-being to all.

18. This is an unsolved problem of Russian colonialism, not only in Poland but elsewhere. The inability of Russians to run their state by means other than hard or soft tyranny has frustrated many Russians, but so far they have not found a remedy for it.

19. India has acknowledged the accomplishments of its former hegemon by adopting the form of democracy practiced in Great Britain. In contrast, Poles generally despise the oppressive political system recurrent in Russia.

20. It should be emphasized that the Polish émigré discourse was a ghetto discourse; i.e., it did not influence in a major way the discourse of the host country.

21. This amounts to a typical subaltern attitude: an inability to generate discourse about oneself and convince Others that this discourse is credible.

the Polish elite's subjugation to it even deeper than similar internalizations among the Pakistani, Hindu, Finnish, or Irish intellectuals.

Postcolonial discourse lays bare such relationships, although it cannot instantly eliminate them. It is conducted on the premise that articulating an intellectual dependency helps to even out the playing field between colonizer and colonized. Thus in assessing Polish discourse one has to remember that it is permeated with respect toward, and even submission to, the surrogate hegemon. This has led, for instance, to the frequently encountered situation of foreign commentators writing in the Polish press; these commentators know little of Polish history and political traditions and they usually do not know Polish, yet they are listened to with great attention. Their resumes contain references to internationally prestigious universities, publishing houses, and periodicals, and that is enough for Polish audiences to treat them with utmost seriousness. In contrast, the commentaries delivered by local scholars who spent their entire professional careers studying the society in which they live are often treated with less respect. Foreign intellectuals are aware of that, and they use to the full their hosts' permission to theorize about Poland and other smaller or weaker states of Central and Eastern Europe. This readiness to theorize Others is particularly visible in Germany. In contrast, Polish scholars are seldom asked to comment, let alone theorize, on German social and political problems.²²

These realities exert a twofold influence on the Polish elite. First, they encourage members of these elite to look down on one another (just as they are looked down on by the corresponding elite of the hegemon nations). Second, they encourage Polish intellectuals to look down on the less-educated social strata, whose members are unable to participate in any discourse because they have not been scholastically prepared for it. Thus the contempt of the intellectual toward the "unwashed masses" stems in my opinion from the relationship of dependency between that intellectual and his/her surrogate hegemon in first-world countries.

Mutatis mutandis, *The Location of Culture* is dedicated to similar problems.²³ The book's title reveals the author's fascination with the consequences of locating *the center of one's culture* abroad rather than inside the country where one lives. This may lead to hybridity, Bhabha's favorite outcome, or it may lead to the creation of a self-image that is deficient, distorted, and demeaning. Bhabha sarcastically mentions such binary pairs as "western civility" versus "sly civility" (with which the colonized respond to the colonizer), as well as a broad range of mimicry practiced by the colonized as a form of adjustment to the hegemonic situation. Bhabha's representations remind the Polish readers of Witold Gombrowicz's "duels" between master and peasant in novels such as *Ferdydurke* (1937). However, in Bhabha's book the duel takes place between two different communities. Bhabha makes one aware of the continuous struggle for the right to interpret and the right

22. The 2010 Karlspreis awarded to Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk included a laudation of Tusk conceived in a truly colonialist manner. The issue was widely discussed in Poland: Bronisław Wildstein, "Rekord 'Wyborczej', europejskie standarty," *Rzeczpospolita*, 23 Jan. 2010; Zdzisław Krasnodębski, "Odpowiedź laureata," *Rzeczpospolita*, 25 Jan. 2010.

23. Bhabha's epistemology is incompatible with the logocentric epistemology commonly assumed in Poland. However, perhaps because Bhabha's premises are different from both the Enlightenment and logocentric premises prevalent in European countries, he sheds light on problems that European researchers have not even articulated.

to be a cocreator of discourse. The possession of such a right supplies prestige to the possessor. It should be remembered that next to economic gain, prestige is the engine that drives international politics in the postmodern world.

