

Exotic Others or Fellow Travellers ?
Representations of India in Polish Travel Writing during
Communist Era

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1. European Orientalisms East and West.....	25
Chapter 2. The Indian Other.....	54
Chapter 3. The Socialist Reporter’s Eyes.....	85
Chapter 4. Mystical India.....	136
Chapter 5. India, “Land of Contrasts”.....	182
Chapter 6. India and the Socialist Modernity Project.....	207
Conclusions.....	242

INTRODUCTION

The power of grand and small narratives

In a powerful TED talk, novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warns about the danger of a single story¹. Such story places the entire multitude of experience, whether of a person, social group, culture, or region within the confines of one, defining characteristic. For instance, when Adichie arrived in United States from Nigeria, her American college roommate initially perceived her only through the story of Africa's poverty and underdevelopment. "It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power", Adichie explains. According to the writer, "how stories are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power", since "[p]ower is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person" (Adichie). Narratives thus have power to represent and to define, to categorise and to label. The world is full of "single stories", metanarratives about nations, groups and individuals formed by those who dominate the discourse and can diffuse such representations and images globally. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-Francois Lyotard explains that such grand narratives, which organised the way of thinking and acting in the modern world, are becoming obsolete in the postmodern era (xxiv). The dissolution of great structures, like Western European colonial empires after the Second World War or the Soviet Union in 1990s, has enabled this reflection. The new, post-imperial era calls for a critical approach to grand, imperial narratives, and for a creation of small narratives understood as more nuanced and localised discourses.

One of the best known examples of contesting and deconstructing an imperial narratives is Edward W. Said's study of Orientalism. The colonial perception of everything labelled as "the East" was according to Said more than a set of clichés and stereotypes. The mix of perceptions, beliefs, pseudo-scientific knowledge and half-truths formed a comprehensive and all-encompassing discourse, objectifying and mythologising cultures of the Middle East. This discourse on the Orient was strengthened by colonial era administrators and academics, and disseminated through writings and works of art. It is thus a good example how literary or artistic expression can become instrumental in exercising real power. Said's analysis of the effects of colonialism and imperialism constituted a founding reflection for the larger field of postcolonial critique. The aim of such a critique is to assess the dominant discourses, deconstruct them, and make the formerly marginalised voiced heard. Postcolonial studies strive to rethink experiences

¹ See: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie TED talk, "The Danger of a Single Story", recorded in July 2009.

of subjugation through issues of representation, discourse-production and cultural bias. They focus on relations between former empires and their peripheries, between the colonisers and the colonised, and offer a more nuanced, “non-single story” of the experience of the colonial domination.

Gradually, postcolonial critique (as well as the critique of the Orientalist discourse more specifically) proved to be a “travelling theory”² and made its way to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). While early postcolonial studies focussed mostly on Western European colonial power and the discourses it produced, the more recent publications by scholars from the CEE region adapt it to study the Prussian, Habsburg, Russian and Soviet imperialisms³. The postcolonial perspective is also used to examine a variety of other power discourses in the CEE region, produced by local centres and used to subjugate diverse minorities. This particular study focuses on a very specific form of Orientalist discourse used to describe India by Polish reporters in the period of Poland’s dependence from the Soviet Union.

Orientalism Travels to the East

The use of the postcolonial perspective to describe the imperial histories of the CEE region, and Poland more specifically, has become more frequent⁴. More specifically, the case of Poland, with a history of dominations, partitions, and occupations, but also with strong tendencies to dominate others, is a perfect example of the workings of an imperial power (Cavanagh 85). In Ryszard Nycz’s words: “[t]he history of Polish society as well as Polish literature and culture could constitute not only a complex and rich, but almost a paradigmatic case in the postcolonial research in the categories of domination and subordination” (5). As a result, both the Polish relation to the West of Europe⁵, as Polish discourses that Orientalise its minorities or neighbours⁶, can be studied from a postcolonial angle.

This approach is still a recent one. When debates on decolonisation and effects of colonialism took place in Western European academia, Poland was under the communist regime and the intellectual exchange with Western Europe was rather limited. Nevertheless, certain works of critics of colonialism were translated into Polish: for instance, Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*⁷ or Edward Said’s *Orientalism*⁸. Several works of postcolonial fiction

² Term used after Edward Said’s essay “Traveling Theory”.

³ See, for instance, Tlostanova and Mignolo, Korek, Gosk, Ryabchuk, Skórczewski, Stefănescu.

⁴ See footnote above.

⁵ As in Leopold Neuger’s article “Central Europe as a Problem”, discussing the concept of Mitteleuropa and its discourse of colonial expansionism, or Izabela Surynt’s work on German Orientalising discourses on Polish territories.

⁶ As in the works of Dirk Uffelmann, Alfred Gall, and Maxim Waldstein.

⁷ It was translated by Hanna Tygielska and published in 1985.

⁸ There was no translation into Polish after the immediate

also made their way to communist Poland (among them R.K. Narayan and V.S. Naipaul), as described in Dorota Gołuch's *Postcolonial Literature in Polish Translation (1970-2010): Difference, Similarity and Solidarity* (2013). Nevertheless, postcolonial theory "travelled" or "transferred" to Poland only around 2000s. Of note were Ewa Thompson's *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (published in Poland in 2000) and Clare Cavanagh's article "Postcolonial Poland" (2004). Subsequently, postcolonial perspective was also applied by scholars of other disciplines, including history, sociology and cultural studies, resulting in a number of books, journal publications and essays⁹.

One of the first attempts to study imperial power in a Central European context was Ewa Thompson's Saidian analysis of Russian and Soviet power discourses. Thompson argues that similarly to the way Western European empires created a whole body of writings for justification of colonialism, the Russian Empire – and later Soviet Union – explained its expansion and subjugation of various peoples through the words of its illustrious writers. Literary critic Ryszard Nycz considers Thompson's book as a "founding" study on the topic (6) and a beginning of a new perspective in postcolonial studies: going beyond the "First World" vs. "Third World" relation, and introducing the "Second World" into the equation. Nevertheless, postcolonial critique offers much more than an opportunity to study discourses of domination. The works of a French historian, Daniel Beauvois, revealed another aspect of coloniality in the Polish context. By studying the relations between various ethnicities inhabiting the Polish/Russian territories in 18-20th centuries, the scholar pointed to the colonial aspect of the Polish domination over other nationalities in the region¹⁰.

Thus, already at the beginnings of debates on the place of Poland in postcolonial studies, there was an awareness of a double role of the country – as the colonized and as the colonizer. This issue is also discussed in an article of an eminent scholar of Polish 20th century literature, Aleksander Fiut, in "Polonizacja? Kolonizacja? [Polonisation? Colonisation?]" . A more specific article on the Polish colonial discourse pertaining to the Eastern borderlands of pre-Second World War Poland was published by Bogusław Bakula, "Kolonialne i postkolonialne aspekty polskiego dyskursu kresoznawczego [Colonial and Postcolonial Aspects of Polish Eastern Borderlands Discourse]". He called for an analysis of Polish literature depicting the so-

⁹ See: Special issue on postcolonialism of the *Er(r)go* journal, in 2004, with the title "Postkolonializm i okolice [Postcolonialism and its Surroundings]"; special issue on postcolonial theory of the *Recykling Idei [The Recycling of Ideas]* journal (sociology), featuring translations of texts by Gayatri Spivak, Neil Lazarus, Immanuel Wallerstein and Homi Bhabha; special issue of *Literatura na Świecie [Literature in the World]* journal (literature), featuring translations of texts by Chinua Achebe, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Homi Bhabha and Dipesh Chakrabarty; special issue on postcolonial theory in the *Nowa Krytyka [The New Critique]* journal (philosophy), featuring texts by Terry Eagleton, Etienne Balibar and several Polish critical philosophers.

¹⁰ See: Beauvois, *Les confins...*

called Kresy (Eastern borderlands), where colonial, dominating and imperialistic attitudes of the Poles towards Ukrainians, Russians, Belorussians, and other peoples inhabiting these territories are displayed.

Furthermore, Dorota Kołodziejczyk in an article on a “Postcolonial Transfer to Central-Eastern Europe” argues that postcolonial critique offers new possibilities of analysing Central European forms of freedom struggle: various forms of artistic expression despite censorship, emancipatory movements, notions of modernity, hybrid forms of political identification (mimicry, various forms of dependence from the hegemonic power etc.), paradoxes brought about by the communist system (inequalities in a theoretically class-less society), and strategies of resistance in language and literature (30-31).

Eventually several Polish scholars came to the conclusion that the term “postcolonial studies” is not fully adequate in reflecting the Polish experience. This led to the coining of the term “post-dependence studies”¹¹. A book by Hanna Gosk, *Historie kolonizowanego / kolonizatora* [*Stories of the Colonised/Coloniser*] (2010), is a seminal work of literary reflection on the topic of Polish dependence and post-dependence. An extensive presentation of this approach can also be found in the volume edited by Ryszard Nycz (2011), *Kultura po przejściach, osoby z przeszłością: Polski dyskurs postzależnościowy: konteksty i perspektywy badawcze* [*A Culture with a Past, People with a Past: Polish Post-Dependence Discourse*]. Polish post-dependence discourse in academia often focuses on the period of communist rule and Polish identity in the post-socialist period, for example, in the volume edited by Hanna Gosk and Ewa Kraskowska ((*Po*) zaborach, (*p*)o wojnie, (*p*)o PRL. Polski dyskurs postzależnościowy dawniej i dziś [*After/About Partitions, After/About the War, After/About the Communism: Polish Post-Dependence Discourse Now and in the Past*]). Another important collection in this discussion is a 2014 special issue of literary journal *Teksty Drugie* in English on “Postcolonial or Postdependence Studies?” featuring articles by most eminent Polish scholars in the area: Ryszard Nycz, Maria Janion, Aleksander Fiut, Grażyna Borkowska, Ewa Thompson, Dariusz Skórczewski, Dorota Kołodziejczyk, Hanna Gosk, and others.

Apart from these publications in postcolonial/post-dependence studies, a number of scholars engaged with Edward Said’s work on Orientalism. Probably the most famous is Maria Janion, a renowned literary critic, who published in 2006 a book of essays, *Niesamowita*

¹¹ a Post-Dependence Studies Centre was created to coordinate research on this topic The Centre, grouping researchers from several major Polish universities, organises annual conferences around the theme of post-dependence, hosting academics from Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. They published several volumes of texts on the topic, see Nycz (ed.) *Kultura...*; Gosk (ed.), *Narracje...*; Gosk and Kraskowska (eds.) (*Po*) zaborach...; Gosk and Kołodziejczyk (eds.), *Historie...*; and Graczyk et al. *Białe...*

Słowiańszczyzna [*Uncanny Slavicdom*], in which she analyses how the repressed memory of Slavic – pagan – roots, pushed away by Christianity, returns in a phantasmatic form and often fuels fears, nationalist tendencies, or self-Orientalising tendencies. Indeed, a number of works appeared that position Poles as Oriental Others to Western Europeans¹², but also on how Poles Orientalised their Eastern neighbours, such as previously mentioned ethnic groups living in its Eastern borderlands¹³. Several scholars have written about Polish Orientalism in art and literature, including Izabela Kalinowska (*Between East and West. Polish and Russian Nineteenth-Century Travel to the Orient*, 2004), Michał Buchowski (*The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother*, 2006) and Dariusz Skórczewski (*Teoria – Literatura – Dyskurs* [*Theory – literature – discourse*], 2013). These studies firmly establish that Poles were (and maybe still are) at both ends of Orientalist discourse, as its subjects and co-creators¹⁴, but also as its objects.

A Socialist Orientalism?

Although Orientalism has been studied in various forms, aspects, in connection to different cultures and geographical areas, there is relatively little research on Orientalism in socialist countries of Central Europe – barring the volume *Postcolonial Europe? Essays on Post-Communist Literatures and Cultures* (2015), which contains an article on “Representations of India in Slovak Travel Writing During the Communist Regime (1948-1989)” by Robert Gáfrik, as well as an article on Polish “Socialist Orientalism” by the author of this book. Indeed, themes such as Orientalist discourse, Otherness, cultural clichés etc. are discussed in the context of the Central and Eastern European region, its history, its minorities, as well as in its relations with the West, but rarely do they touch upon the socialist perceptions of non-European Others. Little attention is devoted to the relations between the Second and the Third World – the countries of the Soviet Bloc and the newly independent post-colonial states. This book is an attempt at filling this gap by exploring the story of Polish perceptions of India as told by Polish reporters. It offers a new angle to the narrative of the relations between a country of the Eastern Bloc, which while recovering from devastation of Second World War

¹² See in particular Wolff and Surynt.

¹³ See in particular texts by Fiut, *Spotkania...* and Gosk, *Opowieści...*

¹⁴ Aside from “acquiring” a typically Orientalist take on the countries of the so-called Third World from Western Europe, Poland initiated the development of its own colonialist discourse during the interwar period, fuelled by the creation of the Maritime and Colonial League in 1930. A monograph on the League and its colonial ambition written by Marek A. Kowalski, offers detailed description of the history, organizational structure and activities of the League, but little critical insight. A better analysis of the phenomenon of Polish “colonialism without colonies” can be found in Andrzej Szczerski’s article, “Kolonializm i nowoczesność: Liga Morska i Kolonialna w II RP [Colonialism and Modernity. The Maritime and Colonial League in the Polish Second Republic]”.

stills suffers from trauma of foreign domination, and a former British colony, which is struggling to define its policy and model of development amidst a sharply polarising Cold War. It takes a step back to look at a sensitive period – from the late 1950s to the late 1970s – in the history of both Poland and India.

The main hypothesis of this book is that even though reporters from socialist Poland wanted to present India in a new way, devoid of the colonial perspective that, till recently, was the common standard for the Europeans, their descriptions of India can be labelled as Orientalist, albeit with a socialist touch. In an unlikely combination, they perpetrate Orientalist clichés on India, but also promote socialist modernity, once again trying to impose a foreign model on India. In order to verify this hypothesis, several research questions are posed. First, what was the general perception of India in Europe, its place in the discourse of Orientalism, and were Poles part of this discourse? What were Polish relations with India through the ages? Second, what kind of texts presented India to Poles? This book focuses on a particular genre, namely travel writing, and – more specifically – its subgenre, particularly popular in Poland: travel reportage. Thus, the third question: What is the specificity of Polish reportage, its traditions, and its development in the communist period? Further, the analysis of primary material leads to a separate series of research questions. One set of questions pertain to reporters and their approach: what are their assumptions, their credibility, their location in the text? Another pertains to the manner in which the selected narratives describe India: what customs, beliefs and other cultural phenomena do they talk about? How do they describe Indian past and present? What is their assessment of Indian modernity?

The underlying problem that this book attempts at solving is to define the difficult position of the socialist reporter, having conflicting loyalties and different points of reference: Poland, Soviet Union and – culturally and symbolically – Western Europe. The assumption of this study is that there exists a different type of Orientalism, a Polish, (or even Eastern European) one, a socialist one, and that it shapes not only the image of the Other, but also of the Self.

Polish Travel Reportage to India as Case Study

The Polish-Indian encounter breaks into multiple stories on India of the 1950s, 60s and 70s as seen by seven Polish reporters. Each reporter has his own style and subjective take on India. Their accounts – nonfictional, first-person, travel narratives – belong to the genre of

reportage, a “blurred”¹⁵ and heterogeneous prose, which gained popularity in Poland at the beginning of twentieth century and over the years, became a sort of a national specialty. The Polish reportage, with its most famous representatives – Melchior Wańkowicz, Ryszard Kapuściński, Hanna Krall, Wojciech Jagielski, Małgorzata Szejnert and Wojciech Szablowski (to cite just a few reporters of different generations) – is becoming an increasingly recognisable phenomenon around the world¹⁶. Travel reportage was particularly popular in communist times as it constituted a sort of a “window to the wider world” for the Polish people, as most of them could not travel themselves. Nevertheless, this “window” did not always provide an impartial and bias-free view of the world. Polish reporters visiting India tell a story that, on the one hand, reflects India of its time, but, on the other hand, it is coloured by the experience of socialism in Poland. Although the reporters claim to offer a new, non-colonial perception of India, their accounts are often far from ideological neutrality and detached objectivity. Indeed, these accounts speak of ideas of socialist solidarity and development, while still continuing to draw on the Orientalist discourse on India. The goal of this book is to analyse this blend that can be called “socialist Orientalism” as observed within the story of a very particular period and a very particular relationship between two countries, which are themselves somewhat peripheral in relation to the main axis of the Cold War.

The selection of travel accounts on India studied here is limited to works of Polish reportage from the socialist period. The reason for selecting reportage is that it is a particularly Polish genre of writing, which was and continues to be popular. It is also a genre where the writer not only offers a personal account of journey, but also a commentary of a more general nature: on politics, history, social issues or economics. In this way, the writer tends to betray his ideological location (whether by personal choice or because of institutional affiliation) as well as the general discourse on India prevalent in the home country. Majority of the writers of these texts are reporters working for Polish newspapers or the Polish News Agency (Jerzy Ros – *Indyjskie wędrówki* [*Indian Wanderings*] (1957), Wiesław Górnicki – *Podróż po garść ryżu* [*A Journey for a Handful of Rice*] (1964), Janusz Gołębiowski – *Nadane z Delhi* [*Posted from Delhi*] (1966), Wojciech Gielżyński – *Kraj świętych krów i biednych ludzi* [*The Country of Holy Cows and Poor People*] (1975) and Jerzy Chociłowski – *Indyjska szarada* [*Indian Charade*] (1977)). Two of the reporters are better known for fictional writing, primarily novels, but only their nonfictional travel accounts have been selected - Wojciech Żukrowski’s

¹⁵ The term “blurred” is used after Clifford Geertz article, “Blurred Genres: the Refigurations of Social Thought”.

¹⁶ A short introduction to Polish reportage “A Foreigner’s Guide to Polish Reportage”, together with a list of recent reportage texts translated into English, is available at the website of the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Culture.pl.

Wędrówki z moim guru [*Travels with my Guru*] (1960) and Jerzy Putrament's *Cztery strony świata* [*Four Corners of the World*] (1963) and *Na drogach Indii* [*On the Roads of India*] (1967). Finally, included here is one reportage, whose author is neither a journalist, nor a writer, but a professor of forestry – Witold Koehler. Nevertheless, his account, *Indie przez dziurkę od klucza* [*India through a Keyhole*] (1957), is very much travel reportage, written in the first person, in a vivid and original style. Indeed, writing constituted an important part of his career – he published many books popularising environment protection and screenplays for nature documentaries. The decision to consider a text that is not written by a reporter as reportage follows the seminal *100/XX: Anthology of Polish Reportage of Twentieth Century*, which also classifies certain texts as reportage whose authors are not journalists¹⁷. The nine texts selected for this dissertation amount to about one third of all Polish travel accounts on India published in the period of communist rule. With such a large pool of material – over thirty travel accounts in the span of almost forty years – many texts had to be excluded.

Therefore, the timeframe adopted for the research was to select reportage from almost three decades: mid-1950s, 60s and 70s. It was introduced in order to focus on writings that were representative of socialist discourse. Such a delimitation results mostly from the political context. There are no accounts from early years of communist rule, before 1956, as these were the years of Stalinist terror, when foreign travel was nearly impossible. On the other hand, the accounts from 1980s are not part of this dissertation given the radical changes in Polish political landscape from 1980 onwards. These changes began with the advent of the Solidarity movement, which incorporated a large cross-section of society, including many reporters and journalists, and led a general strike in protest against the communist power in 1980. Eventually the authorities retaliated by imposing martial law on 13 December 1981, which lasted for almost two years. Although foreign travel was again possible after the martial law and a few accounts were published in mid-1980s, the authors of these accounts were not inclined to express their political views. The martial law significantly comprised the promise of communism in the public opinion, and indeed, in 1989 the communist system crumbled. While there is a certain consistency in the accounts from India in the three decades, from the mid-1950s to the 1970s, the accounts from the 1980s are certainly very different.

Another unintended specificity of this particular selection of texts is the gender of reporters – all of them are men. It is not due to a preference in showing a male gaze on India, but it results from the simple fact that almost all travel accounts from India in that period were

¹⁷ According to Mariusz Szczygieł, some authors of reportage were not even aware that their writing is a reportage. A good example is Stefan Bryła's reportage from United States, "Ameryka" (Szczygieł, *100/XX*: 1: 189-194).

written by men. There are two interesting accounts by women, Janina Rubach-Kuczevska and Halina Ogrodzińska, both of whom came to India due to their husbands' posting to Delhi. They focus more on everyday life in India than on describing the country as a whole, and their accounts would be better placed as memoirs than as reportage. Another account from India written by a woman is Lucyna Winnicka's *Podróż dookoła świętej krowy* [*Travel around the Holy Cow*] (1987), which was not included in the selection not only because it was published post 1980, but also because of the author's emphasis on personal experiences with Indian spirituality, alternative medicine, and Ayurveda. Although an interesting memoir, this text did not yield much insight into the focus of this study – the socialist perspective on India. A travelogue written by a couple travelling through India, Andrzej Rytzel and Janina Woźnicka, *25 tysięcy kilometrów przez Indie* [*25 Thousand Kilometers Through India*] (1986) was also excluded from the selection because it is written in the 1980s, and it is more a travelogue or a travel diary than a travel reportage.

There are several travel accounts that, although they would fit in the timeframe adopted for the research, were excluded from the selection. One example is Waclaw Kontek's *Notatki z podróży do Indii* [*Notes from Travel to India*] (1956). Although Kontek attended the same forestry congress as Witold Koehler, whose account is analysed in this dissertation, his text is different than the one by his colleague. It is not as personal as Koehler's, resembling more a synthesis of secondary information on India, gathered from encyclopaedias, history books and periodicals, complemented by some memories from the journey. Another example is Włodzimierz Janiurek's *Dzień dobry, Nusantaro* [*Good day, Nusantaro*] (1962). Janiurek accompanied the President of the State Council, Aleksander Zawadzki, to Indonesia and India. A large part of the account includes reprints of speeches made by President Zawadzki and by Indian and Indonesian authorities, as well as photographic materials from the delegation, and there is little personal commentary on India. Since the objective of this study is the analysis of travel reportage and personal observations of travellers, this account had less relevance. A similar concern led to the exclusion of *Stare Indie w nowym świecie* [*Old India in the New World*] (1964) by Klemens Kęplicz and *Zrozumieć Indie* [*Understanding India*] (1977) by Ryszard Piekarowicz. These texts offered less insight of the into the reporter's views, resting mostly factual descriptions. On the other hand, Tadeusz Margul's *Indie na co dzień: z notatnika religioznawcy* [*India on Every Day: from a memoir of a religion scholar*] (1970) and Antoni Korzycki's *Zapiski Indyjskie* [*Indian Notes*] (1968) are, respectively, a personal memoir and a collection of essays, thus lacking the larger view that can be found in the selected reportages.

In order to maintain a certain consistency of the analysis, the selected texts can all be categorised broadly as works of travel reportage. The two genres – travel writing and reportage – both have a long tradition, and sometimes blend into a form of nonfictional travel writing. A brief discussion of the two genres is needed in order to better define the term “travel reportage”.

Travel Writing as a Genre

The term “travel writing” is in itself problematic, in English often used interchangeably with “travel literature”¹⁸. In Polish, it is either called *literatura podróżnicza* (travel literature), or *reportaż podróżniczy* (travel reportage), but the translator of Mary Louise Pratt’s book into Polish, Ewa Nowakowska, uses a more direct translation of the term “travel writing”: *pisarstwo podróżnicze* or *podróżopisarstwo*. The latter term is also used by Stanisław Burkot in his study on Romantic voyages. Barbara Korte, author of *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*, treats terms “travel account”, “travelogue”, and “travel writing” as synonyms, though she also underlines that “in a narrower understanding, “travelogue” is sometimes reserved for accounts that are composed retrospectively . . . – in contrast to accounts in the form of journals, diaries or letters which are normally written (or at least drafted) while a journey is still in progress.” (Notes, p. 181)

Apart from discussions on lexis, the definition of travel writing as a genre remains a challenge to scholars. Mary Louise Pratt even said that it was too heterogeneous to be circumscribed to any genre (11). According to Carl Thompson, author of a definition of travel writing as a genre, it stems from the encounter between self and other that is brought about by movement through space, so it is at some level a record or product of this encounter, of the negotiation between similarity and difference (10). This definition emphasises the necessity of spatial movement, and the element of otherness, of experiencing difference. Similarly, Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs stress the importance of travel writing as a narrated account (usually in first person) of an actual travel that really happened. The main condition for a text to be considered as “travel writing” is that the author must have travelled to the place(s) he/she describes, otherwise these works would be classified into a different category, the one of imaginary voyage (Youngs 4). Nevertheless, as underlined by John Zilcosky, there are various texts which deal with travel, in which the author does not set off on any real journey at all. These are either fictional accounts, for instance *Mandeville’s Travels*, a text widely popular in

¹⁸ It is so in other languages too: in French, the genre is called *récits de voyage* (travel accounts) or *littérature de voyage* (travel literature), in German *Reisebericht* (travel report or travel account) or *Reisebeschreibung* (travel description), and in Italian *reportage di viaggio* (travel reportage).

mid-fourteenth century and for a long time considered to be a true travel account, or books by authors who based their knowledge on other traveller's accounts, never participating in a journey themselves¹⁹. Immanuel Kant, in his *Anthropologie* even declared that there is no need to travel as real anthropology is to learn about one's own home. "If we only pay attention to our homes, Kant suggests, we (enlightened cosmopolitans) are 'always already travelled.'" – says Zilcosky, and adds: "note, too, that Kant, who never left Prussia, probably quenched his private, unscientific longings for foreignness through the travel books he devoured" (Loc 95-98). And what can one make of novels where the actual journey is only a base for a story of fictional characters, as in Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*? Can these texts be considered as travel writing, which primarily is a non-fiction genre? Unlike Hulme and Youngs, who divide texts into two groups, "travel writing" and "travel-related texts", Zilcosky adopts a rather more inclusive approach, arguing that it is exactly the fact that travel literature escapes such categories what makes its central characteristics.

Travel, as an escape from daily routine and familiar surroundings, always provided inspiration. John Zilcosky points at the connection of travel with storytelling, and reminds of an old German proverb: "when we go travelling, we have stories to tell" (quoted from Walter Benjamin, Loc 325-326²⁰). Nevertheless, story *telling* and story *writing* are two different things, because, according to Benjamin, telling requires orality and community, and writing – silence and isolation (Zilcosky, loc 70). A travel account is usually written after the completion of the voyage, which is what makes it different from a journal or a diary. Writing is not only a way of documenting the journey itself, but it also makes it possible for the traveller to convey his/her feelings and observations to the readers. It allows for a deeper reflection on the individual experience of travel.

Such universal need to describe one's journey found countless ways of individual expression. In the words of Percy Adams, "[t]he literature of travel is gigantic; it has a thousand forms and faces" (281). There is a variety of forms, styles, types of authors, and goals that this type of writing serves. For some, a travelogue serves a personal goal: to assert their status and authority, to display their knowledge and acquired cultural capital. In other cases, it constitutes a rite of passage, a chance for self-discovery and confrontation with their preconceptions. As suggested by Carl Thompson, the first type of traveller was prevalent in the Enlightenment period, when authors were trying to provide information to larger society and avoided focusing

¹⁹ Notably, this was the case of early anthropologists, like James Frazer, who wrote his *Golden Bough* hardly moving away from his desk in England.

²⁰ Walter Benjamin, "Der Erzähler", 386. Quoted by: John Zilcosky in *Writing Travel: The Poetics and Politics of the Modern Journey*.

on themselves, while the second type was more characteristic of the Romantic notion of introspective analysis of self, of the emotions evoked by the surrounding landscape, and of the possible transformation of oneself through the experience of travel (54). While travel writers were usually to some extent representative of the epoch that they lived in, their writing styles remain “notoriously hybrid, ranging from the sober and scientific to the poetic and rhetorical” (Zilcosky, loc. 160-161). This multiplicity and hybridity is well captured by Jonathan Raban’s humorous comment:

As a literary form, travel writing is a notoriously raffish open house where very different genres are likely to end up in the same bed. It accommodates the private diary, the essay, the short story, the prose poem, the rough note and polished table talk with indiscriminate hospitality. (253)

Practically every scholar dealing with travel writing emphasises how eclectic this genre is. It presents a “bewildering diversity of forms, modes and itineraries” (Thompson 1-2), it is “notoriously refractory to definition” (Holland and Huggan, x-xi), and, it freely borrows from the memoir, journalism, letters, guidebooks, confessional narrative, and fiction (Kowaleski, 7). The diversity of texts equals the diversity among their creators. Travel accounts have been published by a variety of authors: writers, journalists, celebrities, pilgrims, conquistadors and individual explorers or backpackers (Thompson 1-2).

Primary texts analysed in this book are as heterogeneous as travel writing as a whole. They, too, are written by various types of people – journalists, writers, conference delegates, and government employees – sometimes performing more than one of these roles at once. In this research, only one country, or travel destination – India – is taken into account. However, the authors’ itineraries vary, since most of them visit different sites during their journey. The given political and historical moment, current events in Poland and in India, exert some influence on their writing too. There are several aspects in which they are similar to Western travel accounts, but in many points they differ. While most twentieth-century travellers are individuals who are responsible for their own agency, the socialist travel writers are sometimes limited in their movements. Among the authors analysed here, two were visiting India on an official journey, which was organised and planned for them, and they were probably accompanied by guides at least on parts of their journey (e.g. Putrament and Koehler). The reporters coming to India as correspondents of newspapers and magazines were more independent and had more agency in deciding what to visit and which events to cover, but they must have also received certain recommendations from their superiors in Warsaw. Finally, unlike their Western counterparts, a self-exploration, or soul-searching, was not recommended,

as it would contradict with the socialist, pragmatic spirit, and could be perceived as “bourgeois”. The style and language of each of the account varies from others, some adopting a more personal, emotional approach (Górnicki), some following a more ideological agenda (Ros), some aiming at a rather neutral stance (Chociłowski) and some maintaining an attitude of distance, at times tinged with irony or sarcasm (Putrament).

In consequence, the selected texts are so diverse that they could be studied by historians, by social scientists, by media studies specialists, as well as by literary critics. It is only one more proof that travel writing is situated at the crossroads of many other genres, and it appears as an ideal material for interdisciplinary study. Not only can the texts be analysed from the point of view of genre, literariness, style, modes of descriptions, but they can also be considered as documents of an epoch, as products of a particular political context and of a specific condition of writers and journalists. Travel writing in its essence is a negotiation between at least two cultures – the one of the traveller, and the one of the “travellee”²¹. Indeed, as concludes Forsdick, “analysing a textual form that is inherently transcultural permits critical dialogues that are themselves often powerfully comparative and cross-cultural” (Loc. 100-101). It is exactly the genre’s diversity and hybridity that renders possible a reflection on the experience of travelling, which is in itself an act of crossing boundaries, challenging beliefs and encountering Otherness.

Reportage: What It Is and What It Isn’t

Another nonfictional genre apart from travel writing to which the selected texts belong is reportage. The Oxford Dictionary of English online defines reportage either as a mass noun that means “the reporting of news, for the press or the broadcasting media”, or as “factual presentation in a book or other text, especially when this adopts a journalistic style”²². In the English-language tradition, what is known as reportage in French and other European languages, is usually labelled as either “New Journalism” or “creative/ literary nonfiction”. This book, however, uses the continental European term “reportage”, as it refers to the Eastern European context and it is a direct translation of the Polish word “*reportaż*”. The term is by and

²¹ The term “travellee” was first used by Mary Louise Pratt to indicate a member of culture visited by the traveller. Pratt uses it first in her Introduction (on p. 7) then in Chapter 6 of her book, and explains it in the endnote on p. 242: “This clumsy term is coined on analogy with the term “addressee.” As the latter means the person addressed by a speaker, “travellee” means persons traveled to (or on) by a traveler, receptors of travel.”

²² Other dictionaries (e.g. Merriam Webster, Collins, Cambridge) offer similar definitions, while Encyclopaedia Britannica lists reportage as one type of nonfiction.

large used in academic works in English on reportage²³, especially those on Polish reportage (for instance in Kuprel 2004)²⁴. Nevertheless, the line between reportage, nonfiction, essay and travel writing is often blurry. A good case in point is the critical reception of William Dalrymple's *Nine Lives*. This nonfictional account about spirituality in India is in some reviews called "reportage", in others "travel writing", or even "collection of stories"²⁵. What is it, then, that distinguished reportage from other genres?

Several indications on how to classify a work of nonfiction as reportage are given by John Carey in his introduction to *The Faber Book of Reportage*. First, the author insists, a reportage must be an eye-witness account, because this guarantees the authenticity of the text (xxx). Perhaps only historical reportages could be exempt from this condition. Another requirement for Carey is that a reportage is dated exactly, so that it can be placed in a larger context (xxxi). "The reporter is a private eye working in a public area, and the subject of his report must not be inward or fanciful, but pinned verifiably to the clockface of world time" (xxxi), explains Carey. He does not identify particular subjects that reportage explore, asserting that it is the form of writing rather than the content that matters: any subject can be important, even if it seems trivial at first (xxxii). Moreover, Carey rejects the criterion of immediacy, since it does not really matter if the reportage was written on the spot, just after the event, or much later, after the writer took time to reflect on what he/she witnessed.

In a Polish anthology of reportage, the editor, Mariusz Szczygieł, adopts a similar approach to identify texts belonging to this genre. He bases it on a definition formulated by Egon Erwin Kisch, one of the precursors of the genre, who claimed that reportage is a dry account [of events] elevated to the level of art (Szczygieł, *100/XX... Vol 1*. 18). Given that the term "reportage" originates from the Latin verb *reporto* - to report, to bring back - it is important to see the intentionality in texts of this genre: they are written with the intention to reach the recipient.

²³ There are several examples: Faber & Faber publishing house issued an anthology of best texts of this genre, *The Faber Book of Reportage*, edited by John Carey, so did Granta magazine, collecting the best reporters' texts in a volume *The Granta Book of Reportage* (ed. by Ian Jack). Similarly, "The New York Review of Books" recently issued a selection of their best reportage in a book *The New York Review Abroad: Fifty Years of International Reportage*, featuring such authors as Timothy Garton Ash, Nadine Gordimer, Susan Sontag, V.S. Naipaul, or Ryszard Kapuściński. There are also various academic works on reportage from around the world, notably Charles A. Laughlin's and Rudolf Wagner's books on Chinese reportage, and George Feifer's analysis of Russian reportage.

²⁴ Various contemporary works of nonfiction are categorised as reportage, for instance Linda Grant's *People on the Street: A Writer's View of Israel*, Alexandra Fuller's *Scribbling the Cat: Travels with an African Soldier*, Anna Politkovskaya's *A Dirty War: A Russian Reporter in Chechnya*, Jean Hatzfeld's *The Antelope's Strategy*, or Liao Yiwu's *The Corpse Walker: Real-Life Stories, China from the Bottom-Up* – all of which received awards for best works of reportage. Namely, the awards were Lettre Ulysses Award for Art of Reportage (France) and Ryszard Kapuściński Award for Literary Reportage (Poland).

²⁵ Exerpts from press reviews of *Nine Lives* can be found on Dalrymple's website: http://www.williamdalrymple.uk.com/books/nine_lives (23.04.2015).

That is why, Szczygieł²⁶ decided to include only texts of reportage published in the press or in books, leaving aside journals or memoirs (even if in form they were close to reportage). One of his main points of reference was the definition of reportage by Jacek Maziarski in his *Anatomia Reportażu* [*Anatomy of Reportage*]:

It appears that in debatable cases a general rule to adopt is to consider as reportage only these works in which the relating function is a dominant one - in consequence, those with the domination of action (narrative), description and representation that leads the reader to visualise [events]. (Szczygieł, *100/XX... 1*: 19)²⁷.

According to Kazimierz Wolny-Zmorzyński, a theoretician of reportage, the genre can be defined as a truthful and realistic representation of facts using artistic forms of expression (178). Thus, it is usually characterised as: imaginative, actual, touching upon an important problem, skilfully depicting reality with literary language, and using a communicative style that takes into account the relation between transmitter and recipient (178). Wolny-Zmorzyński underlines that the poetics of a written reportage originate from the novella, and the two share such traits as short form, single plot of action, simplicity and clarity of the narrative, the dramatic character of the story, a reduced number of protagonists, a cause-effect motivation, a frequent contrasting of events, and a striking ending (178). Other attributes of a reportage are: a good documentation of actual events, and a current topic that the reporter relates from his/her own experience, “from the inside” (181). This characterisation seems, however, better applicable to the shorter form of a newspaper reportage rather than a travel reportage book.

Maria Wojtak in her *Analiza gatunków prasowych* [*Analysis of Press Genres*] emphasizes the connection between reportage and real life, which is visible even in titles of newspaper sections devoted to reportage or the titles of reportages themselves: “Closer to life”, “Real life”, “Taken from life” etc. (123). It is also a deliberate strategy of authors and publishers of reportage to highlight the authenticity of their texts. Wojtak even mentions the existence of a “factographic pact”: a tacit understanding between the reporter, the publisher and the readers that guarantees authenticity and objectivity of presenting events (123), even if the narrative strategies used in the text originate from fiction. Indeed, these strategies can vary and many authors see reportage as an assembly of genres, modes of representations and various stylistic patterns - a sort of collage. Reportage focuses on minute details to present a different take on

²⁶ The anthology of Polish twentieth-century reportage was prepared by Szczygieł in cooperation with a programme board composed of reporters and experts that assisted him in selecting texts to be included in this three volume publication.

²⁷ “Wydaje się, że w przypadkach wątpliwych generalną zasadą powinno być przyjmowanie za reportaż tylko tych utworów, w których dominuje funkcja sprawozdania, a więc w konsekwencji – dominuje element akcji, opisu, unaoczniającego przedstawienia.” (Szczygieł, *100/XX... 1*: 19).

the whole. By showing a situation or an event from a different perspective, or unveiling its complexity, it avoids simplifications and easy judgements (Wojtak 125). This seems to be the biggest strength of today's reportage. Given the speed in which news travels nowadays, reportage's role has changed: it is no longer a primarily informative one. It cannot compete with news and offer a simple relation of events, which the public could already see on the television, follow on the internet, and hear about on the radio (Szczygieł & Tochman 295).

News still provides us with a topic, but today, what matters in reportage is what is absent in the news. . . Reportage should reach where the camera and the microphone of a news journalist will not reach, under the surface of the event. It should be deepened by personal emotion and reflection of the author. In the reportage, the world smells, tastes, it is cold or hot, bright or dark. It evokes calm, disgust or fear. (Szczygieł & Tochman 295)²⁸

Reportage, therefore, serves to explain an event, a process or a phenomenon, and to give a multi-dimensional and in-depth picture of it.

To sum up the characteristics of reportage listed by various specialists in the field, several traits of the genre can be identified. First of all, authenticity, but also a creative depiction of real-life events, often from a perspective of an individual. Secondly, objectivity, as the author is expected to show a problem or a phenomenon from different perspectives, but also subjectivity: the author has a voice and a character of his/her own, and can choose between various styles and techniques. Finally, reportage displays more emotions than news, and a reporter should be empathetic and try to relate to the readers the experience of his/her protagonists, as well as to sense the feeling of a place, a time, and of the general atmosphere. The primary texts selected for this study all display the characteristics listed above. They are first-person accounts, presumably authentic, written on the basis of an actual journey. Apart from subjective opinions and perceptions of India, their aim is in large part informative and educational. Nevertheless, the language is vivid, creative, with frequent use of metaphors or comparisons.

A Polish School of Reportage

Although nonfiction and reportage are genres well-known in Western Europe, Polish reportage was strongly marked by the shift towards facts that occurred as a result of the Russian Revolution. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Polish reporters often espoused leftist

²⁸ "News wciąż daje nam temat, lecz dziś w reportażu ważniejsze jest to, czego w newsie już nie ma. . . Reportaż powinien sięgać tam, gdzie nie sięga kamera i mikrofon depešowca, pod powierzchnię wydarzenia. Powinien być pogłębiony osobistą emocją i refleksją autora. W reportażu świat pachnie, smakuje, jest mroźny lub gorący, jasny albo mroczny. Budzi spokój, wstręt albo strach" (Szczygieł & Tochman 295).

views, and the first manifesto of the genre appeared actually in a communist periodical of the interwar period. After the Second World War, reportage in socialist Poland developed in the same way as it did in other countries of the Soviet Bloc, becoming incorporated in the propaganda system. In these times, reportage was defined in the following way:

. . . a journalistic genre, the subject of which is a concrete social situation (a “slice of life”), limited in time and place. There are two basic forms of reportage: informational and analytic. Analytic reportage considers the totality of socially meaningful facts from the perspective of class-party interests and draws conclusions having important practical significance. Reportage is characterized by a stable unity of content and form, ensuring its journalistic effectiveness. It is one of the most common genres in the Soviet general political press; urgent production and economic questions are its main theme. (Free Dictionary online, after *The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* (1970-1979))

Certainly, this definition lost its accuracy with the end of the Soviet Union, but the main focus of reportage is still to illustrate a particular social situation, in other words, a “slice of life”. A current definition from a Polish dictionary states that the term “reportage” means:

. . . a genre of prose in between journalism and artistic literature, typical of twentieth century, aiming at a truthful, problematized account of authentic events and phenomena; a recording of facts known to the author from first-hand observation or documentary sources, it usually combines information and an attempt at interpretation of the presented phenomena, rarely giving a straightforward judgement; developed as a separate genre in the press at the end of nineteenth century; the evolution of technology led to the emergence of other forms of reportage: film reportage, audio reportage, photo reportage; as per subject, it is divided into following types: social, real life, travel, political, war, court, or sports reportage; literary reportage often comes close to forms of fictional narrative – novel or short story.²⁹ (PWN Encyclopaedia Online, my own translation)

Clearly, reportage is perceived in Poland as a sovereign genre that has diverse types and forms and explores various topics. Also, it is significant that the Polish definition notes a particular kind of reportage – literary reportage – and points out at its similarities with fiction.

While the tradition of writing called literary journalism, or reportage, can be found in many countries, Polish school of reportage is a rather exceptional phenomenon. Diana Kuprel,

²⁹ “reportaż [fr.], charakterystyczny dla XX w. gatunek prozy z pogranicza dziennikarstwa i literatury artystycznej, mający na celu wiarygodną, sprobmatyzowaną relację o autentycznych zdarzeniach i zjawiskach; zapis faktów znanych autorowi z własnych obserwacji lub ze źródłowych dokumentów, zwykle łączy informację z próbą interpretacji przedstawionych zjawisk, rzadziej z ich jednoznaczną oceną; ukształtowany w prasie jako odrębny gatunek pod koniec XIX w.; rozwój techniki spowodował powstanie innych form reportażu: reportażu filmowego, reportażu dźwiękowego, fotoreportażu; ze względu na temat rozróżnia się odmiany: reportaż społeczny, obyczajowy, podróżniczy, polityczny, wojenny, sądowy, sportowy; reportaż literacki zbliża się niekiedy do form narracji fikcjonalnej — powieściowej lub nowelistycznej.” (PWN Encyclopaedia Online).

discussing the emergence of “fact literature” in Central and Eastern Europe underlines that: “[t]his intersection of journalism, belles-lettres, and politics was particularly manifest in Poland, which developed a strong tradition of reportage: the press preserved the language, provided a source of employment for the intelligentsia and the gentry, and fostered opposition to the regime during its partitioning.” (374-377). Kuprel tries to offer an explanation why has it become such a prominent genre in Poland, and not necessarily so in other countries. First, she points out strong traditions in historical, realist and documentary prose, as well as in travel writing that preceded the birth of reportage *per se*. Secondly, she attributes the popularity of the genre to the particular political and historical context, the trauma of the two World Wars and the ensuing profound social and economic changes that created a need for a new language (378). This new form of expression was close to a documentary approach, but also left space for individual perceptions and feelings. Kuprel identifies six aspects that make Polish literary reportage unique. The first one is a fairly strong amount of “creative subjectivity” (in the words of Marek Miller), or “the author’s unique “I” that tries to grasp, understand, order, and then explain that which is to be related” (Kuprel 381). The second aspect is a particular approach to truth, which is not absolute – a true picture can be obtained also when a certain amount of fiction is used. Wańkiewicz, for instance, instead of trying to achieve “documentary truth” preferred a “synthetic” one, but one that grasps the essence of a problem (Kuprel 382). The third aspect is participation, which appears in various degrees of presence. Kuprel claims that according to reporters, “participation is essential to fulfil the hermeneutic function of reporters for it allows them to identify with the otherness they relate” (383). As the fourth aspect, Kuprel lists the explicit implication of the audience, which is called to assume an active, critical role in respect to the story told to the reporter (383). The fifth feature of reportage is its hybrid style, a composition of diverse styles and techniques (Kuprel 384). Finally, the sixth – and, in Kuprel’s words, the most salient – aspect of Polish reportage is its allusiveness.

Given the long tradition of freedom restrictions, censorship and other forms of oppression, both Polish writers and readers developed various ways in which a message could be passed across between the lines. One way was to tell the story of an individual in order to portray a larger issue, another to talk about a problem in a different country, but hinting at the similarities with Poland. Kuprel describes how foreign correspondents specialized in such strategies:

Reporters would use exotic subject matters to write about the home situation; conversely, the home audience would “read” the reportage about some distant land as an allusion to its own situation. In the 1970s and early 80s, Wojciech Giełżyński wrote a number of books about the

ideological systems in Cambodia and Vietnam, which his Polish audience automatically read as a critique of the Gomułka era. On the other end of the world, Wiesław Górnicki penned under the ironic title *Zanim zaczną rządzić maszyny* [*Before the Machines Begin to Rule*] a positive analysis of American capitalism and the development of the humanities; for attentive Polish readers, the book contained an exposé of how the Communist system failed to function. (Kuprel 385)

Certainly, to understand such hidden allusions, readers needed a certain amount of interpretative skills. Similarly, reporters had to recur to techniques which usually belong to fiction, such as metaphor or allegory (Kuprel 385). Fact and fiction would thus be intertwined in reportage in surprising ways, making this genre a truly unique one, and hardly comparable to nonfiction in other countries.

*

The subgenre of reportage analysed here is travel reportage, as it provides insight to how the non-European cultures were depicted by reporters from communist Poland. Indeed, travel reporters face similar dilemmas as anthropologists: how to approach the Other, how to understand a different culture, and – finally – how to describe their experience. Their works are not bound by academic expectations and methodological requirements, but they have a certain responsibility towards their readers. Travel reporters, in particular, are bound by the expectations of their journalistic profession. In his book, *A Reporter's Self Portrait* (2003), Kapuściński reflects on the role of a travel reporter and on how similar it is to the work of an anthropologist or an ethnographer. Both are fuelled by the same motivation: the curiosity about the world (3). It is very different from a holiday or a tourist's journey.

The reporter's journey requires hard work and a huge theoretical preparation. One needs to acquire knowledge about the terrain where one is going. Such a journey knows no relaxing time. It is undertaken in full concentration, full focus. We need to realise that the place where we have reached is perhaps given to us only once in a lifetime. We will never return to it, and we only have one hour to get to know it. During that hour we must see, remember and hear everything, record the ambiance, the feeling, and the situation. The reporter has to be prepared for a great logistic, physical and intellectual effort. The reporter's journey is exhausting and strenuous. (...) When someone, upon finding out that a reporter was in Congo, says: oh, I was also there and I was visiting, then these are two separate things. It is a completely different way of experiencing and perceiving the world. That is why, travelling as a reporter requires a certain emotional

surplus, a passion. Aside of passion, there is no other reason to do it. (Kapuściński, *A Reporter's...* 13-14)³⁰

Travel reportage is, ideally, both a passion, and a profession – a particularly demanding one. A reporter's journey requires planning, preparing, and learning about the destination. When going abroad, the reporter gives up the usual tourist comfort in order to document, with full focus, the encounter with a different culture. In that, a travel writer is indeed similar to an anthropologist, as he or she strives to document a reality, and give an objective representation of it (to the best of his or her capacity).

In Polish literary culture, the most prevalent type of travel writing is travel reportage, given the large popularity of reportage as a genre. In the previous sections, the two strands of nonfictional writing were discussed, travel writing and reportage. Travel reportage is situated in between: like in travel writing, the narrative is usually in first person, and it involves a journey, most often abroad. Furthermore, like in travelogues, the narrator offers his or her subjective interpretation of the observed phenomena, accounts of his/her interactions with people, and insights into the foreign culture. However, a travel reportage usually goes beyond the travel account, providing information about social or political issues. It is thus usually more engaged and socially conscious than travelogues, and closer in style to journalistic accounts. As opposed to informative journalism, travel reportage not only describes reality, but also reacts to it (Rejter 29). Scholars who analyse travel reportage underline two elements: the subject – the reporter/ narrator/traveller; and the object – the observed reality (Rejter 36). In the earlier travel accounts, the subject and his or her unilateral account³¹ were more prominent, while in twentieth-century reportage, the subject's role is diminished and more attention is given to the object of travel: the journey itself, the reality of the foreign place, the narratives of people encountered during the travels (Rejter 50).

A crucial question can therefore be asked: what is it that the observer – traveller – sees? Is his gaze reliable, does it fully grasp the object that they want to represent? The primary challenge that the reporters visiting India face, is how to describe what they perceive as reality.

³⁰ “Podróż reporterska wymaga ciężkiej pracy i wielkiego przygotowania teoretycznego. Zdobywania wiedzy o terenie, na który się jedzie. Podróż ta nie zna relaksu. Odbywa się w pełnej koncentracji, skupieniu. Musimy mieć świadomość, że miejsce do którego dotarliśmy, być może jest nam dane tylko raz w życiu. Nigdy tu nie wrócimy, a mamy godzinę, żeby je poznać. Przez godzinę musimy wszystko zobaczyć, zapamiętać, usłyszeć, utrwalić nastrój, sytuację, atmosferę. Reporterska podróż po świecie, jeśli wyjechać poza krąg Europy i USA, jest podróżą ciężką, nieraz morderczą, bo świat jest źle komunikacyjnie zorganizowany. Reportera czeka ogromny wysiłek logistyczny, fizyczny i intelektualny. Podróż reporterska wyczerpuje i wycieńcza. . . . Dlatego reporterskie podróżowanie wymaga pewnej nadwyżki emocjonalnej, wymaga pasji. Oprócz pasji nie ma innego powodu, żeby to robić” (Kapuściński, *Autoportret reportera*, 13-14).

³¹ Rejter also mentions bilateral accounts: when the traveller addresses a particular person or group of people. This is most visible in the case of epistolary travel accounts, but it remains in contemporary travel reportage in forms of the narrator directly addressing the readers, in particular in the foreword or afterword section, or in a “note from the author” section.

They contrast the idea of India as imagined by the wider public, with what they have seen with their “own eyes” (Koehler 18). They consider themselves to be journalists who observe reality and represent it in an objective way. In this way of thinking, they follow in the footsteps of nineteenth-century realist writers, whose ambition was to depict “reality” as truthfully as possible. This endeavour was characteristic of Western modernity; it was one of its dominant discourses. Tzvetan Todorov remarks that realism was also a discourse, even though it was disguised as transparent, almost inexistent, so that the readers could feel like they have witness a real “slice of life” (“tranche de vie”) (Barthes et al., 9). This discourse was based on the assumption originating from a Cartesian belief in senses, through which one can experience truth. But what if the senses fail and one’s image is influenced by preconceptions? What kind of discourses, generated by the global powers, may affect the way travel reportage depicts its object? Forms of representation of Otherness and their roots in a variety of dominating discourses were described at length by Edward W. Said in his best-known work, and his findings can very well be applied to an analysis of travel reportage from communist Poland. The next chapter will focus on various Orientalist discourses in order to facilitate a discussion on the depiction of India in works of Polish travel reporters.

CHAPTER 1 EUROPEAN ORIENTALISMS EAST AND WEST

The dissolution of colonial empires and the new Cold War world order triggered a new reflection on global hierarchies of power and on the effects of colonialism. Many scholars focused on describing the colonial³² and post-colonial³³ formations and phenomena. Analysing the conquest of overseas territories only in terms of economic gain and imperial expansion was not sufficient. It became clear that equally important were cultural forms and power structures that legitimised the subjugation of non-European peoples. Three concepts were crucial to this reflection. The first is the notion of discourse, in Michel Foucault's understanding of it as "all utterances and texts which have meaning and which have effects in the real world" (Mills 6), and which can work as tools of symbolic power. Thus, knowledge is also an expression of power: the power to create and disseminate discourses. The manner in which ideas and images are positioned in a given discourse can be linked to another concept – the one of representation. To represent is to speak for someone or something, and so in the context of discourse, it relates to how a concept is imagined and circulated by those who have the power to define that discourse (Spivak, *The Postcolonial Critic...* 108). The third concept, directly connected and resulting from the first two, is the one of Eurocentrism: Europe's power to define, categorise, name and represent. These three concepts feature in the European thought on the non-Western world: representations of a Eurocentric character form a discourse which legitimises colonial domination and cultural hegemony.

Europe's idea of non-Western Others – be it close neighbours, or far-away peoples – was shaped through centuries of contact and conflict. Already in Antiquity, in times of Greco-Persian wars, the self-image of the West (Greece) as land of freedom was juxtaposed to the idea of the East (Persia) as "seat of slavery, brutality and ignorance" (Davies, *Europe...* 100). Middle Ages abounded in the images of strange, almost monster-like peoples living at the edges of what was believed to be a flat world³⁴. The age of European voyages to the so-called New World generated different imageries of non-Europeans, and led to new ways of categorising and appropriating all natural and social phenomena, or even people, seen as part of the

³² Among the earliest critics of colonialism were: Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Aimé Césaire, Jean-Paul Sartre (*Colonialism and Neocolonialism*), and Edward W. Said (*Orientalism*).

³³ The now thriving field of postcolonial studies was born out of the writings of Edward W. Said and those of the Indian-based Subaltern Studies Collective (with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Gyan Prakash, Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty as its best known representatives), and several other scholars based in the West (Homi K. Bhabha, Bill Ashcroft, Benita Parry, Anne McClintock, Robert J.C. Young to name just a few). Subsequently, postcolonial critique was applied to various regions of the world, from Latin America (Walter Dignolo) to Russia (Madina Tlostanova).

³⁴ A variety of images showing how Europeans imagined far-away Others were presented at the fascinating exhibition „Us and Them. An intricate history of otherness”, at the International Cultural Centre in Krakow, Poland, 16 March 2011 – 5 June 2011.

landscape that can be taken into possession by the European newcomers (Pratt 1992). Together with European colonial conquest, the representations of Others began to play a new role. Portraying local populations as inferior was followed by firm actions against these subjugated populations – violence, looting, slavery, all under the banner of the glorious *mission civilisatrice*. Before the expansion overseas, different parts of Europe would maintain a certain notion of unity and togetherness (Le Goff 2005), but the so-called Great Discoveries of far-away lands, which seemed only new and undiscovered to the Europeans, disrupted this unity. The gains from the overseas territories gave the colonial empires an unparalleled advantage over other states on the continent due to huge inflow of goods and capital, as well as an ever-increasing political importance. The period of Western European colonial expansion thus created a division of Europe into East and West (Wolff; Sowa, *Fantomowe...*). The empires of the West, each with its own ambitions and spheres of influence, invested into their fleets and explored other continents. Empires and kingdoms in the East – the early Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Prussia, the Habsburg, the Ottoman and the Russian Empires – had a different strategy. They expanded their territories mainly in the adjacent regions, engulfing various neighbouring populations or simply each other's lands. As a result some indeed expanded their reach and power, like the Russian Empire, and some fell prey to internal tensions and their neighbours' ambitions, like the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This division into Western overseas colonialism and Eastern territorial expansion, beginning in the Early Modern Age, had profound consequences well into twentieth century, as it had an impact on the growth and fall of empires, emergence of various independence movements and creation of different new states. In the course of these processes, two types of Orientalist discourses developed, sharing, however, certain traits with one another. These two Orientalisms, in the East and in the West, will be analysed below, and the borderline cases, or the spaces in between these two models, will be described later in this chapter.

1. Western Orientalism and Its Critics

Western European colonialism is certainly best known for its unprecedented scale. In early twentieth century, colonies or ex-colonies of European states covered over eighty percent of land surfaces of the globe (Loomba 3). What were its specificities and how did the reflection on colonialism develop, to eventually lead to a postcolonial critique? It was certainly not a homogenous movement – different empires expanded at separate points of time, in various

directions, using diverse methods of control and subjugation³⁵. The Portuguese, the Spanish, the French or the British had their own colonial styles, discourses and models of governance. If a more general observation could be made, what was specific of European colonialism was that it developed alongside capitalism, fuelling it significantly. Imperial expansion greatly facilitated the development of capitalist, highly industrialised societies of the West, providing them with resources, products and manpower. The networks created in the colonial era, when indentured labourers and goods were transported from one continent to another, profoundly impacted societies around the globe. Among the elements that can be listed as essential to European colonial strategies were: economic domination combined with cultural hegemony, the colonisers' belief in the civilising mission and in spreading universal (read: European) values, the expectation of acculturation among the colonised, and racism (Osterhammel 1997). Moreover, colonialism did not finish with the end of direct rule: in the words of Ania Loomba, “[a] country may be both postcolonial (in the sense of being formally independent) and neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically and/or culturally dependent) at the same time” (12). The economic primacy of the West and the exploitation of the resources of the Global South continues also in the post-colonial era, although new actors from other parts of the world loom on the horizon³⁶.

Many of these aspects of colonialism came under scrutiny and criticism over the years. Anti-colonial critique is probably as old as colonialism itself, although it is sometimes overlooked in discussions within postcolonial studies (Young 74). From bishop Bartholomé Las Casas objecting to Spanish conquistadors' actions in the Indies to the British anti-slavery movement, the condemnation of colonialism was fairly significant, as aberrations of the imperial powers could not be concealed. There were various arguments against colonialism, based on human rights violations, on destruction of ancient cultures or on economic exploitation. However, only in the twentieth century, a new form of critique appeared, having as its object the core of Western European culture: the mental structures that result from a colonial mind-set and the deep, long-lasting effects of colonialism. A group of intellectuals from formerly colonised countries took part in this debate. Aimé Césaire pointed to the exploitative, degrading and dehumanising effects of the supposed civilising mission. Frantz Fanon wrote about the psychological results of domination and their harmful effect on the self-perception of the colonised. Anouar Abdel-Malek demonstrated how Orientalist scholarship in the West reinforced clichés and prejudices about non-European cultures, and Ngugi Wa

³⁵ See Juergen Osterhammel's typology of colonies (10-11) and identifications of various stages of control (20-21).

³⁶ See, for instance, the works on China's exploitation of Africa (Rotberg, 2009; Kofigah, 2014; Langan, 2017).

Thiongo focused on hegemonic practices regarding language policy and emphasised the need to decolonise the mind by reviving African languages.

A central figure associated with this type of critique was Edward W. Said, who described the representations of the non-European Other in works of fiction and non-fiction. He posited that by depicting the East as at the same time exotic, fascinating and threatening, the writer would cast it in a role which was set and defined by the Westerner. In his *Orientalism* (1978), Said described the mechanisms behind the Western construction of the idea of the Orient, looking at various discourse-producing actors: academia, colonial institutions, artists and policy makers. The term “Orientalism” lost its innocence: it no longer denoted only trends in art or academic studies on the East. It acquired a negative connotation: Orientalism began to be understood as a way of stereotyping, subjugating and exploiting the East. Said’s critique of Orientalism became emblematic for the analysis of colonial, Eurocentric, or Western-centric discourses; it is worth noting, however, that it was part of a wider wave of criticism of Orientalist scholarship in particular, and the West’s approach to the Islamic world and other European colonies in general.

To critically investigate colonial discourses on the East, Said relied on the reflections of three influential thinkers: Erich Auerbach, Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault. From Auerbach, Said draws his historicist, highly interpretative and subjective approach to literary texts, assuming that representations are a product of their times and their makers, so in order to understand them, one must try to recreate the mind-set and the reality experienced by the author of the analysed text (see: Said’s introduction to Auerbach’s *Mimesis* xiii). His aim is thus to critically investigate European texts to unveil their inherently Eurocentric prejudices and their roots in the historical context of colonialism.

The second crucial reference for Said were the writings of Antonio Gramsci, from whom he borrowed the concepts of hegemony and ruling class. Gramsci perceived the society superstructure as composed of civil society – operating on the basis of voluntary affiliations – and of the political society of the State – or, in other words, the ruling class (124). This hegemonic class is supported by intellectuals who become the “officers” of that class and inculcate certain ideas to the society at large by means of both the apparatus of State coercion, and the consensus manufactured thanks to the ruling class’ position and prestige (Gramsci 124). Said considered Gramsci’s idea of hegemony as “an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West” (*Orientalism* 7), and as a factor that reinforced and supported Orientalism, understood as European superiority over “Oriental backwardness” (*Orientalism* 7). Indeed, this hegemonic Western view of its Oriental Other,

supported by a network of state institutions, policy-makers, intellectuals and artists, proved to be a particularly persistent one.

Finally, the concept of the hegemony of Western knowledge also draws from the ideas of Michel Foucault, who famously analysed the connection between knowledge and power. Each society has a certain “regime of truth”, or a “political economy” of truth; such truth is produced by centres of power whose institutions impose discourses in which certain notions are deemed true and others not (Foucault 131). This discourse, or regime of truth, says Foucault, was a condition for the formation and development of capitalism³⁷ (132). Said adopts this Foucauldian idea of discourse as his key theoretical reference, because “without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, socio- logically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (*Orientalism* 3). This discourse was so all-encompassing that anyone “writing, thinking or acting on the Orient” (3) was inevitably falling into the web of Orientalist clichés. There is no return to understanding Orientalism just as a passion for the exotic or a fascination with the Oriental lifestyle. Said demonstrated that such tendencies among Europeans had far-reaching implications, proliferating condescending representations of “the Orientals” and legitimising the colonial conquests of the Western empires.

Saidian Reading of the European Discourse on the Orient

Orientalism as a discourse is understood by Said in a variety of ways, and its manifestations can be visible in a large array of disciplines:

To speak of Orientalism therefore is to speak mainly, although not exclusively, of a British and French cultural enterprise, a project whose dimensions take in such disparate realms as the imagination itself, the whole of India and the Levant, the Biblical texts and the Biblical lands, the spice trade, colonial armies and a long tradition of colonial administrators, a formidable scholarly corpus, innumerable Oriental "experts" and "hands," an Oriental professorate, a complex array of "Oriental" ideas (Oriental despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty, sensuality), many Eastern sects, philosophies, and wisdoms domesticated for local European use—the list can be extended more or less indefinitely. (4)

Such an understanding of Orientalism makes it rather difficult to define the Orient in a precise manner: neither an enumeration of countries or territories, nor a delimitation of disciplines

³⁷ Foucault was well-aware that these regimes of truth were not only found in the West. He was highly critical of the oppressive nature of the socialist state, having spent a year in Poland in 1958. The story of Foucault's stay in Warsaw as director of a French cultural centre, and the mystery of his sudden expulsion, most likely at the request of Polish secret services, was recently described by Remigiusz Rzyński (2017).

would do it justice³⁸. What Said does, instead, is to focus on a large number of texts that are separate cases illustrating his general point on Orient's image in Western perception³⁹. Thus, the Orient functions in the European discourse as an object of scrutiny, judgement, disciplination, and as a material of study and illustration (*Orientalism* 40); it is perceived as static and unchanging, and as such, various figures of the colonial world can speak about it authoritatively, either as administrators, rulers, experts, scientists, but also as writers. This asymmetrical relation of superiority is supported by two aspects of the Orientalist discourse, one pertaining to "learning, discovery and practice", and the other to the Orient as "a collection of dreams, images and vocabularies" (73). Therefore, artists play an important role in strengthening this system of signs and meanings that constitutes the Orient in the European imagination.

Said argues that the Orient is perceived by Europeans as the opposite of the rational, logical, European self (39), as a professional and personal project (158), as an exotic dream, a possibility for self-exploration (170), a romantic adventure (185), an object of desire (188) and a male power-fantasy (207). Orientalism is a cumulative kind of knowledge, a system of representations that are present in many disciplines, from academia⁴⁰ to imperial governance. Said even goes as far to say that "every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric" (*Orientalism* 203)⁴¹. This essentialised view of the Orient, the set of ideas on what the Orient represents – sensuality, brutality, despotism, backwardness, irrationality, chaos – is so strongly embedded in European minds that its repertoire is used almost subconsciously. Said calls it latent Orientalism, in contrast to the manifest Orientalism that consist in various views on the Orient's history, society, politics, language, literature etc. It is only the second kind that is subject to change – latent Orientalism is practically static (206).

Orientalism after Colonialism

³⁸ Critics accused Said of offering a too generalised picture that does not take into account the subtle regional and cultural distinctions. Some called him too political, or too "prosecutorial" (Kerr 544).

³⁹ The wide selection of diverse texts and contexts was also criticised, Said was blamed of isolating Orientalism from its historical context and of a liberal dropping of names, anecdotes and places, rather than focussing on specifics (Kopf 496).

⁴⁰ Said's attacks on Orientalist scholarship unleashed a strong backlash from academics studying „the Orient“, especially the key figure of Orientalist studies at the time, Bernard Lewis. He criticized Said for many omissions, historical imprecision, misinterpretations of various Orientalists' work and of their intentions, but most of all – for dismissing *en gros* the whole Orientalist scholarship and all its achievements, whether in the field of linguistics or history (Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism").

⁴¹ This point was countered by Ibn Warraq who contended in his book *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* that to all Said's evidence one can provide an array of counter-examples, showing Western intellectuals as in fact quite open-minded towards Otherness (Loc 541). A similar issue was raised by Robert Irwin who claimed that Orientalism is not a monolith – it was an extremely heterogeneous tradition, which, even though it did create certain images that remained for long in the European imagery, was less harmful than what Said implies (4).

Furthermore, Said discusses how the discourse of Orientalism changed after the end of the colonial era, when United States began to play a dominating role on the global arena. The new American Orientalism shares certain characteristics with the previous Orientalism, but also, in the changing political circumstances, creates new images (for instance, Arabs are seen as dangerous, degenerate and violent, and often as greedy or dishonest, which to Said seems to be the proof of how anti-Semitic stereotypes are transferred from Jews to Arabs (286)). Like in the previous era of imperial competition, the knowledge of the Orient is again used in a political way - Said quotes a government report where it is advised to create schools of Oriental languages, because America's rival, Soviet Russia is intensively training Arab speakers (292). For the same reason, United States began to develop a cultural relations policy, in order to be able to exert more influence in the Middle East and counterbalance the Soviet Union (209). This is yet another way in which, according to Said, the countries of the Orient become satellites subjugated to the interests of the the key international players, with little power of culture, knowledge and scholarship production (322). Therefore, Said perceives the discourse of Orientalism as practically all-encompassing and easily adapting to new historical and political contexts.

While prejudicial discourses on non-Western Others are still present and take new forms and shapes (the current debates on Muslim migrants and refugees are a case in point), Said's work provoked much debate. As James Clifford observed, a huge change happened in the world from 1950s onwards: the representatives of the cultures that were for centuries studied and observed by the Westerners started writing back. Said, a Palestinian residing in the United States, was part of this global phenomenon offering a new, critical view on the Western gaze. For Clifford, the main value of Said's work is that he questioned basic categories, such as culture. Gyan Prakash went even farther: in his 1995 article, "Orientalism Now", he talked about the "iconoclastic effect of Orientalism" (200) and the subversive power of Said's book:

. . . what accounts for the extraordinary impact of Orientalism is its repeated dissolution of boundaries drawn by colonial and neocolonial Western hegemony. The book ignited an intellectual and ideological conflagration by its insistent undoing of oppositions between the Orient and the Occident, Western knowledge and Western power, scholarly objectivity and worldly motives, discursive regimes and authorial intentions, discipline and desire, representation and reality, and so on. (Prakash 200-201)

This destabilizing, unsettling effect of *Orientalism* is already in itself a weapon against the authority and certainty of the Orientalist discourse. Still igniting strong emotions, Said's text is an ever-present critique of the pitfalls of Western knowledge. Clearly, Said's critique was only

part of a larger trend in which the postcolonial criticism “converges with the poststructuralist interrogation of universal subjects and origins” (Prakash 205). Many academics were inspired by his book and took his ideas further – in order to look at colonial relations from a gendered perspective⁴², to concentrate on different fields and forms of artistic expression⁴³, or to analyse more specific geographical and cultural contexts. His work inspired various critics of colonialism that created the entire field of postcolonial studies, which is still developing and adopting new angles and perspectives.

The pervasive nature of Western colonialism and the durability of Orientalist discourse, which can still be observed in popular culture, politics, and – maybe less so – academia, is probably its main characteristics. Nevertheless, self-criticism is also a central trait of the European culture (Bauman 2), which allowed the critique of colonial, Orientalist discourses to grow and to be widely read and discussed among scholars on the European continent.

2. Eastern Orientalism – Russia, Soviet Union and the Orient

“We live in Europe’s East, but this fact does not make us Eastern.” Chaadaev

Excerpt From: David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye. “Russian Orientalism.” iBooks.

Russian Orientalism

While Western European empires established a pattern of colonial domination overseas, the main powers at the centre and in the east of the continent adopted a different strategy, trying to ascertain their supremacy over the different peoples inhabiting the larger Eurasian area. Russia, due to its liminal position, stretched between Europe and Asia, has itself strived for being recognised as more than a periphery in the eyes of the Westerners, and often struggled against Orientalist clichés. Paradoxically, even Karl Marx, whose thought was later revered as main inspiration behind the Russian Revolution, used to call Russia “semi-Asiatic”, and characterised the tsarist rule as “Oriental despotism” (van der Oye 16). Russians would protest against being called Asian, as they perceived themselves as defenders of Christianity against the “pagan” tribes surrounding them. The nineteenth-century debate between Slavophiles and *Zapadniki* (Westernizers) indeed raised questions on whether Russia should consider itself European and turn towards the Latin cultures of the West, or whether it should revert to its Slavic roots. But even Slavophiles did not identify themselves as Asian (van der Oye 18).

⁴² See: Reina Lewis (2004, 2013), Meyda Yeğenoğlu (1998), Madeleine Dobie (2014), Joseph A. Boone (2014)

⁴³ See: Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar in their *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*

Russia's eastern lands were rather considered by imperial strategists as potential territories for expansion and conquest. Certainly, when colonialism reached its peak in Western Europe in the nineteenth century, and when the increased interest in the Middle- and Far East went hand-in-hand with ever more powerful colonialism, Russia was eager to participate in this trend. According to David Chioni Moore, "the Russians were mimicking the French and the British, to whom, again, they had long felt culturally inferior. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, colonial expansion was the price of admission into Europe's club, and this was Russia's ticket" (120). Russian imperial colonialism and expansion in the region is now a widely known and discussed phenomenon⁴⁴, as is its Oriental scholarship. However, the question of continuity between the Tsarist and the Soviet-era Orientalism remains open.

An increased interest in the Orient could be observed in Russia alongside the Western European fascination with "Easternness". Russia was following the trends of the era: Catherine the Great joined in the eighteenth-century fashion of "chinoiserie" and Pushkin, like many Romantic poets, had a predilection to the mysterious and exotic Orient of the Romanticism. Nevertheless, they differed from their Western counterparts in that they did not only write about the Orient understood as Middle East or India, but of the neighbouring regions of Asian parts of Russia, the Caucasus, and Mongolia. In fact, much of the well-known Russian literary creation could be considered in Saidian terms as legitimising the Russia's expansionism to various territories on its South and East (Layton; Thompson, *Imperial...*; Ram). Ewa Thompson calls these writers and poets – among them such literary giants as Dostoevski, Pushkin or Lermontov – the troubadours of the empire. Their texts contributed to a distinctly Russian understanding of the imaginary East, *Vostok*, which has many faces, and comprises of various lands. According to van der Oye, "[i]n the Russian mind, there are both one Orient and many Orients, from the ancient Tartar city of Kazan in Europe only 600 kilometers east of Moscow, to Asian lands such as Persia, India, China, Mongolia, and Japan" (30). Just as there is no single notion of the Orient, the notion of the Russian Empire's discourse on its colonies is also a problematic one, resulting from the fact that Russia itself was labelled by Westerners as Asiatic. As observed by Madina Tlostanova, "[t]he Russian imperial discourses demonstrate the double-faced nature of this empire which feel itself a colony in the presence of the West, at the same time acting as a half-hearted and caricature "civilizer" in its own non-European colonies" (1).

The turn of twentieth century brought a renewed interest in the exotic among Russia's elites. The East was discussed and studied particularly among the intellectuals and avant-garde

⁴⁴ See: Etkind; Mostashari; Thompson, *Imperial...*; Khodarkovsky; Meyer; Brower & Lazzarini; Kelertas; Tolz.

artists, active during the so-called Silver Age of Russian culture (1890s-1917). Among the most interested in Eastern cultures and thought were the literati: Konstantin Balmont, Andrei Bely and Leo Tolstoy⁴⁵. Apart from a cultural exploration of the exotic and the fascination with “Eastern religions”, the Orient began to be studied with all academic rigour. First, in 1804, Orientology was established in Kazan, a city in southwestern Russia, closer to the Muslim-populated parts of the empire⁴⁶. In the later part of nineteenth century, the centre of Orientological scholarship shifted to St. Petersburg. As a rather cosmopolitan metropolis, it hosted students and faculty from different parts of the empire, both Asian and European, as well as the French, the Germans and the Poles. It became one of the main centres of Oriental knowledge in Europe, alongside Paris, Cambridge, Leiden, Goettingen and Yale (van der Oye 367). However, learning about the Orient was primarily intended for utilitarian purposes. In the words of Ivan Minaev, a prominent nineteenth-century Indologist, “Russia’s interests have always been intimately linked to the East, and therefore ... for our scholars Asia cannot be a lifeless, purely bookish object of academic curiosity.”⁴⁷ Indeed, the position of Russian Orientology remained ambiguous: some scholars supported the state in its “civilising mission”, or expansion, to Asia, but some did not (van der Oye, Tolz). While the scholarly centres were created to train diplomats, translators and other future employees of the imperial administration, many academics had a true interest in Middle Eastern or Asian cultures and did not regard them with contempt. They even considered themselves having a deeper knowledge of the Orient than their Western counterparts, due to their historical ties and closer contacts with Asia. Nevertheless, this knowledge was never completely free from the imperial control. “Russian orientology was not always the compliant handmaiden of the state, but there were intimate ties between the two”, concludes van der Oye (28). Such alliance of the imperial state with academia, culture and arts matches the Saidian model of Orientalism understood as a form of symbolic power, a domination of the Oriental East by means of narratives and discourses. While the revolution of 1917 put an end to the Russian Empire, it did not completely eradicate the Orientalist perception of the Eastern Other. Certainly, the approach to the East changed, but not radically – a fair degree of continuity could be observed between the Russian and Soviet Orientalism in academia (Tolz loc 85).

⁴⁵ Tolstoy’s interest in India led to his exchange of letters with Mahatma Gandhi. See: L. Tolstoy, M.K. Gandhi, Leo Tolstoy: A Letter to a Hindu: Including Correspondences with Gandhi & Letter to Ernest Howard Crosby, trans. by A. Maude, L. Wiener (2017)

⁴⁶ Sometimes even called Russia’s window to the East (Oye 182)

⁴⁷ “Ivan Minaev, “Ob izuchenii Indii v russkikh universitetakh,” *Otchet o sostoianii Imp. S.-Peterburgskago universiteta* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Shakht, 1884), 89.” Quoted after David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye. “Russian Orientalism.” iBooks.

Soviet Orientalism

The creation of the Soviet state, emerging from the bloodshed of the Bolshevik revolution, was seen by many observers as an opportunity for establishing a completely new system, which will break with the traditions of the tsarist *Ancien Regime*. Even a few decades after the revolution, Anouar Abdel-Malek concluded his analysis of traditional Western European Orientalism by expressing his hope that the adoption of Marxist thought by Soviet Russia offers new possibilities to counterbalance the Eurocentric approach among European Orientalists (120). In his text, Abdel-Malek was hopeful that the socialist states will be at the head of a new thinking about the Orient, and a more just “neo-orientalism” will emerge (112). As research on Soviet school of Orientalism shows, this did not happen, since USSR had its own political agenda that influenced the research on the “Orient”. In fact, not only the Soviet Orientalists did not propose any viable alternative to Western Orientalism, they were the ones to argue with their Western colleagues in favour of keeping the name “Orientalism” (Lewis B. 4-5) and above all – being subjected to censorship and Soviet propaganda requirements – had little freedom to create a truly innovative academic school of thought on “the Orient”. Soviet Orientalism underwent different phases, but it was always constricted by the ideology imposed by the communist party.

During and after the Bolshevik Revolution, some scholars were persecuted or even killed in the Gulag, but some became the patrons of the new Soviet Orientology. Even though initially, there were attempts at reading Islam in connection with Marxism and finding common elements (like the idea of social justice or giving alms), the communist state by and large rejected Islam as a “feudal” religion that needed to be eradicated (Conermann and Kemper Loc. 347-373). Bolshevik revolutionaries wanted to establish a new, Marxist Orientology. According to Michael Kemper, soon after the 1917 revolution there began a movement towards a Marxist redefinition of Orientalist study, in opposition to the “bourgeois”, “outdated” and “reactionary” Orientalists from the St. Petersburg school (“Red Orientalism...” 437). In 1921, Mikhail Pavlovich, the leader of this movement, set up a Marxist organisation – the Soviet Scientific Association of Oriental Studies – and later became the head of the Moscow Institute for Oriental Studies (1923). He was also behind the emergence of a journal called *Novyi Vostok* [*The New Orient*], which was labelled as “the World’s only Marxist journal devoted to the Orient” (437).

When a few years after the 1917 Revolution the Soviet communists realised that other countries did not follow suit, Trotsky proposed that the Bolsheviks turn towards the Orient. It was assumed that it might be easier to bring down Western capitalism through revolutions in

the colonies of the European superpowers. Hence, the Comintern decided to organise a Congress of the Peoples of the East, in order to support the revolutionary movements in the “Oriental nations”; the Congress took place in Baku in 1920. Contrarily to the ideas of Marx, the Bolsheviks came to the conclusion that the East does not need to go first through a period of capitalism, and that since there was no proletariat (as there was less industrialisation), the revolution should be carried out by peasants (Kemper, “Red Orientalism...” 447). Their call for action was however tainted by the well-known Eurocentric Orientalist perspective, explains Kemper, giving examples of speeches abounding in clichés on the old-age wisdom of the East, or “Oriental backwardness” (448). Once again, the Orientals were not allowed to speak for themselves and the Congress became “a measure to turn the Orient into an instrument of Soviet Russia, which reveal[ed] its functionalist, ‘Orientalist’ character”, says Kemper (“Red Orientalism...” 449). The Soviet speakers pointed out the “ignorance” and “superstition” of the Orientals, which had to be overcome in order to fight a “holy war” against British and French imperialism – a call that Kemper labels as “Red Jihad” (450). The most problematic aspect of the Soviet approach was their claim to leadership of the Orient, based on Marxist developmental thought: “lumped together, the Orient from Morocco to China was treated as an amorphous mass that would obtain contours only through the Soviet model”, observed Kemper (452).

It is clear that the Soviets’ primary concern when calling for the liberation of the Orient was USSR’s own interest. Hence, the Orient became objectified and subjugated to a rather Eurocentric, Western-like project, and made part of a larger global game for strategic domination and influence. Indeed, when the objectives of Soviet diplomacy changed (among other reasons, following a trade agreement with Great Britain), the Bolsheviks were no longer interested in the undertaking of the Oriental Revolution. Furthermore, after Pavlovich’s death in 1927, and after the Stalinist purges which led to the elimination of many academics⁴⁸, among them Orientalists, “Novyi Vostok” and the All-Soviet Scientific Association of Oriental Studies closed down. Also, a new generation of more radical students emerged, and they strongly criticised the older Marxist scholars (Kemper 472). A new Soviet Association of Marxist Orientalists was established, and although it was supposed to study the revolutionary movements in the East, it focused more on the fight with “internal enemies” within the Soviet Union and the elimination of “economic and cultural backwardness” (through forced collectivisation and violent reforms) in the nations of the USSR (474). Moreover, from 1930s onwards, Muslims were persecuted in the Soviet Union, and research on Islam—and more

⁴⁸ Also, as a result of the purges in 1930s, the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, established in 1921 under the guidance of Pavlovich, among others, closed down. Its mission was to educate the future communist elites of the East.

generally, on the Orient—became difficult as well (Conermann and Kemper Loc. 347-373). Many Soviet Orientalists took part in the anti-religious propaganda, for instance distributing pamphlets and sending scholars to Muslim-dominated regions of USSR with lectures on atheism.

While some Orientalists tried to preserve some independence, others in one way or the other collaborated with the Party, for instance by joining the “League of the Militant Godless”, a state-sponsored atheist organization the membership in which could be helpful in their academic career (Bobrovnikov). The political pressure on academics was strong: according to Michael Kemper, by 1940 many scholars of Islam and the Orient were imprisoned, exiled, or executed (Loc 401). However, unlike in the West, the Soviet academic environment incorporated many actual “Orientals” – Soviet citizens from the predominantly Muslim regions – who knew the language and culture of their ancestors and sometimes had even studied in madrasas before they were closed down by the Soviet state. Like other members of academia, numerous Orientalists maintained political connections with the Communist Party and the field of Orientalism was considerably limited by the ideology and the political goals of the USSR. Conermann emphasises that “the task of Oriental studies in the USSR was to provide information on Islam and Muslim societies abroad, with regard to foreign policy, and at home, in the Muslim areas of the USSR, where scholarship was crucial for the formation of national histories and identities” (Loc 158). He demonstrates that while it should be recognized that some Soviet Orientalists preceded Said in their critique of Western European imperialism, their work was far from objective or apolitical. It was strongly embedded in the system of communist scholarship, and closely linked with a discourse of political propaganda that governed external relations and the image of other regions of the world. Thus, the “Red Orientalism” (in the words of Kemper) was “heavily indebted to European imagination about the East” (476), and represented yet another form of Orientalism, only with a “civilising mission” based on slogans inspired by Marxist premises.

In later years of the Cold War era, Orientalism became an arena of rivalry between East and West, a struggle for the power of interpreting and dominating the Orient. Oriental studies were a prestigious discipline, as they offered coveted position, possibilities of travel, and political contacts – even though the delegations going on international conferences were accompanied by KGB officers (Kemper & Conermann, Loc 487). However, freedom of research was severely limited, as directions were still coming from Moscow, and even the Orientalist departments in the Union republics were subjected to this centralised, politically imposed programme. The fact that Orientalist institutes were set up only in some republics, the

ones neighbouring with Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, also meant that their primary focus was to monitor the political developments in these countries, rather than do independent research (Kemper & Conermann, Loc 487). While Soviet-era Orientalism distanced itself from Western colonial discourses, it did not manage to neither remain apolitical, nor to renounce from the feeling of cultural superiority towards its Muslim-populated regions. Under the guise of modernisation, it would impose a new cultural model on the local population, targeting particularly women. According to Tlostanova:

Gender questions stood in the center of Soviet Orientalism, which was based on familiar imported from the West progressivism, scientific pretensions, Eurocentric clichés, a set of negative stereotypes in the interpretation of non-Western cultures - from the presumable lack of hygiene and various diseases, to the mental retardation and savageness (5).

Central Asian women were put under scrutiny, often in a supposedly scientific manner, forced to change their lifestyle and their way of dressing. This constituted another form of oppression, albeit under slogans of women liberation (Tlostanova 5). The colonised populations would be made to adopt Soviet modernity, but not allowed to become fully equal. This hypocrisy of the Soviet discourse was in many ways similar to the one of Western colonial empires, in how they expected the colonised to become modern, but only to a certain degree – if the colonised became like the colonisers, the latter would lose their power over them.

Although in 1960s, the political stance of Soviet Orientology was toned down, political pressure was still exerted on many academics, for instance, those of Jewish origin (Kemper & Conermann Loc 533). Finally, in 1970s and 1980s, studying Islam became once again relevant for Soviet scholars, in connection to the political developments worldwide – Iran Revolution, Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, rise of various political Islamist movements in the East – but also due to Islamic revival in the Soviet republics, perceived by Moscow as an internal threat. Nevertheless, these developments confirmed the defeat of Marxist Orientalism and its belief that religion – and in particular Islam – can be relegated to the past. The fact that many revolutionary movements in the Third World followed Islam, but incorporated socialist elements, was also a challenge for Soviets.

Still, socialist thought appeared to some post-colonial critics as an alternative to the Western one, forever tainted by colonialism. Anouar Abdel-Malek, having experienced French colonialism first hand, proposed a new conception of socialist “neo-Orientalism” which should be based on a fundamental critique of Eurocentrism, as well as offer a change in perceiving the “Orientals” – no longer as objects of study, but as “subjects”, as creators of their own history, culture and science (124). Soviet Orientalists indeed declared their support to the newly

independent nations of Africa and Asia, and encouraged them to adopt the Marxist-Leninist approach, following the Soviet model. However, in promoting a Soviet-style modernisation, and in supporting the state in exerting political influence on the former colonies of the West, they also failed to treat “the Orientals” as autonomous and independent. Madina Tlostanova characterises the Russian and Soviet Orientalism as a “secondary orientalism”, reflecting and distorting the Western original:

Orientalist constructs in this case turn out not only more complex but also built on the principle of double mirror reflections, on the copying of western orientalism with a slight deviation and necessarily, with a carefully hidden, often unconscious feeling that Russia itself is a form of a mystic and mythical Orient for the West. (1)

This “secondary orientalism”, together with a “secondary Eurocentrism”, are two mirrors, one turned by Russia towards the colonies, and the other by Europe towards Russia, create, according to Tlostanova, a “specific unstable sensibility” of Russian intellectuals. Thus,

a representative of the Russian elite clearly coded himself or herself as a European, albeit a second-rate one. On the other hand, it looked as if the Orient that the Russian empire got through its colonizing efforts, was also somehow second-rate, not like the one of Europe. (2)

Since their own colonies, for instance in the Caucasus, were not as enchanting as the ones possessed by the West, Russians turned further East, exploring the “real”, European’s Orient: India, China, Egypt, North Africa, argues Tlostanova (2). Another strategy that Russians used, was to fit their own colonies into the Western Orientalist image (3), using typically exoticising clichés even on populations that resembled them rather closely. This complicated relationship, featuring Russia and its Southern and Eastern territories, includes a third figure: Western Europe, as an important point of reference.

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Western European Orientalism and Russian/Soviet Orientalism had their particular traits, although they were not separate. Russian Orientalism was strongly influenced by the West, and post-war leftist intellectuals would look towards Soviet Orientalism in hope for a new approach towards the Orient. This book addresses a third space, neither (or both) Western and Eastern, where these Orientalisms intertwine and combine. This space in-between is Central Europe, of which Poland can be taken as an example.

3. The Space In-Between: Central European and Polish Orientalism(s)

Among the binary divisions between East and West, which – as it results from the previous section, were not as separate as it may have seemed – there is a liminal space in which Western and Eastern cultural patterns intertwine or collide. The inhabitants of the region are well-aware of this ambiguity: in the words of Stanisław Mrożek, his native Poland is “located to the west from the East and to the east from the West” (qt after Janion 13). The area of Central Europe, where borders often shifted and great empires competed between one another, was crossed by several dividing lines: the limes of the Roman empire, the line separating Catholic and Orthodox religions, the divide between Christianity and Islam (the Ottoman empire reaching as far as Western Balkans and Hungary), the border of the mighty empires of nineteenth century: Prussian, Russian and Habsburg ones, the bloody line between two totalitarianisms (Hitler’s and Stalin’s)⁴⁹, and finally the Cold War-era division by the Iron Curtain (Davies, *Europe...*). These experiences led to the development of a particular, often unsettled identity of Central Europeans, and their feeling of being constantly in-between, in the sphere that is constantly challenged, re-negotiated and moveable. Their relationship with both the West and the East is a constantly changing one, impacting perceptions of the Self and of the Other.

Western Europe often regarded the East as culturally inferior and backward, using at times a similar language to the one used for describing its colonies. As Larry Wolff demonstrated in his 1994 book, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, the perception of Eastern Europe as a separate and culturally different entity began in the Enlightenment (4). In that period, Western Europe invented Eastern Europe as its complementary other half, backward and barbaric, as much as the West considered itself as modern and civilised, says Wolff (4). This perception “flourished as an idea of extraordinary potency since the eighteenth century, neatly dovetailing in our own times with the rhetoric and realities of the Cold War, but also certain to outlive the collapse of Communism, surviving in the public culture and its mental maps” (Wolff 4). The process of mental mapping and associating certain characteristics with a given region of Europe was performed primarily through travellers – Wolff gives as an example the travel journals of the French count de Ségur, who considered entering Poland as tantamount to “leaving Europe” and “moving back ten centuries” (6)⁵⁰. Furthermore, the Frenchman referred to Eastern Europe as “Europe’s Orient”, a term that continued to be used until early twentieth century (in exact terms: *l’Europe orientale* or *l’Orient Européen*) (Wolff 6-7). Moreover, geographers placed the

⁴⁹ Timothy Snyder refers to these territories not only as „borderlands”, but as „bloodlands”, lands that suffered the most from war-time destruction and annihilation of entire populations.

⁵⁰ A similar motif of travelling to a foreign land compared to travel in time returns also in the accounts of Polish travellers to India, as it will be discussed later in this dissertation.

countries of Eastern Europe somewhere in between Europe and Asia, and the supposed separation between the two continents would remain fluid. As Wolff observes,

Such uncertainty encouraged the construction of Eastern Europe as a paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, Europe but not Europe. Eastern Europe defined Western Europe by contrast, as the Orient defined the Occident, but was also made to mediate between Europe and the Orient. One might describe the invention of Eastern Europe as in intellectual project of demi-Orientalization. (Wolff 7)

Wolff underlines the similarities in the construction of the Orient as the Other that can be subjugated and “civilised”, and that of Eastern Europe, which can be dominated by the intellectual power and knowledge of the West, but also through real conquest (8). This was, indeed, the case: most countries of Central and Eastern Europe were for at least parts of their history under the domination of large neighbouring empires: Germany/Prussia, Habsburg’s Austria, Tsarist Russia, or the Ottoman Empire. Many Eastern European nations would also be subjected to domination by other Eastern European states: for instance, Ukrainians in the Polish Second Republic (of the interwar period) or Romanians and Slovaks in (Austro-)Hungary. Thus, more than a few Central European societies know very well what it means to be both powerful and powerless.

Eastern Europe – or the Oriental Europe – was by an large an invention originating in the West. In a more contemporary era, a new concept for the region was created by Eastern Europeans themselves. At the time of Cold War isolation, intellectuals opposing communist rule began to reflect on their position in Europe and wonder whether their nations, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian – situated in a region which they called Central Europe – share certain distinct characteristics. In an influential essay, “The Stolen West or The Tragedy of Central Europe” (1983) Milan Kundera underlined how the nations of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary were geographically in the middle of Europe, culturally in the West, and, after 1945, politically in the East (1). While according to Kundera these Central European nations always identified with the West, after the Second World War they were “kidnapped” and forcibly placed in the orbit of the East – the Soviet Union (33)⁵¹. In his view, nothing could be as foreign to Central Europe as Russia (or USSR), with its uniformity, standardisation, centralisation, and the idea of moulding its citizens into a universal “Homo Sovieticus”. If Central Europeans believed in the ideal of maximum variety in the smallest space, Russians/Soviets would follow an opposite model: minimum variety in the largest space

⁵¹ Kundera says: “. . . we can no longer consider what took place in Prague or Warsaw in its essence as a drama of Eastern Europe, of the Soviet bloc, of communism; it is a drama of the West – a West that, kidnapped, displaced, and brainwashed, nevertheless insists on defending its identity.” (33)

(Kundera 33). But the tragedy of Central Europe is nothing else than the tragedy of the West, as the subjugated nations are the repositories of truly European values, which the Western countries have already lost, Kundera suggests (38). The notion of Central Europe as “kidnapped West” quickly gained popularity among Polish, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian intellectuals, for instance Adam Michnik, Vaclav Havel and Gyorgy Konrad. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the lifting of the Iron Curtain and the breaking of the Berlin Wall, this idea pervaded the mainstream discussion on the region’s identity and intensified the desire of catching up with the West. The accession of the former Soviet satellite states, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary to the European Union in 2004 was therefore perceived by many as a symbolic return to the West, to which Central Europe – as the intellectuals would argue – had always belonged.

Nevertheless, the systemic change did not automatically bring equality and conflict-free coexistence between East and West of Europe. As Cristina Sandru remarks, “[a]fter an initial period of joyous triumphalism at the prospect of a finally united, happily globalised planet, a variety of hardly anticipated tensions emerged, as statal units collapsed under vicious ethnic conflict and economic deprivation set in”, comparing this situation to the one in decolonised countries of the “Third World” (2). The media would once again replay the old images and stereotypes and various forms of “meta-racism” (Sandru 2), and Western (re-)discovery of Eastern Europe would often be marked with well-known Orientalist stereotypes⁵². Maria Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans* (1997), in which Said’s analysis of Orientalist discourse is applied to Western perceptions of the Balkans, and Vesna Goldsworthy’s *Inventing Ruritania* (1998) on a similar topic, exploring the formation of the imagined “Wild East” in Western writing and films (of which Bram Stoker’s vision of Transylvania and Anthony Hope’s invented country of Ruritania are prime examples). Similarly, films like Wes Anderson’s “Grand Budapest Hotel” (2014)⁵³ and Sacha Baron Cohen’s “Borat” (2006)⁵⁴ play on the Western stereotypes of the East, demonstrating how clichés on various Eastern European nations come together in a vision of a somewhat barbaric, loud, illogical and nonsensical cultures of the global periphery. Central (or Eastern) Europe would in turn portray everything further to the East of its borders in a similar way – Polish travel accounts and diaries from Russia or Ukraine are the

⁵² A comic description of the invented city of Prava, somewhere in Eastern Europe, where young Westerners travel for an experience of adventure and decadence, can be found in Gary Shteynagart’s *The Russian Debutante’s Handbook* (2002).

⁵³ Jake Scobey-Thal sees “The Grand Budapest Hotel” as anti-imperialist – see his article, “The Anderson Doctrine” on Foreign Policy.com, March 14, 2014. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/03/14/the-anderson-doctrine/> (last access on 1.02.2016).

⁵⁴ A number of critical analyses on Sacha Baron Cohen’s movie can be found in vol.67 no. 1 of the *Slavic Review*.

best case in point⁵⁵. Countries of Central and Eastern Europe also did not escape reproducing stereotypes visions of others. In her article “Nesting Orientalisms” (1995), Milica Bakić-Hayden explains that each region has a tendency to portray cultures to its East and South as inferior or more primitive, and Orientalist visions can have a variety of manifestations and dimensions. The following section focuses on Orientalism in the Polish context: the Polish problems with its own Easternness, as well as with different notions of the East, or the Orient.

Poland’s Oriental Others

Poles usually see themselves as victims of imperialism, rather than a dominating power. Indeed, in late eighteenth century, Poland was partitioned by three imperial states with strong centres and expansionist ambitions: Prussia, Russia and Austria, later renamed Austro-Hungary. Each of these empires has had its own version of Orientalism, as many scholars demonstrated⁵⁶. After gaining independence in 1918, the new Polish state became a strong power with its own dominating discourse, especially aimed at its Eastern borderlands, and even with some colonial ambitions outside of the European continent⁵⁷. This period ended with the Second World War. Poland once again lost its independence, occupied by the Nazi Germany and by Soviet Union, and after the war became one of the satellite states of the Soviet Bloc. Therefore, Poland was at different points of time a dominated object and a dominating subject, and is an interesting case of being at the same time on both sides of the power equation. As a result, Polish culture features various types of Orientalist and Orientalising discourses, which is why the use of the noun in plural form: “Orientalisms”, is – according to Dirk Uffelmann – more appropriate than talking about “Polish Orientalism” in singular⁵⁸. Hanna Gosk investigates this duality in her book *Tales of the Colonized/Coloniser*, in which she explores the various stages of Polish subjugation or domination over others⁵⁹. This complicated condition is currently analysed from a postcolonial perspective, referred to by Polish scholars as a post-dependent rather than a postcolonial one, deemed more appropriate to the Polish context. This book explores a particular type of Polish Orientalism that can be observed in a specific timeframe – the three decades of socialism – and having a specific object – India.

⁵⁵ The Polish stereotypes on Ukraine are explored in a semi-ironic and self-critical manner by Ziemowit Szczerek in his gonzo reportage from Ukraine *Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje* (2013).

⁵⁶ On German Orientalism see Hodkinson et al.; Kontje; Marchand; Leigh Kopp; and on Habsburg Orientalism: Feichtinger, Prutsch and Csáky. See footnote above for Russian Orientalism.

⁵⁷ See Aleksander Fiut, “Polonizacja?...”.

⁵⁸ This is discussed in Uffelmann’s article, “Ich würde...”. See also: Uffelmann, “Litwo!...”.

⁵⁹ This is well described by Hanna Gosk in her 2010 book *Opowieści....*

The images of Middle-Eastern, or Far-Eastern Others, were shaped in Polish discourses to a large extent based on the Western European model. The main difference from Western Orientalism was that Poles had no direct contact and no relation of domination/subjugation of the Orient⁶⁰. Orientalism was first a trend in art and literature – a fascination with the exotic – as well as a discipline in academic study. In Poland, the Orientalist perception of the “East” developed already in Enlightenment⁶¹ and became more widespread in nineteenth century.

Napoleon’s campaign in Egypt caused a wave of interest in Egypt and the Middle East, fuelling Orientalist images across Western and Eastern Europe. In that period, Poland disappeared from the map of Europe, divided by neighbouring empires. As a response to the foreign domination, Poles organized resistance, plotted against their rulers, conspired and revolted, and many of them emigrated to the West. Also, they took part actively in cultural activities aimed at preserving the national spirit and maintaining links with Western European countries. This coincided with the heyday of European Orientalism. Izabela Kalinowska, author of a study on Polish and Russian Orientalism points at the connection between these two parallel processes:

Paradoxically, in the nineteenth century scholarly and literary Orientalism enjoyed great popularity in Eastern Europe in part because the Eastern Europeans desired to participate as equals in the intellectual life of Europe. For some Polish and Russian writers, travel to the East provided a way to assert their own Westernness and hence Europeanness. (Kalinowska 3)

Even though Poles faced some restrictions in the freedom to travel, the Grand Tour, or *voyage orientale*, was in fashion among Polish cultural and artistic elites. As in the case of the Westerners, it was often a quest for self-definition, but it responded to an even more complex identity crisis, given that they were themselves in the position of colonised subjects (Kalinowska 12). Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, both considered as iconic figures of the Polish romanticism, were among those intellectuals who travelled to the Orient, and their journeys were reflected in their literary creations.

Mickiewicz’s stay in Crimea, where he encounters “Oriental” culture, results in a particular form of lyrical travelogue – the “Crimean Sonnets” (1826). There are various Orientalist elements in the sonnets, which are inspired by classic Arabic literature – in particular

⁶⁰ Apart from repeated wars with the Ottoman Empire in the period of 15th-17th centuries, through which Poles came in contact with what they perceived as the “Oriental” culture.

⁶¹ Jan Tuczyński, analysing Indian motifs in Polish literature, mentions Oriental and Indian tales on animals retold in Polish 18th century tales modelled after the French ones of La Fontaine⁶¹ (29). Polish intellectuals of the Enlightenment, Hugo Kołłątaj and Stanisław Staszic also found inspiration in the “wisdom of the East” and included various concepts from the Indian thought in their writings – Staszic pondered on the impermanence and changeability of the world, or on metaphysical understanding of human suffering, while Kołłątaj underlined the connection between Sanskrit and Slavic languages as coming from the same God (Tuczyński 31).

the genre called *qasidah* – but Mickiewicz differs from his Western European contemporaries in several aspects. For instance, he does so by placing a local Muslim man, the Tatar called Mirza, as one of the main voices in his work, refusing to ascribe to him the stereotypically “Eastern” traits. Some critics see this double presence, of the Traveller and the Tatar as yet another form of presenting the binary opposition between East and West, but others conclude that Mickiewicz was sympathetic to Crimea and its inhabitants because, like his own people, they were dominated by the Russian empire⁶². Kalinowska, too, underlines that “[i]n no way do the *Sonnets* affirm Europe’s dominance and its superiority over the cultures of the East. To the contrary, they survey and illustrate the benefits of a creative engagement born from literary travel to the Orient” (16). That is why, Mickiewicz cannot be simply considered as Orientalist, as his writing was in a sense anti-imperialist. Even though the sonnets bring about oriental imagery and language, they also refer in their form to oriental genres of writing (the *qasidah*), and, according to Kalinowska, they are written in the spirit of a true East-West cultural exchange (55). The same applies to other authors of nineteenth century Polish travel writing about the Orient:

To survey the Orient in the same manner as the Western Europeans meant to emphasize Poland’s allegiance to Europe. Polish writers were therefore prone to replicate the models of cultural encounters present in Western European texts. Yet they did not participate in the West’s colonizing enterprise. Rather, on the level of discourse, they faced the risk of becoming voluntary victims of colonization (Kalinowska 66).

Especially in the period after the failed uprising in November 1830, Polish writers felt powerless and stifled. Many of them left Poland at that time (including Adam Mickiewicz), forming a large émigré community in Paris. Among them was Juliusz Słowacki, another prominent romantic poet. In 1836, like many of his contemporaries, he set off on an oriental adventure: a journey to Greece, Egypt, Palestine and Syria. Even though it was a conventional tour, he distanced himself from this travel experience, portraying the oriental travel in “The Journey” (1836-39) and “Beniowski” (1841-1846) in an ironic way. In other texts however, for instance in some of his poems and letters, Słowacki uses the Orientalist clichés just as other European writers, focusing on the colours, sensual impressions, encounters with women. These clichés inscribe themselves in the Orientalist discourse, even though the main point of reference for the poet is Poland; he is an émigré that longs for his homeland and his journey is strongly marked by nostalgia and feeling of loss (Kalinowska 80).

⁶² Among those critics were Janina Kamionka, Roman Koropeczyk, Leon Borowski, Juliusz Kleiner, Waclaw Kubacki, Jerzy Świdziński – see discussion in Kalinowska (38-50).

The descriptions of oriental travels by Polish Romantic poets did not escape the stereotypes and trends of the European Orientalism, but the motives behind their journeys were different from the Western ones. Mickiewicz considered his travels to be a liberating experience and an opportunity to encounter the otherness that he was curious of, while Słowacki could not shed the melancholic thoughts of how his country is enslaved and subdued. Both these poets were also interested in Indian thought, which they discovered partly through German thinkers – Herder and Schlegel – and partly through the poetry of Ralph Waldo Emerson and his idea of transcendentalism drawn from the Vedas (Tuczyński 66-67). Mickiewicz tried to find common elements in Slavic and Indian mythologies, while Słowacki was inspired by motifs from the Upanishads as well as Buddhist thought (Tuczyński 77-78).

The end of 19th century and beginning of 20th century mark a more intense exploration of Indian culture and philosophy, with the artists of the positivist and “Młoda Polska” (“Young Poland”) movements reading Max Mueller’s studies on India and Schopenhauer’s writings inspired by Vedanta and Buddhism, and with the development of Orientalist and Indological studies at all major academic centres. The slogan “Ex Oriente Lux” – light from the Orient – was often repeated, illustrating this fascination with the “mystical” East (Tuczyński 111). The image of the Orient presented by literature was complemented by visual arts: painting, drawing and graphics. Some of the Polish artists would depict people of the Orient in a very similar way as Western European masters, but a lot of them added a local touch – after all, the pre-partition Poland had many contacts with the Islamic culture, especially due to a considerable Tatar population living on its territories and its proximity to the Ottoman Empire, then very powerful in South-Eastern Europe. That is why, many Polish Orientalist paintings depict Turks, Tatars, Cossacks, Circassians or Kurds, rather than Arabs. Contrary to the Western European painters, often showing Eastern men as traders, craftsmen or nomads, usually portrayed when sitting at a coffee shop, smoking water pipes or praying, the Polish paintings present a much more belligerent version of the Oriental men. Again, this is probably due to the history of conflicts with the Turks and Tatars, which left the memory of a brave, sometimes cruel warriors, rather than effeminate and sensual Orientals. Nevertheless, such a vision is also part of the Orientalist trope that evokes Eastern cruelty or Oriental despotism.

Many painters, such as Stanisław Chlebowski, Jan Ciagliński or January Suchodolski, were students of the famous Orientalist artists, for instance Jean-Léon Gérôme, Benjamin Constant, or Horace Vernet. Polish Orientalists had less insight into the reality of Eastern life,

since they usually relied only on secondary sources or representations by Western artists⁶³. Nevertheless, Orientalist trend in Polish art became quite popular, with Franciszek Żmurko and Pantaleon Szyndler as best known painters. An exhibition of that type of painting at the National Museum in Warsaw, presented pictures of harems, bathhouses, coffee parlours and markets, where colours, decorations, clothing and furniture create an atmosphere of mystery and exoticism. There was also a strong interest in Islam and the religious practice of the Arabs – many paintings represent Bedouin prayers at the desert, muezzins, famous mosques. Just like their Western European counterparts, Polish Orientalist painters were allowed to show more female nudity and eroticism in the context of a different culture, than when depicting their own one. The Orient appears in these paintings as a male fantasy, arising the senses and provoking excitement. The colours, shapes and decorations only strengthen this effect. For many artists, an important source of inspiration was ancient history and stories from the Bible, as well as contemporary romantic literature. Thus, Polish cultural life in nineteenth century shared many similarities with the culture of Western Europe. However, although the artistic and literary creation strengthened the Orientalist stereotypes and Eurocentric attitudes, Poles were much more concerned with their own political situation than in the colonial enterprise of the Western empires. Stressing a cultural proximity to Western Europe was rather instrumental in defining their own identity as European, in the times when Poland as a state ceased to exist.

When Poland regained independence in 1918 in the aftermath of the First World War, intellectual life began to thrive. New movements developed in poetry, prose, nonfiction, as well as in academic inquiry. European's newfound interest in Eastern spirituality could be found in Poland too. Organisations like the Polish Theosophic Society, or the Metempsychological Society were founded by enthusiasts of spiritualist movement. Writings by Swami Vivekananda, Shankaracharya or Krishnamurty were now available in Polish translations, as well as Rabindranath Tagore's poems (Tuczyński 182). Polish Orientalists could act independently, no longer only as part of German or Russian schools of academic Orientalism. In 1922, the Polish Orientalist Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Orientalistyczne) was created, a journal, the *Orientalist Daily* (Rocznik Orientalistyczny) was founded and various conferences and symposia were organised. Thus, a more thorough and systematic intellectual exploration of non-European languages and cultures could be undertaken.

Nevertheless, by that time, the popular perception of Asia, Africa and other territories belonging to the Western powers was largely colonial, borrowed from Western Europeans. The

⁶³ See: article on Orientalist painting at the website of the National Museum in Warsaw.

famous novelist, Henryk Sienkiewicz, in his *Listy z Afryki* [*Letters from Africa*], when comparing the European and the African Other used binary oppositions typical of the colonial discourse: rationality vs magical thinking, organisation vs anarchy, Christianity vs superstition, and history vs lack of history (Szleszyński 124). Another novelist, Bolesław Prus, praised colonialism as an opportunity to find new spaces “for the civilised world” and new resources, bringing “civilisation” to the natives (Szleszyński 126). Similarly, Polish women travellers to Persia at the turn of the century, Maria Ratuld-Rakowska and Maria Mikorska, could not avoid seeing the East through an imperialist lens. Dorota Wojda notices that especially the former traveller had a tendency to use Orientalist terms in her travel accounts. For Ratuld-Rakowska, “the East is wild, barbaric, threatening and ugly, and at the same time attractive in its primitiveness” (114), but it is also aestheticised and exoticised. Both types of discourses, disparaging and idealising, can be considered as tools of symbolic conquest.

The newly regained Polish statehood meant that a redefinition of Poland’s position on the international arena was needed. It was an era in which what defined the global position of a European state was the ownership of colonies. It is thus not surprising that a few among the Polish elite appealed to the government to acquire colonies for Poland. These claims were never taken seriously by the authorities, mostly because Marshal Józef Piłsudski, then leader of the Second Polish Republic, was strongly opposed to the idea and refused to take part in “colonial brawls”, arguing that Poles should focus on more immediate problems, such as their relations with the neighbours or reinforcing their position in Europe (Kowalski 25). Still, the colonial discourse in interwar Poland remained a rather heated one. This was in large part due to the Maritime and Colonial League and their continuous lobbying for the colonial cause. The League was created soon after independence and became an active actor in the Polish public sphere (Borkowska 17). Its propaganda was widespread: apart from issuing magazines, journals and newsletters for adults and children, it had numerous local branches around Poland and collaborated with many public institutions, such as schools, universities, as well as the scouting movement. In fact, by the outbreak of Second World War in 1939, the League had about one million members⁶⁴, inspired the creation of three thousand local school clubs and started its own militia (Kowalski 38). The League organized Colonial Days, during which its members and supporters marched in a parade, waving flags, singing, dancing and carrying banners which claimed colonies for Poland. The organisation even had special uniforms for their militia, which looked very similar to colonial outfits: bright colours, big hats and knee-high boots⁶⁵. The goal

⁶⁴ The total population of the Second Republic of Poland according to the census from 1938 was 34 million.

⁶⁵ The photos from the parades can be found at the online collection of the National Digital Archive.

of the League was to gather massive support for the colonial idea and prepare for a future presence in the territories overseas. That is why, it directed its lobbying also to the top level, addressing governmental elites, professionals, academics, and army officers. On the one hand, the League's activities stimulated popular curiosity in other countries and cultures, but on the other hand, the League's discourse presented colonialism in positive terms, referring to stereotypes and generalisations, and sometimes – even anti-Semitic and racist ideas (Borkowska 21). The activists, apart from presenting economic and demographic arguments as a rationale for colonial possessions, argued how Poland could “expand its cultural sphere” on the new territories (Kowalski 62).

One of the writers who popularised the concept of Polish colonies was Arkady Fiedler, who travelled to Madagascar between 1938 and 1939, and later in 1965-1966. Fiedler's ulterior motivation was to promote the idea of establishing Polish colonies on the island. In fact, one of the outcomes of his journey was a report written for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, evaluating the pros and cons of a potential Polish colonial presence in Madagascar. In her analysis of Fiedler's travel accounts, Dorota Wojda observes a change in the writer's tone: as it could be expected, in the communist period Fiedler downplayed his enthusiasm for the Polish colonial mission and even edited his books, removing the ideologically incorrect fragments (270-275). Nevertheless, his discourse of conquest and symbolic appropriation remains noticeable in his descriptions of the island. Thus, although interwar Poland did not eventually acquire any colonies overseas, it had its “troubadour of the empire” (as Ewa Thompson calls the writers who praised imperialism).

Orientalism in Communist Period

The dream of Polish colonies ended quickly when Poland once again lost its statehood to German and Soviet occupations in 1939. The tables have turned: from a dominating power, with hopes of expansion, Poland became a victim of oppression. The interest in the wider world and other cultures waned in the face of immediate concerns of struggle and survival. After the Second World War, when the new communist regime settled in Warsaw, the vibrant atmosphere of Orientalist and Indological studies of the interwar era was gone: many academics perished, others lived through traumatic events, were imprisoned in German or Soviet camps, or lost their families. Those who survived were often no longer welcome to continue their research, for

instance the outstanding Orientalist, Helena Willman-Grabowska⁶⁶. Now, many of the Orientalist departments were reorganised or closed down as directions for academic study were coming from Moscow. When full-time studies on the Orient and on India returned to the curricula in Poland, they remained to some extent influenced by Soviet Orientalism; what is more, possibilities of travel or exchange with the Western counterparts, as well as fieldwork in Middle East and Asia were limited. The Cold War divide resulted in new hierarchies: the model of the world divided into First, Second and Third World became a reality. The Second World, conflicted with the First World, would try to attract the attention of the Third World, but the former colonies were not always easily swayed: after ousting the colonial powers and regaining independence, they were looking for their own model of development.

In Polish literature, socialist realism became the norm in the first decades after the war, and far-away countries were rarely mentioned. Nevertheless, travel reportage gradually became a popular genre, because reporters, sent abroad by state-sponsored newspapers, were acting as mediators between a regular reader, for whom travel abroad was almost impossible, and the writer, who had a rare opportunity to directly witness other cultures and regions. A number of reporters, among them Ryszard Kapuściński, Lucjan Wolanowski, Olgierd Budrewicz, Wiesław Górnicki, Wojciech Gielżyński, travelled the world and gained popularity. Alfred Szklarski's series of adventure novels for young adults, talking about a teenage boy, Tomek Wilmowski, who travels around the world with his father and his friends, working as hunters of "exotic" animals for zoos, was extremely well-liked. As Małgorzata Żółkoś remarks in her analysis of the Szklarski novels, the motive of catching animals on other continents to bring them to Europe is in itself indicative of a colonial conquest, since possessing a collection of exotic animals is a manifestation of power and authority (348-349). Although the novels have a didactic and informative aspect, they are written from a Eurocentric perspective; furthermore, since the action of the novel takes place in times of partitions of Poland, the protagonists manifest they patriotism or nostalgia after the lost homeland in many occasions (Żółkoś 358). The fact that the novels were written in the communist period is reflected only in a subtle way: like in nonfictional texts of that era, in particular reportage, there is an additional stress on rationality (and rejection of religion), and depreciation of tradition, points out Żółkoś (359).

Nevertheless, the advent of communist regime and, consequently, a different way of describing the world, did not mean that Orientalism vanished. On the contrary, many Orientalist tropes were present in post-war texts, often alongside socialist propaganda. While the reporters

⁶⁶For more information, see: R. Czekalska and Agnieszka Kuczkiewicz-Fraś, *Helena Willman-Grabowska: orientalistka-uczona-popularyzatorka*, Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2014.

who visited India were aware that a new language to describe India is required, and wanted to avoid the long-lived clichés, elements of Orientalist, or even colonial discourse can still be found in their texts. First of all, they often present India as part of the Orient, “the Great East” (Putrament, *Cztery...* 93)⁶⁷. As a result, India becomes just one element of a larger, imagined area, which used to be called “the Orient”, but the reporters refer to it as the “Third World”. They sometimes compare India to Africa or to the Middle East, alluding to the regions associated with the imagined Orient, especially on the metaphorical level. And thus, they mention “Tuaregs on the desert” (Ros 240), people looking like “Ali Baba and his forty thieves” (Ros 236), a “journey on a magical carpet . . . to a land from the tales of One Thousand and One Nights”⁶⁸ (Koehler 38-39), or a castle looking exactly like the one from “One Thousand and One Nights” (Putrament, *Cztery...* 114). When Giełżyński becomes confused about the complexities of the caste system, he calls it an “Abracadabra” (61). A common point of reference is Henryk Sienkiewicz’s novel, *W pustyni i w puszczy* [*In Desert and Wilderness*] (1912), which till today shapes the image of colonial Africa in the minds of Poles. Koehler, when describing a Pakistani’s appearance, finds that the man “looks like he has just stepped out from the pages of *In Desert and Wilderness*” (26)⁶⁹. The characteristics that the colonial, Eurocentric discourse would attribute to the “fascinating”, yet “backward” countries of the Orient become in a way transferred to the notion of the “Third World”. This term appears as more neutral and more acceptable in the post-war, and postcolonial, reality – it is, however, loaded with meaning. Just like the notion of “the Orient”, the term “Third World” lumps together a variety of cultures, religions and customs, and attributes them a certain “otherness”, “exoticism”, but also labels them as “backward” and “underdeveloped”. It is very well illustrated in the way the Polish reporters depict India. In their texts, the motif of the “Oriental fairy-tale” often accompanies the one of “Oriental luxury”, which appears also in the passages where the reporters describe the riches of the maharajas, the lavish palaces or forts, the treasures that the Indian aristocrats possess, as well as in the purported love for jewels among Indian upper classes (Ros 116, 279; Putrament, *Cztery...* 114; Górnicki 117, 215; Chociłowski 87-88). Furthermore, many things appear to the reporters as exotic: whether it is landscape, nature, colours, architecture, decorations, or customs. Putrament, for instance, when visiting Haridwar, says: “[w]e walk, we stare, and we peer at the strange, exotic life” (*Cztery...* 146). India appears to the reporters as a place full of oddities, strange customs, bizarre behaviours and

⁶⁷ Putrament uses the Polish term “wielki Wschód” (93).

⁶⁸ “wycieczki odbytej na zaczarowanym dywanie . . . do krainy baśni z tysiąca i jednej nocy” (Koehler 38-39).

⁶⁹ “Wygląda tak, jakby przed chwilą wyszedł z kart ‘W pustyni i w puszczy’.” (Koehler 26).

abnormalities. The choice of topics in their reportages confirms this bias: although in many accounts, large sections are devoted to Indian industrialisation, politics, and modernisation, issues like cow worship, the existence of sadhus – Hindu renouncers, belief in astrology and “mysteries” of traditional medicine are very prominent. Discussions on Indian rulers are often marked with the cliché of “Oriental despotism”. Similarly, the reporters cannot escape from Orientalist prejudices in their descriptions of landscape, cities, and people. India for them is a land of chaos and disorganisation, the cities are often described as “a labyrinth”, people are emotional and rather than rational. Even in their descriptions of India’s modernisation, they do not escape the Orientalist pattern of imposing European knowledge on the Oriental – in this case, Indian – Other. These Orientalist patterns can be observed in texts on different parts of the imagined Orient⁷⁰ and they are similar to tropes of Western European Orientalism.

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A variety of perceptions of the Orient developed in Western and Eastern Europe, each with different objects, forms of artistic expression and links to the political sphere. Western Orientalism was thoroughly interrogated in the last few decades, in conjunction with the analysis of colonialism and cultural hegemony. Eastern (Russian, Soviet) Orientalism has been discussed only since recently, but already gained a certain momentum in academia. In both cases, Orientalist discourses are strongly linked with the fact of possessing an unusually far-reaching imperial power and the ability to expand that power to parts of the globe that till recently seemed inaccessible to Europeans. The Spanish, Portuguese, British and French reached these far-away regions by sail, the Russian empire – by road. They were, however, equally ruthless in controlling local populations and equally effective in presenting their conquest as civilising mission and a milestone in global progress. What gave the expansionist empires legitimacy was the overwhelming presence of colonial discourses produced by works of literature, scientific studies and popular culture which presented the empires’ actions in a positive light. Whether guided by curiosity for the exotic, by the mission to educate, Christianise and civilise, by a quest for new technologies or by a wish to transform societies, the European powers of the East and West managed to impose their own models and suppress the indigenous ones. There are several differences in the operation of Western European empires and the Eastern one, resulting from the geopolitical, historical and cultural context. Russian Empire started its expansion at a later stage and never reached as far as Western

⁷⁰ For instance, Ros’ observations from Egypt, on the way to India, in the same travel account, analysed here.

Europeans did. It created narratives of conquest, but their objects were either neighbouring populations to the West, not very different in terms of race, creed or cultural habits, or the peoples inhabiting the larger Eurasian region, to the South and East of Moscow, who became much more incorporated in the Russian society than the colonial subject of British Empire on remote islands or far-away continents could ever be. More importantly, while Western European empires' colonial era was coming to an end and a critique of colonial discourses began to develop, Soviet Union still tried to influence, if not dominate, large parts of the globe, and only late 1990s and 2000s brought a more critical reflection on the experience of imperial domination.

Polish Orientalism was by and large shaped by pan-European trends: a romantic fascination with the Orient, an interest in Indian mysticism, and a rush to explore "the colonies". However, it shared some characteristics with the Russian (and later Soviet) one. It depicted the West's colonies, but also the populations closer to home, which were certainly Orientalised, but presented as more threatening, given the history of conflicts (e.g. Tatars or Turks). It created images of Eastern Others, often not having much direct contact with them. It also developed an academic Orientalism, claiming scientific objectivity, but often failing to achieve it. In the socialist era, it appears that the Western Orientalist and colonial tropes were intermixed with Soviet-style propaganda images. This particular blend of Western- and Soviet- style influences is the main focus of this book and will be further explored in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2. THE INDIAN OTHER

European perceptions of India can serve as a good example to investigate the workings of Western Orientalising gaze on other parts of the world. It is a particularly interesting case, as India was not perceived as what was known as the Levant or Middle East. However, it was always central to the European representations of the non-European, “exotic” Others. There are different accounts on how India was (and is) viewed by Europeans, in philosophical terms (Halbfass 1988), in journalistic terms (Sam Miller 2014), or in terms of popular culture (Mehta 1979).

According to Amartya Sen, these various descriptions of India by travellers, visitors and colonial administrators can be divided in three main categories: exoticist, magisterial and curatorial (141). The first category comprises of works by those who were fascinated by India, particularly by Indian spirituality, but also by culture, landscapes, and people. Among those who exoticised India, Sen lists the early Greeks – Megasthenes, Strabo or Apollonius of Tyana, the German thinkers of the Romantic period – the Schlegel brothers, Schelling and Herder, as well as the early twentieth-century poets, such as Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats or Jan Kasprowicz, discovering India through works of Tagore (151-153). A more contemporary example of such fascination with Indian culture and spirituality could be The Beatles’ interest in Hinduism through the teachings of Maharishi. The second category, according to Sen, is related to the exercise of imperial power, and thus it groups approaches that are marked with a sense of “superiority and guardianhood” (142). These were mostly writings by British governors and scientists, who wanted to understand India not only out of curiosity or fascination with the exotic, but also in order to rule it better. Among them is the 1817 classic of James Mill, *The History of British India*, as well as the infamous *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) by Thomas Macaulay or Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India* (1927). Finally, the third category – the curatorial one – applies to writings that intend to note, classify and exhibit various aspects of India’s culture (Sen 142). Sen includes in this category the texts by Arab and Chinese scholars, as well as those by Jesuits, like Roberto Nobili, or British scholars, like William Jones (145).

Although the primary motivation of these writings might be intellectual curiosity, it is difficult to consider them as disconnected from their historical and political context. Moreover, all three categories enhanced an image of India as radically different from Europe – exotic, mystical, and irrational – clouding India’s outstanding achievements in the field of the rational: mathematics, logic, medicine, linguistics or epistemology, underlines Sen (155). All three

aspects: exoticism, mastery, and scientific categorisation, are part of a general perception of the so-called East, or “the Orient”.

What shaped the European perception of India was, on the one hand, the Orientalist discourse, in large part enabled and promoted by colonialism, and the ideas of the European Enlightenment. As Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer explain in their introduction to the volume *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, it is exactly the convergence of Oriental and Enlightenment discourse that facilitated the coalescing of important notions of modernity, citizenship and rationality (7). In consequence, colonial attempts at building a sound, scientific knowledge of India, with all sorts of classifications and categorisations, stand in contrast with what the Europeans perceived as irrational or illogical elements in Indian culture, in particular religious beliefs and traditions that could not be translated into numbers.

Sara Suleri, in her book on *The Rhetoric of English India* (1992), comments on texts written by colonial politicians (Edmund Burke on Warren Hastings), writers (novels by Kipling and Forster), as well as – in more recent years – Indians living abroad (Naipaul, Rushdie). She observes that India functions in the early European discourse as a space “beyond the scope of cartography” (26), and as such is inviting for both plunder and adventure. Burke, to describe India in late 18th century, uses the discourse of difficulty, unknowability, but also aestheticises India, placing it as the “leading moral example of the sublime” (27), which in turn becomes the “uncatalogued horror of the colonial sublime” (30). In other words, the more Europeans try to understand India, the more data is available to them, the more facts and figures turn into hieroglyphs that have no significance except of showing the coloniser’s inability to grasp the object of their exploration, due to inadequate cultural and interpretative tools (31).

Furthermore, in the colonial discourse, the colonisers’ youthfulness is contrasted with the alleged slowness and lassitude of ancient Indian culture (33). However, this antiquity does not command respect, because to the British it “represents a malevolent entropy” (33). Burke’s speech was actually an attempt to impeach Warren Hastings, former governor of Bengal, for abuses of power, and constituted, according to Suleri, one of the first examples of colonial guilt (51). Nevertheless, the scholar observes a fallacy in Burke’s attack on Hastings, as it came from an “urge to locate colonial responsibility in a single figure” (66). That colonial guilt appears in the analyses of other texts, through which Suleri demonstrates the complexity of the coloniser/colonised relationship that cannot be reduced only to binary oppositions. For instance, while the English exercise their domination over Indians, the position of English women in India remains peripheral: although they are implicated in the structures of colonialism, they also become victims of confinement, even more pronounced than the one of their Indian

counterparts (76). As a result, English women resort to the picturesque: through romanticised visions of the colony, they attempt at transforming the dynamic of the cultural encounter into the stillness of a picture (76). The gendered character of colonial relationship is also explored in Suleri's analysis of Forster's *Passage to India* and Kipling's *Kim*. Other scholars, too, underlined the fact that colonial discourse was a masculinised one, and the conquest of a different territory is often tainted with sexual connotations⁷¹.

Ronald Inden elaborated on Orientalism (as understood by Said) in a specifically Indian context. In the article "Orientalist Constructions of India", and in his 1990 book, *Imagining India*, Inden focuses on Western Indological discourse on India. He explores elements of Indian culture central to the strategy of Othering: the notion of castes, the Indian mind, the rural populations of India, or the concept of divine kingship. He remarks that according to the Indological discourse, "the essence of Indian civilization is just the opposite of the West's" (402). The organising principle of this civilisation is a religious one, according to Indology, and its main idea, or Agent, is Caste. Thus, says Inden, the Indological discourse dismissed any forms of Indian political institutions, and declared that Indian thought is "inherently symbolical and mythical rather than rational and logical" (403). What is more, the Orientalist discourse has produced in India the very Orient that was central as a construct to this discourse: Inden gives as an example the non-violence movement by Gandhi, which subscribed very well to the Western vision of Hindu character as averse to war and violence, or even cowardly (408). He emphasises how have the ideas of "Oriental despotism" and "Asiatic mode of production" dominated nearly all discussions on India's political institutions and economy. Many Indologists, as the scholar explains, saw India as governed by principles of Hinduism, but some were particularly attracted to a romantic vision of India as a venue for spirituality and mysticism. Those romantics would perceive India as a "living museum" where one can experience various forms of "ultimate experiences", yogic practices and "far-out psychic phenomena" (Inden 436). Even today, these visions of India persist, albeit in a changed form.

After the Second World War, United States replaced the European colonial empires as the dominant power. "The oppositions of East and West, Traditional and Modern, Civilized and Primitive have been transformed and have reappeared as the idea of the 'three worlds'", says Inden, who stresses the deeply hierarchical character of this division. Referring to Carl Pletsch's study on the three-worlds idea, Inden explains what each of the three areas represents in popular imagination:

⁷¹ See works by Reina Lewis or Meyda Yeğenoğlu in which Said's Orientalism is read through a feminist lens.

Nations of the First World are the most 'developed' or 'advanced' because they are shaped in accord with scientific knowledge of nature; those of the Second World are, although developed, held back by their distorting Socialist ideology; the Third World, where religion and superstition still run rife, are 'underdeveloped' or 'developing'. (438)

Another popular association when Westerners think of India is the idea of caste. Many academic works on India, for instance the one by A. L. Basham, perceive caste as a more important agent than kingship or the state. However, in the course of his research, Inden discovered a completely different dynamic: castes were not the cause of the collapse of kingship, they were its effect (440). That is why, the scholar urges Indologists to stop treating caste as a substantialised agent, and give up on the notions of “essence” of a civilisation. Instead, a scholar should assume that “all humans are constrained by the same indeterminate reality” and that “the societies of the world are not more or less 'correct' images of a single reality but are themselves differing realities, constructed again and again in relation to those around them, by human thought and action” (446). It is a particularly poignant observation, as it puts in question the strategy of Othering commonly used by Westerners.

What complicates the one-dimensional vision of colonial masters versus colonised indigenous population is, in Breckenridge and van der Veer's opinion, the role of Indian elites, mostly Brahmans, as colonial knowledge was in large part formed on the basis of what they chose to present as Indian tradition and beliefs (10). Consequently, other, subaltern voices and traditions were silenced (as explained also by Guha and Spivak). According to Breckenridge and van der Veer, “the point is that there is neither a monolithic imperial project nor a monolithic subaltern reaction, but rather that there are different historical trajectories of contest and change with lags and disjunctures along the way” (10). Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that the asymmetry of power between the English and their colonial subjects led to the strengthening of a binary opposition between the British self and the Indian other. Thus, says Gyan Prakash, “both the self and the other, the rational and materialist British and the emotional and spiritual Indian, appeared as autonomous, ontological, and essential entities” (385). This complicated legacy of Orientalism, both as a colonial discourse and practice, survives long into the postcolonial era, both in the minds of Westerners and in the minds of Indians themselves (Breckenridge and van der Veer 11). Indeed, “Orientalism without colonialism is a headless theoretical beast”, which is harder to identify and eradicate because “it has become internalized in the practices of the postcolonial state, the theories of the postcolonial intelligentsia, and the political action of postcolonial mobs”, the scholars affirm (11).

Orientalism without colonialism is not only a phenomenon of the postcolonial world: it is enough to give the example of German Orientalists, whose knowledge did not serve a colonial conquest of India by Germany, but did contribute to the European Orientalism in various forms. Moreover, intellectuals, scientists, writers, linguists from many European countries would engage in describing and explaining India, its culture, languages (in particular Sanskrit), sometimes even without setting foot on the subcontinent, in this way affirming the asymmetrical relation of Europe with India and contributing to the Orientalist knowledge. The following sections will focus specifically on interrogating the Orientalist legacies of interpreting India and its culture by Polish travellers.