When Bhabha's reflections on culture and its location are applied to Polish reality, two problems appear. The first is the presence in Polish discourse of the surrogate hegemon unknown in standard postcolonial discourse. The second is the prestige accorded in Polish discourse to the social stratum called the intelligentsia. In the United States where Bhabha publishes his books, this prestige is the privilege of the wealth-creating strata of society. The American intelligentsia does exist, and it is associated with the leading publishing houses, universities, and periodicals; however, its social origins and rise differ from those pertaining to the Polish intelligentsia. The latter produced a narrative according to which the intelligentsia has been the carrier of Polish values and identity during the crisis periods of foreign occupation. Such a narrative is incomprehensible to the American reader who does not accord such a high status to his/her native intelligentsia. In Poland, because of this self-generated and flattering image, the intelligentsia is unable to look at itself from a postcolonial perspective and see its own subjugation to the surrogate hegemon. It continues to conduct a narrative about itself as a mediator between the "advanced" societies of the West and the uninformed Polish masses.²⁴ Since postcolonial discourse deconstructs this self-congratulatory narrative of the intelligentsia, it naturally has difficulties taking root among its members.²⁵

After the Second World War, in spite of an almost total control over Polish internal and external affairs, the Soviet hegemon did not enjoy the kind of prestige accorded to West European hegemons in Asia and Africa. Partly because of this, and partly because throughout its history Poland has been culturally tied to the West, the search for the surrogate hegemon was directed westward. The country colonized by Soviet Russia turned to the West for approval, and it did so through its educated representatives. A by-product of this process was the consolidation of the stereotypes that the colonizing powers usually create about the colonized. By positioning themselves as pupils of the West, some members of the Polish elite unwittingly assisted the Soviets in their efforts to eliminate Poland from significant world discourse. They accepted the unflattering stereotypes about Poland that have been proffered in Europe ever since the partitions. Such have been the unintended consequences of the Polish elite's diffidence and attentiveness to instruction from random Western teachers, and their assumption of a patronizing role *vis-à-vis* the Polish masses. One can express this in the words of Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano: the yielding of some Polish intellectuals to discourse about Poland created outside the country creates a situation that "keep[s] the silenced people from asking questions, [and] the judged from judging."²⁶

24. The stereotype of the intelligentsia as mediator and teacher arose in the nineteenth century, when this social group was impecunious and unprivileged. However, with the destruction of the aristocracy and landowners, the intelligentsia became the relatively privileged class and the military conqueror, i.e., Soviet Russia, ruled Polish society through the mediation of a certain segment of the intelligentsia.

25. As noted by Magdalena Nowicka, "Rzeczpospolita postkolonialna," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24 Aug. 2007.

26. Eduardo Galeano, "Divorces," quoted as an epigraph in Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003).

These processes were made manifest in the first decade of the twenty-first century, when the newly-independent Polish government attempted a “vetting” (*lus-tracja*) of state officials, university professors, and other elite groups in spring 2007. Members of these groups were asked to submit written statements declaring that they did, or did not, collaborate with the communist secret police before 1989, when Poland was under Soviet control. If they did, a reasonably detailed description of their activities was required. In response, many members of the university intelligentsia and some high officials refused to comply with the ordinance. Those rebellious intellectuals who had access to foreign media wrote articles denouncing the Polish government as fascist and totalitarian.

These antigovernment articles illustrated the phenomena described in this article. In a spectacular show of submission to surrogate hegemony, members of the Polish intelligentsia made an appeal to the governments and public opinion of other countries to condemn the “backward” home government in the name of the enlightened interests of those who wished to promote progress in Poland.²⁷ The colonized minds of these members of Polish elite placed the center of culture outside the borders of their own country, and condemned the government of President Lech Kaczyński that tried to decolonize the country by removing agents of influence from government positions and from higher education. Those who opted for the surrogate hegemon declared thereby that trustworthiness can only be found abroad and that “the location of culture” is foreign and not native. Such a show of contempt for their own people has seldom been seen in European history. Those who “knew better” and were citizens of other countries were asked to judge those who lived in a country that only recently regained sovereignty. I submit that issuing appeals to public opinion in foreign countries against the democratically elected government of one’s own (and a government that did not forfeit its democratic nature by issuing undemocratic decrees) amounts to a display of inability to regain sovereignty over one’s own thinking about society. It amounts to the abdication of responsibility to the society in which one lives, and a self-generated refusal to participate in culture by placing *the center of culture* beyond one’s reach. It was a classical case of bowing to the surrogate hegemon.

On 26 March 2007, Adam Michnik, editor of the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* and a member of the Polish elite par excellence, presented the following argument in the *New York Times*: under communism Poles dreamed about a Poland characterized by “democracy instead of dictatorship, pluralism instead of monopoly, law instead of lawlessness, freedom of the press instead of censorship, diversity instead of conformity, open borders instead of barbed wire, tolerance instead of a reigning ideology, creativity instead of blind obedience, the possibility of welfare and development instead of poverty and backwardness.”²⁸ Unfortunately, the coalition gov-

27. It should be emphasized that the Kaczyński government, elected in a democratic fashion, was not an extremist government in any way. However, it did interfere with the attempts by portions of the former communist elite to not relinquish their privileged places in society. The endangered members of the former elite acted according to the principle that in countries such as Poland the government reports not to society but only to the elite, who in turn seeks the surrogate hegemon’s approval. Needless to say, the problem of the agents of influence was brushed aside, in spite of the fact that the entire purpose of vetting was to detect people who could be prone to blackmail because of their doings under the Soviets.

28. Adam Michnik, “Waiting for Freedom, Messing It Up,” *New York Times*, 26 March 2007.

ernment elected by the backward Polish society tried to push Poland backward rather than forward, Michnik alleged. Two of the three coalition parties did not even want Poland to join the European Union²⁹; one member published an unacceptable brochure in English, while the Polish prime minister ordered 700,000 people to confess their secret relationship (if they maintained such a relationship) with the communist authorities. A confession of such a collaboration equaled being fired from their current job.

Michnik's article is a masterpiece of rhetorical wit, but it also contains a number of small inaccuracies that together produce an untrue image of what the proposed vetting was all about. He connects the vetting to the admittedly absurdist stances of the two tiny coalition parties that the centrist Law and Justice Party had to accept as partners in order to be able to pass bills in the Sejm. Michnik's American readers, knowing next to nothing about Poland, were likely to treat these insinuations as objective facts, applying the "guilt by association" rule to the Kaczyński's vetting. Michnik's article is replete with what Aristotle's *Rhetoric* calls false enthymemes, or syllogisms in which one of the premises is slightly wrong. In everyday language false enthymemes are called insinuations. In composing the list of Polish dreams under Soviet occupation Michnik forgot the most important wish: national sovereignty. I have not seen any studies suggesting that in "People's Poland" the people wished for "diversity instead of conformity" or "creativity instead of blind obedience." This is rhetorical chaff. The population of Poland wanted to sever their political dependence on Moscow; from that, everything else was to follow. They did not want to consult Moscow about what Polish children should learn in schools, to whom Poles should sell their coal, and what buildings should be erected in Warsaw. In other words, Poles wished for a cessation of colonial dependency in which they found themselves after the Second World War. The vetting planned by the Kaczyński government was a natural outcome of such a wish. It was meant to be a step forward in regaining sovereignty by getting rid of foreign agents in governmental and other institutions. Finally, Michnik's suggestion that any confession of collaboration with the secret police would lead to the loss of one's job was untrue.

The *New York Times* is an influential paper, and also one that carefully selects the articles it wishes to print. Thus it was impossible for someone not of Michnik's public status to answer his insinuation-ridden article on the pages of that paper.³⁰ The opinion-making status of the *New York Times* is so high that articles by the "representative" members of little-known societies such as the Polish are likely to be treated by readers as delivering facts rather than opinions. It should also be added that virtually all members of the American elite pay attention to the opinions expressed in the *New York Times*. It was impossible for Michnik not to know that his views would be treated as objective information about Poland. A few months later Michnik published another "snitch" article in the *New York Review of Books*,

29. Here Michnik says that he is ashamed to write about details, but soon afterward he delves into them and says that one of the coalition party members gave a speech to members of the European Parliament where he praised Gen. Francisco Franco's stand in the Spanish Civil War and condemned the republican forces [that were largely communist and supported by Stalin's Russia].

30. A rebuttal appeared in *Washington Times*. Ewa Thompson, "Praising the Kaczynski Brothers," *Washington Times*, 10 April 2007.

titled “The Polish Witch Hunt.”³¹ Another member of the Polish elite, Professor Bronisław Geremek, also chose snitching abroad: he denounced the vetting in *Le Monde*.³² Geremek’s membership in the communist party in Soviet-occupied Poland extended over a period of eighteen years; thus, his disinterestedness was by no means evident.