1. Polish Travel Accounts and Encounters with India

The Indian subcontinent appeared as a travel destination for Poles as early as in the era of European 15th century sailing expeditions. Probably the first Pole in India was Gaspar da Gama – a Jew from Poznań, who left the city with his parents and moved to the Middle East (some sources mention Jerusalem, some Alexandria), became a merchant and eventually ended up in the service of the royal court in Goa. Other versions of the story say that on the way to Jerusalem, he was captured and sold as a slave to an Indian ruler⁷². When Vasco da Gama reached India, an elderly, European-looking man approached his ship offering his help, but the Portuguese, fearing that he is a Goan spy, seized him and tortured him. Supposedly, this is when he confessed that he came originally from the Kingdom of Poland⁷³. He remained with the Portuguese, converted to Christianity, adopted the name of his patron, Vasco da Gama, and accompanied the sailor on his other journeys. According to Jerzy Ros, “[h]e [Gaspar da Gama] was the first informer of the Portuguese on India and he played an important role in the conquest of that country and in disseminating credible information about it in Europe” (59)⁷⁴.

The second Polish visitor to India, according to historical records, was Erazm Kretkowski, a nobleman educated at the university of Padua, Italy. He was the envoy of the Polish king Sigismund II Augustus⁷⁵ to the court of the Suleiman the Magnificent, he also sailed

⁷² Different versions of the story of Gaspar da Gama can be found in Polish and English sources: see Nawrot; Meixner; Radojewski; Jewish Virtual Library.

⁷³ According to one of the reporters, whose works are analysed here, the man who was later known as Gaspar da Gama, was a courtier of the king of Bijapur (in Karnataka), and has been in India for thirty years before the arrival of the Portuguese (Ros 58-59).

⁷⁴ “Był on pierwszym informatorem Portugalczyków o Indiach i odegrał poważną rolę w podbiciu tego kraju oraz rozpowszechnieniu o nim wiarygodnych informacji w ówczesnej Europie.” (Ros 59)

⁷⁵ Sigismund II Augustus reigned over the Kingdom of Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania in years 1548-1572.

to India in mid-16th century, although little is known about this journey⁷⁶. Another Pole who visited India, was a sailor in the Portuguese fleet. His name was Krzysztof Pawłowski, and he is the author of the first Polish written account from India, a letter (in French) that he sent to his friends in Krakow. In the letter, Pawłowski describes the long journey and the arrival to India, including some remarks on the customs of Indian people and their appearance. In 17th century, a number of Polish Catholic missionaries visited India, in particular the Jesuits who mostly visited Goa. In 18th century, Poles that visited India were mostly soldiers in the service of the colonial armies – Michał Dzierżanowski (serving temporarily in French or English armies in India)⁷⁷, Teodor Anzelm Dzwonkowski (travelling to India with the Dutch fleet)⁷⁸ and Maksymilian Wikliński (serving in the French colonial troops in India)⁷⁹. According to Krzysztof Podemski, these early travellers had some traits in common: they would travel for years, not necessarily ever returning to their homeland, they visited various states and regions of the world, and they were all in a certain form of service – in a foreign fleet, merchant or military, or in the church (216). In his sociological study, Podemski analysed selected accounts from this period, observing that these early travellers had a rather straightforward perception of India, based on their own observations:

Thus, I call the gaze of these first travellers a commonsensical one, as these travellers, in comparison to travellers of later epochs, perceive India pretty much in the way they see it. And they see very little, because they know very little. They are completely unaware of the civilizational otherness, because they do not know anything about the culture and history of India. They do not have any earlier knowledge at their disposal, because such knowledge was almost inexistent, except of the very general “Columbus’ myth” [about the existence of “East Indies” – India, and “West Indies” – America]. (217)⁸⁰

Podemski adds that not only there was little knowledge on India, but also the differences between Europe and India in that era were not very striking – this was no longer the case in 19th century, when Westerners considered travel to India almost as a journey in time (217). These observations confirm the crucial importance of previous knowledge in the perception of a

⁷⁶ The proof that Kretkowski visited India is the epitaph in Latin, still visible on his gravestone in Padua where he was buried, saying that he was seen by various rivers, among them the “rapidus Ganges” – rapid Ganges river. The author of the epitaph was Jan Kochanowski, a famous Polish poet of the Renaissance, himself an alumnus of Padua university.

⁷⁷ More information on Dzierżanowski can be found in Konopczyński (Polish Biographical Dictionary Online).

⁷⁸ Dzwonkowski’s travels are documented in the memoirs he wrote for his daughter Józefa, republished in 1985.

⁷⁹ Wikliński’s travel accounts, originally written in French, were recently published in a bilingual, French and Polish version (see bibliography).

⁸⁰ “Spojrzenie pierwszych podróżników nazywam zatem spojrzeniem zdroworoządkowym, gdyż ci podróżnicy w porównaniu z podróżnikami z późniejszych okresów odbierają Indie znacznie bardziej tak, jak je widzą. A widzą niewiele, bo niewiele wiedzą. Są zupełnie nieświadomi odmienności cywilizacyjnej, bo nie wiedzą nic o kulturze i historii Indii. Nie dysponują żadną wcześniejszą wiedzą, bo wiedza taka nie istniała, jeżeli nie liczyć owego bardzo ogólnego mitu “kolumbijskiego”.”(Podemski 217)

foreign land. Knowledge, in Michel Foucault's understanding, is a form of power, as it provides a framework into which all new facts will be incorporated and interpreted according to the discourse that this knowledge produces. The Early Modern traveller's lack of knowledge about India resulted in more straightforward travel accounts, which were probably less biased than the ones of later travellers.

The Enlightenment was a time when there appeared tensions between traditionalists and modernisers. Reform and modernisation along the Western European models were undertaken by many intellectuals such as Stanisław Staszic (1755-1826), Hugo Kołłątaj (1750-1812), Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz (1758-1841), and even the last Polish king, Stanisław August Poniatowski (1732-1798). In fact, Hugo Kołłątaj and Stanisław Staszic found inspiration in the "wisdom of the East" and included various concepts from the Indian thought in their writings – Staszic pondered on the impermanence and changeability of the world, or on metaphysical understanding of human suffering, while Kołłątaj underlined the connection between Sanskrit and Slavic languages as coming from the same God (Tuczyński 31). All of them undertook voyages of the educative kind, with the purpose of observing other countries, their societies and institutions, to later implement these foreign models at home. After his visits to France and England, Poniatowski even funded bursaries for travel to Western Europe, "as one means of reforming a backward Poland" (Bracewell 119).

Nevertheless, a deeper crisis awaited Polish society. After a series of Partitions, Poland was erased from the map of Europe and its territories were incorporated into Austria, Prussia and Russia. This experience changed the Polish outlook on the world. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said discusses the texts of Joseph Conrad, calling him "a Polish expatriate" (23), who while being an "employee of the imperial system" (23) expresses criticism at the colonial practices of the Western empires. Losing his own homeland, Conrad is able to distance himself from the colonial enterprise and see it also through the eyes of the oppressed. Similarly, Polish military officers in the imperial armies in India, whose accounts were analysed by Podemski, express admiration and recognition of the Subcontinent's culture and often identify more with the Indian population, criticising the colonial armies that they actually serve (224). Clearly, Poles who at the time were themselves subjugated by large empires, were able to understand their Indian counterparts to some degree. This motif of shared suffering returns in various nineteenth-century accounts, and even in reportages from the communist era. Koehler recalls a meeting with an Indian student who knew very well where Poland was.

In his eyes, we see an honest, almost affectionate friendliness.

'Poland – says the young student – naturally, I know [it]. You were also captive [occupied]...'

This tiny word 'also' explains everything. It constitutes a more precious and lasting bond from the ties of blood, community, tradition or belief. It appears that Poland is very close..." (Koehler 91-92)⁸¹

Witold Koehler and his companions are moved by the fact that the young Indian knows of Poland and of its history, and that they can relate to the fact of being occupied or dominated by other countries. Of course, Koehler is cautious not to specify which occupation does he, or the student, have in mind – the recent Nazi or Stalinist one, or the ones from the Partitions' era. Nevertheless, a feeling of solidarity between Poles and Indians, based on a common experience of imperialist domination, is a recurrent trend in the story of Polish-Indian relations.

Orientalists, Experts and Romantics

Although the Polish state ceased to exist, the number of Poles visiting India increased. They were people of various professions: scientists, experts, Orientalists, artists and also simply tourists (for instance, the nobleman Benedykt Henryk Tyszkiewicz, amateur photographer⁸²). Krzysztof Podemski names a few of those travellers: banker Władysław Małachowski, seeking possibilities of exporting zinc to India, engineer Tadeusz Bartmański, who worked at the construction of rail tracks in East India, as well as scientists – zoologist Stanisław Rembieliński, ornithologist Roman Ujejski, medical doctor Władysław Olechnowicz, ethnographer Adam Sierakowski, art historian Karol Lanckoroński, as well as the Pope's delegate, archbishop Władysław Michał Zalewski, polyglot, historian and botanist, who stayed in India for thirty years (186). These experts and scientists were to some extent tourists, who described monuments, important sites, had guides who explained local culture to them. But – unlike many European scholars of the time, who were only armchair travellers – they undertook the journey to India in order to make first-hand observations.

This was also the goal of Romantic travellers, who saw a journey to a far-away place as an opportunity to know more about the world, to educate themselves and gather new experiences. Piotr Kłodkowski remarks on India's appeal to Poles in that period:

What strongly attracted Polish 19th century poets, philosophers, the well-educated members of the intelligentsia and the academic community to "the European discovery of India" was a spiritual message of classical Hinduism and Buddhism. With Max Mueller's translations of the most sophisticated Sanskrit works, Schopenhauer's philosophical zeal for the Upanishads, Goethe's admiration for Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, publications by August Schlegel, Alfred de

⁸¹"W żrenicach czytamy szczerą, niemal serdeczną życzliwość. 'Polska – powiada młodziutki student – naturalnie, że wiem. Byliście także w niewoli...' To małeńkie słówko 'także' wyjaśnia wszystko. Stanowi ono więc cenniejszą i trwalszą od braterstwa krwi, wspólnoty, tradycji lub wierzeń. Okazuje się, że Polska leży blisko..." (Koehler 91-92)

⁸² Some of his photos can be found at the French Musée Nicéphore Niepce in Chalon-sur-Saône, they were also presented at an exhibition in Lithuania. See: Snitkuvienė.

Vigny or Paul Deussen and the Buddhist treatises rendered into English by the Pali Text Society, the metaphysical richness of India became a true source of inspiration for Poles who yearned for freedom of their own country and reflected upon the glorious past and spiritual dimensions of the present. (312)

Indeed, there are various Indian tropes in Polish literature of 19th century. Many intellectuals would discover Indian spirituality, literature, and yoga, for instance poets Antoni Lange (1862-1929), Jan Kasprówic (1860-1926), Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer (1865-1940), Leopold Staff (1878-1957), and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885-1939), as well as the composer Witold Lutosławski (1863-1954), one of the pioneers of yoga in Poland. According to Piotr Kłodkowski, the composer studied treatises of Vivekananda and Yogi Ramacharaka and based on them, he created his own philosophical version of yoga (313).

Nevertheless, none of the major Polish writers visited India themselves, relying instead on secondary sources and accounts of travellers. Such Romantic escapade is described in the travelogue of count Karol Lanckoroński, art historian and archaeologist, who visited India at the end of 19th century as part of his world tour entitled *Naokoło Ziemi 1888–1889. Wrażenia i poglądy* [*Around the Globe, 1888-1889. Impressions and views*]⁸³. Lanckoroński was the first traveller that had a pronounced self-awareness of his journey, remarking on space, time, modes of travelling, as well as on experiencing otherness and liminality of the traveller's experience (Podemski 234-235).

Apart from direct Polish-Indian encounters through travel, and indirect ones through travelogues, literature, and arts, India became known to Poles through academic research, notably through Orientalist and, more specifically, Indologist studies, increasingly popular in 19th century Europe⁸⁴. At first, there were three main centres of academic study where some research on India was conducted: Warsaw, Pulawy and Vilnius (Milewska 127). In 1816, Walenty Skorochoł Majewski printed a Sanskrit Grammar, with excerpts from Ramayana; another famous translation of the Ramayana was done by well-known poet Teofil Lenartowicz in 1869 (Sudyka 89). The Jagiellonian University in Krakow was the first to offer a full, university-level course in Sanskrit, and established a separate Sanskrit chair in 1893 (Milewska 127).

⁸³ Karol Lanckoroński, *Naokoło Ziemi 1888–1889. Wrażenia i poglądy*, Kraków 1893, was first published in German in 1890 and then in Polish in 1893. For more information, see the Lanckoroński Foundation website.

⁸⁴ In fact, already in 1611 a publication appeared, called *Wonderful Verses from the Indian Language* (the original title: *Cudowne wiersze z indyjskiego języka*); it was an adaptation of Bhagavadgita, translated into Polish (via Latin) by a priest, Stanisław Grochowski (Sudyka 89).

Polish Indologist scholarship was strongly influenced by the European one. Many young people from the territories of the partitioned Poland studied at the academic centres of the West – Paris, Oxford, Rome – and in the capitals of the empires that they now belonged to: Vienna, Berlin, or St. Petersburg. They were thus well-aware of academic discussions of French and German Orientalists, as well as of the Russian school of Orientalism, which was equally vibrant⁸⁵. This was, for instance, the case of the linguist Jan Hanusz (1858-1887), who first studied Slavic languages in Krakow and Leipzig, then Sanskrit in Berlin and Vienna, and continued his linguistic research in Paris. It was also the case of the author of the first handbook for learning Sanskrit, still used by students today, Andrzej Gawroński (1885-1927). He studied in Lviv and Leipzig, then became a professor at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, specialising in linguistics as well as well as Sanskrit drama and history of Ancient India⁸⁶. Equally fascinating is the story of Helena Willman-Grabowska (1870-1957), a linguist and an Indologist, the first woman to become a professor at the Jagiellonian University⁸⁷. She studied literature and Sanskrit in Berne and Lausanne, and then moved to Paris, where she taught Sanskrit and Pali at the Sorbonne. When Poland regained independence after the First World War, Willman-Grabowska decided to return to her homeland and became Head of Sanskrit and Indian Philology Centre at the Jagiellonian University. She was a member of Société Asiatique and other associations of Orientalists and travelled around Europe for conferences, talks and lectures. She also made a journey to India in 1930s, visiting Calcutta and Ceylon⁸⁸.

Indology flourished at the universities of Lvov and Krakow, but thanks to Stanisław Schayer (1899-1941), in early 20th century it developed also in Warsaw. In 1932, this Indologist, linguist, and philosopher founded the Institute of Oriental Studies and became its director. Not only he translated many Sanskrit and Bengali works into Polish, for instance *Shakuntala* by Kalidasa and poems by Tagore, but also he authored the first Polish study on the history of Indian literature, as well as studies on Indian philosophy⁸⁹. Thus, academic study of India was becoming increasingly more widespread and generated not only scholarly, but also

⁸⁵ For more information on Russian Orientalism, see Schimmelpenninck van der Oye.

⁸⁶ An interesting article on Gawroński, by Janusz Fedirko, “Fenomenalny multilingwista. Profesor Andrzej Gawroński (1885-1927)” can be found in the Jagiellonian University magazine.

⁸⁷ There are several works on Helena Willman-Grabowska, see for instance: Pobożniak; Czekalska; Czekalska & Kuczkiewicz-Fraś.

⁸⁸ Her life story is rather dramatic. Her stellar academic career was brutally interrupted. During the Second World War, she was arrested by the Nazis together with other professors of the Jagiellonian University. Nevertheless, she survived the war and returned to teaching, but the communist authorities soon removed her and deprived her of pension. She was allowed to return to her position of a professor in 1957, but it was too late – Willman-Grabowska died that same year.

⁸⁹ See in particular his book *O filozofowaniu Hindusów* [*On Indian philosophy*], edited and republished in 1988. See also: Mejor.

popular interest in the Subcontinent: in early twentieth century, a number of Poles travelled to India and recorded their impressions in writing.

Polish Travels to India in the First Half of Twentieth Century

At the beginning of twentieth century, travel became much more available for Poles, especially after their country regained independence in 1918. The advent of the Second Republic of Poland meant that diplomatic relations were established with many countries of the world, and the tourism industry started to grow⁹⁰. This intensified mobility would make authors ask themselves whether it is still worth writing about travel, at a time when readers are able to explore the world themselves. Twentieth-century writers often felt the need to offer justifications as to why they chose to describe their journey. A travel account is worthwhile, if it is written from an unusual destination, or from one particularly relevant for the writer's contemporaries; another justification for writing was the use of an unexpected means of transport (Bracewell 256). Far-away lands were still awaking readers' interest, which is why explorers such as Ferdynand Ossendowski (1886-1945) gained great popularity. His many travel accounts – from India, China, Japan, Russia, Central Asia, or North Africa – were widely read and translated to other languages. He was compared to the travel adventure writer Karl May, as well as to Rudyard Kipling (Reszczyński). Two journeys that fit in the category of unusual means of transport are those of Kazimierz Nowak, who crossed Africa on a bicycle, as well as the one of Halina Korolec-Bujakowska, who – together with her husband – went from Poland to China on a motorbike and described her journey in *Mój chłopiec, motor i ja* [*My Boy, the Motorbike, and Me*] published posthumously in 2011. They eventually settled in India with their son, Jeremy Bujakowski, who took Indian citizenship, became a professional skier and represented India in the 1964 and 1968 Winter Olympics.

A number of Polish visitors came to India in the first few decades of 20th century. Among them were first woman travellers, countess Ewa Dzieduszycka (1879-1968), actress Jadwiga Toeplitz-Mrozowska (1880-1966), writer and activist Stanisław Bełza (1849-1929), journalist and lawyer Jan Hupka (1866-1952), as well as writer and reporter Ferdynand Goetel (1890-1960). All these travellers were highly educated members of intelligentsia or nobility, relatively wealthy and able to travel through India using all the comforts available to Europeans at the time. In her account, *India and Himalaya: Impressions from a Journey*⁹¹, Ewa

⁹⁰ The first Polish tourist office, Orbis, was created in 1920.

⁹¹ Ewa Dzieduszycka. *Indye i Himalaje: Wrażenia z podróży* [*India and the Himalayas: Impressions from the Journey*] (1912).

Dzieduszycka praises the luxury of British trains and hotels, although her curiosity makes her observe various aspects of Indian life. She covers large distances and experiences India's diversity: in Bombay, she is hosted by a wealthy Parsi, then admires the beauty of Jaipur and is amazed by the Taj Mahal, then visits Delhi and Benares, to finally reach the foothills of the Himalayas in Darjeeling. She is interested in the culture and history of India (and is the first traveller to mention Ramayana and Mahabharata), but she also tries to understand the contemporary India (Polskie Radio Dwójka). Krzysztof Podemski observes that Dzieduszycka represents democratic-liberal values of the time, remarking on the patriarchal oppression of women and commenting ironically on the injustice of the caste system; she is also sensitive to poverty and hunger (247-248).

Jadwiga Toeplitz-Mrozowska, too, was open to diversity and cultural difference (Badowski). Toeplitz-Mrozowska was a well-educated, independent, somewhat adventurous woman, who travelled extensively, and visited India a few times in the interwar period⁹². She travelled on her own, ventured to places less visited by tourists, like Kashmir, went hunting, and boldly admitted to her erotic fascinations. She was anticolonial in her views and supported the Indian independence movement. Eventually, her encounter with India became transformative: she questioned her own European identity and felt that she should engage in spiritual quest in India (Podemski 255). Indeed, she finally abandoned acting to do research on Central Asia (where she often travelled as well) and Tibetan Lamaism. She published several accounts from her various journeys in Italian (she resided in Italy after marrying Józef Toeplitz, director of Banca Commerciale Italiana), but her memoir in Polish, containing the account of her visits to India, appeared only in 1963⁹³. Toeplitz-Mrozowska was thus not only a tourist, relating the sites visited during her journey, but she also talked about Indian society, politics and economy.

While the two female travellers mentioned above were both progressive, democratically-minded women, their male counterparts often represented a more conservative outlook. Stanisław Bełza was clearly an Anglophile, praising colonialism and seeing only positive effects of the British presence in India. In his book, *Obrazy i obrazki Indjii [Large and Small Images of India]* (1912), he praised the British for their modernisation of India: the lavish architecture of Bombay (showing that the English do their best to impress Indians (8-9), the train network, a “colossal” thing for India (114), as well as systems of irrigation (116). He also emphasised how the English improved the situation of women, health, education and legal

⁹² More biographical information on Toeplitz-Mrozowska can be found in Michalik (Polish Biographical Dictionary Online).

⁹³ It was called *Słoneczne życie [Sunny Life]*.

system; “the suppressed, plundered and ignorant population – was uplifted, protected and enlightened” (118)⁹⁴. India appeared to Belza as a country full of “curiosities” (*osobliwości*) (17), but also full of colours (57). He constantly underlined the discomforts related mostly to the Indian climate: the heat, the dust, the dirt, the noise, and the crowds (29, 34). Sun is according to Belza, one of the plagues of India (74). Also, Hindu religious rituals and customs were for him a source of disgust and shock (45). Coming from the part of Poland partitioned by Prussia, he compared the German and the British rule, finding the former oppressive, and the latter reasonable (167-168). Belza, as a Polish patriot and social activist in the region of Silesia, was rather polonocentric – he compared what he observed with his native Poland and made references to romantic poets, such as Adam Mickiewicz. Unlike Dzieduszycka or Toeplitz-Mrozowska, he did not engage much with Indians, except of his guides, and he was not personally affected by Indian spirituality or culture, retaining an outsider’s gaze. A similarly conservative outlook can be found, according to Podemski, in the travel account of Jan Hupka. Clearly, although early twentieth-century Polish travellers to India were similar in their background, education and social status, they greatly differed in their views, outlook on the world, and approach to India and its inhabitants.

Another traveller visiting India in the early 1930s, was Ferdynand Goetel, author of what can be categorised as the first Polish reportage from India. An excerpt of his account is included in the Anthology of Polish reportage of 20th century, edited by Mariusz Szczygieł. Szczygieł recalls Goetel’s words: “A writer travels for all those that are not going [with him]”⁹⁵, and underlines his surprise at the fact that there were few sources on India in Polish, so his readers could only have limited knowledge of the Subcontinent. In fact, Goetel’s journey to India was not his first visit to that part of the world. At the outbreak of the First World War, he was deported by the Russians to Tashkent, and after the Bolshevik revolution he was forcibly incorporated into the Red Army. He escaped from there and in 1921 returned to Poland through Iran, India, and Britain⁹⁶. In the Interwar period, Goetel pursued a journalistic career in *Kurier Poranny* and *Naokoło Świata*, he was also president of Polish PEN Club (1926-1933), and of the Trade Union of Polish Writers (1933-1939). His journey to India took place in 1930-1931 and lasted approximately three months. His account is written less from a tourist’s perspective, and more from a journalist’s one: Goetel is interested in political, social, and cultural issues, rather than in visiting sights and indulging his own pleasure. Once in India, he meets many

⁹⁴ “Ludność deptaną, grabioną, ciemną, - podniesiono, osłonięto i oświecono” (118).

⁹⁵ “Pisarz odbywa tę podróż za wszystkich, którzy nie jadą”.

⁹⁶ See: Krzyzanowski.

representatives of the country's elite, he attends a rally of the Indian National Congress, he is fascinated by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. But he does not idealise India. Like Dzieduszycka, Goetel is a democrat and cannot accept the social stratification of India and the discrimination of women. He also realises that he will always be an outsider, treated as a foreigner due to the colour of his skin. He feels that particularly strongly at a rally with Mahatma Gandhi, where Indian participants stare at him with distrust, worried that he might be an English spy⁹⁷ (Szczygieł, *100/XX*. 1: 646). Similar to post-war reporters, Goetel looks for Polish traces in India. By that time, there was already a small Polish diaspora, which included those who, escaping Russia after the First World War, stopped in India, but also those who chose India to be their second homeland.

Poles “Adopted” by India

Twentieth century, with its two wars, was a time when the world began to seem smaller, and as a result, India and Poland moved closer to one another. It happened by the way of positive events, such as more opportunities to travel overseas, further development of Indian studies and strengthened attraction to Indian philosophy, spirituality, and arts, but also through the dramatic events of the Second World War, when India came to Polish rescue in various ways. In the first decades of twentieth century, several Poles became permanent residents of India: they were priests and missionaries, but also those, who wanted to explore Indian culture and spirituality. Among them was probably the most exceptional figure in Polish-Indian relations, Wanda Dynowska (1888-1971). From early age, she studied languages, she continued her education at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, as well as at the universities of Lausanne and Paris. She became interested in theosophy and after a meeting with Annie Besant in Paris, she was entrusted with the creation of the Polish Theosophic Society. She returned to Poland and engaged in popularisation of theosophy, in translation and publishing texts on spiritual matters, and in meetings with likeminded people across Europe.

In 1935, Dynowska left for India to spend some time at the ashram of Sri Ramana Maharishi. There, she met another Pole, Maurycy Frydman (1901-1977), who also explored Hindu spirituality and became known as Swami Bharatananda. Both Frydman and Dynowska became disciples of Mahatma Gandhi and supported the Indian independence movement. Dynowska, known in India as Umadevi – or Luminous Soul, became close to Gandhi and the Congress, helping to organise rallies, made speeches and attended meetings with various

⁹⁷ Jerzy Ros, another protagonist of this study, finds himself in a similar situation just a couple of decades later, when he is rejected by the participants of a rally of Indian communists.

organisations. She continued her spiritual quest, learned yoga and meditation. Together with Frydman, in 1944 Dynowska founded a Polish-Indian Library in Bombay and herself translated many texts from Sanskrit to Polish, including the Bhagavad Gita. Wanting to popularise Indian philosophy and culture in Poland, she also translated various poems and texts by Krishnamurti, Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and by Ramana Maharishi. She also translated Polish texts into Hindi, in an attempt to share Polish culture with Indians⁹⁸.

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, Poland, an ally of Great Britain, and India, a British colony, found themselves on the same side of the barricade, with Polish and Indian soldiers fighting alongside against the Nazis. Poles fondly remember Mahatma Gandhi's words of support for Poland (Makles). Furthermore, India gave shelter to Poles evacuated from various camps around the Soviet Union⁹⁹. An Indian maharaja, Jam Saheb Digvijaysinhji, ruler of the Nawanagar princely state (in Gujarat)¹⁰⁰, offered to host a large group of Polish children that were transported from Soviet Union after losing their parents in the war or in exile to gulags and kolkhozes in Siberia and other locations in USSR¹⁰¹. The maharaja built a camp for Polish evacuees in Balachadi, near his summer residence, that hosted about one thousand children of different ages (from 2 to 15). He welcomed them there with exceptional warmth and hospitality. He declared that they are now Nawanagaris and they should call him Bapu – Father; indeed, he eventually adopted some of them to prevent the new socialist authorities of Poland to claim them back¹⁰². The maharaja and his family often participated in various celebrations with the Polish children and took much interest in Polish culture, the maharaja's daughter still has a folk costume prepared for her by the Balachadi children. Various activities were organised in the camp, including song and dance classes, and scouting activities. According to Wiesław Stypuła, one of the children of Balachadi, now an elderly man, it was one of the few places in the world where the Polish flag was raised every morning and the Polish anthem was sung. The children

⁹⁸ For more information about Dynowska, see the documentary "The Enlightened Soul – The Life and Work of Wanda Dynowska Umadevi", dir. by Tonmoy Das. India/Poland 2015.

⁹⁹ Soviet Union signed a non-aggression agreement with Nazi Germany, called the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact which divided the territories in between the two powers, among them Poland, into a German and Soviet spheres of influence. Just two weeks after Poland was attacked by Germany from the West, on 1st September 1939, on 17th September Soviet Union attacked Poland from the East. After the Polish army was forced to capitulate, Germany and Soviet Union demarcated a border, and the Eastern territories of Poland became parts of Soviet Union. Deportation of Poles from these territories began soon after, from February 1940 onwards. The exact number of deportees is probably impossible to evaluate, but various historians estimate it at 1,2-1,8 million of people (See: Virtual Museum Kresy-Syberia).

¹⁰⁰ Supposedly, the maharaja's first contact with Poland was at a reception in Switzerland, where he met the renowned pianist and later Polish prime minister, Ignacy Paderewski (Bhattacharjee 29).

¹⁰¹ When Germany attacked the USSR in July 1941, and Soviet Union joined the war against Germany, it became possible for Poles to negotiate an agreement with the Soviets (14.08.1941) and create a Polish Army on Soviet soil. The Soviets released the Polish General Władysław Anders from a Moscow jail and allowed him to collect Polish officers from across the USSR to form an army. At the same time, Polish authorities on exile pushed the Soviets to release civilians from gulags and kolkhozes, and volunteers began collecting Polish children and grouping them in several centres, to be resettled.

¹⁰² See: documentary "Little Poland in India" (2013), as well as Anuradha Bhattacharjee's book, *Second Homeland: Polish Refugees in India* (2012).

remained in Balachadi till 1946, when the camp closed down. Some returned to Poland and reunited with relatives, some spread out around the world – a few remained in India, married Indian citizens and made their lives in their “second homeland” (Bhattacharjee 276-277).

Apart from Balachadi, a Polish refugee camp was set up in Valivade, near Kolhapur (in Maharashtra) hosting in total up to 5,000 Poles in the course of five years of its operation (1943-1947). According to Piotr Kłodkowski, thanks to the cooperation of the Red Cross, British Army, the Polish II Corps Command, the Consulate General of Poland in Bombay, as well as the local Indian authorities, the first group of refugees, mostly children and women, arrived there in 1943 (315).

In the beginning there was naturally a shortage of teachers, textbooks or the needed equipment but in spite of that all the young people in settlements were required to attend school. Very efficiently the whole educational and cultural infrastructure was completed. In Valivade, for example, there were 3 Polish kindergartens, 4 elementary schools, a secondary school, a lyceum and a teachers' training center. The children and their guardians could also attend Sunday mass, play soccer or organize Christmas carol evenings. Daily activities did not leave much space for reviving traumatic memories. (Kłodkowski 315-316)

The Poles who were hosted by the maharaja as children retain a particularly fond memory of their time in India, where they were received with such generosity¹⁰³. Among those who sought refuge in India in the war years was also Stefan Norblin (1892-1952), a renowned Polish artist and, in the interwar period, painter of portraits for much of the European royalty. Norblin and his wife fled Poland at the beginning of the war, crossed through the Middle East, and arrived to India. Although initially they planned to reach America, they eventually remained in India, where Norblin received commissions from various maharajas, notably of Marvi and Jodhpur (Kłodkowski 317). His Art Deco paintings are “an inspiring combination of Polish artistic creativity with Indian cultural heritage” (Kłodkowski 317). Indeed, Norblin’s murals blend European motifs, and a somewhat erotic imagery, with scenes from Indian mythology and depictions of Hindu gods and goddesses. They can be found primarily at the Umaid Bhavan Palace in Jodhpur, but Norblin also decorated private residences and various institutions in Bombay¹⁰⁴.

When the war ended, radical changes came about in both India and Poland. India became independent in 1947, while Poland became subjugated to the Soviet Union and the hard

¹⁰³ To commemorate their benefactor, a school in Warsaw took Maharaja Jam Saheb as its honorary patron, and a square in Warsaw was named “The Good Maharaja Square”.

¹⁰⁴ See Małgorzata Skiba’s documentary, “Chitraanjali. Stefan Norblin w Indiach”. [Chitraanjali. Stefan Norblin in India], from 2011.

years of Stalinist rule followed. Many Poles who were exiled in India did not want to return to their homeland, knowing that the new communist regime was not favourable – to say the least – to those who returned from abroad. Many Polish resistance fighters were prosecuted and sentenced to death (Kersten 264). That is why, a number of Poles who were refugees in India decided to stay in their adoptive country. They feature in some of the reportages analysed here, although the authors distance themselves from them and underline that they represent a different ideological option.

Jerzy Ros mentions his encounter with a fellow Pole, a certain Andrzej N. – his last name remaining a secret – who “was one of those Polish fighters in the West that were convinced that in their home country it is prison and exile that awaits them. He got scared and he did not return”¹⁰⁵. He stayed in India and married an English-Goan woman. Nevertheless, he missed his homeland, as Ros observed. The reporter quotes the man asking him about how are things in Warsaw, whether everything has been “turned upside down”¹⁰⁶, and how the city looks like after the destruction of the war (111). Ros is disturbed by the fact that Andrzej N. uses the personal pronoun “we”, to talk about how “we are reconstructing Warsaw”¹⁰⁷. The communist government was indeed calling all Poles to return to their country, presenting those who decided to stay abroad as unpatriotic – however, many of those who did return, faced persecutions. Ros repeats the exact words with which the Pole living in Goa addressed the reporter: “[y]ou are surely a communist, otherwise they would not let you out, but doesn’t matter, you are Polish. Tell me how are things in Warsaw”¹⁰⁸ (Ros 111). In this way, the reporter underlines his own loyalty to the communist government, but also he tries to show a connection between Poles that extends beyond ideological differences.

A similar motif can be found in Wojciech Żukrowski’s reportage, in which he tells the story of another Pole living in India, a certain Zygmunt Rogulski. “He did not return to the home country. He partly believed the anti-Soviet propaganda, but actually he was ashamed that he did not come to any money. How to return empty-handed...”¹⁰⁹ (Żukrowski 74). By emphasising the fact that the Pole had no money, Żukrowski stresses the personal factor in the decision of remaining in India, diverting the attention from the political context of Rogulski’s choice. The reporter became friends with Rogulski, despite having divergent opinions, and they

¹⁰⁵ “. . . był jednym z tych polskich żołnierzy na Zachodzie, których przekonano, że w kraju czeka ich więzienie i zsyłka. Zląkł się i nie wrócił” (Ros 109).

¹⁰⁶ “Pewnie tam wszystko do góry nogami poprzewracane, co?” (Ros 111).

¹⁰⁷ “jak my ją odbudowujemy” (Ros 110).

¹⁰⁸ “Ty pewnie komunista jesteś, inaczej by nie puścili, ale nic, Polak jesteś. Opowiadaj jak tam w Warszawie . . .” (Ros 111).

¹⁰⁹ “Do kraju nie powrócił. Trochę wierzył propagandzie antysowieckiej, a właściwie było mu wstyd, że się niczego nie dorobił. Jakże tu wracać z pustymi rękami...” (Żukrowski 74).

often met over a glass of whisky. Rogulski told Żukrowski about his business plans and his hopes to earn money and visit his mother in Poland. “To be with her only for a week – he dreamed – and then, they can even deport me to Siberia”¹¹⁰ (Żukrowski 74). Like Ros, Żukrowski quotes his interlocutor, but makes sure to present himself as a communist. He quotes a conversation with Rogulski, in which he proposes to save some whisky for later, and his friend replies, jokingly: “[o]h, [you] communist, [you’re] all about the long-term planning”¹¹¹ (Żukrowski 76). Thus, the reporters mark the presence of Poles in India, but place it in an ideologically appropriate political context. Their refusal to return to communist Poland is shown as a personally motivated one, out of shame for being poor, or as a politically motivated one. The latter choice was presented as an outcome of the manipulations of the “anti-Soviet propaganda” – or Western media – that informed about persecutions of former anti-Nazi resistance fighters in the new, socialist regime. Clearly, the reporters fail to mention the case of Polish children welcomed in India by Jam Saheb and the existence of the Valivade camp, as they would have to acknowledge the oppression and violence that Poles suffered in Soviet Union.

Travel in the Communist Era

Although Poles had long traditions of travelling and were eager to go abroad, in the first years of communism, it was practically impossible. Paweł Sowiński, author of a study on vacations in communist Poland, lists the requirements for obtaining a permission to go abroad in the first decade after the war. One had to report to the Passport Office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Warsaw, fill a request form and attach up to twelve different documents: from a certificate from the tax office, through marriage and employment certificates, to proofs of having family abroad certified by Polish consulate in that country (Sowiński 51). Nevertheless, fulfilling these bureaucratic requests was only one condition – proving one’s loyalty to the Party was even more important. Given the destruction and poverty of the country after the war, and extreme measures undertaken by the Stalinist regime, tourism was almost inexistent in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

In the years of Władysław Gomułka, First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party between 1956-1970, tourism abroad increased from 172,000 travellers going out of the country

¹¹⁰ “Być z nią choć tydzień – marzył – a potem niech mnie na Sybir wywiozą” (Żukrowski 74).

¹¹¹ “- Ach komunista, nie ma jak dalekowzroczne planowanie . . .” (Żukrowski 76).

to 871,000 at the end of his rule (Sowiński 148)¹¹². The grand majority of these journeys had socialist countries as destination, because going to the capitalist democracies was too expensive and rarely permitted by the authorities, which feared that Poles would defect to the West (Sowiński 150)¹¹³. Individual travellers were subjected to numerous controls and interrogations, had to provide countless certificates, and were obliged to return their passports to the local police station upon returning from their journey. As Sowiński remarks, the obligation to apply for the passport and the necessity of bringing various documents, created many occasions for the authorities to interrogate the petitioner, assess his or her loyalty and probe into their possible connections abroad (161). Nevertheless, giving the citizens a theoretical possibility of going abroad, even if such journeys were in practice rather difficult to organise, was a deliberate strategy of the Polish authorities, as it created a semblance of freedom and normality. The modern idea of leisure, free time, and holiday was becoming increasingly important all across Europe and socialist states realised that their citizens will demand to participate in it too. Clearly, the state wanted to maintain its monopoly also in this area. As maintains Diane Koenker, author of a study on Soviet idea of vacation, the idea of travel as a holiday was a result of a negotiation between the regime and the people who wanted to have a notion of a “good life” (Loc 85). However, vacationers were not supposed to simply rest and relax, there was “a distinctive blend of purpose and pleasure in Soviet vacation policy and practice” (Loc 85). Permissions for a holiday abroad were also a tool for the state to reward those who were loyal to the system, and punish those who were not.

In the period between 1971 and 1980, travelling abroad became even more accessible, although the trips within the Soviet Bloc still constituted more than 90% of all foreign travel (Sowiński 236). In this period, individual travel became more prevalent than organized travel. Apart from being an occasion for sightseeing or having a holiday at the beaches of Greece, Yugoslavia, or Italy, travel created an opportunity to buy products unavailable in Poland. While this *turystyka handlowa*, or “commercial tourism”, was officially condemned for tarnishing Poland’s reputation, Sowiński argues that unofficially, the authorities would turn a blind eye to

¹¹² Sowiński analysed records available at the archives of the Institute for National Memory [Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – IPN], IPN 0397/262, t. 1, *Turystyka 1971* [*Tourism 1971*], “Statystyka Polska – Materiały Statystyczne GUS Polish Statistics – Statistical Material of the Central Office of Statistics” no 124. p. 25.

¹¹³ Indeed, state-organised group travel (often on a “collective” passport, allowing the individual to cross the border only as part of an organised group), was often an occasion to stay abroad for good. Based on the data, Sowiński assesses that there were many such occasions, as group leaders often reported that several persons were missing from the group on their return journey.

this practice (243). This, too, was a way to make the citizens believe that they can have access to products that appeared to them as symbols of modernity¹¹⁴.

Paradoxically, few possibilities of travel for regular citizens were matched by a great interest in travel writing, reportage from abroad, photographic depictions of far-away places that one could never see with their own eyes. Reporters, or travel writers, adopted a role of emissaries, or cultural mediators, who brought the world to those, who could not experience it firsthand. Probably everyone who grew up in communism remembers the adventure books by Arkady Fiedler (1894-1985), who travelled around the world. Equally popular in that time were travel books by explorers of the polar region, Alina (1907-1993) and Czesław Centkiewicz (1904-1996). Many people were fascinated by the exploits of Polish mountain climbers, who reached the highest peaks of the world, including Mount Everest, K2, Nanga Parbat, Gasherbrum, or Lhotse. Several of them wrote travel accounts and memoirs, for instance Wanda Rutkiewicz (1943-1992), first European woman on Everest, or Wojciech Wróż (1942-1986), who wrote a gripping account from an expedition on Kanchenjunga. While there were many literary travellers in that period, like Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Andrzej Banach (1910-1990), or Edward Stachura (1937-1979), it was travel reportage that reached even wider audiences. Among most popular travelling reporters were: Ryszard Kapuściński (1932-1937), Olgierd Budrewicz (1923-2011), Lucjan Wolanowski (1920-2006), Kazimierz Dziewanowski (1930-1998), Monika Warneńska (1922-2010), as well as some of the authors studied in this dissertation: Wiesław Górnicki, Wojciech Żukrowski, and Wojciech Giełżyński. The hunger for stories on other cultures and lands was also expressed by the popularity of travel-related magazines: *Świat* [*The World*], a weekly published from 1951 to 1969; *Dookoła Świata* [*Around the World*], a youth travel magazine (issued in years 1954-1976, in sale again from 2011); *Poznaj Świat* [*Discover the World*], travel and geography magazine published since 1948; as well as *Kontynenty* [*The Continents*], a monthly travel magazine published in years 1964-1989, reactivated as a travel reportage magazine in 2012.

The reporters of the first decades after the Second World War were well aware of the Orientalist set of ideas about India and the colonial power behind these perceptions. Although Poland never had colonies overseas, it was not excluded from the Western European discourses. Colonial-era novels and studies by Western European Orientalists were widely read. The adventure novels by Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson or Karl May were also well-liked. Furthermore, Poles had their own plans to establish colonies in Africa. In 1882-1884 an

¹¹⁴ These products ranged from foods unavailable in Poland, like chewing gum or chocolate bars, through clothes, jewellery to home appliances or IKEA furniture. Aficionados would bring music records or thematic magazines and books.

expedition to Africa was led by Stefan Szolc-Rogoziński and made popular through the accounts published in the weekly *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* (Gołuch 44). Thus, the image of the non-European exotic was widespread among Poles and pervaded also to works of Polish literature. Henryk Sienkiewicz's *In Desert and Wilderness*, mentioned in Chapter 1, is a case in point. Nevertheless, as Małgorzata Czermińska explains in her article "An Exotic Journey and a Turn into the Inside. Non-fictional Narratives Between 'Orientalism' and Intimism", the early twentieth century travel writers already showed a different view on colonial relations. Sieroszewski, Ossendowski, Janta-Pończyński and Ferdynand Goetel, through their travel accounts, or travel reportage, showed to the readers a more complex relation than simply the European hegemon and the colonised peoples. The best example is Goetel's reportage from India, in which he sympathises with the Indian independence movement and praises Mahatma Gandhi. Moreover, thanks to these authors, and in particular, Kapuściński's reportages, much before postcolonial debates began among academics, Poles, in their collective consciousness, already had a certain notion of postcolonial thinking (Czermińska 15).

2. Communist Poland and Socialist-Oriented India

Although the first Polish consulate opened in Bombay as early as in 1933, the official beginning of diplomatic relations between Poland and India dates to 1954. In fact, Poland wanted to establish relations with India already at the creation of the independent Indian state, in 1947, but Stalin was reluctant. He perceived post-colonial governments as "tools of Western imperialism" (Mastny 52), and did not want the Soviet Union's satellite state of Poland to become close to India. Nevertheless, after Stalin's death in 1953, the attitude in Moscow changed. Stalin's successors were favourable to India and ready to intensify mutual exchange between India and the countries of the Soviet bloc (Mastny 52-53). Indeed, in the second half of 1950s contacts between Poland and India became more frequent. Already in 1955, Jawaharlal Nehru came on a state visit to Soviet Union and Poland, then Soviet leaders, Khrushchev and Bulganin came to India, rallying thousands of supporters (Engerman 228). Two years later, the Polish Prime Minister, Józef Cyrankiewicz, also visited India. In 1957, the Indian Embassy was established in Warsaw, and in the same year, an Agreement on Cultural Cooperation and subsequent Cultural Exchange Programmes was signed. Economic relations were also gradually expanding. Nevertheless, as David Engerman observes, the relations between India and Soviet Union (and – by extension – between India and the countries of the Soviet Bloc), was not an equal one:

Even with India's dramatic exit from the British Empire and Nehru's repeated declarations of nonalignment, Soviet officials placed it firmly in the capitalist world economy and the imperialist bloc. As Soviet contacts with the decolonizing world expanded in the years following Stalin's death, the pedagogical mode remained: Soviet leaders planned to teach India the ways of revolution and of modern economics, serving as an "elder brother" to this South Asian nation much as it had generously acted as elder brother for the Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus. (Engerman 227)

In this equation, Poland occupied a particular position – although it was formally an independent country, it belonged to the Soviet Bloc and was also in an inferior position to the "elder brother". Nevertheless, in relation to India, it seemed to adopt a similarly pedagogical attitude as did the USSR. From 1954, Soviet Union began to send experts to India in order to advise the newly formed state, and – in fact – to compete with America over influence in South Asia. Engerman quotes an Indian economist recalling that in 1950s, India became a mecca of planners and economists from over the world¹¹⁵ (230). Certainly, Soviet Bloc experts would encourage the idea of central planning and praised India's Second Five-Year Plan as they deemed it similar to Soviet plans (Engerman 231). However, even in this praise, a feeling of superiority could be discerned. According to Engerman, one of the eminent Soviet Indologists, R. A. Ulianovskii, said: "[t]he fact that India is borrowing from the planning experience of the socialist countries in its effort to escape from backwardness and to suppress its economic dependence on foreign capital by the country's industrialization is a fact of enormous progressive significance" (231). Although Soviet experts would wish for India to emulate the same model that was introduced in USSR, Indians were well-aware that this is not beneficial to them, as India requires its own model instead of ready-made solutions (Engerman 231). Soviet Union attempted at strengthening its influence not only by sending experts, but also by inviting students and researchers to study at the Soviet universities and by providing them with scholarships. As Griffiths and Cardona conclude, this was yet another form of soft power:

. . . educational aid could contribute to such goals by producing graduates fluent in Russian, with knowledge of and a sympathetic disposition toward the Soviet political economy, its political structures, systems, and economic plans, and toward the Soviet approach to questions of national economic development (231).

The Polish socialist government also organised courses and scholarships for students from developing countries, including India. Several large investments in industry were undertaken

¹¹⁵ Among them were also Polish economists Michał Kalecki and Oskar Lange (Engerman 230).

with the Soviet aid, for instance the Bhilai steel mill, where Polish engineers were involved, as well as coal mines where miners from Poland could be found.

This Polish presence was of particular interest to reporters visiting India. Jerzy Putrament visits the coal mines in Gidi and Sudandih, in the state of Bihar, where he meets a group of Polish miners sent there to instruct their Indian colleagues on mining techniques. His visit coincides with the celebration of “Barburka”, a festivity in the honour of Saint Barbara, the patron of miners. Most Polish miners originally came from the region of Silesia, in Western Poland, and Putrament could experience some of the “Silesian folklore” and Polish-style celebrations that included singing, dancing, and vodka, “the chief deity of the Slavs”¹¹⁶ (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 60). The reporter recalls that the Indian guests were slightly disoriented by what was happening, “just like us looking at the strangest Hindu customs in Benares”¹¹⁷ (60). Putrament is satisfied to see Polish miners in India and compares this fact with his recollection of Polish miners in the mines of France. There, they were just cheap labour, employed for jobs that the locals found too hard.

Here – they are specialists, best paid, most qualified. It is not difficult to [see] the contradiction: once we were exporting force, numbers, resources, today we export reason, quality, ready-made production, ready-made industrial sets. You can shout, you can fuss, you can gossip, you can complain, but same changes will not be reversed by your clatter. It is a different country, Poland of the 60s than Poland of the 30s, and even if you stood on your head, it is closer to the world’s top than thirty years ago.¹¹⁸ (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 58-59)

Putrament is understandably proud of the Polish specialists’ presence in India, but he also uses this fact to provide arguments to the critics of the socialist system and to legitimise it. Nevertheless, he also realises that Poles in India face many difficulties because of the different climate, different culture, and nostalgia over their homeland and relatives.

Another “Polish” spot in India that Putrament visits is the electric plant in Barauni, also constructed with the assistance of Polish engineers. He relates his conversations with them, in which they complain about various difficulties (“heat, monsoons, mosquitoes, and scorpions” (73)) and among others, about the issues with the Indian workers, who - in their opinion, are lazy and disobedient. “- They just don’t do anything. They go there and back, and one cannot

¹¹⁶ “naczelne bóstwo Słowian” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 60).

¹¹⁷ “Hindusi siedzieli z boku, patrząc na widowisko z nie mniejszą zachłannością i zadziwieniem, niż my oglądający najdziwniejsze zwyczaje hinduskie w Benaresie . . .” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 60).

¹¹⁸ “Tu – to są specjaliści, najlepiej płatni, najbardziej wykwalifikowani. Nietrudno o przeciwstawienie: ongi wywoziliśmy siłę, ilość, surowce, dziś wywozimy rozum, jakość, gotową produkcję, gotowe całe obiekty przemysłowe. Krzyczcie i wydziwiającie, plotkujcie, narzekajcie, pewnych przemian wasz najgorszy jazgot nie odmieni. To inny kraj, Polska lat 60 tych niż Polska lat 30tych, i choćbyście na głowie stanęli, bliżej jej teraz do światowej czołówki niż trzydzieści lat temu” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 58-59).

catch them and put them to work. And even if you do, you can't watch over them. . . No, sir, the English knew what they are doing when they kept them at tight leash! Otherwise, they don't do anything..."¹¹⁹ (73-74). Putrament finds this opinion extreme, and underlines that it was uttered only by one individual; nevertheless, he suspects that more Poles share this view (74). Clearly, he is disturbed by the admiration for colonial rule in India, but his own feeling of superiority over Indians and sympathy towards fellow Poles can be discerned. Putrament is also of the opinion that it is good for Poles to work abroad in respected positions as they bring their foreign income back to the country and also they learn to appreciate the Polish reality (84). It is thus easy to notice that exporting specialised workers to the "Third World" often has a propagandist angle. Indeed, Putrament recommends to writers to cover this aspect of Polish presence abroad, rather than invent fictional plots (79).

Several agreements were signed between Poland and India in 1960s and 1970s: on economic cooperation (1960, 1962, 1965), on sail (1960) and air transport (1977) and on economic, industrial and technical cooperation (1977) (Wójcik). Another reporter, Janusz Gołębiowski, also focuses on Polish-Indian economic cooperation and, while in India, is on the lookout of products "made in Poland". Apart from mines, steel plants, electric plants, Poland also began to export to India tractors and motorcycles. Nevertheless, the reporter notices that the lack of knowledge of local conditions caused many vehicles to fail – tires were not strong enough for Indian roads, engines would get heated up in the hot climate (Gołębiowski 160). The reporter is interested, too, in the intensified cultural exchange between Poland and India. He mentions the magazines *Poland* and *Polish Perspectives*, available at the press club in Delhi, and occasional exhibitions of graphic art, books or artistic photography, but he realises that these events have limited outreach and Indian knowledge of Poland remains rather limited (156-157). That is why, he believes in economic progress and trade relations. This was also the dominating aspect in Polish-Indian relations of that period, although culture and education were also areas for mutual encounters.

Indological studies were well-established in main Polish academic centres, and when travel became more and more accessible, both reporters and travel writers went to India and described the situation there for the Polish public. Like in the West, the hippies' movement started growing in Poland¹²⁰, and there were more and more Poles interested in spiritual

¹¹⁹ "Po prostu nic nie robią. Chodzą tam i z powrotem, nie można ich złapać i postawić do roboty. A jak już postawisz, nie upilnujesz. . . . Nie, panie, Anglicy wiedzieli, co robią, że trzymali ich krótko! Inaczej nic nie robią..." (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 73-74).

¹²⁰ For a comprehensive study of hippy movement in communism, see *Dropping Out of Socialism: The Creation of Alternative Spheres in the Soviet Bloc* (2016), by Juliane Fuerst and Josie McLellan (eds).

explorations away from the Catholic paradigms. In 1970s and 1980s, more individual travellers, not sponsored by a newspaper or another public institution, could go to India, although they were few in comparison with Europeans from the West. Various artists became interested in Indian culture and spirituality, for instance the outstanding theatre director, Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999), who based many of his concepts on Indian thought. One of the first plays that he directed was Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* (1960). Probably his best-known concept is the idea of "poor theatre", in which the scenography is limited to enhance focus on the actor, as well as innovative projects that break the division between the actors on the scene, and the public, and to involve the spectators in the performance. He travelled extensively, observing rituals and drama techniques of different cultures – also the Indian ones – and basing theatre plays on those inspirations; this was the stage called "Theatre of Sources".

Indian thought exceeded the field of artistic creation and had an impact on politics: many intellectuals in the opposition movement were familiar with the Gandhian ideas of non-violence and decided to fight with the oppressive communist authorities according to those principles. Indeed, as Piotr Kłodkowski asserts, "Mahatma Gandhi became a symbolic figure for many Poles, an archetype of a non-violent freedom fighter, frequently invoked by the organized Opposition, Academia members, journalists or workers" (320). Indeed, civil resistance is now studied from a larger perspective, which highlights the links and inspirations among leaders of peaceful revolutions across the globe, from Gandhi to the anti-communist "velvet" revolutions in Central Europe (Roberts & Garton Ash).

3. The New/Old Characteristics of Socialist Travel Writing

To conclude, the history of Polish contacts with India, both through travel and through intellectual encounter, is long and rich in unconventional biographies. The intertextuality of knowledge about India is reflected in passing references to these "classics": Polish reporters of the communist era, although selective in who they talk about and do not, are aware of their predecessors visiting India. Certainly, Ewa Dzieduszycka, an aristocrat, could not be mentioned, while figures from distance history, like Gaspar da Gama or Krzysztof Pawłowski, were remembered, as they were not considered to be problematic from an ideological point of view. As it was mentioned earlier, the story of children refugees in India was completely silenced, as well as the story of Umadevi – Wanda Dynowska; she is only mentioned in the reportage of Jerzy Chociłowski, written in 1977, and less ideological in its nature. Apart from the Polish heritage of contacts with India, the socialist reporters are well-aware of the fact that much of knowledge of India came to Poland through the British. As a result, even those visitors

to India who come from a completely non-colonial background, and are staunch critics of British imperialism, refer to the images produced by the colonial Orientalist discourse mechanism. The themes that appear in their reportages from India, are, too, rather repetitive, demonstrating that they are also part of a discourse that fosters certain images and ideas more than others. While Said underlines the adventurous aspect of imperialism, where India appears as a land of freedom and possibility for young English, Polish reporters of the communist period, too, enjoy their travels around the Subcontinent and excitedly relate all the adventures on their way. While Westerners of the colonial era believed that they were travelling on a civilising mission, the Polish reporters tend to present themselves as emissaries of the new, socialist world, whose mission is to popularise new models of modernization and present India as an arena of clashes between “the old” and “the new”.

The accounts of reporters analysed in this book, although a product of their era, bear a certain resemblance to the accounts of earlier travellers. Jerzy Ros’ reportage starts with several chapters which describe his journey to India on a Polish ship, the details of the journey, the anecdotes on other passengers and events on board. Incidentally, at that point of his narrative, he mentions the first travellers that reached India by ship: Marco Polo, Vasco da Gama, as well as the Poles: Gaspar da Gama and Erazm Kretkowski. He seems to – more or less consciously – draw a parallel between their travel of exploration, and his own. Similarly, Witold Koehler emphasises the fact that he travels to India by air, and like Ros, recounts various stages and aspects of his journey. In both reportages, this long introduction to India by means of retelling the air or sea travel, adds to the sense of excitement and anticipation. In this way, Ros’ and Koehler’s accounts resemble the early voyages to far-away, yet unexplored lands.

Another trait that links the historical and the socialist-era accounts is the fact that travel remains a prerogative of the elites. In Renaissance it depended on status and wealth of a family, while in communism, it was conditioned by the political context. Seemingly, communism was supposed to bring more equality and democratisation; it has, however, created new hierarchies, and the possibility of travel was dependent on one’s place in that network of power and privilege. Since there was no free, private-owned media, all the reporters were employees of state-controlled newspapers and magazines, and as such higher in the hierarchy than an ordinary Pole, who would probably have much more difficulty to obtain necessary permissions to go abroad. Some of the authors of texts analysed here are even higher in the system of communist institutions: Jerzy Putrament, for instance, was for years at the head of the Polish Writers’ Association, while Żukrowski was an employee of the Polish Embassy in India. Therefore, although they like to present themselves as ordinary Poles trying to convey their impressions

from India to readers at home, they are members of a privileged class in a theoretically classless society.

One of the goals of travel in the socialist view was that it always had to have a purpose. Travel just for leisure would be too “bourgeois”, and thus the reporters usually were entrusted – or felt entrusted – with a mission. That mission was to provide more knowledge about a fellow socialist country (as it will be demonstrated in the last chapter, they had no doubt that India should fully adopt socialism), to portray cultural differences to their readers, to appraise certain phenomena in a positive or a negative fashion, and to teach the public about how people live in other corners of the world. This ideologically-marked, educational aspect was also meant to transform Polish journalists into worldly, culturally-aware men, who act abroad as “ambassadors” of their own country and the system that it adopted. And so, when visiting an Indian household, Ros talks about the progress and development in his own country, along communist ideals (141), and Górnicki constantly campaigns for the abolishment of caste in discussions with Indian interlocutors (147). Giełżyński, on the other hand, does not seem to seek knowledge for himself or to impart knowledge to Indians. Instead, he has a more didactic approach towards his readers: he addresses them frequently, in a prescriptive tone. For instance, when describing certain Indian customs, he urges the reading public: “[b]ut let us avoid such generalisations, let us not say: what a backwards, what an unenlightened country!”(13)¹²¹.

Furthermore, in a rather romantic spirit, the authors of travel accounts to India keep referring to Poland, its landscape, its people and its customs. Several of them, notably Putrament and Gołębiowski, travel to see the steel mills or mines established by Poles, and praise the products that socialist Poland exports to India. They feel nostalgic when they meet a fellow Pole, even despite political differences. They react emotionally to Polish music (Koehler) or other elements of Polish culture encountered in India. Furthermore, their memories of the Second World War are still vivid, and they are able to compare the fate of, for example, Partition refugees. Although they affirm their loyalty to the Soviet Bloc, by referring to Russian travellers to India in the past or Soviet Union’s investments in their times, they also feel European. They occasionally demonstrate their civilizational superiority, using expressions describing someone’s name as sounding “too long for our European ears”¹²² (Górnicki 118), or saying that Indians are “deaf to our, European, rational advice”¹²³. Nevertheless, they can hardly

¹²¹ “Ale wystrzegajmy się podobnych uogólnień, nie mówmy zaraz: jaki to zacofany, jaki nieoświecony kraj!” (Giełżyński 13).

¹²² “brzmią nieco przydługoo jak na nasze europejskie uszy . . . ”(Górnicki 118).

¹²³ “Hindusi są zupełnie głusi na nasze, europejskie, racjonalne porady . . . ” (Giełżyński 16).

hide their satisfaction at being able to experience the comfort of a large house, full of servants, or the opportunity of attending elegant receptions at par with other Western visitors.

*

Almost all writers analysed in this chapter underline how much of an achievement it is to even embark on a journey. And a very special journey – not to the Polish Baltic sea coast or to the Soviet Crimea, but one to such a distant and “exotic” place as India. Diane Koenker, in her article on Soviet travel, distinguishes between domestic *turizm*, and travel abroad, which “offered a different kind of appeal and required a different kind of mapping: not one that incorporated new sights and experiences into a national whole, but a map that opposed here and there, us and others” (661). The idea of encountering, exploring and describing Otherness is one of the main motivations of the reporters from socialist Poland. This is very well exemplified by Kapuściński and his fascination with the Other:

I consider myself to be an explorer of Otherness: other cultures, other ways of thinking, other types of behaviour. I want to come into contact with strangeness in order to understand. It is a question of how one can describe reality adequately, but anew. Sometimes this kind of writing is called nonfiction writing. I would call it creative nonfiction writing. Personal presence is crucial. Sometimes I’m asked who the hero of my books is. “I am,” I respond, “because these books describe a person who travels, looks around, reads, reflects, and writes about all of this.”
Kapuściński, *Lapidaria* (210).

Thus, apart from the usual goals of a traveller, identified by James Clifford as “search of difference, wisdom, power, adventure, [and] an altered perspective” (91), travel leads to a better self-understanding. Knowing the Other, being confronted with a different culture, is an important lesson on one’s boundaries and personality in general. However, this encounter does not take place in the void, it is also defined by the historical, political or social context. The reporters from communist Poland are not simply individuals on a journey, meeting other individuals. Their experience is influenced by ideologies, which are “systems of representation” (in Althusser’s understanding of the term), that mediate between the individual and his or her relationship to society.

Travel reporters, by presenting a “first-hand experience”, create an illusion of reality, an air of authority over their readers. Their claim to present a “true story” stands in opposition to the fact that no travel account is objective and it does not depict “reality” in its fullness. Already the moment of writing it, after completing the journey, makes travel reportage a reiteration. It is at least “one step removed from the reality that it describes” (Beller and

Leerssen 446). A travelogue is an autonomous text that has a poetic function and a potential to produce powerful images. These images are not facts; they are representations of a reality perceived by the traveller.

As it has been demonstrated, in many cases the proper ideological stance of the communist reporters coexists with a desire for adventure and excitement. Even while describing the “Oriental riches” or the “abject” customs of India, the reporters, perhaps not fully consciously, find a certain pleasure. It reminds of the phenomenon that Ali Behdad described in his article on Nerval’s *Voyage en Orient*. The French writer, in Behdad’s words, experienced a desire of the Orient, which is “the return of a repressed fascination with the Other, through whose differentiating function European subjectivity has often defined itself since the Crusades” (*Orientalist desire...* 39). Despite being representatives of the Eastern Bloc, Polish reporters share this fascination, and display a typically Western European desire to know the Oriental Other and to define themselves in opposition to the Other.

However, this desire does not always lead to a real encounter and dialogue, it does not enable the reporter to hear the voice of the Other. Most travel accounts analysed in this dissertation feature Indian interlocutors rather sparingly. Instead, they are filled with the narrator’s impressions, opinions and interpretations. Going on a journey to India and writing about Indian culture does not in itself make the reporter understand and appreciate it. This problem is illustrated well by bell hooks:

I am waiting for them to stop talking about the ‘Other’, to stop describing how important it is to be able to speak about difference. It is not just important what we speak about, but how and why we speak. . . Often this speech about the ‘Other’ annihilates, erases: no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the centre of my talk. (hooks, 1990: 151–2)

Whatever strategy the authors use to represent India, such representations have one deep flaw: they become *their* narrative of India, their perception. They do not leave much space for the object to speak for itself – they replace it with their own ideas. The reporters know better what India is and what it should be, to what kind of modernity it should aspire, and what traditions it should reject.

Several works were devoted to Western European colonial rhetoric strategies in nonfiction – travel writing and journalism in particular. Mary Louise Pratt, in her *Imperial Eyes: Travel*

Writing and Transculturation (1992) takes under scrutiny the discursive strategies of the travel accounts ranging from mid-seventeenth century till second half of twentieth century. Describing late eighteenth-century travelogues, she identifies a strategy that she calls a narrative of anti-conquest. One of the anti-conquest strategies is a way of introducing global hegemony by means of a seemingly benign, scientific project of categorising and appropriating all natural phenomena. In travel accounts from that period, the land and the nature of the foreign lands “present” themselves to the European eye, which is the one that embellishes, seeks improvement, finds potential for the colonial development and European-style progress (61). Another version of anti-conquest is, in Pratt’s analysis, rooted in the new sentimental fashion, in which the focus of the traveller shifts from the outside world, nature and landscapes, to his internal experiences, emotions, and adventures. Everything that the traveller experiences is filtered through his own lens, as a result providing readers with a highly subjective tale. That tale features the element of contacting the locals and even an expectation of reciprocity – but it is an illusion. In fact, what is behind this supposed exchange, is the civilising mission (85). The undertaking of the Polish reporters can also be understood in terms of an anti-conquest narratives, in which the attempt to reject a colonial depiction of India hides a wish to rebrand and refashion the Indian Other to the liking of the socialist eye. Wanting to find signs of progress and changes towards a new, postcolonial and socialist modernity, the reporters impose their own vision and model of development on India.

The reporters on their journey to India chose reportage as the best form to convey their experiences. From an ideological point of view, non-fiction was also more welcome by the authorities than the “rotten bourgeois novel” (Kuprel 378). While striving to convey a truthful depiction of India, their perception was influenced by both Orientalist, as well as socialist discourses. They were trapped between the need to reject the “wretched exotic” and the encouragement for a transition to “modernity”. However, by imposing their own vision of modernity, they perpetuated a colonial pattern of subjugation. Marek Moroń, sociologist, calls this phenomenon a “Comintern Eurocentrism” (Cegielski 87). The socialist countries were concerned with supporting the Third World not only out of their belief in equality or comradeship. Their mission was also to expand their sphere of ideological influence upon countries that they considered as inferior and underdeveloped, explains Moroń (Cegielski 87). That is why, even if India is no longer presented in travel accounts according to the colonial stereotypes, even if the “exotic” is abandoned, it is still perceived as a second-rate country that needs to be shown the path towards development. It is clearly visible from Putrament’s texts

that the abandonment of the socialist course cannot be positively received by representatives of the Soviet Bloc. The only acceptable scenario would be for India to follow the Soviet example.

CHAPTER 3. THE SOCIALIST REPORTER'S EYES¹²⁴

Reporters and their work are always rooted in a historical, geographical and political context. For the writers and journalists from the Eastern Bloc, going abroad was not an easy undertaking. A reporter's journey – or, as a matter of fact, any journey abroad – was limited in various ways. One limitation was the current political situation: internal unrest in the country would mean restrictions in the possibilities of foreign travel. The other was the person's background, their position and political stance (for instance, membership, or lack of thereof, in the communist party). Sometimes, one could not obtain a passport due to family connections, and sometimes it depended on the willingness to sign a loyalty declaration or strike a deal with the secret services.

Apart from limitations in the possibility of travel, there were many limitations of the freedom of expression. Unlike in the open societies of the West, characterised by a multitude of communication channels and free exchange of information, in closed societies of the Soviet Bloc the media systems were structured in a much more vertical way. It was a tightly controlled hierarchical system, in which the most important messages would go from top to bottom, and the bottom – journalists, the public – could only express support of the top authorities, and occasionally send limited feedback (Goban-Klas 28). However, the Polish case differed slightly from the situation of journalists in other countries. Ever since the end of the Stalinist era, the Polish journalists began to distance themselves from the party, becoming eventually mediators between the party and the people (Curry). But, independently on their views, they could not be openly critical of the party. Every publication had to be approved by the Central Office for the Control of Newspapers, Publications and Events, created in 1945. The decree that enumerated all types of forbidden content was general enough to facilitate a very wide interpretation by censors. The institutions of censorship designed an elaborate system of control, but also journalists themselves engaged in self-censorship, to avoid later complications. The Polish Press Agency (PAP) had a monopoly for information from outside. Effectively, much of the foreign news was simply copied from the Soviet agency TASS. As a result, most travel reportages on India from late 1950s and 1960s were written by employees or collaborators of PAP and other state media.

This chapter is a reflection on who were the authors of the analysed texts and how did they present themselves and their mission in their reportages. Were they setting off on a journey

¹²⁴ This chapter's title is partly a paraphrase of Mary Louise Pratt's work, *Imperial Eyes* (1992).

with the same spirit as regular travellers? What was the motivation that brought them to India? What goals did they set for themselves? The answers to these questions are as diverse as are the authors analysed here. By and large, they can be divided into two categories: journalists, whose aim is to describe India to Polish readers, as well as official delegates, who are sent to India with a particular mission, for instance as participants of a congress or as employees of the state. However, this broad division into reporters and delegates is only a functional one. Actually, as Anne Gorsuch observes, all forms of travel writing – and travel reportage – in socialism were to some extent an official project (20). Hence, independently from their profession and the particular purpose of their travel, all the authors featured in this study are on an official mission. Their journey had to be endorsed by the authorities, as it was otherwise impossible to obtain the passport, visas and foreign currency. That is why, state officials, delegates to conferences, and reporters alike were all bound by the same restrictions and their accounts were (self-) censored. As it was mentioned earlier, travel reportage is a particularly heterogeneous genre and the texts vary in style, narrative, and aim.

Almost all of the analysed authors share their perplexity on how to convey their experiences to the readers. Surely, one issue was to be ideologically correct, but also to give justice to the vastness and diversity of India. It is significant that many reporters include a self-reflexive passage on how to write about India. Even though the authors belong to a generation that came of age and was educated still in a colonial world, and their readings often included the literature of the British Raj, they understood that writing about the independent India requires a new approach. Perhaps such were also the guidelines that they received from their superiors. The Soviet academia criticised Western Orientalism even before such realisations became widespread in America or Western Europe (Kemper & Conermann 2), although their reason for doing so was probably motivated politically and ideologically, by a general anti-imperialist stance rather than by a genuine intention to deconstruct clichés about the Orient. Whatever the reason, a new way of describing the formerly colonial world was necessary, and the Polish reporters in India understood that very well.

The authors of travel reportages written in the 1950s and 1960s often refer to the image of India that was shaped in their mind before their first journey to the Subcontinent. Although that image is rather hazy, composed of snippets of information and loose associations, it is typical of Orientalist depictions of India. What does this image consist of? “[P]alm crests, slender minarets, turbans and elephants, and most of all, an indelible impression of otherness

and a breath-taking exotic”¹²⁵, recalls Waclaw Koehler (5). Jerzy Ros wonders about the world of the “maharajas, elephants, fakirs”(186)¹²⁶, and the precious stones, while Wojciech Żukrowski talks about “clairvoyants, fakirs, [and] sages that vanquish death” (26)¹²⁷. All these authors were aware of a popular image of India as an exotic fairy tale, a land of mystics, but also as a poor and underdeveloped country. This was the India of the European imagination, popularised by art, literature, newspapers, travel accounts and even academia. The Polish reporters probably read the same novels, seen the same films – for instance, the “Indian Grave”, mentioned by Koehler – as their Western counterparts. Practically all of the authors analysed here referred to Kipling at some point of time. Even when they tried to dispense with the preconceptions and banal images of the exotic, they were more or less conscious that they are to some extent enclosed in a discourse where such Orientalist tropes abound. Nevertheless, the reporters wanted to break free from these stereotypes and each of them had a different strategy of “fighting with the Indian exotic” (Górnicki 166)¹²⁸. It is worth briefly analysing what they claim in their writing as their way to talk about India. Obviously, their declarations may not have proven true, however the intention and the method employed to represent Indian reality is telling.

1. To India on an Official Trip: Koehler, Żukrowski and Putrament

When taking into account the authors of the reportages from India analysed here, they can be divided into two groups. One group consists of authors who were not reporters by training, and they were not employed as journalists in a newspaper, magazine or news agency. Putrament writes poetry, fiction and nonfiction, Żukrowski, too, specialises in poetry and prose, while Koehler, given his field of expertise (natural science), is an author of mostly nonfictional accounts about nature. Thus, all three are, in one way or another, writers. Their accounts from India can also be considered as works of reportage, given their lively language and their interest in social, political and economic issues. The other group of text are those written by professional reporters, and can undoubtedly be categorised as reportage. They will be described in the following section.

¹²⁵ “pióropusze palm, smukłość minaretów, turbany i słonie, a przede wszystkim owo niezatarte wrażenie odmienności i zapierającej dech w piersiach egzotyki” (Koehler 5).

¹²⁶ “Gdzież jest ten świat bajki o maharadzach, słoniach, fakirach . . .” (Ros 186).

¹²⁷ “Gdzież są ci jasnowidze, fakirzy, mędrcy, którzy pokonują śmierć?” (Żukrowski 26).

¹²⁸ “front walki z nieszczęsną ‘egzotyką’” (Górnicki 166).

Probably the first Polish travel reportage on India after the Second World War is a text by a delegate to the Fourth World Forestry Congress in Dehradun, which took place in 1954. Witold Koehler (1909-1988) was a rather improbable travel writer, as he was an expert in forestry employed at a public funded research institute, rather than a writer or a reporter. He did not share the same concerns as journalists, whose mission usually is to write about facts, maintain a certain objectivity and satisfy the expectations of their editors. Nevertheless, his account can be categorised as reportage, since it is a rather subjective relation from a journey, even if that journey was an official delegation (with all limitations that result from that fact).

Another text coming from a government-employed official, is the collection of reportages or stories by Wojciech Żukrowski (1916-2000), then posted to the Polish Embassy in New Delhi in the rank of Secretary. Although it resembles the reportage genre, his book, *Podróże z moim guru* [*Travels with my Guru*], is not a non-fictional work *per se*, especially since the author considered himself to be a writer, not a reporter. The situation of Żukrowski can be compared to the one of Jerzy Putrament (1910-1986), also a writer, but above all, communist apparatchik and politician. Both men were sent on diplomatic missions in the early years of their careers, continued writing throughout their lives, and held important positions in state institutions. While Żukrowski's political engagement would fluctuate throughout his life, Putrament remained a rather staunch supporter of the communist system. He travelled to India twice, once because of a session of the World Peace Council, and once on another official occasion.

The four accounts – one by Koehler, one by Żukrowski and two by Putrament – differ: the first one is a text from a short trip to India by an expert in a particular discipline, to attend a forestry congress. As it was mentioned earlier, his account is similar to those of reporters, but Koehler shows a certain naiveté of a first-time tourist to a far-away country. On the contrary, Żukrowski and Putrament are well-travelled members of the intellectual elite of their time, whose language and style are somewhat more sophisticated. What is more, their exposure to India is prolonged: Żukrowski travels around India, having Delhi as a base for a few years, and Putrament visits the country twice, touring many cities and regions. Nevertheless, the two writers' take on India is not radically different from the one of the forestry specialist: similar themes recur, such as spirituality, castes, colonial past, and hopes for progress. Often, the remarks are rather superficial – perhaps only Żukrowski attempts sometimes at a deeper understanding of these phenomena. The following section describes each of the authors, first in biographical terms, and then discusses their declared attitude towards India.

Witold Koehler: India in the Eyes of a Conference Delegate

Witold Koehler, although on a short official delegation, managed to make various observations about India, its culture, customs and traditions. He became a well-known professor of forestry and entomologist, with a mission to popularise the idea of protection of nature and animals. He worked at his alma mater, Warsaw University of Life Sciences, as well as at the Ministry of Forestry and the Institute of Forest Research. Apart from his travel account, he published numerous academic texts, but also books for general public. He also wrote scenarios for documentaries on the environment¹²⁹. His writing style was clear and easy to understand, and his books always contained anecdotes and personal reflections. In his travel account from India, Koehler chose to overlook encyclopaedic or academic information, in order to convey his own impressions of the journey. His book was published in 1957, with a title *Indie przez dziurkę od klucza* [*India through a Keyhole*]. It contains Koehler's description of the journey, as well as his subjective opinions on India and its culture. There are various humorous scenes and real-life dialogues, giving Koehler's book a light tone. The account is composed of thirty-three chapters, out of which first eight cover the story of the journey to the Subcontinent, including a stop in Karachi on the way. This disproportion, resulting from the fact that Koehler gave much space in his account to the journey itself, is yet another proof of how rare far-away travel was in that period. It was a journey by airplane (maybe his first?), so he provides numerous details about the flight: the speed of the aircraft, the hostesses, the co-passengers, and even the meals on board (Koehler 12). It seems as if the air journey constitutes a symbolic line separating "here" and "there", and crossing that line is for the narrator-traveller a kind of rite of passage (in Van Gennep's understanding of the term).

Koehler confesses that his first idea of India was based on the film "Indian Grave"¹³⁰ which he saw as a boy through the keyhole of a local cinema. It left him with an impression of an exotic country, full of elephants, minarets and people in turbans (5). The congress of forestry was thus a chance for a second encounter of India, but just like the first one, it was "short and feverish, giving an incomplete image, but fascinating, full of extraordinary impressions" (6)¹³¹. Similar to other authors, Koehler starts with some reflections on before and after: what was the initial image of India in his mind, and how it was confronted with reality. He is taken aback by

¹²⁹ The information on Witold Koehler is based on a biographical note in the regional section of *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily, from 16.07.2007.

¹³⁰ The author probably refers to the 1921 German movie "Das Indische Grabmal", directed by Joe May.

¹³¹ "krótki i gorączkowy, nie dający pełni obrazu, lecz urzekający niezwykłością przeżywanych wrażeń"

the complexity of India and finds it impossible to describe it in simple words, after only a short journey:

From the chaos of observations and sensations experienced in such conditions, it is difficult to create a homogenous and truthful picture. One could reach for different sources, check statistics, and form for oneself a truth about India. I tried this path... But soon after reading the first pages, the immediate impressions, the images carved in one's memory, the experiences still fresh in one's mind, in brief, all that one could absorb with own senses, starts to fade, recede and blur – overpowered by the importance of exact numbers, irrefutable facts, and eminent opinions of specialists. An image is created, a truthful one perhaps, but devoid of colours, sounds and aromas. Thus, let us allow these gates to remain closed, I am content with my own, personal, fleeting glance through... a keyhole. (6)¹³²

The author uses a repetition, referring at the beginning to the keyhole when describing his first, indirect encounter of India, and then at the end, to demonstrate his still very limited knowledge of the place, despite of the journey there. Like many other travellers before him, he is in awe of India's vastness and diversity, realising that writing about historical, geographical or social issues would be an endless – and, as a result, futile – task.

Thus, Koehler turns to a more subjective formula, closer to a travel memoir, putting himself at the centre of the story and filtering India through his own eyes. He is aware that this may not guarantee objectivity or a deep analysis, but it also saves him from repeating widely spread clichés:

Before our feet touched the Indian land for the first time, we promised ourselves to look at this peculiar world with our own eyes, that we will erase from our memory the (rather meagre) baggage of scholarly information on India. Above all, we swore to guard ourselves again banal formulas of the sort: "India is a country of contrasts". But after all, such is the substance of this land. Contrast is inherent to nature, people, their history and beliefs. We encounter contrast on every step of the way, in every image, event, and experience. (18)¹³³

(Koehler 6).

¹³² "Z chaosu spostrzeżeń i doznań zdobytych w takich warunkach niełatwo jest stworzyć sobie jednolity i prawdziwy obraz. Można by wprawdzie sięgnąć do źródłowych dzieł, zajrzeć do statystyk i wypracować sobie prawdę o Indiach. Spróbowałem tej drogi... Już jednak po przeczytaniu pierwszych kart wrażenia bezpośrednie, obrazy tkwiące w pamięci, przeżycia świeże w bliskim wspomnieniu, słowem to, co chłonęło się własnymi zmysłami, poczyna blednąć, oddalać się i zacierać – przysłonięte ważnością ścisłych cyfr, niezbitych faktów, dostojnych sądów specjalistów. Powstaje obraz, być może prawdziwy, lecz pozbawiony barwy, dźwięku i woni. Niechaj więc pozostaną zamknięte wrota, wystarcza mi to moje, własne, krótkie spojrzenie przez... dziurkę od klucza" (Koehler 6).

¹³³ "Zanim nasze stopy dotknęły po raz pierwszy ziemi indyjskiej, przyrzekliśmy sobie, że będziemy patrzeć na ten osobliwy świat własnymi oczyma, że wyrzucimy z pamięci ubożuchny zresztą bagaż książkowych wiadomości o Indiach. Nade wszystko zaś, że będziemy się strzec banalnych komunałów w rodzaju twierdzenia "Indie to kraj kontrastów". A jednak taka właśnie jest treść tej ziemi. Kontrast tkwi tu w przyrodzie, w człowieku, w jego historii i wierzeniach. Kontrast napotyamy na każdym kroku, w każdym obrazie, przeżyciu, doznaniu" (Koehler 18).

Through most of his account, Koehler speaks in first person, only once or twice mentioning the fact that he was accompanied by two other colleagues. It is therefore puzzling that in the passage above, he suddenly switches to the plural: saying “we” and “our”. The collective resolution to “look . . . with our own eyes” and “erase the baggage of scholarly information” points to the possibility that such point of view was not inherent to the writer. It is possible that the use of the first person of plural was just a rhetorical mode to underline how “everyone” in their group agreed on this approach. It was rather common for those who were sent abroad to have an “interview” with the authorities, prior to the journey, during which they were either recruited to the secret services, asked to write a report on a person, organisation or a particular issue, or at least lectured on how to behave abroad.

Nevertheless, relying on the self and one’s own ability to observe can also lead to a trap. Koehler realises that Europeans are prone to Oriental fascinations and they are easily overtaken by a romantic melancholia. Even seeing a rather common landscape through a train window, “an occasional visitor from Europe constantly surrenders, inadvertently, to a particular atmosphere of a romantic oddness. Everything that surrounds him, seems unreal to him, like a fascinating, exotic film” (147)¹³⁴. But this dream-like state cannot last for long: “once in a while, the malicious fate gives him [the European traveller] a brutal kick” (147)¹³⁵, interrupting this reverie. Such romantic vision of the Orient goes back to eighteenth century and the fascination with the exotic, depicted in literature and art. Such images were accumulating in the European imagination, making the faraway lands seem a distant, yet appealing dream, having no direct grounding in reality. In the first words of his book, Said says: “The Orient was almost a European invention, and since antiquity had been a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (*Orientalism*, 1), adding that this Orient is now practically gone, this fantasy image is located in the past, creating a feeling of nostalgia. Ali Behdad too demonstrates how travellers long for this romantic East, the image of a “pure” Orient, so deeply ingrained in European culture (*Belated*... 50). Koehler shares this feeling, surrendering to the romantic aura, but he keeps in mind that it is not real, it is a fantasy disconnected from reality. One “brutal kick” can bring him back from these nostalgic musings.

Wojciech Żukrowski: Magic and Everyday Life of a Diplomat

¹³⁴ “Obraz to w gruncie rzeczy bardzo zwyczajny i niewiele w nim jest egzotycznych akcentów. Mimo to przygodny przybysz z Europy bezwiednie ulega tu ciągle swoistemu nastrojowi romantycznej niezwykłości. Wszystko, co go otacza, wydaje mu się nierealne, jak fascynujący, egzotyczny film” (Koehler 147).

¹³⁵ “Tymczasem złośliwy los wymierza mu od czasu do czasu brutalnego kuksańca” (Koehler 147).

While several nonfictional accounts from South Asia were available to Polish readers, perhaps the most popular depiction of India in Polish literature of the communist period came from Wojciech Żukrowski's *Kamienne tablice* [*Stone Tables*], published in 1966. It was a novel centred on the adventures of a cultural attaché of the Hungarian embassy in New Delhi. Incidentally, in 1956-1959, Żukrowski was employed in a similar position at the Polish embassy in the Indian capital. Hence, it can be assumed that his novel is based at least partly on his personal story. Here, a different text by Żukrowski is taken under scrutiny: *Wędrówki z moim Guru* [*Travels with my Guru*], published first in 1960. This collection of stories can be considered to be a nonfiction text, given that the narrator speaks in the first person, referring to his actual experiences in the diplomatic service, but it is possible that some parts of it are fictionalised. The narrator recalls meetings with various people, offers his comments on Indian culture and provides explanations for different traditions and customs. Although it can be broadly categorised as travel reportage, it is not only an account of journeys around India. Many chapters do not recount his own adventures, but unusual stories heard from people that he meets during his stay in Delhi. These stories and characters seem to inspire Żukrowski to the extent that they reappear, slightly modified, in his later novel, *Kamienne tablice*. Due to the fact that Żukrowski saw himself as a writer rather than as a journalist, it is difficult to enclose his texts only in one category. *Travels with my Guru* can be located at the crossroads of reportage, fiction and nonfiction. Nevertheless, the comments and observations that he provided in the text are worth analysing, as they represent a particular way of seeing, understanding and representing India.

Even though Żukrowski was a government employee, a member of the diplomatic service of the communist Poland, his biography shows that he was not always enthusiastic about the new, socialist system. While he was often praised by the authorities and given awards, there were periods when his works were frowned upon. For instance, between 1953 and 1956, a few of his books were indexed as too Catholic and bourgeois. Born in Krakow in 1916, he started studying Polish philology before the outbreak of the Second World War. During the war, he continued his education in secret, and was a member of the underground cultural and political resistance. He was also an officer of the Polish Home Army (AK). He continued his career in the army after the war for a few years, while starting his career as writer. In the early 1950s, Żukrowski went to Vietnam as a war correspondent. He also visited China, Laos, and India, the latter on an official posting of a cultural adviser. From early 1960s, he lived in Poland, continuing his career as a writer and as a member of various cultural organisations. He was a prolific writer, who published almost fifty books: novels, short stories, travel reportages, tales

for children, as well as an unfinished autobiography. Four of his works were filmed, and he wrote several scripts for well-known cinematographic productions, such as *Pan Wołodyjowski* (1968) and *Potop* (1974). Loyal to the communist state, he publicly condemned in 1964 the “Letter of the 34” (a protest against censorship signed by 34 leading Polish intellectuals), and in 1981, he supported General Jaruzelski and his decision to introduce Marshal Law to curb the Solidarity Movement. Allegedly, disappointed readers would return his books to the author, as a sign of protest.¹³⁶ In the years 1972-1989 he served as a member of the Polish Parliament. He died in Warsaw in 2000.

Like Koehler, Wojciech Żukrowski also had a range of expectations about India based on stories he heard as a child. After coming into contact with Indian reality, he expressed a feeling of disenchantment. Seeing a sweeper on the street, he admitted:

He [the sweeper] was spoiling the image of India that I have dreamt of as a child. Where are these clairvoyants, fakirs, sages that vanquish death? Where do these sorcerers who control all elements hide? Here, like everywhere in the world, the same battle was being fought, a struggle for a chapatti, for a handful of rice. Those [guests] uninvited to the table, without their regal gowns, were stretching out their hands, they wanted to live. (26)¹³⁷

The author’s self-mockery is visible here: he laughs at his own naiveté and ironically blames the poor man for shattering his illusions. Żukrowski is aware that behind every story from another corner of the world, embellished and exoticised, there lies a reality that is often grim. That is why, he is reluctant to accept the role of such a reporter who minutely documents every event and social phenomenon or analyses statistics and reports. He considers himself more as a writer than as a journalist.

At the end of his book, he recalls a conversation with a Bengali professor, who tries to persuade him to write only about India’s progress, arguing that “we [Indians] do not care about the truth . . . , we know it. You do not need to put a mirror in front of us, we know what we will see in it. We just want to hear some compliments” (319)¹³⁸. The professor tells Żukrowski to write about industries, steel mills, about a new dam, about the new capital of Punjab, Chandigarh, designed by Le Corbusier. “Write about all these things, in which we resemble

¹³⁶ Sources of biographical information about Żukrowski are: Lesław Bartelski, *Polscy pisarze współcześni: 1939-1991. Leksykon [Polish Contemporary Writers: 1939-1991. A Lexicon.]*, as well as Internet sources: Żukrowski’s website, zukrowski.inf.pl.

¹³⁷ “Psuł mi obraz Indii, który sobie wymarzyłem w dzieciństwie. Gdzież są ci jasnowidze, fakirzy, mędrcy, którzy pokonują śmierć? Gdzie ukrywają się czarownicy, którym posłuszne są żywyoty? Tutaj, jak na całym świecie, toczyła się ta sama uparta walka o placek ciapatów, o garstkę ryżu. Nie proszeni do stołu, bez szaty godowej wyciągali ręce, chcieli żyć” (Żukrowski 26).

¹³⁸ “Bo nam wcale nie zależy na prawdzie – mówił namiętnie profesor G., Indus z Bengalu – my ją znamy. Nie musi nam pan podsuwać zwierciadła, wiemy, co się w nim przejrzy. My pragniemy usłyszeć tylko trochę komplementów” (Żukrowski 319).

you [Europeans]” (320)¹³⁹, says the Indian academic. Żukrowski is reluctant to do so, as he finds such description simply boring: facts about progress in different fields can be found in government publications, and readers do not want stories about the “technical unification of the world” (320). The writer’s goal was different:

Writing this book, under the excuse of interesting, almost sensational stories that quench our thirst for the strange and the mysterious, I wanted to show a large chunk of everyday life. A life that unfolds slowly, broadly, in which there is place for you, a professor of a university, an excellent linguist, but also for a fakir with a trident on top of his spear. (321)¹⁴⁰

This justification is logical, as the everyday life of a people cannot be encapsulated only in facts and statistics. However, it seems that the author himself is fascinated by these peculiar stories about astrology, reincarnation, local legends and unusual events. He is drawn to the adventure and the exotic, similarly to nineteenth-century travellers who sought the “unhomely” and the thrill of the Orient, as was described by Ali Behdad. The everyday life of India is for Żukrowski particularly interesting, because observing people performing their daily chores gives the idea of repetitiveness, of time not running forward, but turning in circles. Such a vision conserves traditions and customs, and does not succumb to modernity and change. Żukrowski thrives on stories where the real meets the surreal, the facts are distorted by popular emotions and beliefs. Whether he describes a boy kidnapped by tigers and found in the jungle by his family years later (a similarity with Mowgli comes to mind), or the ghost of a dead child troubling a tailor’s shop, he tries to keep the readers in suspense, keeping possible rational explanation to himself until the end of the story. Nevertheless, the line dividing a truthful report and a tale is blurred – the reader can suspect Żukrowski of a certain *licentia poetica*: to embellish and to fantasise. It is not difficult for the author to make his stories seem credible, because, according to the popular belief, in the Orient everything is possible.

Jerzy Putrament: Two Trips to India of a Communist Official

Like Wojciech Żukrowski, Jerzy Putrament is a particularly interesting figure to analyse as a travel writer. Indeed, he performed many functions: he was a communist party activist, a writer and a public figure. He held a high rank in the communist hierarchy, serving as a diplomat, as a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and as a deputy to the Parliament. For many years, he was the president of the Polish Writers’ Association, which

¹³⁹ “Niech pan pokazuje to wszystko, w czym jesteśmy do was podobni...” (Żukrowski 319).

¹⁴⁰ “Próbowałem, pisząc tę książkę, pod pozorem ciekawych, prawie sensacyjnych historyjek, zaspokajając nasz głód spraw dziwnych, tajemniczych, pokazać szmat powszedniego życia, leniwie się toczącego, rozległego, gdzie jest miejsce i na pana, profesora uniwersytetu, znakomitego lingwistę, i na fakira z trójzębnym ostrzem włóczni” (Żukrowski 321).

was an influential position at the time. He worked as an editor of two literary magazines, *Miesięcznik Literacki* and *Literatura*. Putrament published four volumes of poems, and around fifty books in prose, among them a few reportage texts from his travels to America, Italy, China and India. Born in 1910 in Minsk, he studied in Vilnius. His colleague at the time was Czesław Miłosz, yet to become one of the most famous Polish poets of 20th century. The fates of Putrament and Miłosz intertwined several times: before the outbreak of the war, although having different political views, they were both members of the literary group “Żagary”. In 1945, Putrament, who already started his communist career, recommended Miłosz for a foreign post. He did not know at the time that he was unintentionally helping the future Noble-Prize-winner to leave the country and live in exile. Miłosz worked for some time at the Polish embassy in Washington DC, but the authorities begin to doubt his political loyalty and decided move him to Paris. Putrament served as ambassador in Paris just before Miłosz’s transfer to the French capital and most of his staff continued to be employed at the mission when Miłosz arrived. The writer thus knew very well the two faces of Putrament, the pre-war and the post-war ones, and after defecting to the West, depicted him in his study of intellectuals under communism, called *Zniewolony umysł* [*The Captive Mind*] (1953).

The figure of Gamma – the “Slave of History” – can quite easily be associated with Putrament, although it is an allegory of a particular type of intellectual involvement with communism. Miłosz specifically avoids using real names and chooses nicknames instead, so that his description of minds captivated by the New Faith gains a more universal meaning. He pictures young Gamma as a somewhat brutish, opinionated character, with a loud voice and nationalist sympathies (98). He abhors Putrament’s anti-Semitism, displayed during the tense period of university life in pre-war Vilnius. In Miłosz’s recollection, Putrament – rather mediocre as a poet – had great personal ambitions, and communism was a way to make them come true. Czesław Miłosz explains Putrament’s attitude by the fact that he originated from a mixed, Polish-Russian family from a provincial town, and after coming to study in Vilnius, he was desperate to “catch up” (99), to feel equal to his colleagues. Even later in life, according to Miłosz, Putrament tried to play a game with his Western European acquaintances, pretending to be worldly and liberal. In fact, he was one of the most loyal members of the communist system, even though the communist authorities exiled his family to the camps in the polar regions of the USSR (107).

He often displayed a patronising and superior attitude, which also manifested during his travels.

The pleasures he [Gamma] got out of traveling were not, it seems, overly refined. He had little appreciation for architecture and art; he had no great curiosity about patterns of life in different

civilizations. Had it been otherwise, he would have been a better writer, Travel for him was a pleasant way of killing time and of satisfying the youthful ambitions of a former provincial. (Miłosz 171)

In his two accounts from India, Putrament is conscious of the fact that the readers will know his name and his position, and he mentions that he visits the country as part of an official visit (but it is usually unclear what kind of visit was it, who was organising it etc.). Its programme is set beforehand: meetings with officials, representatives of the Indian communist parties or cultural institutions, and Poles working in India are predictably an essential part of it. Putrament presents himself as someone for whom travel knows no limits and is a rather mundane experience. He is far from enthusiastic exclamations, present in other accounts on India. His approach is sober, ironic, and even cynical at times.

His first account analysed here, *Cztery strony świata* [*Four corners of the world*] (1963), features four journeys, to Morocco, Scandinavia (Norway and Finland), Algeria, and India. Putrament was participating in the session of the World Peace Council and took this opportunity to travel around the Subcontinent. The second, *Na drogach Indii* [*On the Roads of India*] (1967), is exclusively about another, more extensive visit to India, during which he visits Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Mumbai, and Kerala.

Jerzy Putrament travelled to various countries, but he lacked the relative independence of a reporter: the journey was always planned, filled with meetings and official visits. Nevertheless, as a representative of cultural institutions, he also visited monuments and sites popular among regular tourists. In his reportage *Cztery strony świata*, he admits that his understanding of a foreign culture is only cursory:

None of these journeys was “travel for the sake of travelling”, hence the fragmentary descriptions and the lack of depth. But one can “deepen” when he/she is not moving. Since I was in movement, I wanted to note the unique impressions, especially the visual ones. I would like the reader to experience at least to a small degree what I have seen, heard, and admired in these four, very different corners of the world. (*Cztery... 5*)¹⁴¹

Indeed, his book offers a fleeting glance through places very different from one another: North Africa, Scandinavia, India, and Mongolia. As secretary general, and later vice-president of the Polish Writers' Union (closely linked with the communist party), he was one of the creators of the new socialist realist cultural life. Nevertheless, his travel accounts are not particularly

¹⁴¹ “Żadna z tych podróży nie była ‘podróżą dla podróży’, stąd fragmentaryczność opisu i brak tak zwanego pogłębienia. Ale ‘pogłębiać’ można nie ruszając się z miejsca. Ponieważ się ruszałem, chciałem notować niepowtarzalne wrażenia, wzrokowe przede wszystkim. Chciałbym, aby czytelnik choćby w jakiejś części przeżył to, co widziałem, czego słuchałem, czym się zachwycałem w tych czterech stronach świata.” (Putrament, *Cztery... 5*).

political – in fact, his frequent use of French idioms and proverbs would probably be considered as too “bourgeois” if found in another writer’s text.

Even though Putrament is somewhat aware of the clichés about “exotic” cultures, he sometimes adopts a rather Orientalist perspective. He admits:

All of us have a certain vision of the exotic, in general of the “Easternness”, of “the South”. I was wandering around the bazaars of Marrakesh, I was in Alexandria, Istanbul, I was roaming around Shanghai and Canton, and everywhere I could find some confirmation of my image of the Orient. But only here [in Old Delhi] I know that I am in the middle of it, at its heart. (*Four... 92*)¹⁴².

This quote demonstrates how vast the term “Orient” is. To this Polish traveller, the Orient ranges from North Africa to China, encompassing all the lands to the South and to the East of Europe (excluding perhaps Equatorial and South Africa). It does not only refer to the Orient delineated by Said, who focussed on North Africa and Middle East, or – in other words – on Orientalism as “the Anglo-French-American experience of the Arabs and Islam” (*Orientalism*, 1978: 17). Putrament includes also China – a country that did not experience European colonisation. Although he visited the Muslim countries of North Africa, central to Said’s analysis of Orientalist discourse, it is Old Delhi that constitutes the “heart” of the Orient for the Polish writer. He describes the chaos, the movement, the variety of people and means of transportation in a truly Orientalist manner. However, in the next section, he becomes self-conscious. He asks a rhetorical question, so frequently raised by every travel writer:

How to represent this unusual, amazing and terrifying diversity of this world? I do not like my first reportage: between Nowogrodzka [in Warsaw] and New Delhi one cannot feel any barrier, any leap. But then everything, just everything here is different, incomparable. (*Cztery... 97*)¹⁴³

The tone of his first book is more positive and optimistic, with a feeling of genuine interest in the Indian culture. However, in the book written following his second visit, *Na drogach Indii*, Putrament is overall less enthusiastic. At times, he cannot hide his excitement at the thought of an exotic adventure, for instance during his visit to Jaipur including an elephant ride to the Amber fort. But he soon rectifies himself and describes his excitement as “juvenile”. In a similarly self-aware manner, he admits: “Whether you want it or not, I still see India through *Jungle Book*” (*Na drogach... 53*). Nevertheless, the accumulation of adjectives such as

¹⁴² “Każdy z nas ma jakąś wizję egzotyki, w ogóle ‘wschodniości’, czy ‘południa’. Krążyłem po rynkach Marrakeszu, byłem w Aleksandrii, w Stambule, szwendałem się po Szanghaju, po Kantonie, wszędzie coś z moich wyobrażeń o Oriencie znajdowało potwierdzenie. Ale dopiero tutaj wiem, że znalazłem się w jego środku, jego sercu.” (Putrament, *Cztery... 91-92*).

¹⁴³ “Jakże oddać tę niezwykłą, zachwycającą i przerażającą odmienność tego świata? Nie podoba mi się pierwszy reportaż: między Nowogrodzką a Nowym Delhi nie wyczujesz tam żadnego progę, żadnego przeskoku. A przecież wszystko jest tutaj inne, nieporównywalne.” (Putrament, *Cztery... 6-7*).

“horrible”, “dreadful”, or “ugly” gives the impression of a generally negative reception of the visited culture. Putrament is often ironic, whether talking about the Indian idea of tolerance or about the local film industry: “Our cinematography should not be losing sleep . . . The Indians will not threaten it any time soon” (24)¹⁴⁴. There is an increased sense of superiority in his account.

One explanation for this change of attitude is due to the change of India’s political course. During Putrament’s first visit, in early 1960s, there was still hope among communists that India will become more socialist, eventually joining the Soviet side of the Cold War divide. However, after Nehru’s death in 1964, India changed its political course and – as Putrament observes, turned towards the right (*Na drogach...* 186-187). Obviously, the writer, member of the political establishment of communist Poland, laments over this fact and in the concluding chapter of his book demonstrates how deplorable the consequences of such shift are, and how they might worsen in future (*Na drogach...* 194-195). Finally, Putrament claims that since the good memories always outshine the bad ones, he has to actively remind himself of the bad ones too:

From this series of images, I tried to faithfully reconstruct all that was shocking, wild, and inhumane, and to recreate it from my own memories, unearth it from beneath the beautiful pictures. I should never forget the great misery of half a billion people, and pass on at least a part of my anxiety to the reader. (*Na drogach...* 203)¹⁴⁵

Hence, Putrament writes his book with a mission. The most apparent goal of that mission is to represent India, give a full picture of its beauty and its misery. But perhaps an equally important goal is to convey a political message to the Polish readers. By criticising Indian politicians for stepping away from socialism and presenting the apparently negative consequences of this decision, he warns the Polish readers against doing the same. He seems to suggest that there is no other way than to be socialist – capitalism will only lead to poverty and general downfall.

2. Reporters on a Mission

“Mission” is indeed a key word in the discussions on travel reportage from 1950s, 60s and 70s. In the period of Thaw after Stalin’s death in 1953, when Khrushchev denounced the former leader and began de-Stalinization, Soviet Bloc’s relations with other countries

¹⁴⁴ “Wyszliśmy. Nasza kinematografia może spać spokojnie. Hindusi nieprędko nam zagrożą.” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 24).

¹⁴⁵ “Wszystko, co w tej serii obrazków było przejmujące, dzikie, nieludzkie, starałem się wiernie odtworzyć z własnych wspomnień, odkopać spod sterty pięknych obrazów, abym nigdy nie zapomniał wielkiej krzywdy pół miliarda ludzi i aby choć cząstkę własnego niepokoju zasiał w duszy czytelnika.” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 203).

improved. Khrushchev himself visited China, Yugoslavia and even United States (1959). In his speech on the great role of Soviet literature from 8 March 1963, Khrushchev encouraged writers and journalists to travel to foreign countries since “it is necessary for Soviet writers to see with their own eyes how other people live” (Balina 261). However, that mobility had to be very well controlled, so that the confrontation with the outside world does not lead the travellers to question the world inside the Soviet Bloc. The events in USSR influenced the situation in Poland too. It became easier to go abroad and newspapers editors were more eager to send their journalists on foreign journeys. Among reporters that visited India in these three decades were: Ryszard Kapuściński, Jerzy Ros, Wiesław Górnicki, Janusz Gołębiowski, Wojciech Giełżyński and Jerzy Chociłowski. Kapuściński never published a book on his journey to India, he only reminisces about it, nearly half-a-century later, in *Travels with Herodotus* (2004). His colleagues, however, decided to describe their journeys, and these reportages are a particularly interesting document of how India was perceived at the time by a visitor from socialist Poland.

Jerzy Ros: A Socialist Idealist

Jerzy Ros (1919-1997) travelled to India in early 1950s and published the account of his journey, *Indyjskie wędrówki* [*Indian Wanderings*] in 1957. Apart from his travel reportage, Ros wrote several books, some reportages of socialist transformation in Poland in 1950s, but also a fictionalized Viking mythology, and a few books for children, featuring tales from around the world. Following the events of March 1968 and the ensuing anti-Semitic campaign, Ros left Poland in September 1969 together with his family, settling in Tel-Aviv. He lived there for several years, worked as a university lecturer at Tel-Aviv University, and in 1986 joined his sons in United States of America. He published a collection of short stories, *Uśmiech rekina* (1989) and occasionally wrote newspaper articles for various media. He died in 1997¹⁴⁶.

A well-known writer of the time, Marek Hłasko, mentions Ros in 1955, in one of his editorials for *Po Prostu* magazine, referring to him as an associate reporter of the *Życie Warszawy* daily. Hłasko praises Ros, calling him a “true journalist”, as opposed to the “idiotic writers of the interwar”, and admires his ability to put together facts in a telling way (Szczygieł, *100/XX... 1*: 672). Indeed, Ros complied with the aesthetics of socialism, describing workers of a steel mill near Częstochowa (*Stalowe źródła siły* [*Steel sources of power*], 1952), and revisiting the places described by a pre-war journalist, Konrad Wrzos, to demonstrate how

¹⁴⁶ I am very grateful to Simon Ros, for sharing with me the biographical information on his father (email exchange in August 2018).

much has changed for the better with the new system (*Konfrontacje [Confrontations]*, 1954). In the piece selected for the anthology of Polish reportage, Ros finds pre-war workers who wrote letters to the directors of a steel mill, begging for employment. He compares the conditions that they have now to the previous ones in order to demonstrate the superiority of the socialist system. Mariusz Szczygieł concludes that “[i]t is hard to say whether it was socialist realism that employed Jerzy Ros to its service, or did he employ himself” (671)¹⁴⁷. In spite of this perhaps somewhat excessive ideological commitment, Szczygieł finds that there was something refreshing even in the way Ros wrote about steel industry. Similarly, in his travel reportage from India, Ros does not avoid clearly ideological comments, but in spite of that, his account is lively and insightful. First, he focuses on the progress of his journey, describing the cruise on a large ship, “Batory”, as well as the sites that he visits upon his arrival to India.

The journey starts in Gdynia, then the ship collects more passengers from other European cities, and later it passes near the shores of Egypt and goes along the Arabian Peninsula to finally arrive to Mumbai. It is clear that the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea is already something of a culture shock for the reporter. It is his first meeting with the Orient, so far only imagined. Jerzy Ros depicts the bazaars and the sites of Egypt, accentuating the strangeness and the exoticism of the scenery, the “unusual” clothing and jewellery, the “strange” physiognomy of the people, the “Eastern” culture of trading. At the same time, the tone of his account is more political than the one of his predecessors: Ros often criticises Western colonialism and imperialism, praises the communist movement, as well as the achievements of socialism in Poland. Arriving in India, Ros travels around the country, visiting the main cities, like Mumbai and Kolkata, monuments and tourist destinations. He offers some background explanations on Indian history, society and politics, but he does not overload his readers with unnecessarily detailed information.

In his text, Ros appears as a rather idealistic reporter, who treats his travel to India as a professional mission. He stresses the importance of preparation before a journey: “A traveller, setting off to a journey, needs to accumulate and learn the facts that will help him better understand and study the people and the life of the country that he intends to visit. Every hour spent on learning these facts *before* the journey will pay of hundredfold *during* the journey”

¹⁴⁷ “Trudno powiedzieć, czy to socjalizm zaprzął Rosa do służby, czy to on zaprzął się sam.” (Szczygieł, *100/XX... 1*: 671).

(5)¹⁴⁸. Indeed, in the first few chapters of his book, Ros, while describing his long journey to India by sea, mentions various basic facts about India to prepare the reader – just as he prepares himself. Approaching India, he traces a history of Polish travel to the subcontinent, starting from Caspar, or Gaspar, da Gama, a Polish Jew who was a member of the court of Bijapur at the time of the arrival of Vasco da Gama. Ros tells this story with a certain pride, underlining that both Caspar and the Russian tradesman, Nikitin, came to India earlier than the Portuguese colonisers. Given the Cold War context, this fact was an element of competition between Western and Eastern Europe, a somewhat triumphant “we-got-here-first” type of statement. Indeed, “one of the enduring appeals of travel . . .”, says Diane Koenker, “is the drive to escape from collective norms and patterns, to discover new territories, new experiences, to be the first to encounter a mountain peak, a waterfall, a hidden lake, or an unknown ethnic group” (659). Ros’ emphasis on the fact that Eastern Europeans, first a Russian and then a Pole, were the ones to “discover” India, seems to reflect a quasi-colonial ambition to conquer new territories, although neither Nikitin nor Gaspar da Gama were actually colonisers. Nevertheless, the race for primacy in every discipline between the Eastern Bloc and the West, and a certain national pride of the Polish reporter, would make Ros stress these facts.

At the same time, by naming Poles travelling to India over a span of a few centuries, Ros presents himself as a continuator of such glorious traditions. This adds prominence and magnitude to his own journey. As a matter of fact, the reporter sees his mission as the one of an educator and cultural guide, explaining the “reality” of India to his readers:

India should be accepted with all its living inventory and all its baggage of philosophy, particular customs, beliefs and superstitions. The elbow [traditional measure] with which we are used to measure the European, as well as our own, Polish affairs, is oftentimes useless here, so I decided to leave it behind, on the ship. The problems of the Great Peninsula [Subcontinent] require their own keys. (77)¹⁴⁹

Ros understands that times have changed and India has to be seen by a different lens, devoid of Eurocentric prejudices. It is in fact a critique of the essentialist approach of the previous era, since Ros calls for understanding India in the framework of its own context, for assessing it with its own measures. Ros’ call for cultural relativism sounds surprisingly contemporary, making him seem as someone who was ahead of his times.

¹⁴⁸ “Podróżnik, nim rusza na wyprawę, zgromadzić musi i poznać te fakty, które pozwolą mu zrozumieć lepiej i lepiej poznać ludzi i życie kraju będącego celem wędrówki. I każda godzina poświęcona poznaniu tych faktów przed podróżą opłaci się stokrotnie w czasie trwania podróży.” (Ros 5).

¹⁴⁹ “Indie przyjmować trzeba z całym dobrodziejstwem inwentarza żywego i z całym bagażem filozofii, specyficznych obyczajów, wierzeń i zabobonów. Łokieć, którym przywykliśmy mierzyć europejskie i nasze, polskie sprawy, często jest tutaj bezużyteczny, toteż zdecydowałem się zostawić go na statku. Problemy Wielkiego Półwyspu wymagają własnych kluczy.” (Ros 77).

During his journey, Ros talks to people of various backgrounds: young intellectuals, communist party activists, rickshaw pullers, and even gurus. He visits monuments, modern streets of large cities, but also the poorest districts, for instance the slums of Kolkata. There, he stops his description of the city to reflect:

How different is this image from the colourful, juicy landscape, from the Bengali exotic from Kipling's tales, which I used to read at one gulp! Where is that world of tales about maharajas, elephants, fakirs, and the little Kim, who learned perceptiveness on precious stones: rubies and diamonds, topazes and jades, sapphires and opals? (186)¹⁵⁰

By contrasting the imagined riches with a very real poverty, Ros emphasises how inaccurate is the popular representation of India, and to what extent it clouds the understanding of the current condition of Indian society – especially of its poorest groups. It could be a discovery for the Polish readers, still rather uninformed about India. It may even be a disappointment: in Ros' description, the fairy tale turns to a nightmare, the shine of the gemstones is overshadowed by the grim reality of misery and deprivation.

Wiesław Górnicki: Vanquisher of the “Wretched Exotic”

Wiesław Górnicki (1931-1996) was one of the leading reporters of his times. India and Egypt are two countries described in his reportage *Podróż po garść ryżu* [*Journey for a Handful of Rice*] (1964). The well-known reporter started his journalistic career in 1949. He worked for various magazines, and ended up specialising in global affairs – he was a war correspondent in the Middle East and Indonesia, and in early 1960s left for New York, where he became a correspondent of the Polish Press Agency. Politically, he would follow the mainstream political line, however his colleagues remember instances of his insubordination. His appointment in New York was terminated because he protested against the Polish government cutting ties with Israel after the Six Days War in 1967, which resulted in a brutal anti-Semitic campaign. In his protest note that he sent to Warsaw, he said: “I simply wish to keep my hands clean in this insane affair and not to contribute even with one word to acts that fill me with terror and disgust” (qt. after Kwaśniewski). The authorities, fearing his defection, brought him back to Warsaw, where he continued his work as a journalist, in the Polish Press Agency, *Życie Warszawy* and later *Przekrój*. He continued his specialisation in international news until his career took an unexpected turn. At the beginning of 1980s, he became involved in domestic politics. He was

¹⁵⁰ “Jakże różni się ten obraz od barwnego, soczystego pejzażu, od bengalskiej egzotyki opowieści Kiplinga, które ongiś czytałem jednym tchem! Gdzież jest ten świat bajki o maharadzach, słoniach, fakirach i małym Kimie, który uczył się spostrzegawczości na szlachetnych kamieniach: rubinach i diamentach, topazach i jaspisach, szafirach i opalach?” (Ros 186).

offered the position of adviser to General Wojciech Jaruzelski who introduced martial law in 1981. Górnicki seemed flattered by this position, especially since Jaruzelski incorporated him in the military in the rank of a major. Fellow journalists remember him sporting a uniform at every occasion (Szczygieł, *100/XX... 1*: 847). His role was to write speeches for the General and act as his spokesperson. After the change of system in 1989, Górnicki stopped appearing publicly, only occasionally writing articles under a pseudonym. Before he died in 1996, he published a memoir, *Teraz już można [Now it is allowed]* (1994), in which he looked back at his career. Aside of numerous press publications, he authored more than twenty books: mostly reportages, essays, novels and two memoirs. Apart from his role in times of Jaruzelski, he is remembered as an outstanding reporter. For instance, Mariusz Szczygieł, the director of the Institute of Reportage and journalist himself, remembers that it was Górnicki's texts that inspired him to choose the profession of a reporter¹⁵¹.

Akin to reporters mentioned above, Górnicki realises that a new language is needed to describe India. Instead of the old Oriental tale, there should be emphasis on progress and development under the socialist banner. The fascination with the exotic has to end, says Górnicki, almost in a Saidian spirit:

I was coming to this country with the conviction that I will encounter here a widespread struggle with this wretched "exotic"; that I will be carried away by the momentum of the great change, the familiar clamour of debates, the fast course of fiascos and successes, a clear contour of the future in the shadows of the past, the tangle of emerging conflicts. Were we not discussing, full of impatient curiosity, the "Indian path to socialism" in the version presented by the Indian Congress Party? (...) I wanted to write about power plants and bridges, to praise spinning-mills and schools, and to relentlessly avoid all that reminds the readers in my country of the banal picture of India. I wanted to scream: there exist people, who defy the Indian "exotic"! Let's end with the maharajas and yogis! (165-166)¹⁵²

While this fervour in adopting a fresh, non-Orientalist approach is understandable, one detail attracts the reader's attention: Górnicki suddenly changes tenses, from present, used in earlier passages, to past. He says: "I wanted to write about...", "I wanted to scream..." – but did he really achieve this goal? After these declarations, the passage suddenly ends, and a completely

¹⁵¹ Source: Mariusz Szczygieł's personal webpage.

¹⁵² "Jechałem do tego kraju z przeświadczeniem, że zastanę w nim szeroki front walki z nieszczęsną 'egzotyką'; że porwie mnie patos wielkich przemian, ów dobrze mi znajomy zgiełk sporów, spieszny nurt błędów i sukcesów, wyraźny kontur przyszłości w cieniu rzeczy mijających, gmatwanina rodzących się, nowych konfliktów. Czyż nie rozprawialiśmy, pełni niecierpliwiej ciekawości, o 'indyjskiej drodze do socjalizmu' w takim właśnie wydaniu, jakie prezentuje Partia Kongresowa? Chciałem pisać o elektrowniach i mostach, sławić przędzalnie i szkoły, milczeć zawzięcie o wszystkim, co się czytelnikowi w mim kraju kojarzy z banalnym obrazem Indii. Chciałem wołać: są, którzy się targnęli na indyjską 'egzotykę'! Koniec z maharadzami i jogami!" (Górnicki 165-166)

different topic begins. Did his attempt to do away with the exotic fail? The author leaves this issue hanging, and the reader needs to evaluate by himself/herself, whether Górnicki succeeded in “defying the Indian exotic”.

In his first chapter about India, Górnicki describes with awe the riches of the nizam of Hyderabad, “reminding of the grand Eastern tales” (115), “making the wildest dream of a European jeweller seem an unimaginative dullness compared to the treasures, stored in nizam’s cellars”(115-116)¹⁵³. Finally, he appeals to the readers: “You have to admit: all 1001 nights’ tales would pale in the face of these stories [about nizam’s fortune]”(117)¹⁵⁴. These metaphors and comparisons remind of a typically Orientalist language, even though overall, Górnicki criticises the accumulation of wealth among the Indian aristocrats. In the later part of the chapter, Górnicki adopts a more ideologically correct tone, deploring the feudalism of the colonial era, the exploitation of peasants, and the changes after India’s independence that stripped the princes of large parts of their wealth. His choice of topics in his reportages from India is significant: the five chapters are devoted to 1) the nizam and the fate of Indian princes, 2) cast divisions, 3) the city development in Calcutta, Madras and Trivandrum, 4) hakims – doctors of traditional medicine, and 5) the pilgrimages to the holy city of Hardwar. It seems like a collection of rather typical issues, based on Oriental tropes – Oriental riches, castes, urban poverty, traditional medicine, religious rituals... Nevertheless, each of these chapters also leads to a reflection of a different kind: on agricultural reform, social divisions, politics, and secularism.

In his endeavour to be a travel writer of a new kind, Górnicki does not limit his visits to tourist sites, but also tries to describe modern India: the cities, the industry, the people. This is a choice made by many of the travel writers: they contrast “old” India with the “new” one. However, this approach creates a binary division between what is traditional (Eastern), and modern (Western), or uncivilised and civilised. Although Górnicki, and many of his contemporary writers, do not associate themselves with the West understood as North America and Western Europe, they have a sense of belonging to the modern, Soviet world. This socialist modernity should be exported to the Third World, Górnicki seems to suggest, so that “superstition” and “old beliefs” are eradicated. The project of “defying the exotic” becomes thus problematic: instead of giving a voice to Indians so that they can represent themselves, the socialist narrative imposes yet another model of modernity, coming from elsewhere.

¹⁵³ “zatrącająca o pyszne bajki wschodnie” (Górnicki 115); “najdziwszy sen europejskiego jubilera może być tylko pozbawioną fantazji szarzyzną w porównaniu ze skarbami, zalegającymi piwnice nizama.” (Górnicki 116).

¹⁵⁴ “Przyznajcie: wszystkie baśnie z 1001 nocy błędą wobec tych opowieści.” (Górnicki 117).

Janusz Gołębiowski: A Correspondent and His “Assessment Criteria”

While Górnicki is considered to be a classic of the post-war Polish reportage, Janusz Gołębiowski (1924–2013), also a Polish Press Agency correspondent, seems to be forgotten. According to his obituary¹⁵⁵, as a young man, he fought in the Warsaw Uprising. After the Uprising, he was taken as a prisoner of war by the Germans. When the war ended, he graduated from the Warsaw School of Economics, and became a journalist. He was posted to India, United States, and Japan.

In his book *Nadane z Delhi [Posted from Delhi]* (1966), Gołębiowski attempts at showing the whole spectrum of social and political issues. He is, however, aware that a dry description of the modern Indian industry without talking about the culture and history of the country might not only tire the readers, but also give an incomplete image. He wants to write about “everything” (6):

I came back to Delhi [after a trip out of the city] with a confusion in my head and a resolution to write about everything that happens in India: about the extreme poverty and brave attempts of getting out of it, about the work of the Indian “doctor Judymów” [a Polish symbol of sacrifice in the name of charity] and about the selfishness of some local politicians, about the economic backwardness of the country, and about the newly created islands of modern industry. This first encounter with Indian reality convinced me that in many magazines and books about this country, various aspects of this reality are exaggerated – in a positive or negative way. Drawing one’s attention only on the construction of steel mills in India creates an equally distorted view of the country, as concentrating solely on the descriptions of the masterpieces of Indian art or the mysterious practices of yogis. (6)¹⁵⁶

Announcing in the introduction his intention to cover a broad spectrum of issues, Gołębiowski undertakes an uneasy task. He realises that, and elaborates on his approach: the first chapter of the book is entitled “The assessment criteria”. It explains to the readers what is – in the author’s opinion – the image of India in Poland and in the world, how it is affected by Cold War politics, and to what extent it is true. He points out that even though India is considered by the USA as “a tool of Moscow” (10), the country still preserves strong ties with Britain, and it adopts a

¹⁵⁵ See: Gołębiowski’s obituary in *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

¹⁵⁶ “Wróciłem do Delhi z zamętem w głowie i postanowieniem pisania o wszystkim, co się dzieje w Indiach: o skrajnej nędzy i śmiałych próbach wydobywania się z niej, o pracy indyjskich ‘doktorów Judymów’ i sobkostwie niektórych miejscowych polityków, o gospodarczym zacofaniu kraju i o powstających oazach nowoczesnego przemysłu. To pierwsze zetknięcie z indyjską rzeczywistością przekonało mnie bowiem, że w wielu prasowych i książkowych relacjach z tego kraju przejawiają się poszczególne aspekty tej rzeczywistości – negatywne lub pozytywne. Skupianie uwagi wyłącznie na budowie w Indiach hut stwarza tak samo błędny obraz kraju, jak koncentrowanie się na opisach arcydzieł indyjskiej sztuki czy tajemniczych praktyk jogów.” (Gołębiowski 6)

rather neutral political stand (11). The radically leftist programmes of political parties, especially inspired by Nehru and other sympathisers of socialism, should not be taken too literally, says Gołębiowski (11). “(...) [These socialist programmes] have tarnished the old, Kiplingian image of India, but in its place they created an equally extreme image” (11)¹⁵⁷.

Gołębiowski, as a journalist seeking objectivity, seeks to present a more balanced representation of India. He says: “Still about a dozen of years ago, the most popular source of these images [of India] were the exotic books of the “Jungle Book” kind, filled with colonial overtones, or British movies about the mission of the white man on the colonised territories.” (11)¹⁵⁸. Later on, continues the journalist, due to certain “dogmatic political concepts”, the independence struggle was questioned, and only in the 1950s India was “discovered anew” as an important anti-colonial and anti-imperialist force (12). However, Gołębiowski deplors the excessive zeal in attributing radical socialist ideas to Indian politicians and warns against taking their speeches and fiery declarations out of context, while failing to inform on various negative issues taking place in India at the same time (12). As a result, another “false image” of India was created: one of a “large, revolutionary country that after breaking the bonds of the colonial domination, entered its own, fascinating way towards socialism” (12)¹⁵⁹. However, India’s reality is quite far from these opinions, says Gołębiowski, discussing various policies of the Indian government that prove its neutral position versus the capitalist/socialist divide. He also stresses the sheer size and diversity of India, which preclude any generalising statements about the country in its whole. This is the first of five criteria of assessment that Gołębiowski lists as key issues to keep in mind when writing about India. The following four are: India is a country of a large-scale poverty, but with stark contrasts in the access to material goods; so far it has not had any astounding economic successes, but it is going forward; its development is uneven in a temporal, spatial and sector-oriented sense; India is a neutral country, not aligned with any of the blocs, but its politics remain changeable and lack consistency (19-20). The author presents these assumptions in a matter-of-factly way, without dwelling on cultural aspects, but effectively, his approach challenges clichés, prejudices, as well as propagandist formulas. In his view, society is not homogeneous, political affiliations are not static, and development is not linear. As a result, even though perhaps he does not remain fully in line with the ideological

¹⁵⁷ “Brane zbyt dosłownie programy te zatarły dawny, kiplingowski obraz Indii, ale na jego miejsce stworzyły wizerunek równie krańcowy.” (Gołębiowski 11).

¹⁵⁸ “Jeszcze kilkanaście lat temu najpopularniejszym źródłem tych wyobrażeń były egzotyczne, nie pozbawione kolonialnego podtekstu książki w rodzaju *Księgi Dżungli* Kiplinga lub angielskie filmy o posłannictwie białego człowieka na terenach skolonizowanych.” (Gołębiowski 11).

¹⁵⁹ “Był to wizerunek wielkiego rewolucyjnego kraju, który po zrzuceniu pęt kolonialnego panowania wkroczył na własną, fascynującą drogę do socjalizmu.” (Gołębiowski 12).

goals of presenting India as an unquestionable socialist ally, he manages to form a new viewpoint. This viewpoint is far from an unquestionable belief in progress, whether understood as the evolutionist concept of stages of civilisation or as the Marxist idea of development. Gołębiowski's goal is to stay balanced, but as the analysis of his text in the following chapter will demonstrate, it is not always easy to maintain this declared neutralism.

Wojciech Giełżyński: Educator of the Readers

Wojciech Giełżyński (1930-2015) was born into a journalistic family: his father was editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Ludowa* daily. Already as a 16-year-old, Giełżyński published his texts in his father's newspaper, and after graduating in economics, he became a full-time reporter of the sports section of *Dookoła Świata* magazines. He was a sportsman himself, and even won a championship of Poland in rowing. He continued his journalistic career, publishing in various magazines and specialising in foreign affairs. As he confessed, between 1957 and 1964 he was a secret collaborator of the SB – security service, since it was a condition for his journeys abroad. Later, Giełżyński joined the opposition. During the martial law, he started writing for the underground press, and after the end of communism in 1989, he worked for the independent *Tygodnik Solidarność*. After retiring from active reporting, he taught journalism to students. Throughout his career he visited 85 countries, and wrote around 60 books on a wide range of topics. He is one of the best known Polish reporters, but – as Mariusz Szczygieł points out – radically different from Kapuściński: while the latter would always be close to literature, Giełżyński focused on facts (Szczygieł, *100/XX... 2*: 551). Kapuściński looked for a synthesis, or even for a metaphor, while Giełżyński wanted to document the events and their context as well as he could.

In Wojciech Giełżyński's *Kraj świętych krów i biednych ludzi* [*Land of Holy Cow and Poor People*] (1977), the narrator does not ruminate over how he should describe India – instead, he turns to the readers. He lectures them on how another culture should be perceived, using plural pronouns in the imperative mode, such as *wystrzegajmy się* – “we should avoid”, or *nie mówmy* – “we should not say”. Similarly, he prescribes the readers to learn to understand others, using the impersonal modal verb “trzeba” (“one ought to”). Surely, this plural form includes himself too, but it extends the responsibility of using a particular language – or avoiding certain statements – to a collective. His individual voice is thus only a part of a larger discourse. Giełżyński adopts the role of a teacher, who imparts his experiences and instructs his potential followers how to behave when visiting India. For instance, after describing Indian

customs as strange, Giełżyński declares, almost with guilt, that “(...) we should avoid such generalisations, we should not say at once: what a backward, unenlightened country!” (13)¹⁶⁰.

This kind of statements, admonishing the readers or, more generally, the public opinion, appear frequently in Giełżyński’s book. Nevertheless, in his own descriptions of India he frequently uses generalisations and stereotypes. As many of his predecessors, he describes cow worship, the belief in astrology, and various customs that seem unusual to him. He is, however, conscious that there is a different way of reading India. That is why, he also expresses support and praise to the communist rule in Bengal, or emphasises India’s progress. Once again, the old is contrasted with the new, the spiritual with the material and the irrational with the rational, even though this is precisely what Giełżyński claims should be avoided. “Fakirs, holy cows, astrologers. What a strange country, full of paradoxes and contrasts! This last phrase is rather unwise, but it is often used about India.” (17-18)¹⁶¹.

Finally, Giełżyński concludes that every culture has its own particularities, which are difficult to understand for people in other cultures. He believes that this cultural autonomy should be respected – even if it contradicts one’s own values:

. . . [I]nstead of joking about customs, ways of life, beliefs of other nations, one should learn about them. Only then it turns out how rich is the treasury of other nations’ cultures. And only then, when one knows the source of the existing differences, it is possible to understand why certain people in the world live this way, and others another way – and each of them considers their way of life as the most appropriate. However, to us, people from Europe, especially from socialist countries, from Poland, it is difficult to accept many customs observed there. Above all, it is difficult to close our eyes to social relations, so very different from our own. (20)¹⁶²

Giełżyński calls for a better understanding of cultures and more respect towards otherness, but he recognises that there are limits to such tolerance. These limits result from the socialist ideology which – in the author’s opinion – makes travellers from Poland more sensitive to social issues in India than other Europeans. It is a rather naïve statement, attributing social empathy only to citizens of the Eastern Bloc. Surely, the Soviet Union assisted India in various

¹⁶⁰ “Ale wystrzegajmy się podobnych uogólnień, nie mówmy zaraz: jaki to zacofany, jaki nieoświecony kraj!” (Giełżyński 13).

¹⁶¹ “Fakirzy, święte krowy, astrologowie. Jakiż dziwny kraj, pełen paradoksów i kontrastów! Niemądre jest to ostatnie zdanie, chociaż często tak właśnie się mówi o Indiach. Dla Hindusów wiele naszych zwyczajów jest tak samo ‘dziwaczkich’, ‘śmiesznych’ i ‘niepojętych’.” (Giełżyński 17-18).

¹⁶² “Każda kultura ma swoje osobliwości, niezrozumiałe dla ludzi wychowanych w odmiennych kulturach. Dlatego, zamiast żartować ze zwyczajów, ze sposobu bycia, z wierzeń innych narodów, trzeba je poznawać, trzeba się ich uczyć. Wtedy dopiero okazuje się, jak bogata jest skarbnica kultur tych narodów. I wtedy dopiero, gdy zna się źródła istniejących odmienności, rozumie się, dlaczego jedni ludzie na świecie żyją tak, inni inaczej – i każdy uważa swój sposób życia za najwłaściwszy. A jednak nam, ludziom z Europy, zwłaszcza z krajów socjalistycznych, z Polski, trudno przystać na wiele zwyczajów, które się tam spotyka. Trudno przede wszystkim przymknąć oczy na stosunki społeczne, tak bardzo sprzeczne z naszymi ideałami.” (Giełżyński 20).

areas, offering scholarships and technical support, but also much aid was coming from Europeans and Americans. Nevertheless, Giełżyński used this opportunity to present the communist countries as superior to the West.

Jerzy Chociłowski: A Reporter Overwhelmed by India

Although he graduated from the department of law at the Warsaw University, Jerzy Chociłowski (1933-) worked mostly as a journalist and as a translator. He was a reporter for various newspapers, in particular *Polityka* and *Rzeczpospolita*, and he served as editor-in-chief of the *Kontynenty* magazine, specialising in travel reportage. In his nonfictional writing, he focussed mostly on Asia, in particular he authored reportages from Thailand, Vietnam and India. In later years, Chociłowski also published a few other works: a book presenting the unusual personalities of the Polish Second Republic, short stories and limericks. His reportage from India, *Indyjska szarada* [*The Indian Charade*] was published in 1977, and as Henryk Sobieski¹⁶³ suggests in the introduction to the book, it is composed of close-up images of a huge country that is India (5). Indeed, at the very beginning of his account Chociłowski mentions the difficulty of describing India:

Coming to India is like being thrown into deep waters, but not knowing how to swim. Some would immediately sink to the bottom, others somehow manage to stay on the surface, choking and gagging, constantly getting undercut, submerged by the wave, pulled into whirlpools. And even those who will, after a period of time, master somehow the art of swimming – will notice, that the shore that they want to reach is a grey, blurry line on the horizon. There is probably no other place in the world that would be defined as often as India, and at the same time, that would so easily slip out the frames of those definitions. Nevertheless, such definitions do not cease to be produced, because they are provoked by the intriguing matter of this country, shiny and brisk, and then dark and immobile, simultaneously unchangeable and diverse. (Chociłowski 10-11)¹⁶⁴

The reader is faced with an impossible challenge: whatever he or she will come to understand about India, it will be a fleeting and impermanent knowledge. In this way, the reader shares the powerlessness and perplexity of the author. Chociłowski continues: “[t]alking about India, one

¹⁶³ Henryk Sobieski was a diplomat in the communist period, he worked for years at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and served as ambassador in Venezuela and Angola.