Such are the sad results of colonization: Polish intellectuals who disagree with the laws passed by a democratically elected government that observes democratic procedures choose to avail themselves of their foreign contacts to publish articles that denounce their government instead of attempting to contest and challenge the laws they disagree with on the pages of native periodicals, and using their own Polish institutions to lobby for change. They continue to do in free Poland what certain brave dissidents did in Soviet-occupied Poland, when publishing articles in Western media could bring a jail sentence. The ability to reach a surrogate hegemon is valued highly by members of the colonized elite even at a time when their countries are not ruled by the real hegemon. Geremek’s and Michnik’s articles initiated a campaign of denunciations of the Kaczyński government because that government issued an ordinance about vetting. Thus Geremek and Michnik confirmed and reinforced the discriminatory stereotype that began to be promoted by Catherine II of Russia when she coengineered the partitions of Poland: that Poles are intolerant and cannot govern themselves, and therefore need help from abroad to have a functioning country.

The stereotypes rearticulated by Michnik and Geremek in foreign media were legitimized by the prestige and strength of the surrogate hegemon. They encouraged the foreign centers of power to actively interfere in internal affairs of a democratic and law-abiding country. Since Poland experienced such intervention many times in its history, crying wolf was particularly inappropriate. It also went against the observations concerning nationhood and democracy offered by British politologist Margaret Canovan. She noted that without national loyalty the guarantees of citizens’ rights that democratic states underwrite would not be worth the paper on which they have been expressed. Without national solidarity countries like France, Great Britain, or the United States would not wield the democratic power they hold at present. Canovan argued that, paradoxically, democracy’s bedrock is nationality: human rights are least transgressed in countries whose borders are kept closed to Others. In order to become a citizen of France or of the United States, one has to spend quite a bit of money and meet residency requirements of many years. In spite of the slogans of equality and solidarity with regard to all peoples of the world, in practice democratic countries mainly defend the human

31. Adam Michnik, “The Polish Witch Hunt,” *New York Review of Books*, 54, no. 11, 28 June 2007.

32. Bronisław Geremek, “Pourquoi je refuse la lustration,” *Le Monde*, 27 April 2007. This and other articles reaffirmed the negative stereotype of Poland that is still alive and well among the American elite. Tony Judt’s biased statements about Poland, expressed at the outset of his review in *New York Review of Books* of Leszek Kolakowski’s *Main Currents of Marxism*, are examples of such prejudice. Judt wrote the following: “Kolakowski forged his intellectual and political career in opposition to certain deep-rooted features of traditional Polish culture: clericalism, chauvinism, anti-Semitism” (*New York Review of Books*, 21 Sept. 2006). Such cavalier dismissal of a culture of which Judt knows little, would be impossible without the presence of the negative stereotypes reinforced by articles such as those by Geremek and Michnik.

rights of their own citizens. Canovan thus maintains that nationality is one of the conditions of democracy.³³ This is a paradox worth remembering when one assesses the colonized elite's attempts to find approval abroad rather than at home.

Thus invocations of the authority of a substitute hegemon are acts of submission; they duplicate the act of surrendering to the colonizer and his superior power. They confirm the colonialist essentializations: civilization-barbarism, Enlightenment-the Dark Ages, intelligentsia-rednecks, superior-inferior, better-worse.

A colonized mind is not the same as Czesław Miłosz's "captive mind."³⁴ Captivity is imposed from the outside, whereas the colonized mind (in the postcolonial period) implies a choice. One chooses the hegemon rather than an awkward, slow, and frustrating construction of one's own identity. One chooses the surrogate hegemon because it is an easier choice: it is easier to trust the enlightened and tested foreign metropolis than to associate with citizens of one's own country whose poverty and lack of polish appear distasteful to members of the elite. I posit that publishing in the foreign press articles that erroneously announce that an undemocratic government came to power in Poland is an expression of a desire (perhaps unconscious) to have Poland ruled from abroad. Poles are not to be allowed to pursue their own choices even when these choices are in perfect agreement with domestic and international law and do not impinge on democratic freedoms of citizens. By comparison to the American Patriot Act of 26 October 2001, the Polish vetting was child's play, yet quite a few members of the Polish elite tried to give it a reputation of a Stalinist or at least Putinist activity. Ironically, the complaints about the Kaczyńskis were voiced especially loudly in the country that passed the Patriot Act. By doing so, some members of the Polish elite confirmed their own essentializing prejudice that Polish society is incapable of generating an acceptable self-rule and that it needs extraordinary pressure of foreign public opinion to properly conduct its own affairs.³⁵