¹⁶⁴ “Przyjechać do Indii, to trochę tak, jakby być ciśniętym na głęboką wodę, a nie umieć pływać. Jedni idą od razu na dno, drudzy utrzymują się jakoś na powierzchni, ale krztusząc się i zachłystując, podtapiani nieustannie, zalewani falą, wciągani w wiry. I nawet ci, którzy po pewnym czasie opanują jako tako sztukę pływania – dostrzegą, że brzeg, do którego zmierzają jest szarą, zamazaną nitką na horyzoncie. Nie ma chyba miejsca na świecie, które byłoby tak często jak Indie definiowane i które by zarazem z taką łatwością wyslizgiwało się z ram tych definicji. Definicje te jednakże nie przestają być produkowane, prowokuje je bowiem intrygująca materia tego kraju, błyszcząca i ruchliwa, to znów ciemna i nieruchoma, jednocześnie niezmienna i różnorodna.” (Chociłowski 10-11).

can prove everything and deny everything, always maintaining the semblance of reason. It is a land without truth, but also a land of uncountable truths, which, like nowhere else, are subjected to the pressure of relativity theory” (11)¹⁶⁵. He realises that what makes the assessment of India difficult are the clichés that foreigners bring along and that “at the first sight, seem to maliciously find confirmation”¹⁶⁶. The reporter says that these clichés vary across countries, but have certain common points, for instance poverty and “Oriental splendour”, “holy cows”, women wearing saris, snake-charmers, elephants, fakirs, baths in the Ganges and burning the dead on stakes (12). “The Taj Mahal in Agra – the “eighth wonder of the world” and crowds of beggars...”¹⁶⁷, enumerates Chociłowski. As a result, “an average tourist returns home with a baggage of such clichés, registered on the films of memory and on the rolls of videos. Some time is needed for the plaster of stereotypes to fall off, unveiling the fragments of the great Indian fresco”¹⁶⁸ (12). He admits that he, too, was visiting Delhi in a rush, like a tourist, and only later, he could experience more varied images of India, when travelling through different regions of the country. Nevertheless, he remains aware that it is difficult for a foreigner to fully understand India, as one of his Indian interlocutors told him (14).

Chociłowski tells the story of Wanda Dynowska Umadevi, a Polish woman who lived in India for years. Every time someone asked her about her adopted country, she used to respond: “it depends where” or “it depends when”, because “all that can be true in one place of India can be false in another” (14)¹⁶⁹. Chociłowski mentions various attempts (mostly unsuccessful) of other journalists to describe India and the difficulties they faced. Finally, he concludes:

But despite of all these – objective and subjective obstacles that we encounter when trying to decipher the Indian Sphinx - there are things that strike our eyes more than others. And we will perhaps not be mistaken if we say that there are two most striking facts: the might of Hinduism, or more specifically, of the caste system, and poverty. Let us add right away, that there is something like a feedback between these two phenomena. (16)¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ “Mówiąc o Indiach można wszystko udowodnić i wszystkiemu zaprzeczyć, zachowując zawsze pozory racji. Jest to ziemia bez prawdy, a także ziemia niezliczonych prawd, które jak nigdzie indziej poddawane są ciśnieniu teorii względności.” (Chociłowski 11).

¹⁶⁶ “które na pierwszy rzut oka zdają się złośliwie sprawdzać” (Chociłowski 12).

¹⁶⁷ “Tadž Mahal w Agrze – ‘ósmym cud świata’ i gromady żebraków...” (Chociłowski 12).

¹⁶⁸ “I przeciętny turysta wraca do domu z bagażem takich właśnie kalkomani, zarejestrowanych na kliszach pamięci i na błonach filmów. Trzeba trochę czasu, żeby zaczął się osypywać tynk stereotypów, odsłaniając fragmenty wielkiego indyjskiego fresku.” (Chociłowski 12)

¹⁶⁹ “to, co w jednym miejscu Indii jest prawdą w innym może być kłamstwem” (Chociłowski 14).

¹⁷⁰ “Ale pomimo wszystkich – obiektywnych i subiektywnych przeszkód, na jakie napotykamy chcąc rozszyfrować indyjskiego sfinksa – są przecież rzeczy, rzucające się w oczy bardziej od innych. I nie popełnimy chyba błędu, jeśli powiemy, że najbardziej uderzające wśród tych faktów są dwa: potęga hinduizmu, a właściwie systemu kastowego, oraz nędza. Dodajmy od razu, że istnieje coś w rodzaju sprzężenia zwrotnego między tymi dwoma zjawiskami.” (Chociłowski 16)

Towards the end of his introduction, Chociłowski quotes E. M. Forster's *Passage to India*, saying that India is not a promise, but a bait (31). Strangely, the reporter seems unaware of the colonial context of Forster's take on India (31). The reporter warns the readers that what they will find in the book are just subjective impressions, which only slightly touch upon India (31). According to Chociłowski, India is "too complicated of a place on earth for one to talk and write about it without appropriate humility"¹⁷¹. Furthermore, "if here and there I happen to draw a picture that does not seem idyllic, it is not because I have been looking into a distorting mirror for too long, but in a friendly attempt to demonstrate how deeply is India immersed in its difficult complexity" (31)¹⁷². Therefore, declaratively, the reporter's take on India is a very uncertain one, he keeps excusing himself to the readers about the superficiality of his account in the face of India's complexity. However, in his reportages, he is not afraid of making bold, often generalising statements. What differentiates them from his predecessors is that he is less ideologically-driven and rarely professes openly political statements.

The biographies of the authors of reportages analysed here reflect the broader history of socialist Poland. While some are better known, others are now forgotten. Although their writing may bear several similarities, their life trajectories are widely different. Putrament joined the communist party early in his life and was one of those who contributed to imposing this system in the country. He was personally involved in shaping the cultural life in socialism and remained a Party member till the end of his life. Ros, who seemingly embraced the new system after the war and identified with socialist ideology, was betrayed by that very system only because of his Jewish origins and forced to emigrate. Perhaps the most interesting is the political stance of Wiesław Górnicki, who was a staunch communist, but during the anti-Semitic campaign of March 1968, he opposed the hate speech. At the same time, while many of his colleagues joined the ranks of the opposition, he became more radical and accepted the position of Wojciech Jaruzelski's spokesman. Giełżyński, on the contrary, although having a history of collaborating with the secret services, later became close to Solidarity movement and was one of the journalists present at the Gdańsk shipyard. These are just the best-known examples: not having enough information about the authors, it is impossible to assess their political views in their entirety. Nevertheless, the historical and political context is important in the reading of their works. Their reportages cannot be read literally, without the necessary assumption of the censor's interference and of political pressures of the time. That is why, this book focuses more

¹⁷¹ "miejsca na ziemi nazbyt skomplikowanego, by można było o nim mówić i pisać bez należytą pokory" (Ch

¹⁷² "Jeżeli zaś tu i tam przydarzyło mi się naszkicować obrazek, który nie tchnie sielanką, to nie dlatego, że się zapatrzyłem w krzywe lustro, ale z życzliwej chęci unaocznienia jak głęboko pogrążone są Indie w swej trudnej złożoności." (Chociłowski 31)

on the texts rather than on the biographies of the authors. Obviously, Wiesław Górnicki as a reporter's persona present in the text as narrator and protagonist is not the same as the real Górnicki, whose actual motivations and political views can only be subject of speculation. Even though reportage as a genre is part of the larger branch of nonfiction, it does not mean that it can be read merely as a collection of facts or news. The subjective views of the narrator are not expressed in a vacuum, they are also a product of their times, as well as their political and historical context.

3. Reportage in Communism

The shape of the media landscape in communist Poland was tightly connected to the political events in the country. After the first period of eliminating ideological opponents and concentration of power in the hands of the Polish United Workers Party, periods of relative stability were intertwined with moments of deep crisis. Reporters, and the press in general, were particularly sensitive to any movements of the political pendulum. Since all independent media were shut down, the public ones, tightly controlled by the Party and the censorship, could only be as free as the system allowed it. Journalists were the first to be called for help if the leaders wanted to strengthen their position, but also the first to be let go in times of difficulty. Nevertheless, they cannot be considered merely as a professional group. Much depended on each journalist, reporter or writer as an individual. On his or her integrity, honesty, independence, personal ambition, as well as many other factors shaping their decisions. The following sections demonstrate the situation of intellectuals, and the press in particular, in different periods of the communist rule. These sections attempt at showing both a story of the press as a whole, as well as individual stories of particular journalists or writers.

3.1. After the war: The Communist Concentration of Power

Those intellectuals who survived the war in Poland, started to organise the cultural life on the ruins of the destroyed cities. Many of them were struggling with traumas of occupation, Nazi and Soviet camps, and death of their loved ones. The culture of the pre-war Poland could not be recreated: there was a different political system, numerous artists and intellectuals died in the war or were exterminated in Nazi and Soviet camps. The Jewish community was decimated, many of its representatives perished or escaped abroad. Generally, Polish artistic and intellectual elites, of any origin, were in large part scattered around the world and uncertain whether they should return to Soviet-dominated Poland. Those pre-war leftists who found themselves in Poland, even those who suffered from the Soviets, often embraced the new

system. But they were not the only ones – many intellectuals decided to work within the socialist framework and to be compliant with the authorities. If they wanted to continue writing or creating, there was no choice left: leaving the country was difficult, and the refusal to take part in communist cultural life could have dire consequences. Indeed, the communist authorities from 1945 onwards tried – and succeeded – to monopolise cultural life.

The media were an important element of this concentration of power. Socialist Poland was to follow the Soviet model. Lenin saw the press as a key factor in ideological revolution and as an extension of the Communist Party. According to Tomasz Goban-Klas, after 1922 Soviet Russia introduced a unique media system, in which Party press became state press and no other voices could be heard (45). Such control was extended not only on press, but on all writing – literature was also perceived as an important weapon in the ideological war. Thus, press and literature were controlled in two ways – negatively, through censorship institution, and positively, through recommendations and guidelines what kind of content should be found in publications (46-47). A similar model was to be introduced on the territories that fell under Soviet control as a result of the war. In an information void and war chaos, it was relatively easy to win the minds of people with propaganda, as no alternative news, except through informal channels, was presented. The first Polish President after the communist takeover, Bolesław Bierut (1892-1956), extremely suspicious of any external influence, issued an order that the possession of a radio without a licence would be punished with a death sentence (Appelbaum 196).

Although at first, freedom of press was theoretically declared, the authorities' attitude towards newspapers, periodicals and publishing was uneven (Appelbaum 196). Initially, since all officially registered political parties were allowed to run a newspaper, some voices of dissent could still be heard (e.g. in *Życie Warszawy* or *Gazeta Ludowa*). However, already in 1945, the printing industry became public, so those newspapers who were not fully supportive of the government had trouble to get issued. Book publishing soon also became monopolised by one institution, Czytelnik, run by Jerzy Borejsza. By 1947 – when the communist rule was officially introduced in Poland – most pre-war journalists were killed, blacklisted, forced to emigrate or pushed aside (Curry 35). What remained, however, were the historically conditioned traditions of the press as “an independent voice against unwelcomed ruler and a forum for intellectual discussion” (Curry 35). Such traditions were formed during the time of Partitions, and during the interwar era. Even though in the first decades of the communist rule journalists had to assist in strengthening that rule, they soon became a separate, highly professionalised group that

spoke its own voice, and eventually played an important part in overthrowing the communist regime.

The first reportages after the war were still relatively creative, as the socialist realist “production” genre did not yet pervade in journalism. The main topic in 1945 were the newly acquired lands in the West of the country – compensation for a much larger territory of pre-war Poland, annexed by Soviet Union. These lands, formerly German, were called the “Regained Territories”, as once, in Middle Ages, they belonged to Polish kings of the Piast dynasty – a continuity that the communist authorities were happy to underline¹⁷³. Nevertheless, freedom of expression for writers and journalists alike gradually decreased and only very typical pieces, written according to the party-imposed model would be accepted.

The newly created daily, *Rzeczpospolita*, announced a new style in journalism already in 1944:

Our press differs, and will differ from the pre-war one: it will not describe sensational court cases, publish popular romance nor easy articles, appealing to lowest of instincts. We belong to a new generation that sees the seeding campaign, the potato lifting, the projects of machines for agriculture, a crèche or a new school as much more important than the Gorgonowa case [a famous 1930s court case of a governess killing her pupil] or the murder of Henry the Eight's wives. (*Rzeczpospolita*, 19 December 1944, p. 1 - qt after Goban-Klas 85)¹⁷⁴

It is rather puzzling why the author of this press manifesto contrasts the coverage of socialist progress with the rather remote story from the Tudor monarchy – if anything, it only indicates his classic, “bourgeois” education. Nevertheless, the mission of socialist journalism was laid out as not only a mission of providing information to readers, but also an ideological struggle to build a new order. From 1949 onwards, newspapers stopped informing and started to comment, educate, and pass on messages from the authorities (Magdoń 12). An entire system was created to ensure that the press is tightly controlled. Already at the end of 1944, the Lublin interim government created a Ministerstwo Informacji i Propagandy [Ministry of Information and Propaganda]; the control of news and publications would also be under scrutiny of the ruthless Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego [Ministry of Public Security]. In 1945, a

¹⁷³ Edmund Osmańczyk’s 1945 reportage from Opole region and Wanda Melcer’s “Wyprawa na odzyskane ziemie [Expedition to the Regained Territories]”, from 1945 were probably the first reportages published after the war (Szczygiel, 100/XX... 1: 591). While Osmańczyk, himself a representative of Polish minority in Silesia, was understandably happy about his region to become part of the Polish state, Melcer’s reasons are rather of an ideological nature. Her account is a propagandist one, yet written with insight and empathy. These two accounts still maintain a certain originality, which very soon becomes unwelcome.

¹⁷⁴ “Nasza prasa różni się i będzie się różnić od przedwojennej: nie będzie opisywać sensacyjnych procesów sądowych, drukować popularnych romansów ani łatwych artykułów, zaspokajających najniższe instynkty. Należymy do nowego pokolenia, które uważa kampanię siewną, wykopki ziemniaków, projekty maszyn dla rolnictwa, żłobek czy nową szkołę za znacznie ważniejsze niż proces Gorgonowej lub zamordowanie żon Henryka VIII” (Goban-Klas 85).

separate agency was created, Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk [Central Office for the Control of Press, Publications and Performances], but censorship was officially introduced by a parliamentary decree on 5th July 1946. The censorship bureau would restrict any information that was not in line with the communist party, and news content started to be mostly obtained via the Polish Press Agency - such centralised system was easier to control by the communist authorities (Goban-Klas 91). Censorship was not always needed: journalists themselves were scared to write anything out of line, since any small mistake could have grave consequences.

Many intellectuals found themselves in a difficult situation. They wanted to continue their work as writers, poets, reporters, or artists – but the price to pay was the subjugation to the new system. Communist apparatchiks knew well how to manipulate the insecure and vulnerable literati: as soon as the Red Army liberated Lublin (a city in the East of Poland), the new, Moscow-appointed authorities insisted on creating a cultural life in the city and attract artists and writers from all formerly Polish territories. “Hoping that they will finally be able to publish an article or a poem, to speak on the radio, to organise a concert, to stage a play, writers, journalists, actors, directors were arriving to Lublin even if they did not share the enthusiasm about the new, Soviet order” (Bikont & Szczęsna 23)¹⁷⁵. Jerzy Borejsza, one of the key organisers of socialist cultural life, would gather artists dispersed around small towns and villages, and propose them employment, accommodation, publications, public readings etc. Borejsza used to say that there should be a cultural and educational revolution in Poland, but a “mild” one. Some believed him and appreciated his efforts to publish Polish classics and to found public libraries in smaller towns and villages – but this was only one side of the coin.

Jerzy Andrzejewski says in a letter from 6 September 1948 to his friend, Czesław Miłosz, then cultural attaché in Paris:

Do you really think that because I am still in the country, I do not take a proper distance to myself and to what is happening here? . . . For some time now, I live with almost only doubts and oftentimes it is hard for me, so hard, like never before in my life (letter, qt after Bikont & Szczęsna 38)¹⁷⁶.

In spite of moral doubts, many intellectuals chose to participate in the cultural life of the new system. In some cases, they did it out of opportunism, in others – out of fear. But just as many

¹⁷⁵ “Kierowani nadzieją, że można będzie wreszcie opublikować artykuł czy wiersz, wystąpić w radio, zorganizować koncert, wystawić sztukę, ściągali do Lublina pisarze, dziennikarze, aktorzy, reżyserzy, niekoniecznie entuzjaści wprowadzanych przez Sowietów porządków” (Bikont & Szczęsna 23).

¹⁷⁶ “Czyż Ty naprawdę myślisz, że dlatego, że jestem ciągle w kraju – nie mam właściwego dystansu I do tego, co się tu dzieje, i do siebie samego? (...) Od pewnego czasu żyję prawie samymi wątpliwościami i chwilami jest mi ciężko, jak chyba nigdy ciężko mi w życiu nie było” (6 September 1948, quoted after Bikont & Szczęsna 38).

were those who were simply happy that the war is over and that they can start rebuilding their country – even if that meant an allegiance to the red flag. Their life in early communist Poland was rather detached from the experience of average Poles. This is how this period is remembered by Kazimierz Brandys, then living in the industrial city of Łódź:

We lived with ideas and we lived well. We used to meet every night at the “Pickwick” club. The distance to Moscow seemed immense. The closeness of Warsaw did not cause worry. The eye of the Party observed us attentively, but from a distance. Certainly, they also made sure to separate the Łódź cultural circles from life in the rest of the country through particular privileges: first passports to the West, allocation of flats in villas previously owned by German industrialists, and less severe censorship. Socialism in art was not yet postulated. For people with money, everything was available in shops, from Bielsk worsted to smoked salmon. In the country, AK members were imprisoned, Łódź workers could only eat potatoes and dumplings. [And] artists led a life of whites in a colonial city. (Kazimierz Brandys, *qt after Bikont & Szczęsna 50*)¹⁷⁷

Creating enclaves for artists was thus part of the Party’s strategy to pull intellectuals on their side and, by these means, create a wider support to the communist rule. Nevertheless, this strategy worked only for some time, because the illusion of good life could not be maintained for very long. First of all, the material conditions were not as good for literati, as Brandys perceived it. Secondly, while in 1946 writers still thought that they will be able to continue their work relatively freely, the following years proved them wrong. Soon, socialist realism became the one and only doctrine and writers could not remain apolitical.

3.2. Stalinism: a Monopoly of Socialist Realism

The first disappointment came in 1948 with the World Peace Congress in Wrocław. Many Polish writers were convinced that they will remain at par with their Western European colleagues and show them how Polish culture is rebuilt after the war. However, the Polish delegation was completely overpowered by the Soviet one, which dominated the Congress and expressed opinions that were unacceptable to a significant number of delegates from the West¹⁷⁸. The Swiss journalist François Bondy remembers it in the following way:

¹⁷⁷ “Żyło się ideami I żyło się nieźle. Co wieczór spotykaliśmy się w klubie “Pickwick”. Odległość od Moskwy wydawała się ogromna. Bliskość Warszawy nie budziła niepokoju. Oko partii obserwowało nas uważnie, ale z dystansu. Zapewne dbano też o to, aby łódzkie środowisko kulturalne oddzielić od życia kraju szczególnym uprzywilejowaniem: pierwsze paszporty na Zachód, przydziały mieszkań w willach po fabrykantach niemieckich i miękka śruba cenzury. Nie postulowano jeszcze socjalizmu w sztuce. Dla ludzi z pieniędzmi było w sklepach wszystko, od bielskiego kamgaru do wędzonego łososia. W kraju więziono akowców, łódzcy robotnicy jedli ziemniaki i kluski. Artyści wiedli życie białych w kolonialnym mieście.” (quoted after Bikont & Szczęsna 50)

¹⁷⁸ Several of them, for instance Julian Huxley (then at the head of UNESCO), Oxford professor A. J. P. Taylor, or painter Fernand Léger, demonstratively left Wrocław.

It was difficult to pretend that the Congress' atmosphere was friendly. The tone that the Russians imposed was a disaster for Poles. To them, the Congress appeared as a chance to maintain their relations with the Western world. And the Russians attending the Congress spoke in a way to exacerbate all the disparities between intellectuals from the two sides of the Curtain (François Bondy in a conversation with Bikont & Szczęsna 107)¹⁷⁹.

This is how the illusions of Polish intellectuals came to an end. They could no longer expect that Poland will be a “window to the West” for the Soviet bloc, and a country where both Western culture and Soviet political system could coexist.

Indeed, in the following years, culture would drift away and the communist system was tightening its grip, imposing more and more restrictions on artists and intellectuals. A new generation of young communists was coming of age and dominating the literary scene. Among them was Wiktor Woroszyński and Tadeusz Borowski. The communist ardour of these activists, labelled as “the pimple-faced” [*pryszczaci*] due to their age, was much stronger than the one of the older generation who started their careers in the interwar period. The turn towards an even sharper ideological edge could be observed at 1949 assembly of the Writers' Association (Związek Literatów Polskich - ZLP). The Party had clear expectations from literature: it has to represent the goals of the people in a socialist realist spirit, and it must support the new system. Any other kind of literary creation was perceived worthless or outright noxious. Aleksander Wat remembers how, on the last day of the assembly, the Russian delegation walked in, its leader first promised support and financial gain to cooperating writers, and then threatened: “And who will not join us, will be annihilated and his name will forever be crossed out from books and from memory” (Bikont & Szczęsna 125)¹⁸⁰.

The next assembly of writers, in June 1950, only strengthened the monopoly of socialist realism in literature. On a photo featuring its participants, Jerzy Andrzejewski and Jerzy Putrament, one can see a poster in the background. Painted on it were words of the supreme leader, Joseph Stalin: “Writers – engineers of human souls”¹⁸¹. During the assembly, most well-known writers were criticised, barring the authors of the new “production” genre (in Polish: *produkcyjniak*), and the participants were given a lecture on socialist realism. It was delivered by a Marxist critic, Melania Kierczyńska, who said that socialist realism creates typical

¹⁷⁹ “Trudno było udawać, że kongres przebiega w serdecznej atmosferze. Dla Polaków ton nadany przez Rosjan to była klęska. Dla nich kongres jawił się jako szansa na podtrzymanie więzi ze światem zachodnim. A Rosjanie obecni na kongresie swymi wystąpieniami potęgowali wszystkie rozbieżności między wypowiedziami intelektualistów z obu stron żelaznej kurtyny.” (François Bondy in conversation with Bikont & Szczęsna, 107).

¹⁸⁰ “A kto nie pójdzie z nami, będzie unicestwiony, a imię jego zostanie wykreślone z książek i pamięci na zawsze” (These words of a Soviet delegate, Professor Anisimov, were remembered by Aleksander Wat and quoted in his book *Świat na haku i pod kluczem: eseje* [*The world on a hook and locked with a key: essays*], Ann Arbor: Polonia, 1985. Page 22; Also quoted by Bikont & Szczęsna, 125).

¹⁸¹ Photo available at the National Digital Archive.

characters, in typical conditions, or in other words, characters living in a reality strongly recreated from its concrete model. She listed other traits, such as optimism, humanism, sharp actuality, depiction of the “new man” – maker of socialism, and loyalty to the Party (Bikont & Szczęsna 134). This meant that there was no longer any space for creativity and originality of expression, and literature could only exist if it was subjugated to the goals of the communist party. Maria Dąbrowska, in her (then) secret journal, called the assembly “a sort of official funeral of literature and writers” (Bikont & Szczęsna 136)¹⁸².

What followed, was an almost complete dictatorship of the Party in the field of literature. Works, as well as particular words, expressions, characters or even authors’ personal lives were discussed in detail, bordering on absurdity. Authors would be criticized for the smallest deviations from the Party line – or even for mentioning such bourgeois food articles as oysters. After Stalin’s death in 1953, the literati were pressurised to publish poems and elegies bemoaning the “Great Leader” – what resulted were pieces full of pathos and exaggerated grief. Paweł Hertz recalls: “[s]urely there were palls on Nowy Świat, but everything looked normal. If people grieved, they did it only where they were expected to, not on the street” (Bikont & Szczęsna 214)¹⁸³. In private conversations, one could hear expressions of relief and satisfaction: the ruthless dictator is no more; some even secretly celebrated (214). Thus, there was a stark contrast between the disproportionate demonstrations of sadness in official newspapers and magazines, as well as at public events, while privately, many Poles saw Stalin’s death as a ray of hope for the system to become less harsh.

Media in the Stalinist Era

The new system started to form its own media, recruiting and training young journalists and pushing aside the pre-war members of the profession, in spite of the protests voiced by the Union of Polish Journalists (recreated after the war). The Union became powerless, and journalists’ complaints about freedom restrictions in their work were not heard. By 1948, when the Polish system became transformed into a fully Stalinist one, and power was entirely taken over by the consolidated Polish United Workers Party, the condition of journalists’ work has become worse than ever. The media policy at the time, according to Curry, had two goals: “to win support from a hostile population for communist rule in Poland and to sovietise the population” (39). Also, a journalist acted as an intermediary between the society and the Party,

¹⁸² “był czymś w rodzaju uroczystego pogrzebu literatury i pisarzy na rzecz pismaków-pomagierów rządu w akcji ‘umacniania ustroju’” From Maria Dąbrowska’s journal, entry from 27 June 1950, qt after Bikont & Szczęsna 136.

¹⁸³ “Na Nowym Świecie z pewnością były kiry, ale wszystko wyglądało zwyczajnie. Ludzie, jeśli łkali, to tam, gdzie musieli, nie na ulicy.” (As remembered by Paweł Hertz and mentioned in his conversation with Barbara Łopieńska, qt after Bikont & Szczęsna 214).

collecting testimonies from the “worker-peasant” correspondents, intervening with bureaucrats, as well as transmitting the propaganda message to the society. The media, as declared in a popular magazine *Sztandar Młodych* [Youth’s Flag], was supposed to act as “propagandists, who day after day convey the Marxist-Leninist theories, agitators who day after day speak about the international political situation and about the Party’s and people’s government policies, and organizers, who day after day mobilize our forces for their active part in Socialist construction” (Curry 39)¹⁸⁴. These three roles that the press had to play were first laid out in Lenin’s doctrine of Party press, drafted well before the Bolshevik revolution. That is why, even reportage had to contribute to the ideological offensive of socialism.

Like in literature, in reportage too, a new genre appeared, also called a “production” one (*produkcyjniak*). Its theme would be centred around a factory or a construction site, it would be simple, schematic, with one-dimensional characters. Its goal was to educate, strengthen the faith in the system, and evoke emotions (Szczygieł, *100/XX... Vol. I* 624)¹⁸⁵. Such reportages were written in the early 1950s, by newspaper reporters, like Jerzy Ros, and even by well-known writers, not necessarily supporters of communism, like Maria Dąbrowska¹⁸⁶. Surprisingly, even in the harsh period of Stalinism, the communist party was not fully successful in creating a disciplined and ideologically involved media. Young recruits to the journalism programmes soon realised that what they were taught at the university was rather removed from reality. Many would become sceptical of the government observing the conditions of workers or peasants’ reactions to plans of collectivisation (Curry 41). Already as early as 1953, journalist and editor Henryk Korotyński delivered a speech in which he voiced many complaints and problems that him and his colleagues were facing: lack of discussion among journalists, lack of trust from readers, lack of possibilities to satisfy readers’ expectations, colouring of reality rather than solving actual problems etc. (Curry 45). Even though Korotyński was bound to also express support to the Stalinist system, his speech was revolutionary and provoked much

¹⁸⁴ Jane Leftwich Curry quotes from an article that appeared in *Sztandar Młodych* on 5 May 1953, translated into English as “The Fettered Fourth Estate” in *News from Behind the Iron Curtain*, I, no. 7, June 1953, p. 35.

¹⁸⁵ A good example of such “production” kind of reportage was “Ludzie rusztowań [People on Scaffoldings]” (1950), written by Michał Krajewski, prized bricklayer, and Bogdan Ostromęcki, writer and poet, at the time employed by the Ministry of Reconstruction. The central theme of the reportage is a construction site and the activity of engineers, builders and supervisors. It follows them at work, on the day when they try to achieve record speed in laying bricks, and describes their families, the prospects that the workers will have in socialist Poland, and the future of the working-class housing districts that they are building. They also mention the first female bricklayer team, describing these girl workers as happy, youthful, and hardworking.

¹⁸⁶ Interestingly, In Dąbrowska’s case, what was supposed to be a *produkcyjniak*, turned out to be an *anty-produkcyjniak*. The novelist visited a factory of steam trains – but what she observed there could not appear in the press, as it stood in sharp contrast with the official propaganda. The workers’ conditions were appalling and the pre-war class differences were still striking. The employees of the factory told the reporter how reluctant they were to attend the party meetings, considering the Second Republic much better than the new system (Szczygieł, *100/XX... I*: 645). Dąbrowska’s reportage was only published for the first time 1973, when criticism of the Stalinist period was already allowed.

discussion – it began to dawn on the Party members that journalists cannot be considered as a mere propagandist tube for the system. In the following years, the ferment among journalists increased. It coincided with a Thaw period in the Soviet Bloc after Stalin's death in 1953, which allowed for a certain liberalisation of the press.

3.3. Post-Stalinist Thaw: First Signs of Dissent

Indeed, even before the historically significant year 1956, in Polish intellectual life a gradual “breaking of the ice” began already in 1955. Many of the staunch supporters of the communist doctrine began to publicly express doubts about the system: among them philosopher Leszek Kołakowski, and writers Antoni Słonimski, Maria Dąbrowska, Julian Przyboś and Jan Kott. Socialist realism was criticised by well-known literary critics, for instance Jan Błoński. The publication of Ilia Ehrenburg's novel, *Thaw*, caused a wave of debates. Several works previously blocked by the censorship were now published. Nevertheless, two events of 1955 particularly shook the public: The International Youth and Students' Festival, and the publication of the “Poem for Adults” by Adam Ważyk. Even though the Festival was planned as a propaganda device, to demonstrate comradeship between people from various continents united in their love of communism, it became an impulse for change. The Polish participants of the Festival came from all parts of the country: in Warsaw, they met thousands of people from around the world, happily celebrating together, freely discussing global issues, telling first-hand stories about their countries of origin. For many, it was an eye-opening experience. “It turned out that it was possible to be “progressive”, and at the same time enjoy life, wear colourful clothes, listen to jazz, have fun and fall in love” – remembered Jacek Kuroń (qt by Applebaum 474-475), realising how the presence of foreigners livened the grey, poor, and gloomy reality of Poland. The sight of happy, smiling people from the Western countries also contradicted the propaganda's image of the unhappy, conflict-ridden, unhealthy liberal world.

Around the same time, poet Adam Ważyk, member of the party and until then – loyal communist, wrote a poem that shocked the Polish society. The flagship of socialist progress, the newly built industrial city of Nowa Huta (in the suburbs of Krakow), was presented in the poem as a failed experiment, as a place where one can witness the human condition at its worst. The poem begins by a nostalgic reference to pre-war Warsaw, and continues to illustrate the degeneration of Nowa Huta, the lack of resources for those in charge of the building of “New Homeland”, the human misery contrasted with idealized visions of progress. Even though the party blocked the reprint of the poem and banned Ważyk from writing, the damage was already

done. Ważyk's poem was discussed far and wide: in workplaces, in queues for food, in factories and universities. The poet's personal disappointment with the system in which he so strongly believed, gave his piece an additional emotional charge: "I was destroying the mythology in which I previously believed" – Adam Ważyk used to say (Bikont & Szczęsna 251)¹⁸⁷.

The authorities were in panic and started a vigorous counter-campaign. Among other actions, they decided to send reporters to describe the "real" situation in Nowa Huta. Among them was young Ryszard Kapuściński, beginning his career at the *Sztandar Młodych* magazine. He set off to Nowa Huta in order to illustrate the real conditions in the town. To the dismay of his superiors, Kapuściński confirmed Ważyk's observations: he described the extremely bad conditions of workers in gruesome details. Young men and women brought from small towns and villages were provided with terrible housing or hardly any accommodation at all, and the new city did not give them anything except from work – no entertainment, cultural or religious institutions. Even married couples had to live separately, as no accommodation was provided for families. As a result, alcoholism, prostitution, and sexually-transmitted diseases wreaked havoc in the town. Even though his reportage, "This, too, is the truth about Nowa Huta", managed to pass through censorship and be published, it was obviously not well received by the authorities. The consequences were widespread: the editor-in-chief of *Sztandar Młodych* and the censor in charge were let go, while a special commission wrote a report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party that demoted the entire management of Huta's steelworks. Kapuściński was eventually prized for pointing out "irregularities", but sent abroad so that he does not create any more trouble (Niemczyńska).

Kapuściński's story was a sign that a new generation of journalists was about to enter the scene. They were reporters of a new type: bolder, more adventurous, less intimidated by the system. Many of them believed in socialism and the values that it was promoting: world peace, equality, economic development. However, they also felt entitled to criticise that same system. A group of such young, critical journalists took over a student magazine, *Po Prostu*, and started to write about various "uncomfortable" topics¹⁸⁸: corruption and incompetence of bureaucrats, poor management of public resources, excessive privileges of top party members, as well as the

¹⁸⁷ "... rozbijałem mitologię, w którą sam przedtem wierzyłem." (Ważyk qt by Bikont & Szczęsna 251).

¹⁸⁸ A good example of such bold reportage by a reporter from *Po Prostu*, Włodzimierz Godek, is a story on a graduate's life in Nowy Sącz, a small town in Southern Poland. The reportage is styled as if it was a monologue of the protagonist, talking to the reporter about his frustration about the lack of opportunities and almost non-existent cultural life in the provincial town, the conflicts between local apparatchiks, the absurdity of issues discussed at Party meetings (Szczygieł, 100/XX... 1: 702). The text was thus quite radical in how it unveiled the pathologies of the system, especially given that other press painted the socialist reality only in bright colours.

decline of ethical standards in everyday life (Goban-Klas 138). Nevertheless, as it turned out in just a few years, this freedom at *Po Prostu* was rather short-lived.

While in literature and media tensions could be felt already in 1955, real change could only take place after the death of Bierut, one of the “little Stalins of Central Europe”¹⁸⁹ (Applebaum 45). His passing away coincided with Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” in 1956, in which Stalin’s rule was denounced as ruthless and cruel. Polish public, who found out about it as soon as the speech was leaked to Western sources, was shocked by the Khrushchev’s revelations about executions, torture and other excesses of Stalinist regime. What followed that legendary speech, was turmoil in Poland and Hungary. Societies of Eastern European countries were wrecked by terror, NKVD brutality, poverty and lack of freedom and wanted change. In June 1956, approximately 100 000 workers in the Polish city of Poznań went on strike, demanding “Bread and Freedom”. The communist authorities deployed the army that ruthlessly curbed the protests, killing tens of people and leaving hundreds wounded (Applebaum 484). In Hungary, events took an even sharper form – in October 1956, large groups of protesters went out on the streets of Budapest. It soon became a full-blown revolution, as Hungary’s political leader, Imre Nagy, took side of the protesters, declared the country’s withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and announced neutrality, calling for the West’s support. The Soviet Union, dismayed by the scale of the protest, sent out the Red Army to pacify Hungarians. In following months, hundreds were killed and thousands sent to prison, many others were forced to emigrate (Applebaum 488). Even though Stalin was dead, the communist party of the Soviet Union maintained a tight grip over societies of the Bloc. However, that grip was different depending on the country.

In Poland, 1956 brought about a change of power, and following the VIII Plenum of the Party in October of that year Władysław Gomułka (1905-1982) was nominated as a new leader. Gomułka was loyal to Moscow, but he believed that Poland can have its own “road to socialism”, and does not need direct supervision from Soviet Union. As a result, says historian Norman Davies, “the Polish People’s Republic ceased to be a puppet state, and became a client state” (9). The new leader granted several concessions – less persecution of the Church, abandonment of the farm collectivisation idea, more artistic and intellectual freedom. When it comes to the situation of Polish journalists and writers, October of 1956 presented an opportunity to publish previously banned works, start new magazines and journals, and write about topics that were formerly taboo. The critique of the system was particularly strong among

¹⁸⁹ The other two were Hungary’s leader Mátyás Rákosi and GDR’s Walter Ulbricht.

those communist revisionists whose illusions were shattered, who realised that they took part in a totalitarian destruction, rather than in a socialist utopia. Many intellectuals gave up their party membership, for instance Jerzy Andrzejewski, Stanisław Dygat, Paweł Herz and Mieczysław Jastrun. The Marxist philosopher, Leszek Kołakowski, wrote a text entitled “What is Socialism?”, a parody of the system¹⁹⁰. This short piece soon became the revisionists’ manifesto (Bikont & Szczęśna 278). Among them were many of the previous radical communists, like Woroszyński or Borowski. Journalists and reporters also felt a breath of fresh air: although they were still controlled by the Party, they were allowed to say much more than before. Even if this freedom of press was curbed already in 1957, the October opening brought changes in people’s minds that could not be reverted:

Young people developed a passion for avant-garde painting, cabaret, theatre and existentialist philosophy, discs, art, and, occasionally, Coca-Cola. . . . Contacts with the West were partly renewed, the [state-sponsored] stations that silenced BBC, Voice of America and Radio Free Europe were temporarily off. University libraries obtained foreign books and magazines, including the Paris-based *Kultura* [influential Polish émigré magazine]. Cinemas showed Hollywood movies, theatres performed new Parisian plays. . . . For all of 1957, cultural life in Poland was freer than ever before, since the communist takeover. (Goban-Klas 153)¹⁹¹

This taste for freedom and for international opening was there to stay. It was one of the reasons for the popularity of news and writing from other parts of the world.

In the period of Thaw, following Stalin’s death, first travel reportages began to appear: earlier, it was almost impossible to go abroad. The strict limitations of the Stalinist period would not only allow for travel, but also for the translation of travelogues by foreign authors. Things changed in 1956: in July 1956, the National Publishing House “Iskry” [“Sparkles”] started its

¹⁹⁰ In the first words of his article, Kołakowski says:

We will tell you what socialism is. But first, we will tell you what it is not. Thus, socialism is not:

- A society, in which a person that did not commit a crime, waits at home for the arrival of the police;
- A society, in which it is a crime to be a brother, a sister, a wife, or a son of a criminal;
- A society in which one man is unhappy, because he says what he thinks, and another is unhappy because he does not say what he thinks;
- A society in which a man lives better, because he does not think at all;
- A society in which one man is unhappy because he is a Jew, and another feels better, because he is not one; . . .
- A state in which one lives better because he praises the leaders of the country;
- A state in which someone is sentenced without trial; . . .
- A state that one cannot leave; . . .

This was part one. And now – listen carefully! – we will tell you, what socialism is. Thus: Socialism is a system, which... eh! What is the point of talking! Socialism is a really good thing.

(Kołakowski - my own translation from the original).

¹⁹¹ “Młodzi ludzie zachwycali się awangardowym malarstwem, kabaretami, teatrem i filozofią egzystencjalną, płytami, sztuką i, okazjonalnie, coca colą. . . . Częściowo zostały przywrócone kontakty z Zachodem, stacje zagłuszające BBC, Głos Ameryki, a nawet RWE czasowo zamilkły. Biblioteki uniwersyteckie otrzymywały zachodnie książki i czasopisma, w tym paryską *Kulturę*. W kinach wyświetlano hollywoodzkie filmy; w teatrach wystawiano nowe sztuki paryskie. . . . Przez cały 1957 r. życie kulturalne w Polsce cieszyło się większą swobodą niż kiedykolwiek przedtem od czasu przejścia władzy przez komunistów” (Goban-Klas 153).

travel series called “Naokoło Świata” [“Around the World”]. Its white cover became recognisable for decades to come, as throughout the forty years of its existence it became the most popular travel reportage series in Poland. It was run by two experienced editors and reporters: Krystyna Goldbergowa and Zbigniew Stolarek. The series featured both original travel reportage, as well as translations of travel accounts by various international authors. Renowned reporters and travellers were published in *Iskry*: Olgierd Budrewicz, Waław Korabiewicz, Melchior Wańkiewicz, Roald Amundsen, Thor Heyerdahl, Ernest Hemingway, Maurice Herzog, and many more. One of them was Jerzy Ros, author of socialist reportages and collaborator of *Życie Warszawy*. It is difficult to determine in what circumstances he was sent to India, but it was clearly a journey sponsored by the authorities, probably in the spirit of rapprochement between Soviet Union and India. Ros published his reportage in 1957, in the “Naokoło Świata” series of *Iskry*, with a title *Indyjskie wędrówki* [*Indian Wanderings*]. Two other travel accounts from India were published around that time: Waław Kontek’s *Notatki z podróży do Indii* [*Notes from a Journey to India*] (1956) and Witold Koehler’s *Indie przez dziurkę od klucza* [*India through a Keyhole*] (1957). Their authors were participants of a forestry congress in Dehradun and later they documented their impressions in writing. Unlike their Western counterparts, these travellers were not on an individual adventure: they were part of an official delegation. Even in the period of Thaw, had they not been officially sent to India, it would be virtually impossible for them to leave the country on such a faraway journey, outside of the Soviet Bloc.

Nevertheless, the enthusiasm of Polish intellectuals and their various cultural initiatives would not find completion – this period of openness was not there to last. In the following years, the regime backtracked from its liberal course, closed down the more free-thinking and critical magazines, like *Po Prostu*¹⁹², and increased the censorship of new publications.

3.4. Backlash and Stabilisation: The Gomułka Years (1956 – 1970)

The years of Gomułka rule were a time of relative stability, interrupted by various events in which the power of the Party was challenged. Writers, journalists and other members of intelligentsia continued to push the boundaries imposed by the state. Reporters, even though most remained at the payroll of the Party press system, managed to present the reality of 1960s in a way that would cause the readers to ask uncomfortable questions: what is the purpose of

¹⁹² When Gomułka ordered to close *Po Prostu* down on 2 October 1957. The reaction to his decision was strong, as the weekly was considered a symbol of (relatively) independent journalism. Students took to the streets, asking for “freedom of press”, and literary circles publicly voiced their protests – to no avail.

different state policies? Why are there discrepancies between propaganda and real life? Why do the politicians' promises remain unfulfilled? What are the everyday struggles of a common man, that the communist system was supposedly trying to help?

Gomułka, perceived as a moderate in comparison to his more radical comrades, began his rule among high hopes in the society that he will allow the relaxation to last. Nevertheless, already in 1957 and 1958, he was heard expressing his disapproval, finding these new liberties far-fetched. Journalists were at the centre of this criticism: from now on, said Gomułka, they have to choose whether they are with the Party, or against it – complete loyalty had to be assured (Goban-Klas 163-164). In Gomułka's opinion, journalists should "serve society and respect Party politics", but instead they became "little involved with the life of the country and too enamoured with Western consumerism" (Curry 64). That is why, the Party decided to make changes in order to restrict journalists even more. Many editors-in-chief of major newspapers were removed, and a new governmental body that controlled the press was instituted in 1958. It was called the Commission for Publication and Distribution of Press, and its members soon called for a "reorganization" of the press market, closing down over 200 titles.

At the turn of 1950s and 60s, the Party was set to strengthen its grip on the society and start an ideological campaign to woo young people. An important part of this campaign was to promote secularism and detract the youth's attention from the Catholic Church's activities – it was to be done through the popularization of science and technology. "A pro-scientific orientation had an openly anti-religious goal: the struggle, with the help of science, with "religious obscurantism, ignorance and spreading of nationalist views"" (Goban-Klas 166-167)¹⁹³. This was one of the reasons why travel and geography became even more popular in that period. On the one hand, stimulating young people's interest in far-away, non-Western countries, was meant to offer an attractive alternative to fantasies about the rich and beautiful West. On the other hand, it was a tool in combatting religion and tradition, by exposing young minds to other topics than the ones presented in Church. Indeed, travel books of that period (for instance those by Ros, Górnicki and Giełżyński), have a clearly anti-religious tone, whether they talk about Hinduism, Islam or Christianity.

Nevertheless, the Party met an important obstacle in its ideological campaign: intellectuals (writers, journalists) who already tasted a certain freedom in October 1956, did not want to let go of their right to freedom of expression. In March 1964, they drafted a letter to the Prime Minister, protesting against limitations of printing paper and calling for their civil rights

¹⁹³ "Orientacja pronaukowa miała cel otwarcie antyreligijny: walkę, za pomocą nauki, z 'obskurantyzmem religijnym, ciemnotą i szerzeniem poglądów nacjonalistycznych'" (Goban-Klas 167).

guaranteed in the constitution to be respected. It was signed by 34 eminent literary figures, of different backgrounds and affiliations: from Catholic, right-wing writer (and reporter) Cat-Mackiewicz, to Adam Ważyk – atheist, and till recently, militant communist. The news of the “Letter of the 34” reached Radio Free Europe, based in the West, and caused an international commotion¹⁹⁴. As a result, the Party accused the signatories of taking part in an “anti-Polish” campaign and defaming their homeland abroad. A counter-letter was also drafted and many writers, professors and other members of cultural elites were pressurised to sign it – among them was Wojciech Żukrowski. Nevertheless, what is now remembered as the “Letter of the 34” was one of the first steps towards a formation of a democratic opposition (Bikont & Szczęsna 334).

As for reportage, a group of liberally-minded journalists, working for *Po Prostu*, *Polityka*, *Kultura* and other newspapers, began to criticise the communist state in various ways. They employed a plethora of strategies to show the weaknesses of the system. Marian Brandys switched from socially-engaged reportages to historical ones - they could also be read as metaphoric of the actual situation. Zbigniew Kwiatkowski, reporter of *Gazeta Krakowska* and *Życie Literackie*, focussed on small towns and the provincial life, unveiling the absurdities of the communist economy and a variety of local problems. Janusz Rolicki, working for *Polityka* and *Kultura*, became famous for his “impersonation reportages”: he tried being a construction worker, employee of a collective farm, a fisherman, and a homeless person. In this way, he discovered various schemes, corruption cases, and instances of theft and other petty crimes. This showed that the celebrated working class was not exactly as brave and honest as the propaganda would have it, and that the paradoxes of the system pushed people to challenge the law. Another reporter of *Polityka*, Stefan Kozicki, tried to demonstrate how the system controls people and how little individual initiative is allowed - he, too, based his observations on the Polish province. His reportage on a local beauty pageant is an opportunity to present the scandals surrounding the entertainment scene in a small town. Aleksander Rowiński (*Prawo i Życie*, *Kultura*), on the other hand, reports from a court case that followed a famous catastrophe - a fire at a transport ship. He relates how the responsibility for the accident is shifted around, nobody wants to speak up, and the clerks are scared of taking decisions. All these strategies were used by the journalists of late 1950s and 1960s to illustrate various problems in the personal, social, economic and political spheres, without expressing outright criticism of the Communist Party.

¹⁹⁴ Arthur Koestler, Hanna Arendt, Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, Arthur Miller, Susan Sontag, Alberto Moravia, and many other intellectuals supported their Polish counterparts’ claim to be granted freedom of expression.

At the same time, the less oppressive post-Stalinist years gave many reporters the opportunity to apply for a passport and be sent abroad by their newspaper or magazine. Kapuściński travelled to Africa, the Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as Latin America. Lucjan Wolanowski went to USA, Australia and South-East Asia. Wiesław Górnicki was an envoy to the UN in New York, he also visited India, Egypt, Afghanistan and Cambodia. Wojciech Giełżyński, too, reported from various countries, among them India and Indonesia. Wojciech Żukrowski, on the other hand, spend most of the late 50s and 60s abroad, working for Polish embassies in Delhi and Laos. Janusz Gołębiowski became a Polish Press Agency correspondent in Delhi. Jerzy Putrament, given his privileged position of vice-president of the Polish Writers' Association (1959-1980), and his intensive cooperation with the top Party officials, was able to travel even more than his colleagues. In 1960s he visited India twice, publishing two travel journals from there, he also went to several countries of Europe, North Africa, Mongolia and China. Polish readers, at that time still having limited possibilities to travel, were particularly eager to read these reporters' accounts from far-away countries. Nevertheless, those who travelled in that period, usually had to pay a high price for such freedom.

3.4. The Anti-Semitic Campaign of 1968 and the Crisis of 1970

The communist authorities were challenged once again in the time of international crisis following the Six Days War in the Middle East. The West took the side of Israel, while the Soviet Bloc supported the Arab countries. This became a convenient setting for the nationalist fraction in the Polish communist party. The fraction's leader, Mieczysław Moczar, was eager to eliminate his rivals based on their Jewish origin. An anti-Semitic campaign was a perfect way for Moczar to gather support among more nationalist Poles, and to neutralise the more progressive elements in the party. Adam Mickiewicz's play, "Dziady [The Forefathers]", directed by Kazimierz Dejmek, and staged by the National Theatre in Warsaw, became a pretext to start the campaign. Moczar and his supporters called for the performance to be cancelled, calling the play anti-Russian, and its enthusiasts - pro-Zionists. Students of the Warsaw University protested against this decision, which led to a wave of unrest, later remembered as the "March events". The demonstrators gathered on 8 March 1968 to protest against censorship and restrictions of cultural freedom. They were attacked by the police, the leaders were arrested and later relegated from university. The press covered the events in a particularly biased manner, and the Moczar fraction underlined the "foreign" origin of the student leaders, such as Adam Michnik, calling them "Zionist agents" and "enemies of the Polish nation" (Goban-Klas 184). Students of other universities across the country went out on the streets in solidarity with

their Warsaw counterparts. The Party responded by organising a large-scale campaign against intellectuals in general: professors, students, writers and dissidents. Given the anti-Semitic character of the campaign, all those with Jewish-sounding names felt threatened¹⁹⁵. As a result, Polish intelligentsia of Jewish-origin was facing repressions, many lost their positions, and numerous were forced to emigrate. This was also a critical moment for the press - instead of taking the side of the intelligentsia, like in 1956, a large part of the media joined the virulent anti-Semite campaign launched by Moczar and his supporters. These journalists were labelled “*prasa marcowa*” - the “March press” - and were given instructions directly from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Warsaw section of the Party (Goban-Klas 187). Their tone was so violent, and they had such strong backing, that even Gomułka succumbed to this anti-Semitic rhetoric (in spite of the fact that his own wife was Jewish).

A number of journalists, writers and intellectuals disappeared from the Polish scene, as they were forced to emigrate. Their voice could be heard either through Western publications smuggled over the border to Poland, or only more than two decades later, when Poland regained independence. This was also the fate of Jerzy Ros, one of the authors featured in this book. Little is publicly known of his biography - he published several reportages in 1950s, but then his name disappears from the Polish newspapers. As it turns out, Ros followed a route similar to many March '68 émigrés: first left to Israel (in 1969), and from there to America(1986).

Another victim of the March events was *Świat* weekly, which featured texts of various well-known reporters, such as Kazimierz Dziewanowski, Marian Brandys, Krzysztof Kąkolewski, Andrzej Mularczyk, Adolf Rudnicki, Lucjan Wolanowski and Jerzy Waldorff. It was also home to two protagonists of this research, Wiesław Górnicki and Wojciech Żukrowski. It was published since 1951, by the RSW Prasa, but due to the political purge began by the Moczar fraction, it was closed down in 1969. Indeed, the events of March 1968 led to a crisis in the media: an aggressive nationalist and anti-Semitic group of journalists tried to marginalise their differently-minded colleagues. Goban-Klas recalls: “For the entire year of 1968, the media was dominated by the faction of “partisans”, who held semi-fascist (or rather communo-fascist) views” (188)¹⁹⁶. As a result, over 800 employees of the state media company, RSW Prasa, were dismissed or forced to change jobs, and many editors-in-chief were replaced with Party loyalists. Repressions also touched students: over 1600 were relegated from universities

¹⁹⁵ Kazimierz Brandys was scared to leave his house on his own, knowing that both his Jewish and non-Jewish colleagues were beaten up on the street. Another writer, Julian Strykowski, had to change his phone number twice, since he was often woken up at night by hateful, anti-Semitic callers (Bikont & Szczęsna 371)

¹⁹⁶ “Przez cały rok 1968 w dziennikarstwie dominowała frakcja ‘partyzantów’, która reprezentowała poglądy semi-faszystowskie (czy raczej: komuno-faszystowskie)” (Goban-Klas 188).

(Goban-Klas 189). At the same time, a deepening economic crisis provoked new tensions in the society. In December 1970, miners went out to protest against an increase in food prices, and their demonstration was brutally curbed by the police and the army. The officers opened fire, killing more than 40 persons, and over a thousand were wounded. This massacre led to a public outcry and Gomułka had to resign - the reigns of the Party passed to Edward Gierek (1913-2001).

3.5. The 1970s: Growing Tensions Between the People and the Party

Like most leaders of the communist era, Edward Gierek came to power after a violent crisis (the massacre of demonstrators in 1970). He was at first perceived as a liberal, and the society expected him to grant more freedom to various groups. Indeed, Gierek promised reforms and unveiled his grand economic strategy, which was to bring prosperity to all. This initial “honeymoon” phase lasted for a very short time. Soon, it turned out that the foreign loans (from the same Western capitalists so deplored by the Soviets) did not bring expected results (Davies, *Heart...* 13). This “phoney prosperity” the ever increasing debt¹⁹⁷, the frozen prices of food, the wages and subsidies that the state could not afford, were all signs of an approaching economic disaster. When Gierek suddenly tried to increase food prices, the workers of Ursus factory in Warsaw and Radom arms industry began to protest. Even though eventually the government called off the price increase, the protesters faced harsh consequences, many were beaten up or made redundant. As a response to these events, the intellectuals decided to form an organisation helping the persecuted workers: Komitet Obrony Robotników (KOR) [Workers’ Defence Committee]. It was the first open, legal civil society organisation that was vocal in criticising the government. Furthermore, apart from offering legal and financial support to the workers, it held discussions, started underground publishing, and even organised a Flying University. It was the seed from which grew the largest opposition organisation in the Soviet Bloc - the Solidarity movement. Another event that caused great trouble to the Communist Party was the election of a Pole, Karol Wojtyła, to the position of the Pope. The ensuing visit of John Paul II to his homeland, in 1979, has further shaken the legitimacy of the communist rule. Millions of Poles participating in the meetings and open-air masses felt united and powerful, able to face up to the oppressive regime.

A critical moment took place in 1975, when members of the Communist Party meeting at the 7th Assembly, decided to include mentions of “unbreakable bonds between Poland and

¹⁹⁷ The Polish foreign debt exceeded twenty billion dollars - which was at the time the entire foreign debt of the whole of USSR (Davies, *Heart...* 14).

the Soviet Union” and a “leading role of the Communist Party” in the new constitution (Goban-Klas 208). Critics of the system signed a letter addressed to the Speaker of the Lower Chamber of the Polish Parliament. An initiative of Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuroń, and Jan Józef Lipski, the so-called “Letter of the 55” (in reference to the previous “Letter of the 34”), was signed by writers, professors, lawyers, scientists and priests. Given how all attempts at expressing critique of the government were met with severe repressions, the decision to sign a public appeal was not an easy one to take. As Bikont and Szczęsna point out,

The entire second half of 1970s was marked by such emotional seesaw for the intellectuals, and dilemmas of the type: to let oneself be carried away by emotions and a wish to challenge the authorities, or to continue doing one’s own thing? to risk losing the right to get a passport or to face ostracism in one’s milieu? to save the national substance or to get involved in political squabbles? to give testimony to the truth or to be a coward? (Bikont & Szczęsna 405)¹⁹⁸

Nevertheless, more and more members of intelligentsia found the courage to publicly denounce the anomalies and abuses of the communist state. Numerous writers, among them Jerzy Andrzejewski and Wiktor Woroszyński joined KOR together with younger intellectuals. They also began to publish an independent literary magazine, called *Zapis* [Record], the first underground publication. More and more authors started to write for the so-called “second circle” - the underground, or samizdat, publishings¹⁹⁹. These publications were not only addressed to the intelligentsia - many social groups had their own independent magazines, such as *Robotnik* [The Worker], *Bratniak* (a student magazine), or *Gospodarz* (addressed to farmers). Madeleine Albright remarks that one of the most remarkable initiatives from that time was the uncensored Nowa publishing house, that by 1980 issued over 50 book titles (18). Furthermore, Tomasz Strzyżewski, an employee of the censorship office, defected to the West and smuggled the handbook of GUKPPiW, the Main Office for the Control of Press, Publications and Performances out of the country. Soon after his arrival to Sweden, Strzyżewski published it as *The Black Book of Censorship in PRL (1977)*²⁰⁰. Even though everyone was aware of the existence of censorship, Poles were shocked by how detailed and precise were the instructions

¹⁹⁸ “Cała druga połowa lat siedemdziesiątych upłynęła wielu intelektualistom na takiej emocjonalnej huśtawce i rozstrząsaniu takich mniej więcej dylematów: dać się ponieść emocjom i chęci przykopywania władzy czy robić swoje? Rzykować utratą paszportu czy ostracyzmem środowiska? Ratować narodową substancję czy wdawać się w polityczne awantury? Dać świadectwo prawdzie czy stchórzyć?” (Bikont & Szczęsna 405).

¹⁹⁹ The first underground publication in communist Poland was published on 29 September 1976, and it was the “KOR Statement” (according to Goban-Klas 210).

²⁰⁰ It was edited and translated into English by Jane Leftwich Curry, and published as *Black Book of Polish Censorship*, New York: Vintage Books, 1984.

for censors²⁰¹. There was a growing sense of divide between the sympathisers of the communist Party and the sympathisers of the opposition.

The 1970s were a particularly intensive time for journalists on both sides of the divide. Those who chose to stay close to the political leaders could quickly reap the benefits of their loyalty. Contrarily to Gomułka, who was rather distrustful of journalists, Gierek attached much importance to his public image. According to Goban-Klas,

His information policy would grant the journalistic profession a high status. Those journalists who supported him, became part of the political elite. Their conditions of work improved, incomes increased, and they were able to go abroad more often. Simply speaking, Gierek would have a “stick and carrot” policy, while Gomułka made use only of the stick. (200)²⁰²

Indeed, according to a young editor interviewed by Madeleine Albright, journalists in that time could be divided into two types of people (14).

The first group comprised journalists who had come up through the party ranks and were really white collar workers who wanted to make a name for themselves and liked to see their name in print. The second were intellectuals who wanted to have their work appear in print and tried to figure out how to write their thoughts in such a way as to fit within the censorship system.²⁰³ (Albright 14)

The press became even more centralised. *Trybuna Ludu* remained the most important Party newspaper, and the local dailies often quoted it or reprinted its news items. The already large Party publishing house for magazines and journals, RSW Prasa, became even larger and more powerful, as it was transformed in RSW Prasa-Książka-Ruch. It was joined by the Party book publisher, Książka i Wiedza²⁰⁴, as well as Ruch, the state company solely responsible for press distribution (Goban-Klas 204).

Nowadays, the 1970s are now remembered as the Golden Age of reportage, when the greatest names gained their fame. It was the age of Ryszard Kapuściński, Małgorzata Szejnert, Hanna Krall, Teresa Torańska, Barbara N. Łopieńska, Wojciech Giełżyński and Krzysztof Kąkolewski. They were skilled at making compromises with the system, trying to outwit the censors and to pass across veiled messages for their readers. Nevertheless, in spite of the

²⁰¹ For further information about Strzyżewski case, see documentary by Grzegorz Braun, “Wielka ucieczka cenzora” [“The Great Escape of the Censor”] (1999).

²⁰² “Jego polityka informacyjna przyznawała zawodowi dziennikarskiemu wysoki status. Ci dziennikarze, którzy go popierali, stali się częścią elity politycznej. Warunki pracy dziennikarzy poprawiły się, zarobki wzrosły, częściej też wyjeżdżali zagranicę. Krótko mówiąc, Gierek prowadził politykę ‘kija i marchewki’, podczas gdy Gomułka robił użytek wyłącznie z kija” (Goban-Klas 200).

²⁰³ Albright identifies her sources by numbers - this journalist is coded as “Source no. 2” - in order to guarantee their anonymity. Her book was published in 1983, at the time of the communist backlash.

²⁰⁴ For instance, Książka i Wiedza was the publisher of Janusz Gołębiowski’s book, *Nadane z Delhi*, analysed in this dissertation.

intensive development of reportage as a genre, reporters faced many hardships in their dealings with the authorities. Małgorzata Szejnert recalls how she agreed to write a reportage on the condition of Polish aristocracy in communism. It was an idea of her boss, Jerzy Urban, chief of the domestic affairs section of *Polityka*. The enterprise was risky, as it was very likely that the censorship office will not let it pass. Małgorzata Szejnert, an ambitious young journalist, decided to try her luck: her story “Mitra pod kapeluszem” [“A Mitre under the Hat”] was published in 1973. Even though the censorship allowed it to be published, the authorities were deeply displeased, especially given that the Soviet delegate visiting the May Parade in Warsaw reprimanded the propaganda secretary for it (Szczygieł, *100/XX... 2*: 140). Szejnert recalls the consequences of her article:

When the text was adjudicated, the press division [of the Party] organised a hate campaign against me. They called several journalists and instructed them to write polemical texts. And that is when more brutal texts appeared. [...] International journalists became interested in why the reportage evokes such emotions, and many foreign newspapers reprinted it. This fact shocked the Party comrades, and the authorities put my name and my article on record [a ban on publishing]. From that time, I was surrounded by a deep silence. (Szejnert quoted by Szczygieł, *100/XX... 2*: 140)²⁰⁵

Hanna Krall, who later became famous for her reportages on Holocaust, faced similar problems as Małgorzata Szejnert. The reporter claimed that her aim was to write about the good and the evil in people, but also about mundane things, like about “people who enjoy their life because they managed to save eighty złoty or to get pig legs from the shop” (Szczygieł, *100/XX... 2*: 302)²⁰⁶. Just like many of her colleagues, Krall wanted to show the absurdities of everyday life in communist Poland. While her individual reportages were still tolerated by the censors, when she wanted to publish them as a collection in a book called *Szczęście Marianny Głaz* [*The Happiness of Marianna Głaz*] (1976), all the copies of the book were destroyed (Szczygieł, *100/XX... 2*: 302).

Even those journalists who did not face such problems as Szejnert or Krall were often criticised for “excessive pessimism” in showing Poland in the 70s, or for adopting the “wrong” point of view (Szczygieł, *100/XX... 2*: 169). Many of those reporters, having started their

²⁰⁵ “Kiedy tekst został odsądzony, wydział prasy zorganizował na mnie nagonkę. Wezwali kilku dziennikarzy i zlecili im polemikę. I zaczęły się kolejne brutalne teksty. [...] Dziennikarze zagraniczni zainteresowali się, czemu reportaż wywołuje takie namiętności, przedrukowało go mnóstwo zachodnich gazet. To poruszyło towarzyszy, władze partyjne zrobiły zapis na moje nazwisko i tekst. Nastąpiła głucha cisza. Ale byłam już taka sławna, że kiedy poszłam na pocztę i podałam nazwisko, to paniienka odwróciła się do koleżanek i krzyknęła: ‘Dziewczyny, to ta co arystokrację napisała!’.” (Szejnert qtd by Szczygieł, *100/XX... 2*: 140).

²⁰⁶ “o ludziach, którzy są zachwyceni życiem, bo udało im się odłożyć osiemdziesiąt złotych na książeczkę albo zdobyć nogi wieprzowe” (Szczygieł, *100/XX... 2*: 302).

careers as employees of daily newspapers, in 60s and 70s moved to newly created weeklies, *Kultura* (1963-1981) and *Literatura* (1972-1981). The former one had the same name as the émigré *Kultura* run by Jerzy Giedroyć in Paris and was meant to be an alternative to the unwanted foreign influence. The latter one, *Literatura*, with Jerzy Putrament as its editor-in-chief, featured both fiction and reportage. Many works of reportage were also published in the monthly *Kontrasty* (1965-1990) and in the student weekly magazine, *ITD - Ilustrowany Magazyn Studencki* (1961-1990). *Polityka*, created as a propaganda tool after October '56, and at first run by Party loyalists (such as Jerzy Putrament), under the editorship of Mieczysław Rakowski gained significant independence and became famous for its articles and reportages. Travel reportage could be found primarily in *Dookoła świata* (1954-1976) and *Kontynenty* (1964-1989)²⁰⁷. While many reporters attempted to visit places which were the scene of important political changes, such as the revolution in Iran (covered by Giełżyński) or wars in Africa and South America (described by Kapuściński), India remained one of the favourite directions for travellers. A few reportages about the Subcontinent were published in the 1970s: Wojciech Giełżyński's *Kraj świętych krów i biednych ludzi [The Country of Holy Cows and Poor People]* (1977) and Jerzy Chociłowski's *Indyjska szarada [Indian Charade]* (1977). Several travel accounts and memoirs from India were also published in this period (Dworczyk, Margul, Rubach-Kuczewska). The eruption of travel literature in 1970s was, however, soon to be over. The advent of the Solidarity movement in 1980, followed by the martial law in 1981, turned the attention of the public towards domestic affairs. Also, many reporters were banned from official press and started publishing in the underground media. They re-emerged into the legal media circuit after the fall of communism in Poland in 1989, some becoming founders of the new, free press.

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Clearly, it is impossible to present the entire story of Polish reportage in communism in a comprehensive manner in one chapter. Much more could be written about individual figures, particular organisations, and media outlets. Similarly, there were different currents within the communist party and diverse policy decisions. One of the goals of this overview was to point at the complexity of relations between the press, the state and the society. Nowadays, in the Polish public discourse, there are tendencies to tell the story of communism in a rather black-and-white, simplified manner. The communist period is presented as yet another “single story”: a binary divide between the evil communists and brave oppositionists. This duality could

²⁰⁷ Its last editor-in-chief was one of the reporters featured in this study, Jerzy Chociłowski.

perhaps be observed in the last phase of communism in Poland, when the society became to large degree polarised, but it was not so in previous decades. The interplay between the press and the government, between various state institutions, and between fractions among media representatives themselves, transcends such simplistic models of struggle between “us” and “them”. The space of negotiation was enlarging or shrinking in accordance to political situation. The periods of stricter control, followed by more freedom, and then leading to a backlash and tightening of control again formed cycles which repeated throughout the history of communist Poland.

Intellectuals – writers, journalists, thinkers, reporters – were at the centre of these cycles. Some, in their writing, would strengthen the ideological message of the Party, some would try to undermine it. Thanks to the efforts of the latter ones towards pushing the boundaries of free expression, the space of dialogue was always in negotiation. Many journalists performed several few roles at the same time: they were employed in newspapers or magazines, sometimes wrote longer pieces – reportages, essays, fiction – and sometimes were involved in political activities as well. This is also due to the reality of communist system: each citizen had to have a permanent employment. One could not work as a “freelance” journalist or “independent” writer. Authors were strongly encouraged – if not forced – to be part of Writers’ Association or other state-controlled organisations. Many intellectuals were also obliged to join the Party, especially if they wanted to be published, travel abroad, participate in international associations etc. Some did not need coercing at all, since they identified with the communist ideology. This issue presents another problem in current discussions on the nature of the communist state. While right-wing nationalists would like to identify and label all those who “collaborated” with the system, the context of that historical period makes it virtually impossible. So much depends on the historical context and to individual reasons for making ideological choices. How to assess those who were initially enthusiasts of communism, in the worst, Stalinist years, but later became ardent opponents of the system? Which period in their lives should be deemed as more important? How to judge those who were presented with an impossible choice: if you do not inform on your colleagues, your child will be refused treatment at the hospital? Or even those who made choices in less dramatic circumstances: a permission for academics to do research abroad in turn for a Party loyalty declaration? And what to make of those who were part of the system itself: were they all corrupt Party loyalists, or did they have doubts of their own? Finally, is the ideologically motivated art and writing created in this period worthless, because it served a political goal, or can it still be appreciated for other reasons? It seems obvious that precisely

because these questions cannot be answered in a straightforward manner, the story of communist Poland must be seen in its full complexity.

CHAPTER 4. MYSTICAL INDIA

“With the power of contrasts, typical of India, the old mixes with the new... There are two things particularly complicated for a European visiting India. It is the issue of religion and the issue of castes. To a large extent, they are linked with one another.” (Koehler 105)²⁰⁸

While the previous chapter focussed on **who** the reporters were and **how** did they approach India, the following chapters will explore **what** the reporters chose to write about. The attention is thus shifting from the subject to the object of the reportage. India – a country, a subcontinent, a federation of states, a mix of languages, cultures, lifestyles, religions and landscapes – offers a travel writer an almost infinite number of potential topics. Nevertheless, it is striking that practically all the authors focus on the same set of topics. Among them are the usual suspects: the caste system, the “cult” of the cow, the “holy men” (*sadhus*) and various Hindu customs and rituals. Furthermore, the reporters often mention astrology and other popular beliefs that they consider to be “superstition”. These issues are usually presented together with notes on history, geography, and climate of India. Such index of topics would indeed sound like a table of contents of a book on India from the colonial era, if it was not for considerably large sections on Indian modernisation, in particular industry and government economic plans. Apparently, the socialist travellers had the ambition to convey to their readers the past and the present (and even the future) of India. There was a clearly ideological goal in this approach: presenting the past in negative terms would make the future look positive. Consequently, such a juxtaposition would contribute to a rather optimistic vision of world development along the Soviet model. Thus, Polish reporters often presented the two realities – of tradition and modernity – in a mutually exclusive way. Old customs clash with ambitious plans for the future, traditional social constructs prevent progress, and religious beliefs cloud rational thinking. Most reporters choose to present India in this way, although they realise it is a rather clichéd vision. What is more, talking about contrasts serves a practical purpose: it helps conveying the travellers’ surprise at what they find in India and titillating the readers with exiting contradictions.

²⁰⁸ “Z właściwą Indiom siłą kontrastów stare miesza się tu z nowym... Dwie sprawy są dla Europejczyka, odwiedzającego Indie, szczególnie zawikłane. To kwestia religii i kwestia kast. W znacznym zresztą stopniu wiążą się one ze sobą.” (Koehler 105).

1. Hindu Religion, Spirituality and Worship

One of the main themes appearing in Polish reporters' accounts is religion, or more specifically, its manifestations. The reporters do not explore Indian philosophy and beliefs in depth, and instead address mostly customs and traditions related to Hinduism, rather than the religion itself.

India as Land of Origins

Indian philosophical thought and spirituality were always at the centre of interest among Europeans of different epochs. Already the Ancient Greeks, trying to define the origin of their own philosophy, looked towards the East. They wondered if the thought of Hellas has roots in the "Orient", and more specifically – in India, another civilisation the existence of which the Greeks were aware (Halbfass 4). Although no definitive proof of such influence was found, it is remarkable that Greeks were considering this possibility and were ready to accept these "alien" sources of their own culture (5). They did not know much about India, and until the era of Alexander the Great, their idea of this "far-away kingdom" was mediated through the accounts of Persians. Two Greeks in Persian service, Scylax of Caryanda and Ctesias of Knidos, were authors of the first European descriptions of India. According to Wilhelm Halbfass, "[t]heir stories of bizarre creatures and "fabulous races" played their part in the European image of India up to the Middle Ages and beyond" (11). The real opportunity to learn about India and its religion came however at the time of Alexander the Great's Indian campaign in 327-325 BC, as the Greek leader was accompanied by several philosophers. The ruler himself had meetings and discussions with Indian "naked sages", or *sadhus* (Halbfass 12). Another Greek famously travelled to India as an ambassador of a Seleucid ruler to the Mauryan capital, Pataliputra (today – Patna). His name was Megasthenes, and his account, *Indika*, served as reference to many Greek and Roman authors, among them Strabo and Pliny. He described Indian beliefs and gods using Greek names and concepts (Halbfass 14). The idea of India as the land of origins of thought and religion would thus become more and more prominent among the Greeks, and it resurfaced at different times of history.

Exoticising Hinduism

While in Middle Ages Europe was separated from India by the Muslim world, the direct connection was recovered in 16th century, after Vasco da Gama's expedition in 1498 established the sea route to India. Before that, India appeared in the accounts of Muslim

travellers, such as Al-Beruni and Ibn-Battuta, and European ones – Venetian traders Marco Polo and Niccolò Conti, and Catholic monks from France and Italy. India was featured, too, in the fictional account of *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. According to Sam Miller, it is one of the first popular attempts to describe Indian beliefs and it presents “a shadowy, often misleading and exoticised idea of what we now call Hinduism” (114). Indeed, the idea of Hindu customs mentioned in *Travels...* is not very different from themes that occur in contemporary travel writing on India. There are “half-man and half-ox” gods, cremation of the dead, ritual suicide, worship of fire, sun, trees and snakes, idols on chariots, and so on (Miller 114). As a consequence of Vasco da Gama’s journey, more and more Europeans began to travel to India, with – as the Portuguese sailor’s envoy supposedly put it – “Christians and spices” in mind (Miller 132). Indeed, many missionaries were sent to India with the task of converting Indians, perceived as heathens, to Christianity. Interestingly, this effort triggered research on Hinduism and learning of Sanskrit, considered as tools of evangelisation²⁰⁹ (Halbfass 49-50). Unfortunately, few missionaries were interested in deeper studies of Hinduism, and – according to Halbfass – dogmatism and intolerance were prevalent (53). A negative opinion on Hindus as devil worshippers would also circulate among the European public, due to travellers’ descriptions of scary Hindu gods²¹⁰. Many other accounts made India appear as a land of strange customs, mysterious rituals, frightening gods and exotic holy men.

Mythical and Mystical India

Europe kept its interest in Indian religion and philosophy throughout Enlightenment. Philosophers, often critical of the Catholic church, would embrace the idea of an ancient faith which can be found in India. Voltaire, for instance, believed that India is the cradle of civilisation and the home of religion in its oldest and purest form (Halbfass 57). This idea appears again in various occultist and spiritualist movements that emerged in Europe in the following centuries, particularly in Romanticism, the prime time of “Indomania”. The Romanticist critique of utilitarianism, industrialisation and rationalism was a fertile ground for exaggerated visions of the Orient, as a mythical land unspoilt by modern civilization. According to Halbfass, “the very idea of India assumed mythical proportions; the turn towards India became the quest for the true depths of our own being, a search for the original, infant state of

²⁰⁹ Some Hindu religious texts, such as Vedanta and the Upanishads, deemed as a highpoint of Indian religious thought, were seen by Europeans a transitional stage in the evolution towards accepting the Christian faith (Halbfass 51).

²¹⁰ One of them was the journey of the Italian aristocrat and traveller, Ludovico di Varthema, whose description of the idol of “devil in Calicut”, and the numerous visual images resulting from it would remain for a long time in Europeans’ imagination (see: Spinks 2014).

the human race, for the lost paradise of all religions and philosophies” (72). This outburst of fascination with India was reflected in the development of Indology as an academic discipline. It would also manifest itself in other disciplines and non-academic intellectual endeavours, such as the spiritual pursuits of the theosophists.

Not only would Western Indology claim their right to explain and represent Indian thought to the European public, but also it searched for an “essence” of the religion. For many Europeans, especially the Romanticists, this “essence” that defined Indian religions was mysticism, a particular spirituality. King observes that today, two main images about Indian religion circulate in the West: one of the “mystic East”, and the other one, of “militant fanaticism” (146-147). Both relate to the European idea of Oriental “irrationality”, but one has a more positive connotation than the other. The mystical is linked with the notion of spirituality, philosophical reflection and meditation. The image of “militant fanatics” appeals more to contemporary European fears and is related to a well-known cliché that presents Orientals as “wild”, “passionate”, “excitable” and “unpredictable”.

The Polish reporters visiting India represent various approaches to Indian religion, but the Western fascination with Indian spirituality, so frequent in that time, is almost absent. Perhaps Żukrowski is the reporter that expresses the most positive, sometimes even enthusiastic take on Hinduism. His narrative opens with a description of an Indian man, a Brahmin, that the writer considers as his “guru”. Indeed, throughout his account, Żukrowski often mentions the insight and explanations provided by the guru. However, the author often realises that his guru friend, a modern, Westernised man, educated in Oxford, despite all his European appearances, is still “one of them” (175). Żukrowski recalls how the guru “takes off his suit, wraps himself with a dhoti, crouches on the floor, eats with his hands, plunges into meditation – with a relief, he comes back to his ways” (175)²¹¹. There is a trace of irony in this description, but overall, the writer feels close to Indians and their way of life. According to Piotr Kuncewicz, the author of an introduction to Żukrowski’s memoir, the writer was always fascinated with spiritual mysteries and paranormal events (9). This explains why, in his nonfiction stories from India, Żukrowski confesses that his aim is to collect stories that pertain to curious or inexplicable events, so that he can get to know and understand the Indian mentality (6-9). Every chapter of his book deals with magic, superstition, peculiarity and mystery. These inclinations and a certain desire of immersion in the Hindu culture, make his guru convinced that the Polish writer’s destiny is somehow particularly linked to India. “You are more of an Asian, than you

²¹¹ “Zrzuca smoking, owija się dhoti, siada w kucki na ziemi, je palcami, uprawia medytacje – z ulgą wraca do siebie.” (Żukrowski 175).

would like to admit”, declares the guru, “. . . why were you born in Europe, if you feel so drawn to India? After all, you feel good among us. Did you ever think that you could have lived here before?” (174)²¹². The writer protests, saying that he believes in only one life, but he seems rather pleased with the idea of a particular bond that ties him to India.

While Polish writers in times of socialism were clearly less inclined to mysticism of the New Age type than their Western counterparts, it was still acceptable to express a certain interest in Indian spirituality. Żukrowski was not the only one to write about this topic. A former film star, Lucyna Winnicka, also became interested in Eastern religions and philosophy. In 1970s, she started her own practice, called Academy of Life, where one could learn about meditation, self-awareness, traditional medicine etc. In 1987, she published an account from her spiritual travels around India, *Travels around a Holy Cow*. However, the trend of travel to India in search of spiritual enlightenment, described, for instance, in Gita Mehta’s *Karma Cola* (1979), would have limited impact on Poles. It was due to the fact that there were many restrictions of travel for leisure, and the costs of intercontinental plane tickets were too high for an average Pole. The hippies’ movement which developed in Poland in late 1960s would heighten the interest in meditation and other elements of Hindu spirituality, but it was a phenomenon rather limited in scale, and it faced repressions from the communist authorities. Hinduism was studied in academia by Orientalists and Indologists, but – again – it was a small circle of specialists. By and large, Poles knew very little about Hinduism. No wonder that reporters coming to India had a rather meagre idea of this religion and only learned about it there.

Hinduism as Understood by Polish Reporters

Witold Koehler suggests that Hinduism is too complex to understand. He comments on India’s religions briefly, as it is not his main point of interest. His first observations pertain to food restrictions in Hinduism and other external manifestations of religious belief. Given that the questions of religion and caste are, to his mind, “particularly complicated” (105) for a European visitor, he chooses not to delve into them.

It is a question that, during a short stay in India, can prove to be interesting – or not. The effect is anyways the same. In one way or the other, the mysteries are concealed by thousands of veils; one would have to keep taking them off just like one tears off the pages of a calendar, whereas

²¹² “Ty też jesteś bardziej Azjata, niż chcesz się do tego przyznać. . . dlaczego urodziłeś się w Europie, skoro cię tak ciągnie do nas? Przecież się dobrze czujesz między nami. Czyś nie myślał, że już zdarzyło ci się tu żyć?” (Żukrowski 174).

the calendar of Hindustan's history comprises at least a few thousands of years. (Koehler 105-106)²¹³

Koehler thus prefers to leave the exploration of Hinduism to experts, only outlining quickly the main ideas of the religion to the readers. He explains that “Brahmanism”- as he calls Hinduism – has three main gods, Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva, the latter of whom is accompanied by his “blood-thirsty wife, Kali” (105). There are millions of other gods, but according to the reporter, only the priests can make sense of this complex family. Common people “care little about divine mysteries” (105), choosing to worship one god or a few gods. This view confirms the point about Hinduism being represented and described to Westerners by Brahmins (see: King, Thapar), hence its popular designation in Europe as “Brahmanism”. Koehler also presents a rather Orientalist picture of Hinduism as a religion with a large array of rather scary gods who expect bloody sacrificial offerings. This in itself is an image that in the popular understanding would be associated with the “uncivilised” or the “primitive”. Moreover, Koehler clarifies that “[t]he fantastic labyrinth of religions proliferated over the ages in propitious circumstances among peoples with a vivid and excitable Eastern imagination“(105)²¹⁴. Therefore, Indian tradition of polytheism is – in the reporter's view – an outcome of an excessive imagination, which supposedly constitutes an inborn trait of the Orientals. It is linked with a particular “excitability”, a propensity to be moved by passions and emotions. Colonial Orientalists attributed this “excitement” to the climate zone and the stimulating effects of heat, but, as highlighted by Edward Said, it was only imagined this way in order to present the European self as cool, detached, disciplined and in control of passions – and imagination (Orientalism 162). Koehler closes his remarks on Hinduism by presenting the Indian religious landscape as characterised by contradictions:

The religions of India may be fascinating with their immeasurable wealth or they may discourage at the threshold of discovering them. They do not lack in any of the human passions, starting from an almost hysterical compassion to horrible cruelty, from asceticism to laxity and from the beauty of the purest poetic thought to the prose of most primitive, animal instincts. (105)²¹⁵

²¹³ “Jest to kwestia [religie Indii], która w ciągu krótkiego pobytu w Indiach może zainteresować lub – nie. Skutek zresztą jest zupełnie ten sam. Tak czy inaczej zagadki kryją się za tysiącem zasłon; trzeba by je zdzierać jak kartki z kalendarza, kalendarz zaś historii Hindustanu obejmuje co najmniej kilka tysięcy lat.” (Koehler 105-106).

²¹⁴ “Fantastyczny labirynt religii przez wieki rozrastał się w sprzyjających warunkach wśród ludów o bujnej i pobudliwej, wschodniej wyobraźni.” (Koehler 105)

²¹⁵ “Religie Indii mogą fascynować niezmiernym bogactwem lub mogą nim zniechęcać u progu ich poznania. Nie brak w nich żadnej z namiętności ludzkich, począwszy od aż histerycznego miłosierdzia do potwornego okrucieństwa, od ascezy do rozwiązłości i od piękna najczystszej poezji myśli do prozy najbardziej pierwotnych, zwierzęcych instynktów.” (Koehler 105)

Once again, India is shown as a country of paradoxes, which leave the visitor puzzled and confused.

The stereotype of a “militant fanatic” is also part of the modern Orientalist imagery. Jerzy Chociłowski, coming to India in mid 1970s, remarks exactly on this aspect of Hinduism. Indian religiosity, in his description, comprises of contradicting emotions and behaviours (goodness and cruelty, asceticism and laxity, lyricism and primitive instincts), but it can also be fanatic and overwhelming. Chociłowski finds Hindu extremists dangerous, because of the sheer size and impact of the religion that they claim to represent. “Hinduism is like a huge river that runs its course calmly through the Indian Motherland, but it can always overflow and drown whatever is around” (17)²¹⁶, says the reporter. He gives the example of the fanatic Jana Sangh movement that – in the reporter’s words – wished for Muslims to be engulfed in the sea of Hinduism (17). Chociłowski remains in awe of Hinduism considering it to be a particularly mighty religion. Its power results not only from the large number of followers, he clarifies, but also from the immovability of its dogmas, particularly the one that assumes people are not born equal (18). However, in comparison with other reporters, Chociłowski stands out as a more detached narrator. He often adopts the position of an outside observer who tries to withhold judgement and offer historical, sociological and cultural explanations to Indian customs and beliefs. He focuses on manifestations of religiosity in everyday life and worship, instead of informing his readers about Hinduism as such.

Reporters – Proponents of Atheism

Most reporters, however, cannot be placed neither in the camp of romantic admirers of Indian mysticism, nor in the camp of Europeans scared of Hindu fanaticism. Their position is different – they are critical of any religion, as it is expected from a reporter from a communist state. As Lenin famously said, religion is the opium of the people, and “[a]theism is a natural and inseparable part of Marxism, of the theory and practice of scientific socialism” (6). The best weapon against religion was, according to Lenin, a “scientific world-outlook” (“Socialism and Religion”). Indeed, the reporters often recur to rationalist or scientific explanations of Indian culture, recommending to end the “cow worship” or to free the society of the influence of priests. Many of them do not explain the main assumptions of Hindu beliefs, focusing on their cultural manifestations instead.

²¹⁶ “Hinduizm jest jak ogromna rzeka, która toczy spokojne swe wody przez Macierz Indyjską, ale może zawsze wezbrać i zatopić wszystko co jest naokoło.” (Chociłowski 17).

Jerzy Ros prefers to document his journey and to talk to people rather than to elaborate on the main tenets of Hindu religion. In fact, it is clear that his approach to all religions is sceptical, he considers faith as a relic of the past, unnecessarily dividing humans and causing conflicts. In his account, the religiosity of his interviewees is presented in a somewhat ironic way. It is easily discernible when Ros describes the motivations of a young Hindu owner of a ship taking passengers from Bombay for a pilgrimage to Goa, where the remains of Saint Francis Xavier were put up for public display. “Trusting that Hindu gods will not blame him for organising a Christian pilgrimage and will understand that business is business, he [the young entrepreneur] believes at the same time that the Catholic saint will bless his undertaking and will help him raise his little fortune” (93)²¹⁷, explains Ros. The reporter finds it rather humorous that the belief in gods of one religion does not exclude the belief in the power of a saint of another religion, especially when money matters are concerned.

Indeed, for Christians, whose faith is quite rigidly confined to a particular dogma, and transgressions from it are not welcome, this openness of Hindu religion comes as a surprise. Even today, the boundaries between Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism, are sometimes fuzzy in the popular understanding and it is not uncommon to find families where these religions are mixed within one household. The Hindu Marriage Act from 1955, in force till today, applies to Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhist, and does not consider marriages between the members of these communities as interfaith relationships²¹⁸. The pilgrims in Goa, described by Jerzy Ros, are also representatives of various faiths. “Protestants and believers in Hinduism, Muslims and Parsi, all compete in praising the healing powers of the saint” (92)²¹⁹, notes Ros. Why? What brought them to this Catholic church? “Curiosity, often an innate mysticism, partly desperation, partly a belief that the intercession of a white man can get more in cases when own gods did not grant favours...”(100-101)²²⁰ – explains the reporter. This quotation is symptomatic of Ros’ approach to religion. He often calls religion “superstition”, perceiving it as a human weakness of some sort, which originates from the feeling curiosity, fear and desperation. While this view can still be considered as a sympathetic one, attributing to Indians a particular need for spirituality, the notion of “an innate mysticism” is a typically Orientalist, patronising statement, reminding of an old Western cliché. At the same time, Ros often condemns the colonial

²¹⁷ “Ufny, że hinduscy bogowie nie wezmą mu za złe organizowania chrześcijańskiej pielgrzymki i zrozumieją, że *business is business*, wierzy równocześnie, że katolicki święty pobłogosławi tym poczynaniom i pomoże zaokrąglić fortunę.” (Ros 93).

²¹⁸ If, however, a follower of these religions would like to marry a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or a Jew, the Special Marriage Act from 1954, which provides for mixed couples, would apply.

²¹⁹ “Protestanci i wyznawcy hinduizmu, muzułmanie i Parsowie na wyścigi sławiają uzdrawiające moce świętego.” (Ros 92)

²²⁰ “Ciekawość, częściowo wrodzony mistycyzm, trochę wiara, że wstawiennictwo białego świętego wskórać może więcej w sprawach, w których nie udało się uzyskać przychylności własnych bogów . . .” (Ros 100-101).

influence which instilled a belief among Indians that white Westerners are superior to them – a belief manifested in the pilgrims’ conviction that a white saint’s prayers will be more effective than theirs.

In other moments of Jerzy Ros’ account, strong religious beliefs are judged by the reporter as “conservative” (308), “reactionary”(176) or even “fanatic”(176)²²¹. The reporter seems to suggest that religion is an element of the past, and that it is part of the feudal, colonial, and caste-based systems of oppression. It is noticeable when, while describing the birth of Buddhism in India, Ros presents Buddha almost as a socialist messiah who wanted to bring justice to the poor people exploited by the upper caste (157). However, after Buddha’s death, the mighty priests eradicated Buddhism from India, and “the word of the reformer, which was to destroy the unjust [social] order . . . was placed as a pillar supporting the ceiling of an old temple”(158)²²². “Not the first time, not the last”, concludes Ros, referring to all reformists movements crushed by the power of a clergy (158)²²³. As a self-proclaimed communist, Ros is obviously critical of the Catholic church. Nevertheless, he defies the Western belief that religion is completely banned in a communist state. When travelling to India on a Polish ship, “Batory”, he sneers at foreign passengers’ surprise that there is a chapel and a mass takes place there every day. Ros is convinced that the accusations of lack of religious freedom in communist Poland are the outcome of the Western propaganda. Even though Ros believes in the individual right to religious convictions, he expresses a hope that modernisation and progress will lead to secularisation, and religion – “the opium of the people” – will become obsolete.

Wojciech Giełżyński shares a similar view: he is often ironic and critical of Hinduism, which he considers as a tradition that will slowly fade away. “India’s religiosity is striking at every step”, observes the reporter, and adds: “one does not need to go to Benares to see the fanaticism of faith”(Giełżyński 55)²²⁴. He points out the inconsistencies in Hindu beliefs: respect for animals, but exploitation of people (54), huge expenditure on religious festivals, while there lacks money for allowances for the poorest (56). He also finds esteem of the of the “half-naked old men” incomprehensible (55)²²⁵. Giełżyński adopts a position of a rational moderniser, who does not understand why seemingly logical and cost-effective solutions are not adopted. While admonishing the readers to always keep Indian cultural specifics in mind,

²²¹ “konserwatywne” (Ros 308); “reakcyjne” (Ros 176); “fanatyczne” (Ros 176).

²²² “. . . słowo reformatora, które miało zburzyć krzywdzący ład, oplecione girlandami legendy wstawiono jako jeden z filarów podtrzymujących strop starej świątyni” (Ros 258).

²²³ “Nie po raz pierwszy i nie po raz ostatni...” (Ros 258).

²²⁴ “Religijność Indii rzuca się w oczy na każdym kroku. Niekoniecznie trzeba jeździć do Benares, by zobaczyć fanatyzm wiary.” (Giełżyński 55).

²²⁵ Giełżyński calls them in Polish: “pónadzy starcy” (55).

he himself displays a patronising attitude towards Indians. He believes that reforms, if applied properly, are bound to bring positive results, and India will become modern and secular. This process, he thinks, is already under way:

Still, slowly, imperceptibly, step by step, - beliefs wane, religious ardour dies away. The cinema is more attractive than the rituals at the temples. The work at the factories demands at least an elementary discipline, it does not allow to participate in every religious ritual and ceremony. Through schools, and especially through universities, flow the currents of modernity, still modest, but already discernible. (56-57)²²⁶

However, a few decades after Giełżyński wrote these words, it appears that Indians remained as religious as they were before. The Indian national census conducted in 2011 reveals that in spite of radical changes in demographics, Hinduism is still the major religion in India, with Hindus constituting almost 80% of population (compared to 84% in 1951), and the number of respondents claiming to have no religion does not even amount to 1% of the population (in 1951, it was 0,4%). Other religions also retained their share over these six decades²²⁷. Clearly, Indian society has not become secular, as some of the reporters expected. Given that riots between religious communities are still not uncommon, it seems that large parts of the Indian population still feel very strongly about their beliefs.

Nevertheless, except of these communal tensions, strong religiosity did not lead to any great catastrophe, as Wiesław Górnicki feared. In his reportage, he asks in a dramatic tone:

Will the people, put to a narcotic sleep with satyagraha and centuries of inaction, ever assault the gold and the land of the nawabs, break the yoke of caste, and start exerting their rights? Will the sages deliberating on ahimsa ever be able to notice the rags, the hunger, the illnesses, and draw practical conclusions from them? If they will not, they will bring over India a storm, that has never been seen on this continent; will four thousand years of philosophy matter then? (197)²²⁸

Thus, according to Giełżyński, no religion can alleviate the suffering of the most unprivileged in the Indian society, other means will have to be employed. Hinduism is, in his eyes, partly responsible for India's problems: it inculcates a feeling of powerlessness and passivity among its believers. Incidentally, these traits are also typical in the depiction of Orientals.

²²⁶ "A jednak powoli, niepostrzeżenie, krok za krokiem, - wierzenia słabną, religijny zapal przygasa. Kino jest atrakcyjniejsze niż obrzędy w świątyniach. Praca w fabrykach wymaga choćby elementarnej dyscypliny, nie pozwala na uczestniczenie we wszystkich obrzędach i ceremoniach religijnych. Przez szkoły, a zwłaszcza uniwersytety, idą prądy współczesności – jeszcze nieśmiało, lecz już dostrzegalne." (Giełżyński 56-57).

²²⁷ The percentage data are based on statistics available at the Indian Census site:

<http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/C-01.html> (last access 12.10.2015).

²²⁸ "Czy lud, uśpiony narkozą satyagrahy i stuleciami bierności, targnie się kiedyś na złoto i ziemię nawabów, zerwie kajdany kast, zacznie dochodzić swoich praw? Czy rozstrząsający ahimsę mędrcy potrafią dostrzec łachmany, głód, choroby i wyciągną z tego praktyczne wnioski? Jeżeli tego nie uczynią, sprowadzą na Indie burzę, jakiej na tym kontynencie jeszcze nie widziano; czy wtedy będą się liczyć cztery tysiąclecia filozofii?" (Górnicki 197).

Wiesław Górnicki, himself a staunch atheist, remarks on the evils of religion at many moments of his account. Coming from a predominantly Catholic Poland, he is particularly vociferous when writing about Christian religion in India. Inspired by the visit to the local Catholic church, he shapes his reportage from Trivandrum on the basis on the everyday prayer, “Our Father”. Thus, every paragraph starts with a phrase from the *Pater Noster* (in Latin) and serves as an introduction to a critique of Catholicism. For instance, Górnicki says: “*Pater noster qui es in coelis...* Our father? But whose father, the father of the plantators?” (198)²²⁹. He claims that Vatican owns more than 30% of the spices plantations, and the rest belongs to European and Indian landowners (referred to as “*kulaks*”). Since these forces are allied in the process of exploitation of poor peasants, Górnicki declares: “Here, a sign of equality has been put between Catholicism, plantation owners and European missionaries”(198)²³⁰. The reporter moves on to explain the political situation in Kerala, ending with the final line of the prayer:

...*sed libera nos a malo...* From the evil. From the missionaries, carrying the Bible in one hand, and in the other – a costs-benefits analysis. From the church of the plantators. From the alliance of black *sotnia* of the four different religions. From all the situations that enable the Catholic Church to have a political activity. *Amen.* (Górnicki 204)²³¹

Górnicki’s aim is to demonstrate how false are the words of the prayer when confronted with the actual condition of the local population. The particular attention that he awards to the bad deeds of Catholic church is not coincidental. While the situation of Christians in India might be an interesting topic for a reporter, it usually is not the most prominent issue for a visitor to the Subcontinent. Thus, it seems that Górnicki is particularly intent on ridiculing the Catholic Church because by doing that, he targets his Polish readers and fulfils an ideological goal. Indeed, ideology might play a role in this negative attitude towards religions of India among many reporters of the socialist period. Just like the communist state oppresses or marginalises Churches of various religions, an ideologically consistent view of a communist visitor to India would also require criticism, or at least distance from religion.

2. Hindu Customs

²²⁹ “*Pater noster qui es in coelis...* Ojczy nasz? To znaczy czyj, plantatorów?” (Górnicki 198).

²³⁰ “Pomiędzy katolicyzmem, posiadaczami plantacji i europejskimi misjonarzami postawiono tu znak równości” (Górnicki 198).

²³¹ “...*sed libera nos a malo...* Ode złego. Od misjonarzy, niosących w jednej ręce ewangelię, a w drugiej – rachunek strat i zysków. Od kościoła plantatorów. Od przymierza czarnej sotni z czterech różnych religii. Od wszelkich sytuacji które umożliwią kościołowi katolickiemu działalność polityczną. *Amen*” (Górnicki 204).

Polish reporters visiting India would more or less consciously renounce from providing a more in-depth overview of Hinduism to their readers, but they focus on many aspects of Indian culture and everyday life that are inevitably linked to religion. In the following section, they are considered one by one, as separate case-studies. The first one pertains to the idea of cow worship, the second – to the figure of holy men, or *sadhus*, and third – to religious sites and pilgrimages.

Case Study 1. The “Holy Cow” Stereotype

Practically all reporters address the issue of the “Holy Cow” as it is probably the strongest and the longest-lasting stereotype of India. Chociłowski comments on it in the following way:

In the eyes of an outside observer, Indians’ love for cows is charged with such a load of fanaticism and irrational obsession, that it often serves as an illustration of the saying that there no such depth of superstition that India wouldn’t plunge into with pleasure, up till its nose. It is true that nothing distinguishes India from the rest of the world more than cow worship and it is often the only thing that people know about India; all the more, it is a pity that it is hastily placed among the oddities of Hinduism. (54)²³²

In this quote, the well-known stereotypes of Orientals return: fanaticism, irrationality and superstition. Chociłowski explains the idea of cow worship, trying to show the complex status of cows in Indian society, but he realises that for outsiders, the very fact of respecting the cow is a proof of India’s “irrational obsession”.

Indeed, the special status of cows has been noticed by many foreigners visiting India. A seventeenth-century French merchant, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, apparently determined to impress his readers, described how disgusted he was by the use of cow urine to cure the sick, or by the (unconfirmed) custom of widows eating the “droppings” of cows (Miller 187-188). More contemporary accounts focus on how unusual it is to see cows roaming around on the street, entering temples and other buildings, and stealing food from markets (from Katherine Mayo, through Antonio Tabucchi, to Sarah Macdonald). Polish reporters, too, describe how cows are treated in India, trying to offer explanations of cows’ religious and cultural importance. In a truly socialist spirit of secular rationalism, they demonstrate how many

²³² “W oczach postronnego obserwatora miłość Indusów do krów mieści na ogół taki ładunek fanatyzmu i irracjonalnej obsesji, że chętnie ilustruje się nim powiedzeni, iż nie ma takiej głębiny przesądu, w której Indie nie zanurzyłyby się z przyjemnością aż po dziurki w nosie. To prawda, że nic tak nie odróżnia Indii od reszty świata, jak właśnie kult krowy i często jest to w ogóle jedyna rzecz, jaką ludzie wiedzą o Indiach, tym większa zatem szkoda, że wrzucana pochopnie pomiędzy dziwactwa hinduizmu” (Chociłowski 54-55).

problems are caused by cow worship in India, and voice recommendations on how the “cow issue” should be solved. Jerzy Ros illustrates his account with a very telling photograph of a car that stops in the middle of the street, because a cow stands in its way. The subtitle says: “Technology and Superstition”, and it is symbolic of the author’s understanding of India as a place where modernity and tradition exist side-by-side. The fact that cows are roaming free around India’s towns and villages is for all authors a sign of a tradition that impedes the advent of modernity. The presence of cows on the streets speaks not only to the lack of development, but to the “backward” mentality of Indians (Ros 178).

The reporters have diverse attitudes towards the concept of cow worship, but all of them agree that it is a particularly Indian problem and as such deserves explanation. That is why, in almost all reportages analysed in this book, the veneration of cows is presented as a multi-faceted phenomenon.

The Cow as a Part of Indian History

Ros justifies the special status of the cow by historical conditions. In his vision of India’s past, for the Ancient Aryans a cow was a precious animal as a source of milk, butter, leather, fertilizer for heating, and workforce (177). However, the economic rationale disappeared, says Ros, and what remains is “an orthodox religious dogma” (177)²³³. Chociłowski, on the other hand, explains cow worship by the fact that the cattle that the Aryans brought with them [from Central Asia] was delicate and not adapted to India’s climate. That is why, the Aryans stopped killing cows and eating their meat, and started to protect cows from extinction (55). “By protecting the cattle, Aryans protected themselves, and all the ideology of sanctity was simply concocted by priests who sanction an economic and political need in a religious way”, adds the reporter (55)²³⁴. He remarks that even the Muslim invaders respected Hindu reverence of cows (54). Nevertheless, from the time of Muslim conquests, Hindu perception of cows began to change:

Muslim invasion of India, and then the British occupation, filled the cult of the cow with a new – nationalist – meaning. It expressed as much love for these useful animals, as hate towards the conquerors. It was a turning point in the story of this worship, that at first had a rational and logical intention, and – although it kept its economic rationale. . . – it became dangerously degenerated and acquired an unpleasant whiff of fanaticism.(56)²³⁵

²³³ “ortodoksyjny dogmat religijny” (Ros 177).

²³⁴ “Chroniąc bydło, Ariowie chronili więc siebie, cała zaś ideologia świętości została po prostu dorobiona przez kapłanów, którzy potrzebie gospodarczej i politycznej dali sankcję religijną” (Chociłowski 55).

²³⁵ “Inwazja muzułmańska na Indie, a następnie okupacja brytyjska wypełniły kult krowy zupełnie nową – nacjonalistyczną – treścią. Było w nim wówczas tyleż miłości do pozytecznych zwierząt, co nienawiści do najeźdźców. To był bodaj punkt

As a result of this “pious adoration” (Ros 177), the cows have reproduced so fast that now [in 1957] India’s cows account to almost one fourth of all world cattle (Ros 178). Giełżyński, visiting India in 1974, claims that around two hundred million stray cows roam around the country, and “they are in . . . big cities, even in the centre, in medium and small towns, in villages, on fields and on roads – everywhere!”(15)²³⁶.

If one was to follow the reporters’ train of thought, it would seem that cows were first protected because they were useful and valuable, then they acquired a religious protection, and as a result of these two processes, they became too numerous in times contemporary to the reporters. However, according to historical research, it was not necessarily so. D. N. Jha explains that in the Aryan era, cows were treated just like any other cattle: “the Vedas mention about 250 animals out of which at least 50 were deemed fit for sacrifice, by implication for divine as well as human consumption” (139). Later Brahmanical texts, says Jha, confirm that beef was widely eaten and cows were also killed for sacrifice and other rituals, in particular in the funerary ones (140). The ascent of Buddhism and Jainism contributed to a change in this pattern, and Hindus gradually started to adopt the idea of *ahimsa* – non-violence – towards animals. Only in the middle of the first millennium A.D., beef eating became discouraged among upper casts. According to Wendy Doniger, refraining from eating beef became a matter of status, and that prohibition was strengthened by a number of sanctions (150). Even some Mughal rulers, although Muslim, abstained from eating beef. Emperor Jehangir proclaimed that no animal should be killed and no meat should be eaten on certain days (Doniger 543). In times of the British rule, the special status of cows became a problematic issue, when Indian soldiers discovered that bullets for their guns were covered with cow and pig fat. The cartridges were to be open with their mouth, which meant that they would have to ingest the fat – an idea abhorrent to both Hindu and Muslim military men. It was one of the direct reasons that sparked a full-fledged rebellion, which took place in 1857²³⁷. Gradually, more and more Hindus would perceive cow protection and vegetarianism as key elements of their identity. One of them was Dayanand Sarasvati, who founded in 1875 a reformist movement called Arya Samaj. Protecting cows was central to the Samaj supporters: they established societies to lobby against slaughter and they decried any act of cow killing. In fact, according to Doniger, “cow slaughter was specifically used [by Arya Samaj] to justify violence against Pariahs and Muslims” (623) and

zwrotny w dziejach kultu, którego pierwotna intencja była racjonalna i logiczna, a który – choć zachował swe ekonomiczne uzasadnienie . . . – niebezpiecznie się przecież wykoślawił, nabrał niemiłego zapaszku fanatyzmu” (Chociłowski 56).

²³⁶ “są w . . . wielkich miastach, nawet w centrum, w miastach średnich i małych miasteczkach, we wsiach, na polach i drogach – wszędzie!” (Giełżyński 15).

²³⁷ In British colonial sources it is remembered as Indian Mutiny, but in India, and increasingly in the rest of the world, it is remembered as Indian Rebellion.

it is even today a frequent cause of communal riots²³⁸. The idea of non-violence that includes vegetarianism was reinforced by the time India regained independence thanks to Mahatma Gandhi, who emphasised the importance of a cow as a Mother, and in particular, the Mother of the Nation. A cow remains a particularly important animal for Hindus, who are still in large numbers vegetarian. Nevertheless, accepting nationalists' claim that meat-eating came to India with the Muslim invaders (mentioned by Doniger, 657) would be a rewriting of history.

The Cow as a Mother

Chociłowski titles one of his chapters "The Cow is our Mother", alluding to a slogan often repeated by Hindus (53). Indeed, even today, the cow is sometimes referred to as Gaumata, the cow-mother. It is one of the most symbolic animals in Hinduism, associated with the caste of Brahmins (Doniger 40). A cow is also linked with the female gender and its stereotypically-defined traits: gentleness, maternal care, purity, and docility. The fact of giving milk is associated with a motherly act of feeding and selfless giving. The cow can feed people without having to die – that is why, it became an iconic image of nonviolence. What is more, the image of a cow that nourishes, a cow full of bounty, is, as Doniger observes, a "Hindu parallel to the Roman cornucopia" (112). However, Westerners do not fully understand the status of cows in India and use their own categories of "holiness" or "saintliness" to describe how Hindus treat the animal. Moreover, many European languages use the idiom "sacred cow" in a rather disparaging way. According to Oxford Dictionary, it is "an idea, custom, or institution held to be above criticism", while Merriam Webster indicates that it is used to describe "one that is often unreasonably immune from criticism or opposition". In the Polish language, too, this idiom is used in the same way. However, calling someone "a stupid cow" is intended as a minor expletive, mostly towards women. In this manner, the language itself offers two, rather conflicting images of a cow – one, denoting a special privilege, and the other associating cows with lack of intelligence and a certain slowness. Thus, it is not surprising that Polish reporters are so interested in cows' status – and their alleged "cult" in India. Koehler asks an Indian colleague, professor in zoology, about the status of cows, and hears the following answer:

... setting apart all the religious prescriptions and age-old traditions, the cow is for us a symbol of maternity, calm, gentleness, profit. Our bards have been admiring her beauty for centuries.

²³⁸ Recently (in September 2015), a Muslim man was killed by a mob in an Uttar Pradesh village over allegations that he has eaten beef. See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/03/inside-bishari-indian-village-where-mob-killed-man-for-eating-beef>

Do not be surprised – . . . in our fauna, there are many beautiful, colourful, shapely beings. It is not only about the common harmony of shapes and colours; look into her big, pure, calm eyes... (Koehler 68)²³⁹

It seems as if Koehler chose to quote his interlocutor in order to present the Hindu viewpoint in a more authentic manner. Other reporters heard of similar metaphors. Giełżyński underlines that every cow is holy for Hindus, because “it is a symbol of maternity, prosperity, happiness, and the embodiment of the highest ideal: life” (15)²⁴⁰. Thus killing a cow would be considered as a matricide (Giełżyński 15). He recalls the words of Mahatma Gandhi, who said that if the worship of cows dies, the whole culture will die.

Chociłowski adds that Gandhi tenderly called the cow a “poem of the heart” (53)²⁴¹. Giełżyński points out to his readers that Gandhi was not a fanatic and realised that it is important to modernise the society while keeping some traditions alive (16). In this explanation, the reporter unveils his own view: a “fanatical”, or extreme idea that cows should be worshipped can only be explained in rational terms by political strategy. He suggests that since Gandhi was a respected figure, his respect for cows would only be understandable if it was part of a political bargain: keep the “holiness” of cows, but give up on child marriage and discrimination of the lower casts. Most reporters share a similar view. Although they try to explain what cows mean to Hindus, the cow “worship” remains for them, at best, one of India’s “oddities”, and at worst, a symptom of “fanaticism”.

The Cow as a Part of Landscape

Most reporters perceive the presence of cows as an unusual part of the urban landscape. They notice how they roam around the streets, lie down in parks, sometimes stop the traffic (Kohler 67, Ros 175, 177, 271, Żukrowski 17, Putrament 1 92, Górnicki 155). Perhaps the only author with a positive attitude towards cows is Witold Koehler. As a forester and environmentalist, he is appreciative of Indian cows: “We have to admit that they look neat and pleasant. Their light hair of a milky coffee colour gets a brown velvety shade on their hump and their muzzle. The long ears dangle downwards, the clear eyes look at the world gently and

²³⁹ “. . . pominawszy przepisy religijne i wiekowe tradycje, krowa jest dla nas symbolem macierzyństwa, spokoju, łagodności, pożytku. Nasi pieśniarze pd stuleci opiewają jej piękno. – Nie dziwcie się – . . . w naszej faunie jest wiele pięknych, barwnych, kształtnych istot. Nie chodzi o pospolitą harmonię kształtów i barw; popatrzcie w jej wielkie, czyste, spokojne oczy...” (Koehler 68).

²⁴⁰ “. . . jest symbolem macierzyństwa, pomyślności, szczęścia, uosobieniem najwyższego ideału: życia” (Giełżyński 15).

²⁴¹ “poemat serca” (Chociłowski 53).

peacefully”(67)²⁴². The same colour that Koehler likens to milky coffee, Putrament calls the colour of mud (*Cztery...* 92). Górnicki is even more negative in his description of cows, that he sees as “skinny, dull, covered with an eternal dirt; their udders, sallow like a leprosy-infested skin, hang empty and dry” (155)²⁴³. Cows are not only off-putting by how they look, but also by how they behave. Górnicki recalls a cow walking through a bazaar, jostling through the crowd, butting its head towards the children, or stealing fruit or bread (226). Koehler describes a similar situation: a cow stops at a stall with fruits, and – to the travellers surprise, “the seller that just a moment earlier was ardently haggling with customers, would now stare, motionless, at the “saint” that turned her attention to his modest possessions” (67)²⁴⁴. Nevertheless, upon arrival to the town of Dehradun, Koehler was surprised to see that the reaction of sellers was different. “The dark-skinned vendor would concentrate for a moment on following the cow, and then he took a large stick and with no qualms started to beat the animal on its sides. The holy cow took it just like a normal cow – it ran away” (68)²⁴⁵. The reporter notices that all the other people were indifferent, nobody stopped “the blasphemous hand”, nobody defended the “affronted holiness” (68), and the foreigner visitors seemed to be the only ones perturbed by the scene. To convey this contrast between “holiness” and mundane matters of the sellers, he personifies the cow and presents it – or her (almost, Her Holiness) – as a queen that strides across the market, surveying her possessions. That is why, the reporter is surprised when the sellers unceremoniously chase the animal away.

Indeed, the “sanctity” of a cow is a concept that remains vastly misunderstood by foreigners. Applying Christian notions of “sanctity”, they think a cow is perceived almost as a deity, as a personified figure of worship. Instead, a cow is “holy” only in the sense that it is protected, which means that it is not killed and its meat is generally not eaten. The fact that one can see cows roaming freely on the streets is linked with a general acceptance of animal presence in all spaces, urban and rural.

The Cow as a Problem

²⁴² “Trzeba przyznać, że wyglądają schludnie i sympatycznie. Jasna sierść o barwie mlecznej kawy jest na garbie i pysku brunatnawo aksamitnie przyciemniona. Długie uszy zwisają ku dołowi, wyraziste oczy spoglądają na świat z łagodnym spokojem” (Koehler 67).

²⁴³ “Krowy są chude, tępe, poroście odwiecznym brudem; ich wymiona, ziemiste jak plama trądu, zwisają puste i wysuszone” (Górnicki 155).

²⁴⁴ “Sprzedawca, który przed chwilą targował się namiętnie, patrzy teraz bez drgnienia, jak ‘święta’ zaszczyca uwagą jego skromny dobytek” (Koehler 67).

²⁴⁵ “Ciemnowłocisty sprzedawca przez chwilę śledził ją w skupieniu, po czym chwycił okazały kij i bez ceremonii jął nim bębnić po bokach zwierzęcia. Święta przyjęła to tak jak zwyczajna krowa – po prostu dała drapak” (Koehler 68).

The Polish reporters consider the special status of the cow primarily as a problem for India. Górnicki argues that the number of cows in India is excessively big, given that they do not give much profit:

. . . [they] do not give any milk or meat, they gulp down a lot of fodder, they destroy the meagre plant life in the north and the plantations in the south, they block the movement at city crossroads, they attack passers-by . . . their only rationale is that they serve in field labour . . . and they provide fuel from their dried dung. It is too little [profit] for a number of two hundred million animals. (155)²⁴⁶

Górnicki thus perceives cows as useless. Not only do they fail to contribute to the economy, but, as Ros asserts, they become a “burning economic problem” (178)²⁴⁷. Giełżyński tells the readers about the fact that there are regions in India where most innovative farming solutions are used and their crops beat all records. But even there, the cows enter the fields and nobody dares to chase them away (15). Thus, the reporter considers cows as a hindrance to modern farming and in general, India’s development, and calls them a “plague” of India (15). Chociłowski concurs, and underlines that even Indians agree on that matter. He presents the problem “as seen through their [Indian] eyes” (57):

Through towns and villages of India rove millions of hungry, sick, terribly haggard cows that nobody feeds, and that survive on stealing and ruining fields, shops and stalls. The sight of a slow ordeal of a cow dying of hunger and emaciation is commonplace. Of course, nobody will consider the possibility of ending the animal’s suffering. Similarly – if, for instance, a cow dies on the street hit by a bus or a tram – one can be sure that the crowd would not let a veterinary to give it a merciful injection. It would be against the “karma” . . . (57)²⁴⁸

Chociłowski presents these words as an Indian rationalist’s view, which serves him to justify his point. He also demonstrates a certain moral superiority: in “rational” terms, it would be expected to end the cow’s agony and help the animal die, but the “irrational” belief in karma prevents people from such action, he suggests. But cows dying on the street is not the only problem – the sick cows endanger those who are bred. The herds of stray cows that live near rivers in Uttar Pradesh or Punjab make it impossible to farm these areas (59). That is why, exclaims Chociłowski, backing his point by the opinion of “economists”, keeping huge herds

²⁴⁶ “Reszta nie daje mleka ani mięsa, zżera paszę, niszczy skąpą szatę roślinną na północy i zasiewy na południu, tamuje ruch na miejskich skrzyżowaniach, napastuje przechodniów. . . . Jediną racją ich bytu jest to, że służą jako siła pociągowa . . . i dostarczają opału w postaci wysuszonego łajna. Nicco za mało, jak na ponad dwieście milionów sztuk” (Górnicki 155).

²⁴⁷Ros refers it to as “palący problem gospodarczy” (178).

²⁴⁸ “Spróbujmy spojrzeć na problem ich oczami. Oto po miastach i wsiach Indii włączą się miliony głodnych, chorych, przerażająco wynędzniałych krów przez nikogo nie karmionych, a utrzymujących się z kradzieży i ograbiania pól, kramów i straganów. Powszechnym obrazkiem jest powolna męka krowy zdychającej z głodu i wycieńczenia. Oczywiście nikt nie pomyśli o tym, że można by skrócić cierpienia zwierzęcia. Tak samo – jeśli np. Na jezdni zdycha krowa potrącona przez autobus lub tramwaj – można mieć pewność, że tłum nie pozwoli wezwanemu weterynarzowi na zrobienie zastrzyku miłosierdzia. Byłoby to wbrew ‘karmie’ . . .” (Chociłowski 57).

of cattle that is sick, inefficient and barren is an “economic madness” (59). Saying that cows increase the poverty of India is a euphemism, concludes Chociłowski, “cows devour India!” (59)²⁴⁹.

Marvin Harris, in a well-known article on “Cultural Ecology of India’s Sacred Cattle”, presents a different stance. Unlike those who claim that in India spirit triumphs over the flesh, and assert that the Hindu would rather starve than eat cow meat, Harris views the relationship between humans and cattle as symbiotic rather than competitive (52). Cows are useful to humans particularly because they give milk, they produce bullocks that can be used in the field, and their dung is a particularly efficient fuel for domestic use (54). What is more, other religions or castes can use the meat of the dead cow for eating and skin for leather, says Harris (54). As for breeding cattle, the situation become more complicated, as the farmers usually have to choose which animals are more valuable, and should be given more fodder, and which are not – the cow usually belongs to the second category, as it does not work in the field. Its value depends on whether it can give birth to a calf or at least provide milk. If it does not, it constitutes an additional burden on the farmer, who relies mostly on the bullocks. That is why, even though cows are not killed, they are sometimes left to die out of neglect (57). Nevertheless, the vast majority of cows do have an owner and are useful to humans, while stray cattle constitutes a small percentage of the total. Thus, Harris presents a vision that contradicts the popular belief that cows are a resource that is mismanaged due to a religious belief. On the contrary, humans and cows form an eco-system, in which a cow is a useful animal. It needs very little care and at the same time, it provides cheap nourishment – milk – and ecological fuel.

The Cow as a Political Issue

By and large, the reporters come to a conclusion that cows are not only an economic, but also a political issue in India. Upon seeing a cow blocking the tram tracks, Ros remarks that chasing the animal away might be dangerous. Why? Even a small act of violence against the cow, like pushing or kicking, can have dire consequences if done in presence of a Hindu orthodox – especially if the conductor is Muslim (Ros 177). Surely, violence against all animals is a condemnable act in general, but cows constitute a particularly sensitive case. Given the many instances of Hindu-Muslim conflicts, even one incident can become a spark to ignite a full-fledged riot. Therefore, any political initiative concerning Indian cows causes heated political debate. Giełżyński tells the readers how planned introduction of “progressive, just,

²⁴⁹ “Krowy pożerają Indie!” (Chociłowski 59).

reasonable” (16)²⁵⁰ reforms allowing some cattle slaughter, caused millions of Hindus to unite against the government and the “progressive” parties (16). As a result, “the most reactionary parties were strengthened”, and “good intentions yielded bad results” (Giełżyński 16)²⁵¹.

Failure to introduce the reforms was the least harmful effect. The radicalising right-wing parties started lobbying for a complete ban on cow slaughter in India and organised rallies to support their cause; both Putrament and Kohler mention these events in their accounts (Kohler 68, Putrament *Na drogach...* 45). One of the most violent protests against cow-slaughter took place in 1966, when a huge crowd led by a Jana Sangh MP and numerous *sadhus* surrounded the Parliament. The police used tear gas and rubber bullets to push away the angry mob, but the unrest continued: the protesters destroyed cars and buses, and even set fire to the house of the Congress president. Historian Ramachandra Guha quotes a newspaper that called this march of holy men and their supporters, an “orgy of vandalism and hooliganism” (Loc 8638). In Putrament’s words, “in defence of cow’s blood, a lot of human blood was spilled: mutilated policemen, participants of this pogrom killed by the military” (*Na drogach...* 45-46)²⁵². The issue of cow protection in India remains a political one. The current ruling party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in the “Cultural Heritage” section of its 2014 manifesto mentions cow protection and promotion (41), and Prime Minister Narendra Modi was often critical on growing beef exports. The issue of cow protection, that in itself seems a rather fair claim, becomes however strongly politicised and, as such, is put forward by the extreme right-wing Hindutva movement.

Apart from the right-wing lobby for ban on cow-slaughter, there is another way that cows are present in Indian politics. Wojciech Giełżyński notes that one reason behind the Indian National Congress party’s multiple victories is the fact that the symbol they used at the time was a cow with a calf. According to the reporter, many illiterate people who do not follow politics and do not know party programmes cast their vote where there is an image of a cow (Giełżyński 116). Given that he considers the Congress as a leftist party, he concludes: “in this way, a conservative religion gives support to progressive politics” (117)²⁵³. Indeed, the choice of electoral symbols is still particularly important for political parties who compete for the right to use certain images. These images are predefined by the Electoral Commission, hence the choice is limited. In times of Nehru, Congress used the symbol of two bulls with a yoke, to

²⁵⁰ “prawa postępowe, słuszne, rozsądne” (Giełżyński 16).

²⁵¹ “[owe poczynania] ogromnie wzmocniły najbardziej wsteczne ugrupowania polityczne. Dobre intencje dały więc fatalne rezultaty” (Giełżyński 17).

²⁵² “Broniąc krwi krowiej przelano wiele ludzkiej: rozszarpani policjanci, zabici przez wojsko uczestnicy pogromu” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 45-46).

²⁵³ “W ten sposób zachowawcza religia wspiera postępową politykę” (Giełżyński 116-117).

underline its closeness to the peasants, then, in the course of conflicts and secessions caused by Indira Gandhi, it changed its symbol to a cow with a calf, and later, to the open hand (which is its symbol till now). Nowadays, it is Congress' opponent, the nationalist BJP party, that uses the issue of cow protection for their political goals.

Cow Protection as Ahimsa

Since cows cause such trouble to people, agriculture, economy or even politics, why are they still protected in India, ask the reporters? What should be the solution? Reporters mention various ideas that Indian authorities put forward: from feeding contraceptives to cows to placing them in special pastures, where they can die in peace (Górnicki 155, 156; Putrament 2 192). Chociłowski even visited a cattle hostel, financed by devout Hindu businessmen who wanted to ensure that cows are given best condition possible (58). Still, the reporters assert, the easiest way to solve the cow issue would be to kill the cows and convince Indian villagers to eat beef (Chociłowski 60, Giełżyński 16). They realise, however, how difficult it would be to run such an "Operation Slaughterhouse", as Chociłowski jokingly phrases it (60)²⁵⁴. A contemporary reader might find the authors' lightness of tone shocking, especially because animal rights have now become a much more prominent issue worldwide as compared with 1960s or 70s. Even in the meat-loving West, more and more people switch to vegetarianism, although their numbers fade in comparison to India, where meat consumption is the lowest in the world²⁵⁵. It seems, however, that Chociłowski is only saying this to provoke the readers. For after proposing this operation of mass cow slaughter, Chociłowski explains that in fact, such a solution would not be beneficial to India. He echoes Marvin Harris' argument that cows are needed, because they provide some nourishment to people, they can occasionally be milked, their dung can be used for fuel etc. Killing them would mean death to the people who rely on them. "Those who say and write that cow worship in India is a senseless relic of the past . . . do not understand it" (63)²⁵⁶, underlines Chociłowski. Giełżyński, always sceptical and ironic, distances himself from this solution:

Hindus are completely deaf to our European, rational advice, to finally put an end to those cow parasites, kill most of them, and only keep the ones that are healthy and eligible for breeding. Some of them respond in the following way: then why you, Europeans, do not plough over your cemeteries, why don't you tear down your churches? You could grow wheat on cemeteries and

²⁵⁴ "Operacja Szlachtuz" (Chociłowski 60).

²⁵⁵ According to Daily Charts by The Economist, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/91840616/Meat-Consumption-Per-Person>.

²⁵⁶ "I tego przede wszystkim wydają się nie rozumieć ci, którzy mówią i piszą, że kult krów w Indiach jest obłędnym przeżytkiem, który czym prędzej należy wyrzucić na śmietnik." (Chociłowski 63)

the brick from churches would be of use in building houses? Every culture has its sanctities that it does want or cannot subjugate to practical reasons. (16)²⁵⁷

Undeniably, the respect for cows is a practical embodiment of the key assumption of Hinduism: Ahimsa, or non-violence. It is the idea of doing no harm to other, especially to those weaker than humans. Vegetarianism is one of its expressions: its aim is to break the chain of alimentary violence by proving that it is not necessary to kill in order to eat (Doniger 10). The idea of *ahimsa*, as a more general principle of not harming other beings, is still present in Hindu attitude to all animals. Witold Koehler, as someone who appreciates nature, is positively impressed by this fact: “A Hindu does not kill. It means that in his environment he does not take the position of a predator. It means that he does not evoke fear and he does not create a void around himself. Quite the opposite, his proximity gives a sense of security to the weak.” (38-39)²⁵⁸. Putrament, on the other hand, is sceptical. Upon seeing many stray goats, cows and dogs, says:

Indians, whose sympathy to animals, in spite of all the excess and fanaticism . . . also demands our sympathy, are different in their approach from our [dog-loving] ladies. Dogs are treated with contempt . . . Dogs in India are true pariahs and they are well-aware of it. They are cowardly and they don't even bark at anyone, because why would they do that? (57)²⁵⁹

Once again, the reporter notices a paradox: cows are loved, but dogs are disliked. In a European point of view, a dog is associated with friendliness, loyalty and intelligence. The reporter is clearly finding it difficult to understand that Indians may not feel as much sympathy towards dogs as they do towards cows. Another paradox that the reporters point out, is that there are hostels for cows, hospitals for birds, monkeys and cows are protected – but not all people enjoy such privilege. After visiting the cow hostel, Chociłowski is shocked: “all this in a country where people die every day, where there was not enough rice or medicine for them” (57)²⁶⁰.

Thus, even though the reporters try to explain the importance of cows to the Hindu believers, they still think in Western, anthropocentric terms, in which humans are at the top of the hierarchy of living beings. In such view, rights of animals are secondary to the rights of

²⁵⁷ “Hindusi są zupełnie głusi na nasze, europejskie, racjonalne porady, ażeby z tymi krowimi pasożytami zrobić wreszcie porządek, większość wybić, a zachować tylko sztuki zdrowe i zdadne do hodowli. Niektórzy odpowiadają tak: a dlaczego wy, Europejczycy, nie zaorzecie waszych cmentarzy, nie zburzycie kościołów? Na cmentarzach mogłoby przecież rosnąć żyto, a cegła z kościołów przydałaby się w mieszkaniowym budownictwie! Każda religia, każda kultura ma swoje świętości, których nie chce albo nie może podporządkować racjom praktycznym” (Giełżyński 16).

²⁵⁸ “Hindus nie zabija. Znaczy to, że w otaczającym go środowisku nie zajmuje on pozycji drapieżcy. Znaczy to, że nie sieje grozy i nie stwarza pustki wokół siebie. Przeciwnie, sąsiedztwo jego daje słabszym poczucie bezpieczeństwa” (Koehler 38-39).

²⁵⁹ “Hindusi, których sympatia do zwierząt mimo przesady i fanatyzmu, o czym później, zasługuje i na naszą sympatię, różnią się w tych zamiłowaniach od naszych paniuś. Psy są otaczane pogardą. . . Psy w Indiach są prawdziwymi pariasami i mają pełną tego świadomość. Są tchórzliwe i nawet nie szczekają na nikogo, bo niby za co i po co?” (Putrament, *Na drogach*... 57).

²⁶⁰ “w tym kraju, gdzie codziennie umierają ludzie, dla których nie starczyło ryżu albo lekarstw” (Chociłowski 57).

humans – a belief that in contemporary bioethical studies would be called speciesism. It is defined by Peter Singer as “a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interest of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species (6). According to Singer, a campaign for animal liberation does not mean that animals should be given the same rights as humans, politically. But, in the same way as small children of humans, animals have the right to food, comfort, warmth and good treatment from others (5). Incidentally, Singer uses the example of cows, explaining that they do not desire freedom, if they are confined at a green pasture - they will be happier there than strolling the streets of New York. Here is where the academic discourse of animal rights touches the issue of attitude to cows in India. The Hindu source of respect for animal rights is placed in the belief in reincarnation– a soul travels through different bodies, human and animal alike – rather than in the issue of rights. That is why killing an animal, in particular a cow or a monkey, is wrong from the point of view of karma. Cows should be protected, as they are giving animals on which many Indian households rely.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that cows are necessarily awarded a good treatment in India. While some Westerners imagine cow worship as an expression of an ideal human relationship towards an animal²⁶¹, the condition of cows in India is often far from perfect. Certainly, unlike the West, India does not consume beef in industrial quantities, nevertheless, it is one of the top world exporters of beef (Raghavan)²⁶². Cows are caught, kept and slaughtered often in horrible conditions. Moreover, according to animal rights groups, even those cows that roam freely become a victim of human consumptionism: since they are hungry and search through rubbish looking for food waste, they end up eating plastic which eventually blocks their digestive system and leads to a slow and painful death. In the words of the Karuna Society for Animals and Nature which collects funds for cow surgeries to extract the plastic from their bodies, “it is an acute form of cruelty”. They add that nowadays, “the noble cow has become a scavenger” (Karuna).

The stereotype on “cow worship” in India is thus a rather problematic one. On the one hand, it is true that cows enjoy a special status and protection in India. However, it does not mean that is so from times immemorial, nor that it would always be manifested in the same way. While eating beef is still taboo for many Hindus, the cows’ fate in contemporary India is often far from ideal. The reporters, commenting on this issue several decades ago, would

²⁶¹ See Christie Ritter’s book for young adults, *Animal Rights*: “Sacred Cows: Cows have a special place in Indian society. . . According to Hinduism, cows are the most sacred of animals. They are a symbol of the divine. Cows are used in religious ceremonies and it is believed that they provide special blessings for people. . .” (17)

²⁶² While the beef industry states that the exported beef comes only from buffaloes – which are not considered as sacred – the media report that it is not always true: illegal slaughterhouses and black market of beef is a growing phenomenon (Desai Gopal; Harris).

perceive cow protection as a tradition belonging to the past. Today, it is very much part of the present, but together with the very modernisation for which the reporters so strongly advocate, the cow's condition has often become worse than in the first decades of the Independence.

Case Study 2. Sadhus

Cows are not the only element of Indian surroundings, say the reporters, another “typical” picture is the one of naked sadhus, or “holy men”, wandering around the country. Chociłowski defines sadhus as “ascetics-pilgrims, apostles of Indian mysticism, teachers and healers of the souls of the people, owners of mysterious truth about life, which – like a shiny ball of mercury – escapes the hands of mere mortals” (64)²⁶³. A sadhu is not only a “philosopher, that sinks into *Samadhi* (meditation), but he can also be a doctor, fortune-teller, magician, and a consultant in all matters of human soul and body” (69)²⁶⁴. It is a rather romanticised vision of sadhus, perceived as Oriental mystics, “owners of truth about life”, people doted with supernatural capacities. Such a view is inscribed in the Western discourse of Oriental mysticism, so common in reference to India.