Other members of the Polish colonized elite who did not have access to foreign publications chose to follow Michnik's and Geremek's lead in the domestic press. Another opportunity to do so was given by Prime Minister Kaczyński's and Foreign Minister Fotyga's travel to the EU Forum in Berlin in summer 2007. Nothing would be wrong with criticism if it contained a measure of solidarity with Polish national interests. In many cases, however, the opposite was true: the tenor of the criticism was that the Polish foreign minister and the Polish prime minister should not have opposed anything that foreign governments proposed regarding Poland, because such opposition amounted to being fascist or backward. The daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* led these attacks.³⁶ Few people noted that if Kaczyński and Fotyga did not make strong statements during the Berlin Forum, Polish interests

33. Margaret Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 1996).

34. Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind*, trans. by Jan Zielenko (New York: Knopf, 1953).

35. In the Russian government-sponsored site <www.inosmi.ru>, one of the readers noted in a commentary that Poland exchanged one hegemon, Russia, for another, America. <www.inosmi.ru>, 2007, *passim*.

36. Articles such as Jacek Pawlicki's "Anna Fotyga – minister naj," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 8 May 2007, appeared virtually daily in spring, summer, and fall of 2007. Even after the October 2007 election that brought defeat to the government, a left-leaning Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* chose to go after the underdog: "łatwo nie będzie," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 27 Nov. 2007, internet edition, accessed 20 Dec. 2007.

would not have been taken into account at all. It was thanks to the tough Polish stance at the Forum that Poland was granted a postponement of the date when EU countries would have to adjust the number of their representatives in the EU Parliament according to the size of their populations. Instead of praising the Polish government for its diplomatic success, the media denounced it. Similarly, Judy Dempsey's interview with Fotyga in *International Herald Tribune* on 14 August 2007 was criticized because of Fotyga's statement that Germany does not treat Poland as a legitimate partner in negotiations concerning European affairs. This has been obvious to Poles ever since they joined the EU. If an adjustment was to be made, someone had to say this aloud at an international gathering. Such statements were necessary to make a "new" country assert itself among its peers, because the subordinate status of Poland has been taken for granted for a long time. The freeing of Central and Eastern Europe from Soviet domination had to produce such startling (for some) readjustments of vision, and Fotyga took it upon herself to make the first step. Yet the Polish press criticized her precisely because she dared to do so.

The postcolonial mentality of a significant portion of the Polish elite is so well entrenched that it will probably take a generation or so to weaken or eliminate it. In particular, few historians in Poland or elsewhere are fully cognizant of the fact that starting with the Enlightenment, many significant political theories and ideologies created and advanced in the Western world were based on an unwritten premise that Poland would not be returned to the map of Europe. The political customs and traditions that followed likewise implied that the partitions of Poland were a matter of course and were necessary for the proper functioning of the European continent. Thus President Woodrow Wilson's European policy, revered in Poland because the first of Wilson's Fourteen Points spoke about Polish independence, is generally considered by Western historians to be disastrous for Europe. Left-wing historians blame it and the Versailles Treaty for the rise of Nazism, whereas right-wing historians bemoan the demolition of the Habsburg empire (allegedly benign), and the creation of Poland and other Central and East European countries from chunks of the former German, Prussian, Ottoman, and Russian empires.³⁷ The Versailles Treaty that ratified the reconstruction of Poland and brought together Poles from the three partitions is routinely denounced. We are told by most historians that the treaty facilitated Hitler's rise to power by placing unreasonable reparation demands on Germany. Few Western historians display a similarly solicitous attitude toward the Polish nation imprisoned in the German empire, or toward other nations that the Treaty of Versailles liberated. Poles (as well as Czechs, Slovaks, and members of other East European states created as the European empires shrank) consider the treaty to be a token of international recognition of the wrongs done to smaller nations by their bigger and more rapacious neighbors. Western historians pay no attention to such claims. They consider such discourse to be conceptually outdated. To sort out these diverse opinions and to find an interpretation that would firmly situate Poland and other non-imperial nations in Europe while at the same time ac-