European Fascination with Indian Mystics

The reporters see India as a place where spirituality occupies a particularly prominent place. “There are plenty of saints here”, says Putrament, and sketches the picture of saints belonging to different religions; “[t]he simplest saints have long hair, long beards, dirty white coats, classic, Aryan features.” (*Cztery...* 93)²⁶⁵. As if underlining the universality of “saints” of various religions, he continues his description of Indian “holy men”: “The other, Buddhist ones, have yellow-orangey robes, shaved heads, some clanging things. The Jain saints seem to be the most logical. Their contempt of the worldly possessions was taken to the extreme: they are naked.” (*Cztery...* 93)²⁶⁶.

There is no consistency in terms used in the reportages selected for this study. They are called: “saints”, “sadhus”, “fakirs”, “ascetics”, “pilgrims”, “yogis”, “gurus”, “sanyasins” and “dervishes”. Indeed, there exists much confusion as to terms used to name the “Holy Men of India”: Western texts often use them interchangeably. However, the term “sadhu”, originating

²⁶³ “. . . asceci-pątnicy, apostołowie indyjskiego mistycyzmu, nauczyciele i lekarze dusz ludu, właściciele tajemniczej prawdy o życiu, która jak błyszcząca kulka rtęci wymyka się z niezręcznych dłoni zwykłych śmiertelników” (Chociłowski 64).

²⁶⁴ “Sadhu jest bowiem nie tylko filozofem, pogrążającym się w samadhi (medytacji), może być także lekarzem, wróżbitą, czarodziejem, konsultantem we wszystkich sprawach duszy i ciała ludzkiego.” (Chociłowski 69)

²⁶⁵ “Zresztą świętych tu pełno. Święci najprostszy mają długie włosy, długie brody, brudne białe chałaty, klasyczne, aryjskie rysy. . .” (Putrament, *Cztery...* 93).

²⁶⁶ “Inni, buddyjscy, mają żółtopomarańczowe szaty, włosy zgolone, jakieś brzękadełka. Najbardziej logiczni wydają się święci dżainowscy. Ich pogarda dla dóbr doczesnych doprowadzona została do końca: są goli” (Putrament, *Cztery...* 93).

in Sanskrit and used in India, means “a holy man, sage, or ascetic” (Oxford Living Dictionary Online). The term “fakir”, on the other hand, has a Muslim origin, and means “A Muslim (or, loosely, Hindu) religious ascetic who lives solely on alms” (Oxford Living Dictionary Online). Similarly, a “dervish” is also a term from the Muslim culture, which is used mostly in reference to Sufis. The term “guru” denotes a “Hindu spiritual teacher”, while “yogi” is understood as someone “proficient in yoga” (Oxford Living Dictionary Online). The word “sannyasi” is explained as “a Hindu religious mendicant” (Oxford Living Dictionary Online). In India, probably the most common term used to describe such a person would be the term “sadhu”, meant in a rather all-encompassing way; a sadhu can also be a sannyasi, a guru and a yogi, depending on the particular activity that he performs. In academic language, the term commonly used is “renouncers”, as opposed to those who live a family life in their homes – the “householders” (Hausner).

Ros describes sadhus as wandering ascetics or hermits, who have renounced the world (245). He explains that among their pursuits are pilgrimages to holy places and temples, and the disciplining of their body and mind through special exercises and meditation (245). He warns Europeans against the use of the word “fakir”, which is of Arabic, not Indian origin (245-246). Interestingly, Ros lists six ascetic commandments, and six prohibitions for sadhus, however he does not include the source of this list. It includes no sleeping in a bed, no wearing white clothes, no talking to or thinking of women, no sleeping during the day, no riding of an animal or means of transport, and not allowing for the mind to be agitated (246). Given this rather impressive list, no wonder that his fellow reporter, Chociłowski, associates the sadhus with the Greek philosopher, cynic and ascetic, Diogenes, who supposedly wore rags and slept in a jar (64). Actually, Ancient Greeks were fascinated with Indian sadhus to the point of having Alexander the Great to hold a meeting with the “gymnosophists, or the “naked sages”” upon his arrival to India (Halbfass 12). This Western fascination with sadhus, perceived as the embodiment of Hindu spirituality, was a recurring trend. Many Europeans searched for their guru in India, went to live in ashrams and followed their spiritual teachers. Gita Mehta talks about this fascination critically, describing how this spiritual tourism is another way of Orientalising, and marketing, the “mystic East” (xi). She referred to the situation in late 1970s, but the recent popularity of Elisabeth Gilbert’s *Eat, Pray, Love* travelogue in which the visit at an ashram and interactions with a guru become a life-changing event for the protagonist, is another, more contemporary, case in point. Nevertheless, with the exception of Żukrowski who shows a certain interest in the spiritual and the supernatural, Polish reporters place themselves at the opposite pole of Western fascination with Hindu spirituality. They observe sadhus as if

they were ethnographers describing an artefact of a different culture, they focus on the social and political role of the “holy men”, but they do not show any personal admiration or veneration of them.

Who are the sadhus and what characterises them? According to Sondra Hausner, author of a study on ascetics in Hindu Himalayas, “people become renouncers for many reasons, including an inability or an unwillingness to fit into normative society, on one hand, and a profound desire to understand the meaning of existence, on the other” (21). Becoming a sadhu means leaving behind one’s family, house and all material possessions. It also means rejecting one’s caste – sadhu community does not have caste divisions. However, Hausner’s study reveals that it is not always the case – some sects do introduce a caste requirement, and some sadhus and sadhvis (female sadhus) maintain a connection of some sort with the larger society, by keeping contact with their families (39-40). The inclusiveness of the sadhu community and the freedom that such a lifestyle offers are probably even more attractive if the alternative is a rather rigid, hierarchical Hindu society with gender-oppressive norms and strong social pressure.

Shocking Appearance of the Sadhus

What strikes the reporters most is the sadhus’ appearance: fascinating, repulsive, or scary. Koehler describes a renouncer as a “beggar or maybe dervish with long, entangled hair that flows on his bare back and falling onto his eyes, which are so piercing as to cause an unwitting shiver” (28)²⁶⁷. Ros characterises sadhus as “hirsute, dishevelled ascetics”, whose “wild and unkempt look – fiery eyes, bodies covered with ash, foreheads marked with symbolic signs, skinny and naked limbs” make a great impression (200)²⁶⁸. Chociłowski talks about them in the following way:

Half-naked, or [naked] as God created them, with faces smeared with ash and paint, dishevelled like Macbeth’s witches, with hair woven in dreadlocks or with smoothly shaved cranes, with a stick or Shiva’s trident in their hand, barefoot, unwashed, grey with dust and dirt – they look sternly and boldly, sure of their power and of the fear they cause. (64)²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ “zebrak lub może derwisz o długich, skołnionych włosach, spływających na nagie plecy i opadających na oczy, których przesywające spojrzenie wywołuje mimowolny dreszcz” (Koehler 28).

²⁶⁸ “[Nad basenem . . . siedzą] kudłaci, rozczochrani asceci – sadhu. Ich wygląd dziki i niechlujny – oczy gorejące, ciała posypane popiołem, czoła znaczone symbolicznymi znakami, członki wychudłe i nagie – sprawia niesamowite wrażenie” (Ros 200).

²⁶⁹ “Półnaczy lub jak ich Bóg stworzył, o twarzach wysmarowanych popiołem i farbami, poczochrani jak makbetowskie wiedźmy, z włosami splecionymi w strąki warkoczyków lub o gładko wygolonych czaszkach, z kosturem lub trójzębem Śiwy w ręku, bosy, niemocy, szarzy od kurzu i brudu – patrzą surowo i zuchwale, pewni swej siły i lęku, jaki wzbudzają” (Chociłowski 64).

Giełżyński focuses less on the look (although he notices the nakedness and the “strange designs that have a symbolic meaning only for the initiated Hindus”(11)²⁷⁰), and more on their activities. The “saints”, in his description, crouch instead of sitting, stand motionlessly, sometimes only on one leg, adopt yogic poses... (7, 11). Yoga, nowadays extremely popular in the West (including Poland), was almost completely unknown to the reporters of the communist era. The concept of adopting “strange” poses, stretching, loud breathing, bending, “odd” sequences of movements – appears to them as truly eccentric.

The reporters have very little awareness about sadhus as a cultural phenomenon and they judge their appearance as dirty, unkempt, and repulsive, not realising what do the particular elements of the renunciators’ appearance mean. As Sondra Hausner explains, the preference for orange robes has several explanations: one is that orange is the colour of the fire and of the sun, hence a source of energy; two – it is a colour that stands out, so even if the sadhu has, for instance, taken a vow of silence, people can recognise him/her from afar and bring them food or alms (45-46). Naked sadhus, on the other hand, choose not to wear anything in order to set themselves apart from the householders, to defy social norms, and to stress the “natural state” of human body (Hausner 46). Then, they usually cover their bodies with ash from funeral pyres. “By wearing ash, sādhus remind all who see them of the impermanence and substitutability of all material forms”, says Hausner, but she adds that ash has a practical use too: it works as a mosquito repellent and as medicine (46). What strikes the viewer (and the reporters) most, is the tousled hair of the sadhus. Here, too, the explanation goes beyond a simple wish to let the hair grow freely. Upon their initiation to sadhu life, the disciple’s head is shaved (both in case of men and women), so the length of hair tells for how long one is a sadhu and how strong their religious power has become (Hausner 46). For practical purposes, the hair is usually weaved into dreadlocks – *jata*. According to Hausner:

Most renunciators keep their *jata* tied into a manageable turban, as if to keep the true power of the hair under wraps. The unruly nature of renunciators’ dreadlocked hair symbolizes their explicit rejection of normative life and also serves as a public sign of the power of renunciation. (46)

Long, dreadlocked hair is thus perceived as something demanding respect in the Hindu society, as opposed to the reporters’ somewhat disdainful pose. The designs with which sadhus adorn their bodies, that Giełżyński qualifies as intelligible only to the “initiated” Hindus” (11), are in fact simply a way of identification and a public manifestation of devotion to a particular god.

²⁷⁰ “. . . pomalowany w różne dziwne wzorki – mające symboliczne znaczenie dla wtajemniczonych Hindusów” (Giełżyński 11).

The most common *tilak* (mark on the forehead) is the one made of three lines, symbolizing the trident of god Shiva (Hausner 46). For the same reason, sadhus often carry a trident or tongs, that also serve to scare animals away; other few belongings with which they travel include a blanket (for sleeping), a water jug (for drinking and washing), a small bag, and often photographs of their gurus (Hausner 47). This minimalistic approach is similar to ascetics of other religions, but unruly hair and naked or painted body are more specific to Indian sadhus.

It is the hair and the body adornments that attracts most attention of foreign visitors searching for the “Indian exotic”, because they are not only biological phenomena, they are part of the body as a social construct. Edmund Leach noticed the particular symbolic of hair: he pointed out that in psychoanalysis, head hair is associated with genitals. Ethnographic evidence, Leach argued, supports this thesis, as two extreme forms of hair treatment – shaving and letting grow – are symbolic of, correspondingly, castration and renouncement of sexuality (as in case of ascetics with long beards and hair) (149). Discussing the context of Indian sannyasin, Leach referred to the Upanishads to prove that sexual behaviour and hair behaviour go parallel with one another (156). Leach separated symbols into public and private (considering hair as a public one), but according Gananath Obeyesekere, author of *Medusa's Hair*, these two realms are linked together, as emotions and customs often intertwine (13). Obeyesekere finds that shaved hair and matted hair are not expressions of two extreme acts, as Leach proposed, but the former is more common to Buddhist culture, and the latter to the Hindu one (38). As for the cultural message that long, matted hair convey, Obeyesekere observes a strong emotional reaction to the ascetics' hair: fear, disgust, revulsion, and an association of hair with actual flesh growing out of one's head (36). Hence, the sight of a sadhu with matted, tousled hair is a source of anxiety, linked both with the idea of purity (hair as impure) and repressed sexuality. The reporters are indeed troubled by the appearance of sadhus, although they hardly come in contact with them. Usually, they just observe the sadhus from afar. They try to understand their function in the society, but – with the exception of Chociłowski – do not attempt to talk to the “holy men” directly.

Sadhus' Role in Society

Ros' *Indian Wanderings* features a black-and-white photograph of a sadhu dressed in a long, dark, robe and a mask. The caption says:

In places of public gatherings, appear various weirdoes and cranks, apostles and pilgrims, strangely painted and tattooed, with uncut hair and nails, extending their beggar bowls.

Thousands of mountebanks prey on the good-naturedness and naiveté of simple, ignorant people. (224)²⁷¹

Clearly, Ros considers sadhus primarily as crooks who exploit people. Other reporters, too, attribute the special status of sadhus in Indian society mostly to the common people's ignorance and fear. Chociłowski explains that sadhus are most popular – and most feared – in villages, among least educated people:

The country is understandably the territory where a sadhu feels particularly well. He comes there with his face red with vermilion, with a skull in one hand and a claw in another, bejewelled with talismans and rosaries made of lotus seeds or human teeth. Singing his “mantras”, he casts and breaks spells, he exorcises ghosts and demons from “possessed” women, he heals those who were bitten by snakes and scorpions. (Chociłowski 69)²⁷²

Koehler agrees with this view and finds this “mad fanaticism” (133) comparable only to the one in the “dark ages of medieval Europe” (133)²⁷³. As such, it is rooted in ignorance and “infinite poverty” (133)²⁷⁴. Nonetheless, as Giełżyński's account suggests, the elites are also susceptible to the spell of the sadhu. The reporter tells the story of a “holy man”, mister Rao, whose was so popular as to be received by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Rao announced that he will publicly demonstrate how he walks on the surface of water; the event attracted huge attention of Bombay media, a few hundred spectators gathered around the pool. The “saint” made a few breathing and concentration exercises, took a step forward... and sunk in the pool (11). The reporter was surprised that the public so easily accepted the “saint's” explanation (that the night before he dreamt of Lord Shiva and this took away his power of concentration), and calmly went home (12). “This is what is most astonishing: faith in supernatural phenomena, contradicting the laws of physics, is so deeply rooted in India”²⁷⁵, concludes Giełżyński. Clearly, the reporters adopt the position of rationalist commentators of India's cultural reality, presenting the status of sadhus as a confirmation of Indian blind belief and irrationality. It is yet another demonstration of their cultural superiority: they perceive themselves as

²⁷¹ “W miejscu większych zgromadzeń pojawiają się różni cudacy i nawiedzani, apostołowie i pątnicy malowani i tatuowani dziwnie, z niestrzyżonymi włosami i nieobcinanymi paznokciami, wyciągając przed siebie miseczki żebracze. Tysiące wydrwigroszów żeruje na dobroduszości i naiwności prostego, ciemnego ludu” (Ros 224).

²⁷² “Wieś jest zresztą ze zrozumiiałych względów terenem, gdzie sadhu czuje się szczególnie dobrze. Zjawia się tam z obliczem czerwonym od cynobru, z czaszką w jednej i szczypcami w drugiej ręce, obwieszony talizmanami i różańcami z nasion lotosu albo ludzkich zębów. Wyśpiewując ‘mantry’ rzuca i odczynia uroki, wypędza z ‘opętanych’ kobiet duchy i demony, leczu ukąszonych przez węże, skorpiony” (Chociłowski 69).

²⁷³ “Prawda, że obłądny fanatyzm utrzymuje się tu po dziś dzień w rozmiarze i napięciu godnym może mrocznego średniowiecza Europy” (Koehler 133).

²⁷⁴ “Ma to swe źródło w ciemnocie ludu i jego bezgranicznej nędzy” (Koehler 133).

²⁷⁵ “I to właśnie jest najbardziej zdumiewające: wiara w zjawiska nadprzyrodzone, niezgodne z prawami fizyki, jest w Indiach zakorzeniona niezwykle głęboko” (Giełżyński 13).

“enlightened” Europeans, with a secular worldview, in contrast to Indians believing in the magic powers of sadhus.

Nevertheless, Chociłowski breaks this pattern, pointing out that many in India are critical of this tolerance towards the “holy men”, these “leeches sucking on the neck of the Indian simpleton” (72)²⁷⁶. There are also those, says the reporter, who find that sadhus are not always “cynical parasites”, but their services can be useful (73)²⁷⁷. For instance, Gołębiowski recalls how in the Sudandih mine, a sadhu acts as an intermediary between the local peasants and the management, because he is considered to be a trustworthy figure (167). Other reporters mention with appreciation Vinoba Bhawe, an old “mystic”, who wanders around India, teaching peasants and fighting with dacoit crime (Górnicki 182).

However, the reporters are not fully able to understand the social function of the renouncers, who do more than only begging: they perform rituals and prayers, bless people and places. Some of them run dharamshalas – rest houses – for pilgrims, teach meditation and yoga, specialise in natural medicine and provide other religious and non-religious services. These activities often require an advanced knowledge and experience, and years of training. Thus, in rural societies, where the state does not provide a health or education infrastructure, the sadhus offer their medical, psychological, and spiritual knowledge and advice, gaining respect of the population. Hausner underlines that by distancing themselves from the quotidian and materialistic concerns and placing themselves outside the norms of the society, sadhus occupy a position of both marginality and power (184). Referring to Victor Turner’s concept of liminality, Hausner sees renouncers as figures that are not only mobile in space, but who also move in between structures. They are “liminal figures in relation to the normative caste and family structures of Hindu society and, as such, they claim transcendence over that which they leave behind” (184). Hence, like any liminal figure, sadhus cause unrest and a sense of anxiety among the visitors from abroad.

Sadhus: Fake or Real?

One of the most frequently asked question by the reporters is whether a sadhu is a real sage or a fake one? The reporters do not fully dismiss the possibility of the existence of “real” sadhus, but – as it was mentioned earlier – they underline that many of those who claim to be sannyasins, are fake sadhus, “charlatans” (“*szarlatani*”) exploiting naïve people (Gołębiowski 87). They present them as two-faced figures, marked with a duality. Jerzy Ros, describing a

²⁷⁶ “pijawkę przyssanych do karku indyjskiego prostaczka” (Chociłowski 72).

²⁷⁷ He uses the term “cyniczne pasożytnictwo” (73).

sadhu that he met, finds that he had a face of a “half-fanatic, half-philosopher” and it was at the same time “attracting and off-putting” (323)²⁷⁸. Gołębiowski comments on this double-facedness of Indian sadhus in the following way:

One can meet them everywhere . . . Half-naked – and in long, rust-coloured tunics. With shaved heads – and with hair falling on their shoulders. With spiritual faces of ascetics – and with a cunning look of crooks. [Those] reciting fluently verses in Sanskrit – [and those] mumbling “secret” spells. There are as many true priests, devoted to their religion, as ordinary charlatans, preying on people’s ignorance. They have one thing in common: they undoubtedly exert an influence on the masses of Hindu society. (87)²⁷⁹

Chociłowski recalls how he met a sadhu during a walk in Delhi and asked a local student to help him in making a conversation with the “holy man”. Sadhu responded to the reporter’s questions in rather metaphorical terms. Hence, the student concluded that it must have been a real sadhu. Chociłowski quotes his words: “– There are few such people in India today. There are swarms of fake sadhus roaming the streets, who are beggars and frauds. But people believe them and are afraid of them. Everyone is fearful of a spell cast by a sadhu”(66-67)²⁸⁰. The reporter gives several examples of tricks used by fake sadhus to steal money or precious jewellery. Koehler remarks that maybe only a longer stay in India would allow for a better proficiency in “distinguishing the “holy sages” from common tricksters”, although he is not certain of that; to his mind, it seems as if the boundary between the two is rather elusive, and it “vanishes even in the very conscience of the yogis and fakirs themselves” (133)²⁸¹. According to Hausner, many Hindus, too, are unsure how to recognise a true sadhu:

I witnessed a number of heated arguments between householder Hindus about what constituted a “real” renouncer and what kinds of sādhus could be counted as legitimate. Almost everybody—even highly suspicious householders—eventually agreed that a committed devotee might be able to find a real renouncer, who would be a realized or spiritually advanced person who spent his or her days in meditative contemplation, and whose steadfast efforts produced religious power. (21)

²⁷⁸ “jego twarz półfanatyka, półfilozofa odpycha i pociąga” (Ros 323).

²⁷⁹ “Spotkać ich można wszędzie . . . Półnagich – i w długich, rdzawego koloru tunikach. Z ogolonymi głowami – i z włosami spadającymi na ramiona. Z uduchowionymi twarzami ascetów – i ze szczwanym spojrzeniem oszustów. Recytujących biegle sanskryckie wersety – i bełkocących ‘tajemnicze’ zaklęcia. Jest wśród nich przynajmniej tylu prawdziwych, oddanych swej religii kapłanów co i zwykłych szarlatanów żerujących na ludzkiej ciemności. Jedno jest im wspólne: mają niewątpliwy wpływ na masy hinduskiego społeczeństwa” (Gołębiowski 87).

²⁸⁰ “– To był prawdziwy sadhu – rzekł student kiedyśmy weszli w aleję prowadzącą do wyjścia. – Niewielu jest dziś takich w Indiach. Po ulicach kręcą się chmary fałszywych sadhu, którzy są żebrakami i oszustami. Ale ludzie im wierzą i boją się ich. Każdy lęka się przekleństwa rzuconego przez sadhu” (Chociłowski 66-67).

²⁸¹ “Być może, że po dłuższym pobycie w tym kraju nabiera się sprawności w odróżnianiu ‘mężów świątobliwych’ od zwykłych sztukmistrzów, wydaje się jednak, że granica ta jest zgoła nieuchwytna, że ztraca się ona także w świadomości samych jogów i fakirów” (Koehler 133).

Thus, her interlocutors believe that some sadhus can be genuine spiritual guides, but they are convinced that they constitute a small percentage of all renouncers (20). The scholar admits that since sadhu lifestyle is so separate from the regular householder's existence, many people would join the community to shelter themselves from the outside world – for spiritual, social, or family reasons (for instance, if they did not want to marry or if they were widowed), but also sometimes because of a mental illness, criminal record or other reason to flee from someone or something (44). Clearly, many self-proclaimed “sadhus” might pose a threat to both Indians and visitors – stories of sexual abuse, fraud or drugs consumption appear from time to time in the Indian media (Mehta, Hausner).

The Political Role of Sadhus

Given the influence that sadhus supposedly exert on the minds of the people, politicians are eager to have the “holy men” on their side. Gołębiowski describes a minister's plan to use sadhus in social campaigns and in support of economic development – for that goal, a sadhu association was formed, Bharat Sadhu Samaj (88). The reporter participates in the annual sadhu meeting and relates the main issues discussed. He sees a potential political force that was at the time in the process of consolidating, but – in his words – “could become future organisers of a Christian Democratic equivalent in India” (Gołębiowski 89)²⁸². Indeed, an organisation called Bharat Sadhu Samaj (India Association of Sadhus) did form in 1956 and exists till this day. Another, perhaps less formalised, but more all-encompassing organisation is Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad, which brings together both Hindu and Sikh renouncers, grouped in fourteen akharas (orders). Sadhu organisations are not immune to political influence and it is not surprising that various political parties try to assure themselves the renouncers' support. In particular, Hindu extreme nationalists from the VHP and RSS movements tried to woo the sadhus with their slogans on strengthening Hindu identity, enforcing cow protection and protecting “Hindu Dharma”²⁸³. They were often successful: sadhus were indeed involved in various protests and political events. Chociłowski is aware of that and informs his readers in the following way:

Here, confraternities of sadhus do not shun intervention in political affairs and they put on the armour of defenders of Hindu faith, starting campaigns for the untouchability of cows and oftentimes they act as instigators of bloody riots, burning government buildings, destroying

²⁸² “[siła, która] w przyszłości może wyłonić kadrę organizatorską swoistego rodzaju chadecji w Indiach” (Gołębiowski 89).

²⁸³ This was, for instance, Vishva Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council), which belongs to the umbrella organisation of Hindu nationalists led by RSS – the National Patriotic Organisation.

buses, and once even organising a regular siege of the parliament. They belong to those that throw a spanner in the works of progress. (72-73)²⁸⁴

Thus, in the reporter's perspective, sadhus might not only harm "naïve" individuals, but are also preventing the development of India. While in this viewpoint there is hardly a place for sadhus in future India, it seems that not much has changed over time. Nowadays, there are at least as many sadhus in India as there were before, and some do not abstain from political involvement. According to Christophe Jaffrelot, in 1990s, various sadhus such as Uma Bharti presented themselves as candidates in the elections and became members of parliament. Some took to more extreme measures and became involved in terrorist activities²⁸⁵. Modern gurus have associated themselves with a range of Hindu nationalist political causes, for instance participating in the 1992 Babri Masjid riots (started by the destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu extreme nationalists claiming that this was the place of birth of god Ram). According to Jaffrelot, nowadays "saffron-clad leaders have embarked on a more 'secular' warpath, but one thing remains unchanged: the support they receive from the RSS". Indeed, popular sadhus like Baba Ramdev – who publicly supports the current prime minister, Narendra Modi – or Yogi Adityanath (current Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh) play an important role in day-to-day Indian politics.

Case study 3. Sites of Worship and Pilgrimage

A large part of the reporters' narrative on India consists in descriptions of temples, holy places and sites of pilgrimage. The reporters visit many famous monuments or places of worship that are considered as key spots on the tourist map of India. Among them are, of course, the Taj Mahal and other Mughal monuments in Agra and Delhi, but also old Hindu temples in Kolkata, Gwalior or in South India. Some reporters venture to Khajuraho, lured by the fame of the erotic sculptures on the temples' walls. Moreover, visits to pilgrimage sites at the shores of the Ganges were also a must: most reporters visit Varanasi (Benares) and some also see Haridwar and Patna. During the visits to these sites of worship, just like in other instances of contact with religion, reporters maintain an ironic or even critical tone.

²⁸⁴ "Oto konfraternie sadhu nie stronią również od interwencji w sprawy polityczne i okrywają się puklerzem obrońców wiary hinduistycznej, prowadzą kampanie w obronie nietykalności krów i niejednokrotnie byli inspiratorami krwawych zamieszek, podpalali budynki rządowe, niszczyli autobusy, a raz nawet zorganizowali regularne oblężenie parlamentu. Należą więc do tych, którzy wkładają kije w szprychy kół postępu. Indie mają inne, większe kłopoty, a poza tym są przecież krajem, w którym może trudniej niż gdziekolwiek indziej odwrócić się od przeszłości" (Chociłowski 72-73).

²⁸⁵ Jaffrelot mentions three renouncers, Pragma Singh Thakur and Swami Amritananda Dev Tirtha, both accused of participation in the 2006 Malegaon bombings, and Swami Assemanand, accused of organizing the 2007 bomb blast on the train to Pakistan (Samjhauta express bombing).

The Ganga

The Ganges is considered to be one of the most important landmarks in India and its significance in the spiritual life of the country is often underlined. Jawaharlal Nehru once wrote:

The Ganges, above all, is the river of India which has held India's heart captive and drawn uncounted millions to her banks since the dawn of history. The story of the Ganges, from her source to the sea, from old times to new, is the story of India's civilisation and culture...

(Daftuar)

Indeed, the Ganges, third longest river of India, is the most revered of all rivers. It crosses a large part of the Indian subcontinent, flowing from the Himalayas, through Rishikesh, Haridwar, Allahabad, Patna, and reaching the Bay of Bengal, spreading out in a large delta, partly located in India, and partly in Bangladesh. It is 2,510 kilometres long and it provides water to the inhabitants of the Indo-Gangetic Plain – considered to be the cradle of many illustrious civilisations, from the empire of Mauryan king Ashoka to the one of the Mughals (Lodrick). Since bathing in the Ganga is perceived by the Hindus as purifying, and because many choose to cremate the bodies of the dead at its shores (so that the ashes are taken by the river), many towns along its banks became sites of pilgrimages. It is the case of Varanasi, Haridwar or Allahabad, where the bathing festival, the Mela, is regularly held. Referring to the significance of the Ganges, Koehler notes that despite “progressive trends”, the “pietism for the river will certainly last the longest and it will victoriously outlive the decline of the gods” (126)²⁸⁶. For Europeans, too, the Ganges is the epitome of India, the embodiment of the “farthest end of the world”, as well as the “river of paradise”, explains Steven Darian in *The Ganges in Myth and History* (161). The Indian river features already in classical accounts, and Alexander the Great considers reaching the Ganges as the goal of his expedition (Darian 164). In Middle Ages, the fame of rich and bountiful cities at the banks of Ganga reach Europe, and it becomes legendary as the “river of Eden” (Darian 181). Many, including the author of *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, believed that the Ganges carries precious stones and gold. Christopher Columbus was so convinced that his route to India was right that upon landing in America, he assumed that the natives are talking about Ganga (Darian 183). When more Europeans started arriving to India, many sites along the Ganges were eagerly visited by travellers, especially Benares/Varanasi. Francois Bernier called the city at the shore of Ganga the “Athens of India”, and Edwin Arnold talked about it as the “Oxford and Canterbury of India in one” (Miller 304).

²⁸⁶ “Niemniej religijny pietyzm dla rzeki przetrwa zapewne najdłużej i zwycięsko przeżyje zmierzch bogów” (Koehler 126).

Kipling, on the other hand, would refer to it unceremoniously as the city “of two Thousand Temples and twice two thousand stenchs” (304). Mark Twain, too, stopped in Varanasi and although stunned by the temples and cities, he was appalled by the filth of the river, where people bathe and human remains are thrown (Miller 305). Indeed, the “holiness” of the Ganges in Hindu understanding often contrasts with a rather unforgiving take on the river by the tourists.

The Polish reporters are conflicted as well. They realise the importance of the river and try to explain it to their readers, but at the same time, they are repulsed by the “dirt”, “lack of hygiene” and the surrounding “kitsch”. They also criticise the greed of priests and the “blind faith” of the people. Koehler summarises these feelings in the following way:

Here – at the holy Ganges – meet: the calculated might of the priests, the mad fanaticism of the pilgrims, the cynicism of the secular magnates, the unearthly yearnings of the soulful dreamers and finally, the pathetic, helpless trust of the paupers. (126)²⁸⁷

Nevertheless, Koehler does not give up the hope for some kind of spiritual experience. Disappointed by the “stony emptiness and endless void that we have seen in the eyes of the deities sitting on the altars of the Birla temples” (128), he is expecting that the holy river will “unveil its secrets” and that he will be able to understand “this maze of beliefs, cults, dreadful practices and pitifully naive superstitions”(128)²⁸⁸. Even for the socialist non-believers, the Ganges represents a symbolic core of the Hindu faith, as a river so famous that seeing it should be a meaningful event. But Koehler is disappointed once again. Although he admires the old city of Haridwar and the marble stairs leading to the river, he feels that the place is too much of a tourist attraction, where there is little place for reflection. It is remarkable, however, that he notices how Westerners spoil the atmosphere: “there is something brutal in the loud gusts of laughter, in the intrusive nosiness of tourists, in their confidence, demonstrating the superiority of the Western arch-culture”(128)²⁸⁹. Looking at the local people, Koehler feels that there is contempt in their eyes (128). This moment when the gaze shifts from the Polish tourist to the local person – who usually is the object of the tourists’ observation – is significant. The roles

²⁸⁷ “Tu zatem – nad świętym Gangesem – spotykają się ze sobą: wyrachowana potęga kapłanów, obłąkańczy fanatyzm pątników, cynizm świeckich możnowładców, nadziemskie tęsknoty uduchowionych marzycieli i wreszcie żalonna, bezradna ufność nędzarzy” (Koehler 126).

²⁸⁸ “Oto jednak zbliżamy się do świętej rzeki. Za chwilę znajdziemy się w ostrym blasku światła Wschodu, spojrzymy w źrenice boga. Co w nich dojrzymy? Czy ten sam martwy odbłask dręczącego zabójczym żarem słońca, tę samą kamienną pustkę i bezdenną nicość, którą widzieliśmy już w oczach bóstw zasiadających na ołtarzach świątyni Birły? Czy może uchyli się wreszcie rąbek tajemnicy i dotrze do nas iskra zrozumienia dręczącej zagadki tej gęstwy wiar, kultów, przejmujących grozą praktyk i żałośnie naiwnych zabobonów? Próżne nadzieje!” (Koehler 128).

²⁸⁹ “Jest coś brutalnego w głośnych rechotach śmiechu, w natrętnym wścibstwie turystów, w ich pewności siebie, demonstrującej wyższość zachodniej arcykultury. Po raz pierwszy wydaje mi się, że oczy nieruchomo stojącego, brunatnego człowieka patrzają nie przez nas, lecz na nas. W oczach tych jest wyraz – pogardy...” (Koehler 128).

are reversed: it is not the Westerner that surveys his surrounding, it is the local that looks disapprovingly at the tourist. The arrival of a foreign tourist group in Haridwar is presented as an intrusion, an interference, even though Koehler himself is part of that group. Nevertheless, he realises that loud tourists present a disturbance in a place of such spiritual character.

Górnicki, upon his arrival to Hardwar, is much less spiritually inclined than Koehler. Throughout his account, he maintains an ironic distance to what he observes at the pilgrimage site. He approaches the Ganges, the “holy river for Hindus” (223), and informs that its water has purifying qualities, “naturally, [only] in a philosophical sense” (223)²⁹⁰. He describes the waters of Ganga in harsh terms:

A greasy-green liquid maunders lazily among granite stones, floating near the shore there are lumps of buffalo dung, tangerine peels, faded banana leaves, phlegm-like mixture of mud and plankton. In the greasy-green water, shoals of greasy-brown fish mill around. . . The are, however, no feverish fishermen, and the emaciated beggars on the banks do not even dare to cast their desirous glances towards the river. For fish are sacred. A premeditated killing would be an offence, or even a blasphemous sacrilege, which nobody in this town would have the courage of doing. Holy river, holy fish, what else is holy in here? Actually everything. (223)²⁹¹

After drawing this unappealing picture of the Ganges, Górnicki explains that Haridwar is as important to the Hindus as Varanasi, because the waters of Ganga there contain as many “liquefied blessings”²⁹² as in the historical town of Benares (223). He describes pilgrims bathing in a nearby temple pond. Once again, its waters do not seem to be “purifying”, let alone “pure”: “a greenish gunk washes around their necks, lumps of mud and dunk flow close to their faces” (224)²⁹³. Górnicki concludes, sarcastically: “[A]fter such a bath – the benevolence of gods [is] guaranteed” (224)²⁹⁴.

Putrament observes the site of ritual cremation of the dead at the banks of Yamuna, tributary of the Ganges, and is shocked by the fact that next to the burning funeral pyres people bathe in the waters of the river. He, too, finds the river very dirty and muddy, and is horrified to see a man not only drinking the water, but also taking a pinch of the mud to clean his teeth

²⁹⁰ “Oto Ganga, moi państwo, święta rzeka hinduistów”; “Ma własności oczyszczające – w sensie filozoficznym naturalnie” (Górnicki 223).

²⁹¹ “Tłustozielona ciecz snuje się leniwie pośród granitowych cembrowin, przy brzegu płyną wartko grudki bawolego łajna, łupiny mandarynek, zwiędłe listowie bananów, podobna do flegmy zawiesina planktonu i błota. W tłustozielonej wodzie kłębią się stada tłustobrunatnych ryb. . . Nie widać jednak rozgorączkowanych wędkarzy, a wychudli żebracy na wybrzeżu wystrzegają się nawet pożądlivych spojrzeń w kierunku rzeki. Ryby są bowiem święte. Umyślne zabójstwo byłoby niecną, ba, bluźnierczym świętokradztwem, na które nikt się w tym mieście nie poważy! Święta rzeka, święte ryby, co jeszcze jest tutaj święte? Właściwie wszystko” (Górnicki 223).

²⁹² “rozpuszczone błogosławieństwa” (Górnicki 223).

²⁹³ “Zielonkawa maź obmywa ich szyje, grudki szlamu i łajna przepływają tuż koło twarzy” (Górnicki 224).

²⁹⁴ “Po takiej kąpieli – przychylność bogów gwarantowana” (Górnicki 224).

(*Cztery...* 94). Giełżyński experiences a similar scene in Benares. He watches pilgrims sitting, bathing, washing clothes and swimming in the waters of the Ganga. He explains to the readers:

It is even good to rinse one's teeth and, of course, to drink this muddy water that contains sewage from over a dozen big cities and thousands of village, as wells as the ashes of the dead, that have been burnt on pyres at the shores. Nobody is concerned with the hygiene. But, after all, there was never an epidemic here. The waters of the Ganges, probably because of the intensive sun operation (surely not because of the protection of Hindu gods!), are really free from bacteria, in spite of permanent pollution. (49)²⁹⁵

Clearly, Giełżyński's feelings are similar to those of other reporters: he is disgusted and repelled by the waters of the "holy" river, and he makes ironic remarks about Hindu beliefs. At the same time, he tries to explain the phenomenon of the Ganges in rational terms: it is reassuring for him as a European visitor that the river's "purifying" effect can be explained scientifically.

Indeed, research shows that the Ganges, whose waters come from Himalaya glaciers, has a particular ability to purify itself due to very high levels of oxygen in water²⁹⁶. Nevertheless, with global warming causing the glaciers to melt, and with high levels of contamination by billions of litres of untreated sewage and toxic waste, the Ganges has become one of the top most polluted rivers in the world (Zerkel, Daftuar). The situation is not better for Yamuna, flowing through the capital, which is so polluted as to become empty of all aquatic life (Daftuar). Successive governments have tried to tackle this problem, from the rather unsuccessful Ganga Action Plan started already in 1986, to the latest campaign announcements of Narendra Modi, who pledged in Varanasi to cleanse the Ganges (Black).

While these contemporary concerns are understandable, there is something disconcerting about the reporters' disgust with the Ganges. It resembles the way nineteenth-century missionaries and travellers described "primitive religions" as unhygienic and unclean. Categories of cleanliness and dirt reflect, according to Mary Douglas, the ideas of order and chaos, and crossing the line between these states represents an important transgression that the traveller fears. What is characteristic of the Western culture, is that dirt avoidance is a matter of hygiene or aesthetics, and not of religious belief (Douglas 36). Also, the Western thinking of dirt is "dominated by the knowledge of pathogenic organisms" (36), but it only dates back to nineteenth-century discovery of bacterial transmission of disease. However, leaving the

²⁹⁵ "Dobre jest nawet płukanie zębów i, oczywiście, picie tej mętnej wody, niosącej ścieki z kilkunastu wielkich miast i tysięcy wsi, oraz popioły zmarłych, spalonych na stosach, które płoną tuż przy brzegu. Nikomu nie przychodzi zresztą do głowy kłopotać się o higienę. Zresztą, nigdy nie było tu epidemii. Wody Gangesu, zapewne dzięki intensywnej operacji słonecznej (bo przecież nie dzięki protekcji hinduskich bogów!) są rzeczywiście wolne od bakterii, pomimo stałego ich zanieczyszczenia" (Giełżyński 49).

²⁹⁶ See: NPR podcast by Julian Crandall Hollick.

medical aspect aside, dirt is relative: Mary Douglas gives the example of food that is considered clean when on a plate, but unclean on clothes or furniture, or shoes that are not considered unclean when on the floor, but placing them on a chair or on a table would make them seem dirty. Thus, “dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (36). In a similar way, ash in a fireplace would not be considered as unclean by the Polish reporters, but smeared on a sadhu’s skin it would be categorised as dirt. Similarly, ashes of the dead seen by Hindus as purified by fire, appear to foreigners as unclean when they are thrown to the river. Only because certain elements do not fit the system of order familiar and known to the European, they are discarded as dirty or unhygienic.

Kitsch and Ugliness

In most reportages analysed here, numerous judgemental statements on India can be found. While it is understandable that a reporter can express his opinion, these statements often bear a rather excessive negative charge. These critical assessments of Indian surroundings pertain mostly to two areas: the hygienic one – related to cleanliness/dirt – and the aesthetic one – related to notions of beauty/ugliness. Sometimes, these two realms are joined, for instance when Putrament is not allowed to enter a temple and comments: “the temple was a functioning one, packed and dirty, and apart from that, unattractive” (*Na drogach...* 103)²⁹⁷. Putrament, in particular, frequently uses the adjective “ugly”: “the temple [in Mandu] is small and ugly, full of contemporary, thus hideous devotional paintings” (*Na drogach...* 140)²⁹⁸. Indeed, the author claims that the real beauty lies in the ancient temples and in Muslim monuments, like the Taj Mahal. He brutally discards all the contemporary architecture of India:

One can rarely encounter something uglier than a “current” Hindu temple. While the ancient ones survived in all their splendour, shell-like, decorated with a multitude of sculptures, constructed in some delirium-like harmony, saved by the patina of ages from the primitive polychromies, the modern ones, not able to find their own shapes that would fit contemporary materials, ineptly imitate the old forms and make up for it with the “riches”: white marble of the walls, floors and statues, garish, candy-like paintings . . . , garlands of somewhat faded flowers, handfuls of petals thrown at the feet of particularly worshipped statues. (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 19)²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ “Świątynia była czynna, zapchana i zapaskudzona, poza tym byle jaka” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 103).

²⁹⁸ “Świątynia jest mała i brzydka, pełna współczesnych, więc okropnych malunków dewocyjnych” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 140).

²⁹⁹ “Rzadko można spotkać coś brzydszego niż ‘bieżąca’ świątynia hinduistyczna. O ile dawne przetrwały, okazały, jak muszle, ozdobione na zewnątrz tłumami posągów, zbudowane w jakiejś delirycznej harmonii, uratowane patyną wieków od

Putrament is not alone in his contempt for the new Indian architecture. Giełżyński, too, tells the readers that in order to see “the true, old architecture of India”³⁰⁰, one has to go to the South, because the North was destroyed by Muslim invaders (93). “Those [temples] that were built later, when Muslims were gone, are devoid of originality, ugly, sometimes even grotesque” (93)³⁰¹, says the reporter. He is similarly unimpressed by the city of Patna, which has “no breadth nor architectural beauty, it looks as if it was a conglomerate of a hundred small and ugly towns” (Giełżyński 57)³⁰². Koehler, too, is rather nonplussed after visiting the Birla temple, and asks the Polish ambassador about his opinion – the reply is short: “Birla temple? . . . it is horrendous architectural kitsch” (Koehler 58-59)³⁰³.

Clearly, reporters apply to Indian monuments their own, Western ideas of beauty – and those, as Umberto Eco demonstrated, are relative and changeable over time (*On Beauty*, 8-12). If, as underlines Eco, Beauty is associated with Good, what is beautiful is considered to be right, and what is ugly is considered to be wrong. That is why, strong evaluating statements of reporters, who authoritatively divide what they see as beautiful or ugly, or right and wrong, have such a resonance and effect on the reader. What is more, the reporters are guided by the ideal of “high art”, which, in their understanding, characterises masterpieces that are antique and original. On the opposite end of the scale, in their view, is kitsch: colourful, cheap reproductions of the old monuments. The concept of kitsch is a curious one: Walter Benjamin defines it as something that offers instantaneous emotional gratification without intellectual effort, without the requirement of distance, without sublimation” (Menninghaus 41). Also, it presents no difficulties in interpretation and it is a simple invitation to wallow in sentiment (Menninghaus 41). What is more, kitsch is seen as a form of popular art that transcends social norms and defies taboos with its lack of classic beauty, proportion, choice of colours and style. Reporters are disappointed by “kitschy” temples, because they do not match **their** expectations of beauty. But, once again, they look at this issue from a Eurocentric point of view: they do not realise that the temples are not built to merely please the tourists’ eyes, but they serve as places of worship for the local believers.

prostactwa polichromii, to współczesne, nie umiejące odnaleźć własnych, dopasowanych do dzisiejszego tworzywa kształtów, podrabiają nieudolnie dawne formy i nadrabiają ‘bogactwem’: białym marmurem ścian, posadzek i posągów, jaskrawymi, cukierkowymi obrazkami . . . , girlandami przywiedłych kwiatów, garściami tychże płatków kwiatnych, sypanymi do stóp szczególnie czczonych posągów” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 19).

³⁰⁰ “prawdziwa, stara architektura Indii” (Giełżyński 93).

³⁰¹ “Te, które zbudowano później, kiedy odparto muzułmanów, są pozbawione cech oryginalności, brzydkie, często wręcz pokraczne.” (Giełżyński 93).

³⁰² “Nie odznacza się także rozmachem ani pięknem architektonicznym, wygląda raczej tak, jakby była zlepkiem stu małych i brzydkich miasteczek” (Giełżyński 57).

³⁰³ “ – Świątynia Birły? – mówi krótko. – To okropny kicz architektoniczny” (58-59).

Not only temples provoke such unapologetic reactions. Górnicki arrives to Haridwar and walks around the town, observing the stalls full of cheap souvenirs that he quickly qualifies as “zakopiańszczyzna” (222) – meaning the souvenirs sold at the market of Zakopane, a popular resort in Polish Tatra mountains. Although souvenirs produced by the Polish highlanders are hardly items of high quality, Górnicki says that compared to the Indian souvenirs, they are examples of tasteful artwork (222). The reporter notices the following items: “glass beads *made in Czechoslovakia*”, fruits, peanuts, copper plates, “keys to some unknown doors”³⁰⁴, toilet paper and pictures of Mahatma Gandhi, “at least not printed at [the banks] of Veltava [Czech river]” (222)³⁰⁵. These products are for Górnicki the synonym of kitsch, cheapness and poor quality. By referring to beads “made in Czechoslovakia” and pictures of Gandhi that could be printed in Prague, he underlines their lack of authenticity. The reporter notices stands with devotional products: “Among the holy pictures, there are mostly two main conventions: either the wild, Hindu-Buddhist monsters, or the “sweet realism”, similar to our church fair pictures of girls on sofas, floating on ponds full of swans and wild lilies.” (*Na drogach...* 44)³⁰⁶. Upon entering a shop, the salesman shows “Konarak-themed pictures, tawdry and purely commercial” (44)³⁰⁷. Fully disgusted with the religious commercialism, Górnicki forms a very negative opinion of the pilgrimage town of Haridwar. He qualifies it as a “gigantic open-air show, a monstrous church fair” (224)³⁰⁸ and concludes his description by saying that everything there “reeks of plaster, whole-sale and cheapness” (225)³⁰⁹. It reminds him of similar phenomena in his own country. He does not appreciate church fairs as religious gatherings in general, but also, in a rather elitist manner, he shows contempt for everything that is not elegant, stylish and artistic. In fact, the Polish term “odpust” (meaning “church fair”) is often used as a synonym to kitsch.

Critique of Pilgrimage Places

Apart from the aesthetic displeasure of reporters at the sight of various Indian temples, cities and products, their accounts are also critical of people encountered at the “holy places”

³⁰⁴ “Bisiory szklanych paciorków *made in Czechoslovakia*. . . klucze nikt nie wie do czego . . .” (Górnicki 222-223).

³⁰⁵ “Wyjątkowo nie drukowany nad Wełtawą” (Górnicki 223).

³⁰⁶ “Są tu głównie obrazki święte, w dwóch konwencjach: albo dzikiej, indobuddyjskiej maskary, albo ‘słodkiego realizmu’, podobnego do naszych kiermaszowych obrazków z dziewczynami na kanapach, pływających po stawach pełnych łabędzi i dzikich lilii” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 44).

³⁰⁷ “handlarz pokazuje współczesne wariacje tematyki konarackiej, tandetne i wyłącznie komercyjne” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 44).

³⁰⁸ “gigantyczny ‘show’ w plenerze, odpust-monstre” (Górnicki 224).

³⁰⁹ “Wszystko to nadto trąci gipsem, hurtem i taniością” (Górnicki 225).

and their attitudes. According to Putrament, the movement of people at the temple resembles a conveyor belt – the faithful come in, see the “holy man” (or figure), and come out:

What constitutes the most valuable aspect of a strictly religious act is the reflection, meditation, an attempt to look into one’s self and a confrontation with something beyond the self, some non-human element of the scale. What kind of reflection can be possible in this stream, when all the attention is focussed on looking on the right, on the statue of Shiva, and [looking] down, on one’s legs, to avoid bumping into the person ahead? The religious act disappears, and what remains is only the act of satisfying one’s own curiosity, like at an art exhibition, not to mention worse comparisons. (*Na drogach*. . . 20)³¹⁰

Putrament is unimpressed about the emptiness and soullessness of the ritual, he criticises the popular attitudes, seeing them as superficial and thoughtless. Górnicki expresses a similar feeling of disappointment, but in even more negative terms:

All this horrible church-fair in the worst of tastes, the holy rivers and the holy ponds, parades of lice-ridden dervishes, the uproar, the stench and the hysteria of mass pilgrimages – they are solely an embarrassing show, in which ignorance and cynical business play the leading roles. The mass rallies in Benares or Hardwar actually have as much in common with the subtle ruminations of Eastern thinkers, as the Bernardine monks of Kalwaria with Mounier or Maritain. Where were your exotic, naïve travellers of the past century? . . . The only impressive aspects here are the beards of the astrologers and the ugliness of temples that is so absolute, that it is almost fascinating. But it is a poor proof for the “universal need of the absolute”. One should rather discuss on the need of enlightenment and hygiene. (228)³¹¹

Clearly, Górnicki is averse to all Hindu places of worship and the idea of pilgrimage as such. He associates the “holy sites” with filth, lack of hygiene, ugliness, “bad taste”, irrationality and hysteria. Overall, he finds “rational” concepts, such as “enlightenment and hygiene” more important. It is a paradox that the two reporters who are otherwise champions of atheism, criticise the religious sites for their lack of spirituality. Although, as it seems, they are not believers themselves, they still look for the sublime and the metaphysical.

³¹⁰ “W akcie ściśle religijnym to, co jest najcenniejsze – to zaduma, medytacja, próba zajrzenia wewnątrz siebie i konfrontacji z czymś poza sobą, jakąś jednostką miary pozaludzkiej. Jakaż tu może być zaduma w tym potoku, gdy cała uwaga podzielona jest między gapienie się na prawo, na posąg Sziwy i pod nogi, żeby się nie potknąć o poprzednika? Akt religijny znika, zostaje akt zaspokojenia ciekawości, jak na wystawie sztuki, żeby nie szukać gorszych porównań” (Putrament, *Na drogach*... 20).

³¹¹ “. . . cały ten koszmarny odpust w najgorszym stylu, święte rzeki i święte sadzawki, rewie zawszonych derwiszów, wrzask, smród i histeria masowych pielgrzymek – są wyłącznie żenującym widowiskiem, w którym ciemnota i cyniczny byznes grają główne role. Masówki w Benaresie czy Hardwarze mają akurat tyle samo wspólnych cech z subtelnymi dywagacjami wschodnich myślicieli, co kalwaryjscy bernardyni z Mounierem czy Maritainem. Gdzieżeście tutaj zauważyli egzotykę, naiwni podróżnicy z zeszłego wieku? . . . Jedyne, co tu jest naprawdę imponujące, to brody astrologów i brzydota świątyni tak bezwzględna, że aż urzekająca. Ale kiepski to dowód na ‘ogólnoludzką potrzebę absolutu’. Należałoby raczej rozprawić o potrzebie oświaty i higieny” (Górnicki 228).

More importantly, criticising religion in India provides the reporters with an opportunity to present all religions in a negative light. Górnicki contrasts what he perceives as shallow spirituality with real spirituality, giving as example Haridwar and Kalwaria (Polish religious site) on the one hand, and Eastern thinkers, Mounier and Maritain on the other hand. The latter two were Catholic philosophers, but – incidentally – leftist ones, hence more acceptable for a socialist reporter. Górnicki clearly pursues here a domestic agenda, showing the superiority of leftist French Catholics over the Benedictine monks of Kalwaria (opposed to the communist regime). He is particularly inclined to comparing Indian pilgrimage sites with the Polish ones. He even calls Haridwar a “Częstochowa at the shores of the Ganges”. The Polish town of Częstochowa is the destination of Catholic pilgrimages due to a monastery where a “holy picture” of Saint Mary can be found. Górnicki sees many similarities between the two localities. When wandering across Haridwar, he concludes that “[A]ll of this is very exotic, but the atmosphere of this place persistently reminds of something...” (223)³¹². He further explains his point:

It is difficult to deny that a certain country between Bug and Oder rivers is a rather unfortunate place for such critical reflections on the pilgrimages near the Ganges. One should honestly admit that the Częstochowa and Kalwaria events cause the same kind of distaste and feeling of strangeness among the visitors from Western Europe, as the ones that a Pole feels in Hardwar. If some hysteria-meters and smell-measures could be used, who knows whether this comparison would be favourable to the Hardwars on the shores of Vistula river. (228)³¹³

Hence, Polish pilgrimage sites are for Górnicki not very much different from the Indian ones. The same kind of attitudes that appear to the reporter as “fanatical” and “hysterical” can be found in India and in Poland. In his reportage, he is also critical of the role of the Catholic Church in Kerala. In this passage, once again, the critique of Hindu religious sites is for Górnicki a way of criticising the Polish church. It is not surprising given the historical and political context of Górnicki’s times. In communist Poland the Church was one of the key opponents of the regime. While some individual priests would collaborate with the communist authorities, many would support the opposition, allow for unofficial meetings of intellectuals at their premises and present alternative versions of history than the one taught at school.

³¹² “Bardzo to wszystko egzotyczne, tyle że atmosfera tego miasta coś natarczywie przypomina” (Górnicki 223).

³¹³ “Trudno zaprzeczyć, że pewien kraj między Bugiem i Odrą jest miejsce dość niefortunnym dla snucia tak krytycznych refleksji na temat pielgrzymek nad Gangesem. Z ręką na sercu przyznać wypada, że imprezy częstochowskie lub kalwaryjskie przyprawiają przybyszów z zachodniej Europy akurat o ten sam niesmak i poczucie obcości, jakich Polak doznaje w Hardwarze. Gdyby uruchomić zapachometry i hysteriomierze – kto wie, czy porównanie wypadłoby korzystnie dla nadwiślańskich Hardwarów. Ale w prawdziwym Hardwarze, powtarzam, nie ma żadnej huty. I to jest ta decydująca różnica” (Górnicki 228).

Undermining the position that the Catholic Church had at the time in Polish society was an important goal for the propaganda, and thus the reporters' criticism of religion would be encouraged.

In spite of that, it is hard to disagree with the reporters' critical, or at least ironic take on the "church fairs" and commercialisation of pilgrimages³¹⁴. In the years after the fall of communism, Poland experienced an outbreak of religious activity, resulting in numerous new churches and pilgrimage sites being built. Curiously, the style of many of them was a "continuation of socialist realism . . . tangled up with a traditional, folk religiosity" (Niedźwiedź 94). This eruption of Catholic architecture reflects the hegemonic position of Catholic Church in Poland and its ambitions to influence the social and political life of the country. The socialist reporters would probably be surprised that their attempts at presenting the Church (and generally, religion) in an unfavourable way brought a completely opposite result. The communist critique of the Church in fact only strengthened this religious institution (Niedźwiedź 87, Meyer Resende xvi). Similar to contemporary Częstochowa or Licheń in Poland, Hindu pilgrimage sites can also become strongly politicised. It suffices to say that in the last parliamentary elections, it was from Varanasi that the two rivals, Narendra Modi and Arvind Kejriwal announced their decision to run for the seat of Prime Minister. The political scientist Christophe Jaffrelot finds that it is part of a larger phenomenon called "*Yatra* politics", or the exploitation of the holy sites by politicians, particularly Hindu nationalists. Thus, the processes that the reporters observed or in which they participated – commercialisation of pilgrimage sites, alliance of religion and nationalism – have only increased with time in both Poland and India. The secularist agenda of Nehruvian governments and Polish socialists instead of bringing to the society a higher degree of secularism and a certain distancing towards religious institutions and practices, only strengthened the conservatives in both countries. In today's Poland, priests indulge in tirades against atheists and support extreme right-wing politicians, while in India atheists and rationalists are persecuted by radical Hindu groups³¹⁵. While pilgrimage places can serve as a community-building sites of spiritual reflection, it seems that oftentimes they become an important political tool. The reporters' critique of these sites is thus on the one hand based on rationalist, atheist values, but on the other hand, their repulsion at the aesthetic or hygienic aspects of Indian "holy sites" is an emotional reaction. Even though on the rational level, they make Haridwar and Częstochowa appear as equal, on the emotional level, they feel superior to the Indian culture and religiosity.

³¹⁴ For more on cultural meanings of pilgrimages, see Reader & Walter, Katic et al., Eade et al.

³¹⁵ In recent years, there were even murders of atheist activists because of their views (Rahman).

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Although Polish travellers are critical of the “European” religions too, Hindu places of worship are particularly abject for them because of the “dirt”, “naked sadhus” and other “unpleasant” views. This appears to be a common strategy of many European writers. According to David Spurr who analyses colonial discourses in journalism, travel writing and imperial administration, it can be called a strategy of debasement. While Polish reporters cannot be considered “colonial” per se, the language they use in describing India often follows the colonial tropes of Othering, debasing, aestheticizing, classifying, or appropriating. As explained by Spurr, the meeting with the Other is a source of sociocultural stress and the anxiety produced by the unknown causes the traveller to distance him- or herself from the Other, or even to debase the Other (76-77). The anxiety of being confronted with a different culture makes the observer more inclined to affirm his or her own cultural order and place the Other at the negative end of a system of values (77). In colonial discourse it was common to present “the natives” as living in “misery and abjection” (Spurr 77), only to be saved by Western civilising mission. The Polish reporters’ texts do not go as far as to present Indians in such harsh view, nevertheless, the element of disgust at the filth of the most venerated river, or the criticism of the cow status does remind of colonial strategies of debasing the Other and glorifying the Self.

Moreover, it is striking that by and large, the elements of Hindu tradition that the reporters choose to describe belong to the realm of nature. Whether it is the cow and the general protection of animals, the naked bodies of sadhus, the yogic poses that imitate the poses of animals, the funeral pyres at the riverside, the waters of the Ganges revered by the pilgrims – all of these “holy” elements of Hinduism pertain to nature. In this, the discourse presented by the reporters is similar to colonial discourse, in which the binary opposition of nature versus culture serves to underline the “civilised” character of the coloniser and the “primitive” character of the native, who appears to a certain degree as a “savage” that did not leave the state of nature and needs to colonise to lift him on a more advanced level of development. What is more, it is explicitly mentioned by reporters that cows and sadhus are “parts of the landscape” (Chociłowski 64) in India. This way of phrasing demonstrates how the foreign gaze objectifies animals and people, presenting them as if they were props on a scene or elements of the background. These “exotic” aspects of Indian reality are also described as motionless, timeless, and representative of the “backward” mentality of Indians – or, in Said’s terms – of the Orientals. Chociłowski says outright that sadhus “supposedly were always there in India and today one can also meet them in this country, that seems to fit their presence more than any

other [country of the world]” (64)³¹⁶. India is thus presented as a land of curious traditions, an old civilisation and an old religion that has lasted, unchanged, for centuries. However, as demonstrated by the case studies, the Indian take on animal protection or the status of renouncers has not been the same in the past and was revised and reinterpreted time and again.

Furthermore, the vocabulary that is used by reporters often bears a negative charge and reminds of typically Orientalist descriptions from colonial times. The adjectives such as “strange”, “odd”, “repulsive”, “filthy” abound. While declaring that they want to speak about India in a different way than their predecessors, reporters use terms such as “exotic”, “mysterious” or “irrational”. There is a frequent use of hyperboles, contrasting images, enumerations of various examples, and comparisons to what is known from the home country.

Nevertheless, the reporters’ narratives differ in several respects from typically Western, Orientalist narratives. First of all, at least to some degree, the reporters try to incorporate in their descriptions an Indian point of view. In many instances, they underline that their opinions are based on what they heard from their Indian colleagues. For instance, Koehler mentions a conversation with an Indian zoologist, and Chociłowski refers to the problem of cows “as seen through Indian eyes” (57). Secondly, reporters make an attempt at showing religious phenomena, or – as they perceive it – elements of tradition, in a larger context. They discuss the social and political implications of the manifestations of religious faith, they give examples and statistics. Nevertheless, their general take remains ideological: expressions of religion are an element of the past and with “modern” education, they should slowly fade away. Thirdly, the reporters liken Hindu practices to the ones of Catholics, and in that way, universalise religion. They are equally critical of Hindu pilgrimages as of the Christian ones, and they deplore the emptiness of ritual, exploitation of believers by cunning priests, ignorance leading to superstition and so on.

Perhaps it is safe to say that on an intellectual level, the reporters do try to defy the Orientalist narrative on India, but on an emotional level, they succumb to the same feelings as those exhibited by their colonial predecessors. Like travellers of the previous era, they are shocked by difference and they react to it in the usual way: experiencing disgust, fear, displeasure, irritation and contempt.

³¹⁶ “Podobno byli w Indiach zawsze i dziś można ich spotkać wszędzie w tym kraju, który jak żaden inny wydaje się pasować do ich obecności” (Chociłowski 64).

CHAPTER 5. INDIA, “LAND OF CONTRASTS”

India may be seen by some as land of temples and mystics, but it is also perceived as a place of surprising variety and contrast. India is labelled as the “Land of Contrasts” in travel brochures and guidebooks, in blog posts and YouTube videos. It has been so already several decades ago, at the time when the Polish reporters mentioned in this study visited the Subcontinent. Witold Koehler announces from the very beginning that he wants to avoid using the banal statement, repeated by many of his predecessors: “India is a country of contrasts” (18)³¹⁷. Nevertheless, he admits that it is a difficult goal, as contrast is inherent to India and it strikes the visitor at every step of the way (18). His words are echoed by Jerzy Ros, who outlines the huge diversity of cultures, religions, languages, human types, and landscapes that are all part of India. He calls it, too, “a country of social, climatic, and natural contrasts – a truth that has now become a clichéd slogan”(8)³¹⁸. Wojciech Gielżyński, coming to India almost two decades later, also repeats the slogan: “What a strange country, full of paradoxes and contrasts!”³¹⁹. But, he adds immediately, this is not a wise thing to say, because for Indians many of “our customs and habits appear as funny or strange” (17). The Polish travellers are not alone in their observations. Mexican poet and writer Octavio Paz, assigned for a diplomatic post in India in 1952, recalls:

The first thing that surprised me about India, as it has surprised many others, was the diversity created by extreme contrast: modernity and antiquity, luxury and poverty, sensuality and asceticism, carelessness and efficiency, gentleness and violence; a multiplicity of castes and languages, gods and rites, customs and ideas, rivers and deserts, plains and mountains, cities and villages, rural and industrial life, centuries apart in time and neighbours in space. (Paz 27)

Paz realises that he is not the first one to notice India’s diversity and its contradictions, however the image of these stark contrast is what remained a powerful memory from his stay in India. What constitutes, in his mind, the biggest paradox, and the most defining trait of India, is the coexistence of Hinduism and Islam. These two religions, one “strictest and most extreme form of monotheism” (Paz 37), and the other, “the richest and most varied polytheism” (Paz 37) are not only a source of contrast, but also a deep wound, a source of lasting tensions. The Polish reporters are aware of these tensions, although in their reportages there is only some mention of the traumatic events of the last few decades, the 1947 Partition of India into Muslim-dominated Pakistan and Hindu-dominated India. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the reporters

³¹⁷ “Indie to kraj kontrastów” (Koehler 18).

³¹⁸ “Indie są krajem kontrastów społecznych – ta prawda stała się już utartym sloganem – a także klimatycznych i krajobrazowych . . .” (Ros 8).

³¹⁹ “Jakież dziwny kraj, pełen paradoksów i kontrastów!” (Gielżyński 17).

prefer not to emphasise on religious differences, unless it can be used to accuse the former British colonisers of strengthening the divide between communities.

Visual Contrasts

However, the reporters do see contrasts in various spheres of Indian life. The most obvious sphere is the economic one: extreme poverty alongside extreme wealth. Janusz Gołębiowski says upon his return from a tour around several large cities of India: “It was a mega dose. In Kolkata, I saw with my own eyes the shocking contrasts between poverty and wealth, which I knew until now only from descriptions in books and in the press” (Gołębiowski 5)³²⁰. The coexistence of these economic extremes is what causes particular surprise among all reporters featured here.

Another startling aspect of Indian reality is, for the reporters, an aesthetic one. They are surprised by the “the mixing of the old and the new” (Koehler 105)³²¹, of the clean and the dirty, of the beautiful and the ugly. Jerzy Putrament notices the contrast between the fancy residences in New Delhi, and the untended streets (91). The elegant centre of the English-designed new part of Delhi, the circular Connaught Place, is – according to the writer – cluttered with ugly stands and stalls. In the countryside, Putrament observes mud huts in the neighbourhood of ancient temples of Khajurao, and exclaims: “This contrast between grandiose past and the present! It strikes even more than in the [Greek] Corinth, because there, too, is a village, but a clean one!” (Putrament, *Four...* 126)³²². Another reporter, Wojciech Giełżyński, is startled by the difference between new express trains connecting main cities, and old buses, which make a traveller doubt whether India is a modern country (5).