37. A routine condemnation of the Versailles Treaty and lament over the break-up of the Habsburg Empire can be found in Winston Churchill's *The Second World War: The Gathering Storm* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), pp. 7-11. A somewhat less harsh condemnation can be found in J. M. Roberts's *A History of Europe* (New York: Penguin, 1997), pp. 456-58.

knowledging the mistakes of the treaty's drafters will take a major reinterpretation of European history. In present circumstances, an attempt to measure the quality of Polish political life by making an appeal to German, American, or French public opinion (influenced, among others, by the negative interpretations of President Wilson's preference for the sovereignty of all nations and by the nearly universal condemnation of the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles) equals surrendering to the gaze of the surrogate hegemon.

Those Polish intellectuals who upbraided Fotyga and Kaczyński for their "harsh" statements in Germany in summer 2007 seem not to have taken into account the fact that the tradition of intellectual colonization of "Eastern Europe" is still strong in Germany in particular, and that the division of power in Europe is still seen in nineteenth-century terms by many European politicians. For example, the recent German-Russian rapprochement concerning the gas pipeline connecting Russia and Germany but omitting countries situated between Russia and Germany is a continuation of policies born at the time when Germany and Russia bordered on each other at the expense of several stateless nations. It will take time to readjust European thinking and make European politicians accept the fact that between Germany and Russia there now exist other countries that have their own interests and point of view. It is also becoming increasingly clear, in Europe and elsewhere, that the concept of nationhood is by no means outdated. The fact is that Fotyga and Kaczyński's decision to speak up on these matters at an international forum was an act of perspicacity and a demonstration of long-term policy, and it deserved praise and analysis rather than condemnation.

While considering the foreign policy options Poles and other East Central Europeans face, one has to remember that the existence of independent nations between Germany and Russia is by no means fully accepted by all representatives of the European powers, while their partition or only nominal independence has served the interests of these powers for over two centuries. To convince these neighbors that it is better for them to have a sovereign Poland as a neighbor will take a great deal of effort. Unlike Germany and France, whose existence as separate powers is an acknowledged element of European identity, Poland and other smaller nations of Eastern Europe have been the colonies of other powers for at least two centuries, and many a volume has been written arguing and advocating the advantages to Europe of such a state of affairs. Those Polish intellectuals who try to undermine Polish sovereignty just because they do not like the political option that society selected demonstrate their disregard for the values they ostensibly espouse. These values include the belief that each individual and every nation have the right to aspire to run their own affairs, as long as they do not infringe on the affairs of others and act in accordance with democratic principles. While it may be argued that such views are utopian, their absence in discourse implies consent to the law of the jungle and inevitability of unending wars.

The introduction of a postcolonial point of view into discourse about Poland (and other newly independent East European nations) seems desirable for the reasons sketched out above. Unless Poles perceive themselves as the formerly colonized subalterns who have presently achieved the status of an independent nation, they will have difficulties arguing themselves into the European discourse constructed without their participation or input. The positioning of Poland as a truly

permanent member of the European Union requires that the Polish elite cease to regard the “abroad” as an assembly of judges that decides on Polish affairs. Even though Poland has formally been a member of the EU since 2004, in many ways its membership is precarious.³⁸ The process of making it permanent can be speeded up or it can be slowed down. When certain members of the Polish elite line up for the approval of their foreign surrogate hegemons – whether the hegemons are assumed to reside in New York, Paris, Brussels, or Strassbourg – they delay the freeing of Poland and other smaller nations of Eastern Europe from their former status of colonial dependency. In the long run, such dependency leads to instability that the European Union is otherwise anxious to avoid.

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38. Some European diplomats unofficially maintain that the absorption of Poland into the European Union should not have taken place. One such diplomat told a BBC journalist that it would be better if some of the new EU members left the Union because they are separated from it by *a lack of a common history* [my emphasis, ET]. When queried by that journalist, the diplomat admitted that he had Poland in mind. Mark Mardell's Blog, <www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/mark-mardell/2007/07/polish_spirit_1.html>.