There are also a few positive surprises. Jerzy Chociłowski is impressed with the precision, punctuality and maintenance of perfect order during a state parade in Delhi, contrasting with the usual chaos, lack of organisation and “carefree bustle” (33)³²³. Here, the contrast serves to underline the positive aspects and to prove that chaos is not an inherent characteristics of India – when needed, a parade can be organised in a perfect manner. Witold Koehler, too, is astonished by the order and harmony of New Delhi. He says: “the capital of the great Land of Contrasts lacks exactly these contrasts”(49)³²⁴. He finds Delhi similar to large

³²⁰ “Dawka była uderzeniowa. W Kalkucie zobaczyłem na własne oczy, znane mi dotychczas tylko z opisów w książkach i prasie, szokujące kontrasty między bogactwem.” (Gołębiowski 5).

³²¹ “Z właściwą Indiom siłą kontrastów stare miesza się tu z nowym...” (Koehler 105).

³²² “Ten kontrast między świetną przeszłością a teraźniejszością! To silniej bije nawet niż w Koryncie, bo i tam wieś, ale czysta!” (Putrament, *Cztery...* 126).

³²³ “beztroski rozgardiasz” (Chociłowski 33).

³²⁴ “W stolicy wielkiego Kraju Kontrastów brak jest właśnie – kontrastów.” (Koehler 49).

European cities, and even more orderly and well-planned, full of greenery and luxurious villas. Talking about taxis, he notices that in Delhi, they are all of the same type, while in Warsaw one can see ramshackle vehicles side-by-side with modern “Pobedas” and “Warszawas”. “In this respect”, says Koehler, “our contrasts beat the Land of Contrasts”(50)³²⁵. Clearly, the lack of chaos and the lack of contrasts are appraised in a positive manner, because they are associated with European culture. New Delhi appears to Koehler as beautiful because it is similar to European cities, while Chociłowski is reassured by the precision of the parade, organised in a similar way as other military parades across the world. Koehler, perhaps conscious of the fact that perceiving “Europeanness” can be frowned upon in communist Poland, compares Delhi taxis with the Warsaw ones to show that contrasts are also a typical of his own country. It seems, however, that Koehler’s impressions were only based on a visit to the government and residential part of New Delhi.

Contrasts in the Social Sphere

The reporters attempt at showing that Indian contrasts are not only visual, they are rooted much deeper and create divisions at many levels: social, economic and political. Wojciech Górnicki takes the example of the brand new city of Chandigarh, the state capital of Punjab. It was built from scratch, since the old capital of the region, Lahore, now belongs to Pakistan. Designed by a team of international architects, among them Le Corbusier, Chandigarh gained fame for its innovative design. According to Górnicki, “. . . it could have been a truly ideal place for the birth of an actual modern community, free from caste superstitions. Instead, the opposite occurred: the city hardens the barriers between castes” (145)³²⁶. The reporter explains that despite egalitarian ideas and a logical division of the town into sectors, each of these sectors soon acquired a given reputation and a particular place in the symbolic hierarchy of the city. Even the practical idea of building one school for each sector led to the lack of interaction between children of different social backgrounds. Why did this happen? wonders Górnicki, and gives an explanation:

European architects believed the words of Indian politicians, who – themselves full of illusions and wishful thoughts – maintained that the cast system is passing away. Both groups, as a result, involuntarily contributed to the preservation of the cast system. The clash between modernity

³²⁵ “Na tym odcinku bijemy kontrastem na głowę Kraj Kontrastów...” (Koehler 50).

³²⁶ “Czandigarh, przez swą programową nowoczesność, mógł być wymarzoną wprost miejscem dla narodzin jakiejś istotnie nowoczesnej wspólnoty, wolnej od kastowych przesądów. Stało się odwrotnie: miasto petryfikuje przegrady międzykastowe.” (Górnicki 145).

at its best with a congealed backwardness, pervading into social customs, led to almost paradoxical effects. (Górnicki 146)³²⁷

Clearly, modern urban planning did not take into account the resilience of caste divisions, which not only did not disappear with India's independence, but that persist in changed forms and conditions even till this day.

Apart from caste differences, the reporters describe class divisions, created – according to the travellers – by the capitalist economy. Putrament presents a rather grim picture of the capitalist development of two major Indian cities, Kolkata and Mumbai:

Calcutta is a city of traditional, 19th-century English capitalism. Bombay is a gateway to the new, American-style capitalism. What does it mean in practice? The intensification of contrasts. During our trip to Pune, we saw modern blocs of flat surrounded by slums. Both American capitalism, as well as the monopolistic state capitalism *à la Tata* increase and exacerbate the immeasurable contradictions of the Indian society. (Putrament, *On the Road...* 153)³²⁸

The consequence of such economic policies, according to Putrament, is that large masses of people face unemployment and poverty, while only selected ones can be workers (153). The country thus remains in the category of “developing states”, even though in some disciplines, it rivals Western countries. Gołębiowski recalls his astonishment when he hears of atomic reactors, supersonic jets and modern diesel locomotives. “In the course of only few years, this country turned from importer to producer and exporter of train equipment, diesel engines and range of other machines. And in spite of that, it is a backward and poor country” (171)³²⁹, says the reporter. He adds that poverty, deepened over several centuries, cannot be easily eliminated. “It springs to one's eyes in the hardly-enduring villages and slums in big cities. It crawls over the ultramodern arteries, glowing with neon lamps, it creeps around luxurious hotels”(171)³³⁰. In his depiction, poverty is personified as a sneaky adversary that constantly hampers the development. It is also striking that some reporters add a temporal dimension to poverty. It is a phenomenon of the past, a relic of the colonial nineteenth century. Żukrowski, for instance, visits a hydroelectric power plant, and then sees a nearby settlement. “Just behind the twentieth

³²⁷ “Europejscy architekci zawierzili na słowo indyjskim politykom, którzy – sami pełni złudzeń i pobożnych życzeń – utrzymywali, że system kastowy obumiera. Jedni i drudzy w rezultacie przyczynili się mimowiednie do utrwalenia układów kastowych. Zderzenie najlepiej pojętej nowoczesności z zaskorupałym, wżartym w obyczaj społeczny wstecznictwem doprowadziło do skutków wręcz paradoksalnych.” (Górnicki 146).

³²⁸ “Kalkuta jest miastem tradycyjnego, XIX-wiecznego kapitalizmu angielskiego, Bombaj bramą wypadową nowej, amerykańskiej odmiany kapitalizmu. Co to w praktyce oznacza? Zaostrzenie kontrastów. Widzieliśmy na wyjeździe w Punie nowoczesne bloki mieszkalne otoczone ruderami. Kapitalizm amerykański, czy monopolistyczny kapitalizm krajowy *à la Tata* powiększają i zaostrzają niepomierne sprzeczności społeczeństwa indyjskiego.” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 153).

³²⁹ “Kraj ten przekształcił się w ciągu kilku lat z importera w producenta i eksportera sprzętu kolejowego, wysokoprężnych silników i szeregu innych maszyn. A przecież jest mimo to zacofany i biedny.” (Gołębiowski 171).

³³⁰ “Bije w oczy w wegetujących wioskach i wielkomijskich slumsach. Wpełza na ultranowoczesne, lśniące neonami arterie, podchodzi pod luksusowe hotele.” (Gołębiowski 171).

century, on a stony hillside – a hut, if one can even call this windowless block this way . . .”(137)³³¹. A plant thus represents the modernity of the new century, and the hut belongs to the old age. The two stand side-by-side, becoming – in the reporter’s eyes – a symbol of Indian contrasts.

Contrasts in the Minds

Politics reflects these contrasts. Polish reporters visiting India are by and large appreciative of the country’s leaders, who faced a particularly difficult task of building a modern, democratic state, given that the country was so full of contrasts. It was an attempt to “reconcile water with fire”, “socialism with feudalism”, “enlightened intentions with the inertia of a stratified party”, “damned traditions with the postulated modernity”, as Górnicki puts it (129)³³². That attempt was successful only in parts: India managed to build and maintain a democracy, but, as Gołębiowski explains, introducing Western political forms onto a system of “archaic social relations”(121) and “deeply rooted traditions”(121) did not go as smoothly as expected³³³. It created yet another level of contrasts: between the Western form and the local content, which sometimes proved to be contradictory. Even the philosophy and political thought of the politicians at the head of the Indian Republic was based on rather diverse elements. Gołębiowski remarks that Nehru himself admitted that his system of thought was a “mix of old Indian traditions and Western concepts” (187)³³⁴. Often, reporters find it puzzling that their Indian acquaintances, usually educated abroad, Westernised and generally perceived as proponents of modernization and secularism, time and again revert to old “superstitions”, like consulting astrologers, abstaining from certain foods, and “believing in most incredible stories and miracles” (Gołębiowski 92)³³⁵.

Reporters’ Reactions to Contrasts

The reporters realise that contrasts, even if they sound like a cliché, indeed seem to be inherent to Indian reality: cultural, economic, political and mental one. Their reactions to such a diversity are varied. Exposed to so many paradoxes, they admit that they experience a range of emotions: from helplessness to fascination. Witold Koehler states, with a certain resignation,

³³¹ “Ale tuż za wiekiem dwudziestym, na kamienistym upłazie – chałupa, jeśli tak można nazwać bryłę bez okien. . .” (Żukrowski 137).

³³² “Próba pogodzenia ognia z wodą, socjalizmu z feudalizmem, świątłych zamierzeń z beziłą rozwarstwionej partii, przeklętych tradycji z postulowaną nowoczesnością. . .” (Górnicki 129).

³³³ “archaiczne stosunki społeczne” i “zakorzenione głęboko tradycje” (Gołębiowski 121).

³³⁴ “. . . jego sposób myślenia – będący, jak sam przyznawał, mieszaniną starych indyjskich tradycji i koncepcji zachodnich. . .” (Gołębiowski 186-187).

³³⁵ “wierzyć w najbardziej nieprawdopodobne historie i cuda” (Gołębiowski 92).

that an “European, bewildered by the unintelligible maze of superstitions, beliefs, fossilised customs – is soon taken over by doubt and becomes certain that no progress is possible in these conditions.” (106)³³⁶. Chociłowski adopts a more stoic – or relativist – approach, concluding that “[w]hen talking about India, one can prove everything, and disprove everything, preserving the semblance of reason. It is a land with no truth, as well as a land of uncountable truths” (11)³³⁷. Górnicki, on the contrary, would like to rebel against such extremes:

. . . when one sees with his own eyes the span of these [opposite] poles, the black bottom of poverty and the gold-and-pearl colour of luxury, contrasts inconceivable in Europe nowadays – one would want to, despite everything, call for justice; for this basic, ordinary justice . . . which presupposes that people are, and should be, equal. (136)³³⁸

Thus, for many reporters, India’s contrasts are a cause and an effect of other grave problems and should be eradicated. Unlike his colleagues, Żukrowski is fascinated with the contrasts and paradoxes of India. He finds that these contradictions are what makes India unique:

It is perhaps the only place on the globe when one can observe all ages of humanity, [existing] at the same time, side-by-side, from an iron broad-axe, fire stricken by rubbing two pieces of wood, or a nomad’s spear, to the . . . Tata Institute with active nuclear reactors and a group of world-famous scientists. Both the one with a spear in his hand, and the one holding a test-tube in an isolated vice, call themselves Indian. They can coexist one next to the other without conflict, this is what makes the incredible, everyday miracle of India. (322)³³⁹

India’s diversity, its everyday contrasts, are thus seen by Żukrowski as a strength rather than a weakness. It is, in a way, a certain proof that democracy works, if it allows for communities so far apart in their everyday experience of the world to live peacefully within the same state. Tradition and modernity, in Żukrowski’s mind, are not mutually exclusive. India’s success is not dependent on how advanced it is on the scale of backwardness and progress, its success relies on the negotiation between the old the new, and on an effective inclusion of this large diversity into one state structure.

³³⁶ “Europejczyk, oszołomiony niezrozumiałą dlań gmatwaniną zabobonów, wierzeń, skostniałych obyczajów – szybko popada w zwątpienie i nabiera przekonania, że jakkolwiek postęp jest w tych warunkach w ogóle niemożliwy.” (Koehler 106-107).

³³⁷ “Mówiąc o Indiach można wszystko udowodnić i wszystkiemu zaprzeczyć, zachowując zawsze pozory racji. Jest to ziemia bez prawdy, a także ziemia niezliczonych prawd . . .” (Chociłowski 11).

³³⁸ “. . . kiedy się na własne oczy widzi rozpiętość biegunów, czarne dno nędzy i złotoperłowy kolor przepychu, kontrasty dziś już w Europie niepojęte – chciałoby się, mimo wszystko, wołać o sprawiedliwość; o tę najprostszą, najzwyczajszą sprawiedliwość, która . . . zakłada, że ludzie są równi i powinni być równi.” (Górnicki 136).

³³⁹ “To chyba jedyne miejsce na kuli ziemskiej, gdzie można obserwować sąsiadujące ze sobą w tym samym czasie wszystkie epoki ludzkości, od kamiennego toporka, ognia krzesanego przez pocieranie dwóch kawałków drzewa, włóczni nomada, po . . . Tata Institute z czynnymi reaktorami atomowymi i garścią uczonych o światowej sławie. I ten z włócznią w rękę, i ten z próbówką w izolowanym imadle jednako nazywa się Indusem. Mogą koło siebie współżyć bez gwałtu, to jest dla mnie niepojęty, powszedni cud Indii.” (Żukrowski 322).

Socialist Idea of Progress vs. Imperial Binary Oppositions

Nevertheless, most of the reportages analysed here, adopt a rhetoric of progress rather typical of the socialist viewpoint. “The old” should be assessed critically, and “the new” welcomed enthusiastically. This narrative is also present in all states of the Eastern Bloc, where the tenets of previous “bourgeois” cultures are condemned: religion, social structures, free market, private property and enterprise, free thought. That is why, reporters from socialist Poland tend to organise their account from India along the same lines: critique of old customs and praise of progress, especially if that progress is based on the socialist model. The division into tradition and modernity is thus a useful tool in this ideological agenda. Certainly, their intention is to compare colonial and independent India and present the country’s progress under the new rule.

However, this grand scheme has its fallacies: by underlining these contrasts and differences, the reporters tend to follow the well-known binary logic of imperialism. Juxtaposing contrasting images or ideas in media and political discourses is a frequent tool employed to attract audiences and readers, and to present reality in a simplified, black-and-white manner. The poor versus the rich, the good versus the bad, the beautiful versus the ugly – such contrapositions are numerous in contemporary public and media discourses. Ferdinand de Saussure called them binary oppositions, and saw them as key structures of human thinking and a fundamental part of all cultural constructs of reality. According to scholars of postcolonial studies, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, “[t]he problem with such binary systems is that they suppress ambiguous or interstitial spaces between the opposed categories” (23) and overlapping regions become impossible or taboo. The binary oppositions reflect a hierarchy, or domination, which suppresses anything that is in-between. The concept of binary oppositions is also functional in the analysis of colonial relations, because empires to a large extent relied on such binary logic. The distinctions between colonizers/colonized, white/black, civilized/primitive, advanced/backward, teacher/student are typical of the colonial discourse. They serve an ideological purpose of constructing a stronger collective community (us versus them), and they justify the *mission civilisatrice* of the Western empires in other parts of the world. Nevertheless, the spaces between these oppositions can prove to be most interesting, because these are areas, in which “ambivalence, hybridity and complexity continually disrupt the certainties of imperial logic” (Ashcroft et al. 26).

To summarise, in almost all reportages analysed here, at the centre of the narrative are themes of tradition and modernity, the old and the new, the history and the future, the backwardness and the progress. In the reporters’ view, in the area that belongs to the past are:

religion, caste system, poverty, and underdevelopment. What belongs to the future is industrialisation, adoption of the socialist model of development, disappearance (or reduction) of class differences, and secularism. These divisions, however, are rarely clear-cut. The following section analyses how reporters present the issue of social inequality – in particular based on the caste and class divisions – which is very much part of both the past and the present, and how they document their own reactions to it.

Caste and Class in India

Western discourses on India featured two most prominent aspects of the subcontinent's culture: its dominant religion, but also the caste-based social order. Caste has been one of the key aspects in foreign accounts from India, from Al-Beruni's accounts to contemporary travelogues. Even the very word "caste" comes from a European language – Portuguese, in which *casta* means race. The origin of the caste system is unclear: some scholars argue that the Indian society was equal prior to the arrival of Aryans to the Indian subcontinent, but some claim that caste has its origins in earlier tribal systems that evolved into "marriage-circles", or more complex socioeconomic structures (Liddle and Joshi, Klass). The word "caste" actually denotes two concepts that are known in Hindi as *jati* – "the endogamous group that one is born into" and *varna* – "the place that group occupies in the system of social stratification mandated by Hindu scripture" (Guha Loc 256). The earliest known references to the caste system in Hindu texts can be found in the Rig Veda, where at the beginning of the world there is the cosmic being, Purusha, and the different varnas (castes) emanate from different parts of its body – Brahmins from the mouth, Kshatriyas from the arms, Vaishyas from the thighs and Shudra from the feet. The ancient code of laws by Manu, the Manusmriti, describes duties assigned to each varna: to Brahmins - teaching and learning, to Kshatriyas – protecting people and giving away wealth, to Vaishyas – trade and commerce, as well as agriculture and tending of cattle. All three upper classes also had a duty of performing sacrificial rites, and the Shudras – lower class – were to serve them (Geetha 7-8).

Furthermore, there are various categories of peoples that would either be considered as belonging to lower class, or to be outside of the caste system altogether. Traditionally, people lowest in hierarchy were called "the untouchables", and this is the term that most reporters use, alternatively with the Gandhian term "Harijans". Nowadays, the most common word for this group is "Dalits", a term coined by famous reformer and leader of the Dalit movement, B. R. Ambedkar. In contemporary India, different terms have been used to designate groups that are

discriminated and should have the right to reservations (or quotas) in public institutions. Thus, low-caste groups are called Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs and STs), and other socially and economically unprivileged groups are labelled as Other Backward Classes (OBCs). All upper castes are grouped under the term “Forward Classes” for whom no reservations apply. Nevertheless, despite of these seemingly clear-cut categories, there have always been many more cultural divisions than the four major categories commonly perceived as the core of Hindu hierarchy; each region has had a separate system of castes and sub-castes.

Western scholars, as Ronald Inden suggests, believed that caste and religion were two interrelated factors central to the understanding of Indian culture and society (402). These two aspects are prevalent in many foreign descriptions of India. As a result, in the Western discourse, human agency in India is displaced “not onto a reified State or Market but onto a substantialized Caste” (403). Inden uses a capital “C” to indicate that “Caste” becomes a principle, an ideal, and an agent. As a result, researchers would attach less importance to political institutions, because Caste would be considered to be the main factor of development or the lack thereof, and was blamed for its “repeated failure to prevent . . . conquest by outsiders” (403). Clearly, such a perception of India leads to yet another imagined binary opposition, in which the West appears as individualistic – modern – and the East as communalist – traditional. Louis Dumont believed that caste hierarchy is a practice particular to India and even coined the term “Homo Hierarchicus”, referring to caste as the most prominent aspect of Hindu mind. As a result, it is a crucial social trait that differentiates the East from the West. In this perspective the East is traditional and hierarchical, and the West is individualist and organised around the principle of equality. Thus, if caste is such an all-encompassing phenomenon, remarks Inden, then Indians are not autonomous agents, they are not makers of their own history – Caste is (428). Nicolas Dirks concurs, explaining that “caste has been seen as omnipresent in Indian history and as one of the major reasons why India has no history, or at least no sense of history” (3). Moreover, caste is considered as defining the core of Indian tradition, and it is seen today as the major threat to Indian modernity (3).

According to Surinder Jodhka, there are two typical views on caste among Westerners. One is that caste hierarchy is an ancient institution in Indian society, and that it divides the society into four casts (2). In such a simplified version, caste would be a set structure, without any regional variations, changing only when colonisation and modernisation decreased its impact on the society. It would have been eradicated completely by now, if it was not for politicians who use it for their electoral gains, foreign observers seem to suggest (Jodhka 2-3). The opposite view on caste, says Jodhka, presents it as a phenomenon surviving till today, as if

“nothing has changed in the underlying ideological structure of the Hindu mind” (3) and processes of modernisation, development and secularisation were merely superficial (3). However, both of these views are flawed and oversimplified, observes Jodhka. There are three reasons why such opinions do not find confirmation in reality: one, caste is not only an ideology or a religious practice, its materiality and the lived experience of caste should be considered (4). Two, the ground realities of caste are different across regions of India, and three, caste was a contested institution long before the advent of Western modernity (4-5).

Indeed, the Polish reporters are in this respect not different from other Westerners. The two views presented by Jodhka as typical to the foreign perception of caste of India can be found in the reportages from the socialist period. Some reporters believe that caste is a relic of the past and will disappear with mass education and secularism. Others notice the pervading character of the caste hierarchy and the difficulty in opposing it. A closer look at how the reporters describe the idea of caste will help to analyse their positions.

Caste as Seen by Polish Reporters

Most reporters, similarly to other European visitors, see caste as a uniquely Indian social phenomenon. Even Górnicki, who compares social divisions in Chandigarh to urban hierarchies in other cities of the world, finds that there is something specific to the Indian caste divisions. They are deeper than simply economic differences of class. He observes that the newly-built city of Chandigarh, which was meant to be an ideal city of the future, has become thorn by caste divides. Its neat organisation into small districts makes this hierarchal system even stronger. Górnicki calls it “the modernised Middle Ages” (145)³⁴⁰ and observes that if there is any parallel to this phenomenon in European history, it can only be found in Medieval times:

Here, all the analogies to the European social relations end, [and] if one would insist on finding them, then perhaps only in early Middle Ages. Only in that time such cruel, hermetic, impenetrable social relations existed, so deeply ingrained in minds. But even this comparison does not make that much sense. All the European divisions into [feudal] states, the iron-strong exclusivity of nobility or town guilds, do not even remotely equate to the spirit of caste system. This [Indian] society is like a honeycomb, composed still today of closed cells, structures foreign to one another, governed by separate laws, living side by side for thousands of years. (Górnicki 145)³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ “zmodernizowane średniowiecze. . .” (Górnicki 145).

³⁴¹ “Urywają się tutaj wszelkie analogie do stosunków europejskich, gdyby ich jednak szukać na uparte, to chyba tylko we wczesnym średniowieczu. Tylko wówczas istniały układy socjalne równie okrutne, hermetyczne, nieprzenikalne, równie zakorzenione w umysłach. . . [jednak] cały europejski podział stanowy, żelazna ekskluzywność szlachty czy cechów mieszczańskich nie odpowiada nawet w przybliżeniu istocie systemu kastowego. To społeczeństwo, jak plaster pszczele,

Thus, even if one wanted to find a comparable example in Europe, it would be difficult, given the particularity and the longevity of India's caste system. Górnicki is very vocal about caste that he sees as a key issue in India. The reporter explains that being born into a given caste determines the whole life of an individual: his profession, social status, marriage, clothing, circle of friends and type of school that his children attend, and, in Chandigarh, says Górnicki, also his address (149). While there are historical reasons for such a stratification of Indian society, argues the reporter, it is difficult to understand why this "anachronic" social order is still alive in twentieth century. "After all, the social and economic reasons that once provided sense to the existence of caste are now in regression", concludes Górnicki, and adds that "[a] slow, but unquestionable industrialisation, progress of ethnic integration, great migratory movements after independence – they should all precipitate the decomposition of caste system" (151)³⁴².

The reporter cites examples of social progress in other countries, former colonies – Egypt, "Black Africa" (151) – and states his disappointment at the lack of such progress in India. He reckons that the only explanation for this fact is the strong conservatism prevalent in all social groups, "except of the relatively small group of unrelenting leftists" (152)³⁴³. Thus, the struggle against caste will take decades, says Górnicki, and wonders whether doing away with caste is at all possible, given India's political system (152). In his words, "... the modern form – legal, architectural, and any other – does not solve the problem. It does not change the contents" (153)³⁴⁴. And, continues the reporter, the current content is unacceptable (153). The urban planning of Chandigarh thus serves as a metaphor of failed projects of modernity – its architects underestimated the strength of culture. Caste identity can manifest itself even in the most innovative of settings, concludes Górnicki.

Chociłowski, too, notices the extreme resilience and pervasiveness of the caste system and links this inequality to the idea of karma:

Hinduism is powerful not only because of the numbers [of its followers]. Its power lies in the immovability of its dogmas, and especially the one that assumes that people are born unequal. If someone suffers from poverty – he must deserve it because of his dishonourable deeds in his

składa się ciągle jeszcze z zamkniętych komórek, ze struktur wzajemnie sobie obcych, rządzących się odrębnymi prawami, żyjących obok siebie od tysięcy" (Górnicki 145).

³⁴² "W gruncie rzeczy ustają przecież powoli ekonomiczne i socjalne przyczyny, warunkujące dawniej sens istnienia kast. . . Powolna, lecz niewątpliwa industrializacja, postępy integracji etnicznej, wielkie ruchy migracyjne po odzyskaniu niepodległości – powinny przyspieszać rozkład systemu kastowego" (Górnicki 151).

³⁴³ "z wyjątkiem niewielkiej stosunkowo grupy konsekwentnych lewicowców." (Górnicki 152).

³⁴⁴ "... nowoczesna forma – prawna, architektoniczna czy jakakolwiek inna – nie likwiduje problemu. Nie zmienia treści" (Górnicki 153).

previous incarnation. If someone prospers – then clearly he must have earned it. This is what karma says and trying to change this state of affairs is pointless. (18)³⁴⁵

Chociłowski is clearly resigned about the longevity of caste, because in his opinion, the beliefs that justify such hierarchy will not change. He describes how caste structure negatively impacts administrative work, agriculture and social relations, and notices that “caste is so deeply immersed in the Indian society that even among Muslims, Christians and Sikhs caste pockets can be found” (20)³⁴⁶. The reporter admits that the laws against discrimination of lower classes have yielded results and more and more people from underprivileged groups gain education and employment, but in his overall assessment, caste is still a dominating force in the society. Not even in two or three generations, caste divisions will be eradicated, says the reporter (21). He likens the phenomenon of caste to a knot that can come undone only with patience and time:

It is an enormous tie in the entangled knot of this continent. One cannot, unfortunately, cut it with the sword of a law, an order, [or] a penal sanction. One has to keep patiently and laboriously disentangling it, although time is pressing. For it is easier to built an atomic power plant than to change the mind of a man. (21)³⁴⁷

Caste is thus perceived almost as an in-built pattern of the Indian mind, an unchangeable characteristic of Hindu’s worldview, the essence of India’s culture. As such, it is hardly subject to change and its eradication is almost impossible.

While other reporters comment on caste in a general way, Gołębiowski illustrates the problem on the example of a Rajasthani village. Its lower caste inhabitants were forbidden from drawing water from the public well. Police had to be called in order to protect people going to the well from the attacks by “local aristocracy” (56). Through this example, Gołębiowski concludes that although the constitution and administrative regulations forbid caste discrimination, the bias does not fade away. “Age-old traditions do not give in to stamped papers” (57)³⁴⁸, concludes the reporter. He explains the workings of caste in contemporary Indian society: separate wells, kitchens, toilets and other forms of segregation. Caste divisions are, he argues, more prevalent in the countryside, while in large cities these hierarchies are less

³⁴⁵ “Hinduizm potężny jest nie tylko liczebnie. Jego moc to niewzruszalność dogmatów, a zwłaszcza tego, który powiada, że ludzie rodzą się nierówni sobie. Jeśli ktoś cierpi niedostatek – to snadź zasłużył na to niegodnymi postępkami w poprzednim wcieleniu. Jeśli komuś się powodzi – to widać również na to zasłużył. Tak mówi *karma* i bezcelowe są starania zmiany tego stanu rzeczy” (Chociłowski 18).

³⁴⁶ “Kastowość jest tak głęboko wsączona w społeczeństwo indyjskie, że nawet wśród muzułmanów, chrześcijan i sikhów istnieją szufladki kastowe” (Chociłowski 20).

³⁴⁷ “Ale zmiany te w istocie są tak wolne, że żaden z Indusów, którzy przyjdą w tym roku na świat, a może nawet żadne z jego dzieci – nie doczeka zniknięcia kastowości. Sekret jej witalności tkwi nie tylko w potędze kanonów religijnych, sile tradycji i obyczaju. Kryje się za nią konserwatyzm struktur społecznych i gospodarczych. I egoistyczna chęć utrzymania tych struktur przez jednych kosztem ubóstwa drugich. To ogromny supeł na splątany węzeł kontynentu. Nie można go niestety przeciąć mieczem ustawy, rozkazem, sankcją karną. Trzeba go cierpliwie, z mozołem rozwikływać, choć czas pili. Bo łatwiej jest zbudować elektrownię atomową niż zmienić umysł człowieka” (Chociłowski 21).

³⁴⁸ “Odwieczne tradycje nie ustępują wobec ostemplowanych papierków” (Gołębiowski 57).

visible and anti-discriminatory legislation can be applied more efficiently (57). Gołębiowski idealises modernity as an equalising force, repeating that “the reality of contemporary life – its growing mobility, mass communication etc. – makes it impossible to observe old imperatives and traditions” (60)³⁴⁹. The provincial life, on the other hand, is characterised by the continuation of “reflexes developed over centuries” and strengthened by “material barriers” (57)³⁵⁰. Because villages are closely-knit communities, argues Gołębiowski, one knows his place in the group and is aware of what constitutes a taboo (60). The reporter gives examples of how strong these taboos are, and clarifies that at their core is the concept of purity and defilement:

A Brahmin is defiled if the shadow of an “Untouchable” is cast upon him. Impure would be those who kill a cow or take the skin off a dead animal . . . All excrements, except those of a cow, are defiling. For members of one cast, it is impure to eat meat, drink alcohol and smoke tobacco, while in another, there are no interdictions in these matters. Washing oneself in the water from the Ganges “purifies”, while accepting a glass of cleanest water from an “Untouchable” is an act of defilement. (59-60)³⁵¹

The irony in Gołębiowski’s words is evident, and it is stressed by using quotation marks both to denote the members of lower caste as “Untouchables”, as well as to the verb “purify”. The first one is a term used by the upper-caste, that the reporter distances himself from, preferring the term “Harijans”, meaning “the children of God”. As for the verb “purify”, the reporter underlines the lack of rationality in the assumption that water from a dirty river would be considered cleaner than pure drinking water received from an “impure” person. In this way, Gołębiowski demonstrates to readers the lack of sense and logic in the idea of caste system and his personal condemnation of it. He admits that the caste system gave Indian society “a great rigidity and resistance to external influence” which “allowed it to survive various invasions over the centuries and to keep its distinctiveness” (62)³⁵². But now, it is only a “brakeman of progress” (62)³⁵³. It makes people believe that their position in life is determined before they are born and they can only reach a higher status in the next life, explains Gołębiowski (61).

³⁴⁹ “. . . realia współczesnego życia – z jego rosnącą mobilnością, środkami zbiorowego transportu, itp. – uniemożliwiają ściśle przestrzeganie starych nakazów i tradycji” (Gołębiowski 60).

³⁵⁰ “wytrobione w ciągu wieków odruchy”; “bariery materialne” (Gołębiowski 57).

³⁵¹ “Bramin jest skalany, jeśli padnie na niego cień “niedotykalnego”. Skalany będzie ten, kto zabije krowę lub zdejmie skórę ze zdechłego zwierzęcia. . . Kalają wszystkie ekskrementy oprócz krowich. Dla członków jednej kasty kalające jest jedzenie mięsa, picie alkoholu i palenie tytoniu, dla innej nie ma w tym względzie żadnego zakazu. Obmycie się brudną wodą z Gangesu ‘oczyszcza’, natomiast przyjęcie szklanki najczystszej wody od ‘niedotykalnego’ jest czynem kalającym” (Gołębiowski 59-60).

³⁵² “System kastowy, nadając hinduskiemu społeczeństwu ogromną sztywność i odporność na wpływy zewnętrzne, pozwolił mu przetrwać rozliczne inwazje w ciągu stuleci i zachować swoją odrębność” (Gołębiowski 62).

³⁵³ Gołębiowski calls it “hamulec postępu” (62) – a term employed frequently in the Polish propaganda to point at those factors that opposed the socialist government.

Such a philosophy of life does not allow for social advance and is a reason for “minimalism” in the lives and ambitions of a large part of Indian population, judges the reporter (61). That is why, he finds that political change should start with a “general attack on the old superstitions”³⁵⁴, and a large-scale programme of social and economic reforms – anti-discrimination laws and the so-called reservations are not sufficient (64). Gołębiowski is not blind to problems that arise, such as the replication of caste allegiances at the highest levels of politics, leading to nepotism and corruption. Nevertheless, he seems convinced about the fact that progress, understood as urbanisation, industrialisation and secularisation, will bring more equality.

Caste / Class

Like Gołębiowski, Ros is optimistic about modernity leading to the end of caste divisions. He realises, however, that it will take time and effort:

. . . one needs to know that old and deep-seated habits, the ignorance and fanaticism will not give way and surrender without a fight. The main allies of the forces of progress are plans of industrialisation of the country, and plans of construction of a new industrial base which will influence the relics of the old system. (339)³⁵⁵

For Ros, it is a struggle between the forces of “ignorance and fanaticism”, and the “forces of progress”. Incidentally, this is the narrative often employed in socialist viewpoints on Poland and other countries of the Soviet Bloc, for instance in Ros’ earlier reportage, the “Steel sources of power”. In that account, he contrasts the semi-feudal relations at factories of the interwar period with the development and progress brought by socialism (see: Szczygieł, *100/XX... Vol. 1*). At various points, Ros’ conversations with his Indian guides (usually, fellow journalists from left-leaning newspapers), although pertaining to India, are strangely reminding of the Soviet reality. At some point of his narrative, the Polish reporter talks about a celebration of Baram-Puga, “goddess of the jungle”, for which the local raja offered young goats as a sacrifice, to the satisfaction of his subjects. Ros relates the words of his guide:

See . . . [in our country] ignorance is the best ally of the kulaks. Why would a peasant look at the kulak’s land, it’s better if he looks at the sky, where the gods reside. You are poor? It is the punishment for your sins in previous lives – this is what gods want! You are rich? It is the reward for my virtues – this is what gods want! Then pray. Give offerings. Worship the priests

³⁵⁴ “generalny atak na stare przesady” (Gołębiowski 64).

³⁵⁵ “. . . trzeba wiedzieć, że stare i głęboko zakorzenione nawyki, ciemnota i fanatyzm nie ustąpią z placu i nie poddadzą się bez walki. Potężnym sojusznikiem sił postępu jest plan uprzemysłowienia kraju, plan budowy nowej bazy przemysłowej, która najskuteczniej oddziaływuje na przeżytki starego systemu” (Ros 339).

and do not rebel! That is why it is profitable for the wealthy raja to offer goats. Let the peasants believe that their fate and the crops depend on the appeasement of Baram-Puga, not on reforms and human will. (235)³⁵⁶

The use of the word “kulak” (in Polish: “obszarnik”), is typical to the socialist new speech. It is used to denote the rich peasants and landowners, a class that was persecuted by communists for their (true or alleged) exploitation of the poor. Indeed, pre-revolutionary Russia was by and large a society based on a feudal model, but the forced collectivisation of the Stalinist era led to many innocent peasants accused of being “kulaks” to be arrested, sent to gulags, or killed (Pipes)³⁵⁷. Thus, the reporters that shared socialist views would compare the situation in Indian villages to the one in Poland (where collectivisation did not happen, just like in India). Not only did they compare rich peasants or landowners to “obszarnicy” or “kulaks”, but also they saw analogies between the alliance of the religion and the upper class in both countries.

Furthermore, the link between the working class of Poland and the one of India is underlined in Ros’ description of the fishermen settlement in Madras. The reporter talks to a young boy, Kanijapan, son of a fisherman. Ros asks him who would he like to become in the future: to study, to be a doctor, or an engineer? “The boy looks at me as if I were asking him if he wants to become the emperor of India. His dreams go in a different direction: he would like the price of fish to increase and to find clients for [his] mussels and seahorses . . .” (316)³⁵⁸. The reporter explains to the readers why the boy’s dreams are so pragmatic and limited only to the foreseeable future:

The caste system tells him: if your father was a fisherman, you must be one too. You cannot break away from this law, you cannot cross the threshold of the small village and escape to the districts of rich people, where kids go to school, and youngsters study. [Such] advance is against the spirit of the caste, a man should die the same way that he was born. Remember, boy, to be banished from the caste is worse than death. (316)³⁵⁹

Thus, the caste system determines the boy’s future and does not allow him to change his destiny. The reporter tries to explain to him that times have changed and more and more people demand

³⁵⁶ “Widzisz – dodaje poważnie – ciemnota jest u nas najlepszym sprzymierzeńcem obszarników. Po cóż chłop ma spoglądać na obszarniczą ziemię, lepiej niech patrzy na niebo, w którym siedzą bogowie. Jesteś biedny? To kara za twoje grzechy w poprzednich żywotach – bogowie tak chcą! Ja jestem bogaty? To nagroda za moje cnoty – bogowie tak chcą! Módl się tedy. Składaj ofiary. Czczij kapłanów i nie buntuj się! Dlatego bogatemu radzą opłacać się te ofiarne kozłeta. Niech chłop wierzy, że jego los i urodzaj zależy od przebłagania Baram-Puga, a nie od reform i ludzkiej woli” (Ros 234-235).

³⁵⁷ Pipes notes that according to official records, in years 1930-31 almost two milion peasants suffered this fate, and about 30% of them died (60).

³⁵⁸ “Chłopak patrzy na mnie, jakbym pytał, czy chce zostać cesarzem Indii. Jego marzenia idą w innym kierunku: pragnie aby ryba zdrożała i aby znaleźć dość klientów na muszle i koniki morskie. . .” (Ros 316).

³⁵⁹ “System kastowy nakazuje mu: skoro twój ojciec był rybakiem, i ty nim być musisz. Nie możesz wyłamać się z tego prawa, nie wolno ci przeskoczyć progów małej osady i wyrwać się do dzielnic bogatych ludzi, tam gdzie dzieci się uczą, a młodzież studiuje. Awans jest przeciwny duchowi kasty, człowiek powinien umrzeć tym, kim się urodził. Pamiętaj, chłopcze: usunięcie z kasty to gorzej niż śmierć.” (Ros 316).

their rights. The boy is sceptical – the reporter knows why: “[t]ruths brought here by whites were until now almost always the truths of the colonisers . . . They were truths good for them, not for the fishermen from the Madras beach” (317)³⁶⁰. However, at the end of their conversation, the reporter hears the following request from young Kanijapan: “– When you go back home, to your country, write about us, so that your fishermen know how we live and work...” (317)³⁶¹. The reporter is surprised that the boy does not want the large Polish public to hear about his community’s life, but only the Polish fishermen. Ros emphasises this fact, as if he wanted to underline the class solidarity between workers of a particular profession.

Indeed, he thinks that all over the world, things are changing and a revolution against inequality is needed. He describes the worker struggles in Madras in a following way:

People stopped agreeing with the doctrine of passivity and started to actively oppose those, who preach: you must die the same person, as the one you were born, you must be satisfied what fate brings [you] – this is what the gods want. People [now] take their fate into their own hands: in the old system of caste inertia – [it is] revolutionary! (316)³⁶²

Ros is hopeful: people begin to rebel against an oppressive system. Indeed, a revolution against the system of caste is for Ros a parallel to the revolution against class, and as such it fits the Marxist outlook. Caste system is for the reporter yet another form of oppression of the poor by the rich and privileged.

Another example confirms this: while visiting a Tamil village of Sembattu, he describes the situation of leather workers, belonging to the cast of “Untouchables”. He talks about their abject situation, oppression by upper castes, lack of possibilities to recur to the law (as law was made by the more privileged) etc. Ros explains that it is the Brahmins that made the “Untouchables” believe that they are born into a low caste because of past sins and that they have no means of changing their situation. “In such perfidious manner, using religious dogmas, the privileged classes ensured for themselves slave labour of millions of people” (334)³⁶³, he concludes. Since the poor were determined to stay at the lowest rank of society, “the priests and the propertied classes have denied the proletariat the right to “veto” and any rebellious instincts”

³⁶⁰ “Prawdy przynoszone tu przez białych były dotychczas prawie zawsze prawdami kolonizatorów . . . Były to prawdy dobre dla tamtych, ale nie dla rybaków z madraskiej plaży. . .” (Ros 317).

³⁶¹ “– Jak wrócisz do siebie, do domu, napisz o nas, aby wasi rybacy wiedzieli, jak żyjemy i jak pracujemy” (Ros 317).

³⁶² “Ludzie przestali już godzić się z doktryną bierności i przeciwstawiają się czynnie tym, którzy uczą: musisz umrzeć tym, kim się urodziłeś, musisz zadowalać się tym, co przynosi los – bogowie tak chcą. Ludzie biorą swój los w swoje ręce: to w starym systemie kastowej bierności – rewolucja!” (Ros 316).

³⁶³ “W ten perfidny sposób posługując się religijnym dogmatem klasy uprzywilejowanej w starożytnych Indiach zapewniły sobie niewolniczą pracę milionów ludzi . . .” (Ros 334).

(334)³⁶⁴. The terms used by Ros are of a clearly Marxist origin, and in this way, the reporter inscribes Indian caste system into the logic of class struggle.

Indeed, caste and class often intertwine, although most scholars underline that they are not equivalent to one another (Patil, Mencher, Bandyopadhyay). Caste system, unlike class structure, does not allow for social mobility. Also, given the economic changes of Indian society, various castes achieve different economic status: one can find rich Dalits (as lower classes are today referred to) and poor Brahmins. Nevertheless, it does not mean that material wealth will free them from discrimination. Even if there exist Dalit *crorepatis*, or millionaires, the reality of the vast majority of lower caste members is still grim³⁶⁵. On the other hand, the Gujarati Patel caste, historically considered as upper caste, recently demanded to be included in the group of so-called OBCs, Other Backward Castes, which would allow them to benefit from affirmative action that involves reserving quotas for lower castes in education and institutions of the public sector. The functioning of caste system and affirmative policies of successive Indian governments keep stirring fiery debates in Indian society. As scholars observe, caste system often serves upper classes to consolidate and maintain their power, legitimising it by tradition. Nicolas Dirks states in his *Castes of Mind*, that caste was always political. While many external observers perceive caste as the defining feature of Indian society from time immemorial, Dirks argues that it is in fact a modern phenomenon and, more specifically, the product of the historical encounter between India and the West (5). Certainly, caste was not a British invention, says Dirks, but the colonisers contributed to making it a central symbol of Indian society (5):

I am suggesting that it was under the British that “caste” became a single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all “systematizing” India’s diverse forms of social identity, community, and organization. This was achieved through an identifiable (if contested) ideological canon as the result of a concrete encounter with colonial modernity during two hundred years of British domination. In short, colonialism made caste what it is today. (5)

In Wendy Doniger’s opinion, too, enhancing the caste hierarchies was convenient for the British: “[t]he Hindu caste system – more precisely the class system within which the caste system was imperfectly assimilated, awkwardly interleaved – enabled the British to fit into Hinduism as one more Other, another Other” (557). It was also convenient to exacerbate the difference between castes for their own gain (558). The makers of independent India were aiming to at least diminish its impact, if not fully eradicate the divisions. The new Indian

³⁶⁴ “W ten sposób kapłani i klasy posiadające odcięły proletariatu od prawa ‘veta’ i od każdego odruchu buntu” (Ros 334).

³⁶⁵ According to Sudha Ramachandran’s article in *Asia Times*, the Dalit Chamber of Commerce and Industry estimated that about 30 Dalit businessmen fall into the category of *crorepatis* (as their wealth exceeds 10 million rupees).

Constitution provided seats in public offices for lower castes, opened Hindu temples to people of all castes, and called for abolition of untouchability (Guha Loc 2675). Already at that time, the idea of reservations sparked a debate, with left-wing politicians asking for quotas per class rather than per caste (Guha Loc 2696). Also, as Surinder Jodhka points out, the social changes that the Constitution introduced did not happen as fast or as efficiently as expected – they applied mostly to low-caste inhabitants of cities, while those in rural areas could not benefit from the new provisions (147). Again, it turns out that each of these divisions: between castes, classes, the urban and the rural populations, the educated and the uneducated, the privileged and the unprivileged, the men and the women, all affect a person's status in the society. These complexities cannot be reduced only to the concept of caste, perceived as the sole cause of inequality in India.

Reporters' Personal Strategies Towards Caste Divisions

As semi-official envoys from the Eastern Bloc, Polish reporters are expected to condemn social inequality. They employ various strategies to this goal, and they are usually intent on proving that they personally oppose caste hierarchies.

Strategy 1: Compassion

Ros manifests his beliefs in equality in talking to people of various backgrounds, especially to the poor and destitute. Thanks to the fact that he arranges for a guide or translator in every city he visits, he is able to talk to various people and the language is not a barrier. In Mumbai, his guide takes him to the “working class district” of the city, Matunga. He talks to the local brush-makers and points how they are part of a multi-levelled system of exploitation. He is aware of the fact that colonialism had a role to play in creating and maintaining this hierarchy:

For decades, the opinion about this people was shaped in a way to demonstrate that dirt and anti-hygienic conditions are inherent to them, to the extent that they do not realise their situation [as a negative one], that they are protected by their mentality of “people from the East”, by the belief in destiny – *kismet* – mother of abnegation and father of apathy, which allows them to feel happy in conditions that causes horror in us; these same people take me by the hand and show their cubbyholes, where light and air never reach, where mould flourishes on the walls with abundant, tropical fungus: - Look – they say – this is how we live! Look – they say – this is our life! (80-81)³⁶⁶

³⁶⁶ “Ludzie, o których dziesiątkami lat wyrabiano opinię, że brud i antyhygieniczne warunki są im przyrodzone tak dalece, że nie odczuwają własnego położenia, że chroni ich ‘mentalność ludzi Wschodu’, wiara w przeznaczenie – *kismet* – matka

Ros is appalled by the conditions of life of Bombay's poor. Although he certainly realises that his publishers and the censorship authorities expect a narrative from India that includes a critique of colonialism and capitalism, and a tale on how socialist progress can change the condition of the people, his empathy and compassion towards his interlocutors seems very authentic. Whether he talks to the brush-maker, rickshaw-puller, or the fisherman's son, he is truly interested how they live, what they think, what are their worries and hopes for the future.

He faces ethical dilemmas when seeing the poor in Kolkata that pull rickshaws only with the force of their muscles:

In Calcutta, a thoughtful and sensitive person is faced with an unsolvable dilemma, the squaring the circle problem of a rickshaw wheel. If he gives in to the solicitations and gets on the cart, then he cannot stop feeling like he contributed to the disgrace of human dignity: it is a human being that runs in front of him as if in a harness, dragging him like a horse. Sitting on the mattress pillows covered with wax-cloth, he sees the back of the rickshaw-puller covered with a rag, the neck shining with sweat and bent under the yoke of his effort, the brown, fast-moving feet of a runner, he hears the whizz of the [man's] breathing. But if he remains deaf to the begging of the poor – he will have a deep conviction that he stole [from them], deprived them from their meagre earning, and if everyone had similar scruples, the poor rickshaw-puller would have died of hunger on the street... (179-180)³⁶⁷

Ros' focuses on the physicality of the puller: his sweat, his breathing, and his tensed body. In this way, the reader's attention is drawn to the man's effort and suffering. Also, this passage illustrates the moral guilt of a rickshaw passenger. A reporter from a socialist country is probably in an even more problematic position – will his readers (and supervisors) approve of him taking a human-pulled rickshaw? Can one criticise colonial exploitation, while being treated by India's poor as a "saab", or sahib? How to avoid being hypocritical and stay true to one's beliefs? It is clear that Ros struggles with these questions, apparently helpless in front of much larger social stratification than in his native Poland, based not only on economic status, but also on lifestyle dictated by caste. To his surprise, it is not only the upper castes that maintain such hierarchic social order – the poor also distance themselves from other groups. When

abnegacji i ojciec apatii, pozwalające im czuć się szczęśliwymi w warunkach budzących u nas grozę, ci sami ludzie biorą mnie za rękę, pokazują swoje kliteczki, do których nie dociera powietrze i światło, gdzie pleśń kwitnie na ścianach bujnym tropikalnym grzybem: - Patrz – mówią – oto jak mieszkamy! Patrz – mówią – oto jak żyjemy!" (Ros 80-81).

³⁶⁷ "W Kalkucie człowiek czujący i myślący staje przed nierozwiązywalnym dylematem, przed kwadraturą koła rykszy. Jeśli ustąpi przed nagabywaniami i wsiądzie do wózka, wówczas nie może pozbyć się uczucia, że przyczynił się do poniżenia godności ludzkiej: przecież to człowiek biegnie przed nim w zaprzęgu i ciągnie go jak koń. Siedząc na materacowych poduszkach obitych ceratą widzi plecy rykszarza osłonięte szmatą, jego kark lśniący od potu i pochylony w jarzmie wysiłku, jego brunatne, migające stopy bieguna, słyszy świszczący oddech. Jeśli zaś pozostanie głuchy na prośby biedaków – wówczas będzie miał przeświadczenie, że okradł i pozbawił któregoś z nich groszowego zarobku i że gdyby wszyscy mieli podobne skrupuły, biedny rykszarz padłby z głodu na drodze..." (Ros 179-180).

visiting poor districts, he notices that people are diffident of the journalist and troubled by his interest in their life. He is saddened by the fact that the leather workers avoid him and are reluctant to speak with him, but comes to the conclusion that caste oppression made lower castes believe that they are, in fact, “untouchable”. He explains it with a metaphor: “a bird born in a cage, when the door is open, it is at first afraid of a free flight” (336)³⁶⁸. Thus, work towards social change should be done in all groups, concludes the reporter (336).

Strategy 2: Interventionism

The motive of moral doubt and demonstrations of personal engagement in the issue of inequality is recurrent in the accounts of other reporters too. Janusz Gołębiowski recalls when he asked his house cleaner to show him his native village. The boy was enthusiastic. When they arrived to the village, neighbours were gathered to greet the foreigner and the first thing that the boy did was to offer the guest a glass of water. “By offering me the water, he wanted to demonstrate to everyone that I treat him as equal” (61)³⁶⁹, explains Gołębiowski, adding that the boy was from a low cast of sweepers, but his ambition was to become a waiter or a cook in the city. He was pleased that through his presence, he could help to improve the boy’s status in the village.

Górnicki, similarly to Ros, is radically critical of caste, to the extent that he does not hesitate to debate on it with his Indian acquaintances, risking rather hostile reactions. Given the reporter’s emotional way of describing his disputes, it is worth quoting the full passage in the narrator’s own words:

Not once, not ten times, but hundred times I happened to get into heated disputes with Hindus that do not see anything improper about the caste system. Even worse, some are inclined to see in it a sort of reflection of a natural social order, a dignified national tradition, a valuable trait and a particularity of their society. In such discussions, it is easy to loose one’s temper and to earn a reputation of an impolite guests. None, absolutely none of the arguments presented by caste system supporters has any validity; the intellectual poverty of caste believers is embarrassing, and among my adversaries there was even a university professor, a doctor of economics, and a worldly journalist. I do not claim that all Hindus would defend this shameful institution with equal fanaticism; nevertheless, the fact that I met in India so many combative people, mistaking national pride with national nonsense, causes bitterness and many sad reflections. It seems that the extent of this specific regression is much larger than we think. I admit, I was belligerent and tactless, I attacked frontally and I rejected evasive responses. From

³⁶⁸ “Ptak zrodzony w klatce, jeśli mu otworzyć drzwiczki, w pierwszej chwili lęka się wolnego lotu” (Ros 336).

³⁶⁹ “. . . chciał, ażebym – przyjmując wodę – zademonstrował przy świadkach, iż traktuję go jako równego sobie” (Gołębiowski 61).

almost any encountered person I demanded a clear statement: for or against. For I am of the opinion that one should eradicate, destroy and ridicule such national traditions that consist of anti-humanist contents. (147-148)³⁷⁰

Górnicki continues in this tone and explains that in a similar way, he admires Sicilian customs, but rejects the idea of vendetta as anti-humanist as well, and that he feels entitled to criticise aspects of any culture that he disagrees with, at the same time not becoming an enemy of that culture. Which is what Indians could not understand, says the reporter, and thought that when criticising caste, he is criticising India as a whole (148). Finally, he underlines that he is not a “traveller of the by-gone century” (148)³⁷¹ and that he does not tell some exotic tales, but that his goal is to observe the contemporary life and politics, in which caste is still very much present. He finishes his tirade on caste defenders in the following way:

Phew! How good it feels to finally convey this bitter anger on paper. In my reporter’s travels, I have investigated many antipathetic phenomena and it is time to learn to refrain from excessively direct reactions. Well, [what to do] when a discussion with a supporter or at least an indifferent witness of casteism resembles a discussion with an anti-Semite, monarchist, or French ultra: a glass wall. (149)³⁷²

Górnicki expresses his frustration at not being able to convince his interlocutors to his point of view. His critique of caste system may be just, but his intransigence and insistence on taking a clear position seems excessively invasive. Ideology aside, as a foreigner, a tourist, it is not the reporters place to convince Indians to change their customs – doing so is another form of imposing his Western viewpoint on another culture.

Strategy 3: Acceptance

Nevertheless, such vociferous stand against caste is not shared by all reporters. Wojciech Giełżyński accepts that as a white tourist, his position is a rather privileged one, and

³⁷⁰ “Nie raz i nie dziesięć, ale sto razy zdarzyło mi się podejmować zaciekle dysputy z Hindusami, którzy w systemie kastowym nie upatrują niczego zdrożnego. Gorzej, niektórzy skłonni są widzieć w nim jakieś odzwierciedlenie naturalnego porządku społecznego, godną tradycję narodową, cenną właściwość i odrębność swego społeczeństwa. Łatwo w takich dyskusjach stracić panowanie nad sobą i zasłużyć na miano niegrzecznego gościa. Żaden, ale to żaden argument zwolenników systemu kastowego nie zawiera nawet cienia słuszności; ubóstwo intelektualne wyznawców kastowości jest żenujące, a wśród moich adwersarzy znalazł się również profesor uniwersytetu, docent – doktor ekonomii – i bywały w świecie dziennikarz. Nie twierdzę, że wszyscy Hindusi z jednakowym fanatyzmem skłonni są bronić tej haniebnej instytucji; fakt jednak, że spotkałem w Indiach aż tylu zaperzonych ludzi, myślących dumę narodową z brednią narodową, przyprawia o rozgoryczenie i mnóstwo smutnych refleksji. Zdaje się, że obszary tego specyficznego wstecznictwa są znacznie większe, niż sądzimy. Byłem, przynajmniej, napastliwy i nietaktowny, atakowałem frontalnie i odrzucałem wykrętne odpowiedzi. Domagałem się od każdego niemal napotkanego człowieka wyraźnego stanowiska: za lub przeciw. Jestem bowiem zdania, że należy tępić, niszczyć i wyszydzać takie tradycje narodowe, które zawierają w sobie treści antyhumanistyczne” (Górnicki 148).

³⁷¹ “. . . nie jestem podróżnikiem z zeszłego stulecia. . .” (Górnicki 148)

³⁷² “Uff! Dobrze, że tę zapiekłą złość można wreszcie przerzucić na papier. Śledziłem już w reporterskich włóczęgach różne antypatyczne zjawiska i czas byłby odwyknąć od nadmiernie bezpośrednich reakcji. Cóż, kiedy dyskusja ze zwolennikiem czy przynajmniej indyferentnym świadkiem kastowości przypomina dyskusję z antysemitą, monarchistą, lub francuskim ultrasem: szklana ściana” (Górnicki 149).

he is satisfied with this state of affairs. He explains that “every European, in order to live normally in India, must have several servants. One is not enough. A cook makes food, but he will never agree to wash dirty dishes – that is the job of a “sweeper” of a lower caste” (23)³⁷³. He warns the readers of the consequences of not respecting this order. He recounts the story of a certain Pole, new to India, who immediately “fraternised himself” (23)³⁷⁴ with his cook. What happened then?

. . . [The cook] confessed that he has very progressive, socialist, or even almost communist views. They talked about this and that, exchanged similar opinions on political topics. The following day, the cook did not make dinner, and sat comfortably in the living room: after all, if both of them are progressive and both believe in the principle of equality of all people, why would one serve another? (24)³⁷⁵

This story sounds less like a real event and more as a cautionary tale told to those who would be inclined to transgress the boundaries of the social order. Giełżyński ridicules the idealism and naiveté of the fellow Polish citizen. Conveniently, it puts himself in a position of an experienced, slightly cynical traveller that knows better how to avoid being fooled. To his mind, caste system is an unintelligible “abracadabra” (61)³⁷⁶, a mix of beliefs, traditions, uses, diets and other forms of behaviour that seems irrational to him. Although he is critical of caste divisions, he sees it as a hierarchy which, like many other elements of Indian tradition, should fade away on its own, because of the advent of modernity. He notices certain signs of change already, because of the influence of schooling, “radio propaganda” (62), and especially because of urbanisation. Giełżyński is convinced, however, that it will take years, “maybe entire generations” (62)³⁷⁷. Although India introduced a “progressive constitution”, it will not “transform human mentality” nor “end superstitions” (62)³⁷⁸. Hence, Giełżyński as a traveller accepts the workings of caste, although he believes it is a custom that should slowly die out.

Strategy 4: Instrumentalization

³⁷³ “Każdy Europejczyk musi mieć w Indiach, żeby móc normalnie żyć, parę osób służby. Jedna nie wystarczy. Kucharz gotuje, ale za żadne skarby nie zgodzi się umyć brudnych naczyń, od tego jest ‘sweeper’ z niższej kasty” (Giełżyński 23).

³⁷⁴ “spoufalił się” (Giełżyński 24).

³⁷⁵ “. . . ten wyznał mi, że jest bardzo postępowych, socjalistycznych, a nawet prawie komunistycznych przekonań. Pogadali o tym i owym, wymienili zgodne opinie na tematy polityczne. Na drugi dzień kucharz nie ugotował obiadu i rozsiadł się w salonie: przecież, skoro obaj są postępowi i obaj wyznają zasadę równości wszystkich ludzi, dlaczego jeden ma usługiwać drugiemu?” (Giełżyński 24).

³⁷⁶ “abracadabra” (Giełżyński 61).

³⁷⁷ “Wiele jeszcze lat potrzeba, może całych pokoleń, by w Indiach wygasła pamięć o systemie kastowym i jego regułach” (Giełżyński 62).

³⁷⁸ “Postępowa konstytucja nie zdołała przeobrazić ludzkiej mentalności, znieść przesądów. Nie znaczy to jednak, że nic się w Indiach pod tym względem nie zmienia. Wpływ szkoły, propagandy radiowej, a zwłaszcza życie w wielkich miastach, gdzie można ukryć swoje kastowe pochodzenie, powoli przeobraża stare nawyki i osłabia rygory systemu kastowego” (Giełżyński 62).

Although rejecting the idea of caste, Gołębiowski at times does not hesitate to use the principle of caste divisions to his advantage: “[s]ometimes I would be offered a dish that already by its look would cause nausea. Then, it was enough to say that “my caste” does not allow me to eat this food and such refusal would be accepted with full understanding” (61)³⁷⁹. This use of “caste” as a tourists’ ruse is on the one hand a way to subvert the oppressive character of this tradition, and turn it into a mere excuse, but on the other hand, it could be perceived as an arrogant behaviour of a foreigner. Even though Gołębiowski claims that his explanation was met with “full understanding”, one can assume that most Indians know that caste divisions do not exist in Europe and that they are aware that the foreigner uses this concept without understanding it. Also, Gołębiowski’s take on caste sometimes lacks consistency – if he so completely rejects the concept, then he should not make excuses based on that very concept of caste.

In fact, Gołębiowski is the only reporter who describes how isolated, if not discriminated he felt, because of the fact that he was not an upper-caste Indian. Once, he spent a few days in the house of a public administration employee, a Brahmin. The reporter was not surprised that the family was vegetarian, but something else puzzled him:

I could not understand, at first, why they served me meals separately. When I asked, they would usually say that they have already eaten. I finally figured out that in spite of apparent modernity in their lifestyle, my hosts did not do away with their aversion to eating meals with a man of an “unknown caste”. (60)³⁸⁰

Therefore, Gołębiowski not only criticises caste, but positions himself at the receiving end of caste discrimination, together with those who are excluded from something because of caste. Surely, his position in India as a foreign journalist was still a privileged one, but in telling this story, he could express his solidarity with those who experience various exclusions based on their supposed “lack of caste” on an everyday basis.

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As demonstrated in the examples above, the view that caste is a key element of Indian culture is shared by most Polish reporters from the communist period. Indian society appears to them as inherently hierarchical. Arjun Appadurai identifies three ways in which Westerners think about hierarchy (41). Firstly, they have the urge to essentialize caste, a strategy described

³⁷⁹ “Czasem na przykład częstowano mnie potrawą, która samym swym wyglądem wywoływała mdłości. Wystarczyło wtedy powiedzieć, że ‘moja kasta’ zabrania mi jedzenia danej potrawy, i odmowa traktowana była z pełną wyrozumiałością” (Gołębiowski 61).

³⁸⁰ “Nie mogłem się . . . początkowo zorientować, dlaczego posiłki podawano mi zawsze osobno. Na pytania dostawałem z reguły odpowiedź, że gospodarze już jedli. Domyśliłem się w końcu, że mimo pozorów nowoczesności w sposobie życia moi gospodarze nie wyzbyli się awersji do spożywania posiłków wspólnie z człowiekiem ‘obcym kastowo’” (Gołębiowski 60).

also earlier in this chapter. Secondly, there is a tendency to exoticise Indians by stressing the difference between “self” and “other” – their culture is hierarchical, and ours is equal (41). And thirdly, Western views of caste seem to be totalising, as they present this form of social order as pervasive to all domains of life. Appadurai demonstrates the popularity, or – in other words – the hegemony of an idea in anthropological research, which eventually assumes a totalising status and applies to any study of a given region. Thus, hierarchy becomes the defining characteristics of India, just like honour-shame is attributed as typical in the Mediterranean or ancestor-worship in China (46). These particularly resilient images that link places and cultural themes, says Appadurai, “all capture internal realities in terms that serve the discursive needs of general theory in the metropolis” (46).

Polish reporters describing hierarchy in India do realise that their predecessors from the colonial era would operate with clichés and denigrate India in their descriptions, and they attempt at offering a different, fresh perspective. In order to relate Indian issues to their readers, they often draw parallels between India and Poland, for instance by presenting caste hierarchy as similar to class hierarchy. Nevertheless, in most accounts there is a deep-rooted sense of difference that divides usual social divisions of an urban landscape in Europe, and the divisions resulting from the all-encompassing caste system. By and large, the reporters fall into the cliché in which caste hierarchy is a practically unchangeable phenomenon, although they do express hope that modernity will reduce the social division. They differ, however, in their reactions to caste. Ros, in an almost postcolonial spirit, decides to give voice to the most unprivileged, interviewing rickshaw-pullers and leather workers. Górnicki’s provocative questions about caste, on the other hand, are meant to be interventionist, but instead, they are antagonising. As a result, the reporter appears as a European, believing in equality, and his interlocutors as natives, trapped in the dialectics of caste. Giełżyński, although critical of caste as a concept, accepts the everyday existence of social divisions and finds interventionist approaches naïve and foolish.

Even if the reporters follow at times Western bias on caste, they do try to present it in a more complex and empirical manner. They write about historical roots, colonial influence, social and political meaning of caste, the everyday experience of caste – all this presents the issue of hierarchy in a more multi-dimensional way. Nevertheless, the reporters seem to be unable to transcend the opposition between tradition and modernity. For them, caste system belongs to the realm of tradition, even if its effects can also be observed in the realm of modernity.

CHAPTER 6. INDIA AND THE SOCIALIST MODERNITY PROJECT

While manifestations of religiosity and social hierarchies in India are signs of tradition that the reporters hope will soon become echoes from the past, what lies ahead is a supposedly bright future brought by socialist modernity. Although the authors reserve in their texts much space for descriptions of Indian traditions, rituals, beliefs and customs, they do not fail to notice the signs of “progress”. It is brought about by urbanisation, industrialisation, secularism and technology. By and large, they believe that modernity is a positive force, and tradition – a negative one.

As Arjun Appadurai observes in his *Modernity at Large*, such a vision of modernity is typical of the Western thinking. When analysing different societies around the world, scholars would like to point to one single moment which can be considered as a break between past and present, says Appadurai. “Reincarnated as the break between tradition and modernity and typologized as the difference between ostensibly traditional and modern societies, this view has been shown repeatedly to distort the meanings of change and the politics of pastness” (Appadurai 3). Introducing such a clear break between past and present seems virtually impossible, as modernity can mean many different things and be experienced unevenly and in diverse ways. India is a good example of how different processes of modernity run in parallel. Especially in the first three decades after Independence, various types and visions of modernity and tradition competed and coexisted in India. The remains of a colonial modernity project, together with various modernisation projects devised with the help of advisors from Europe and America, and a socialist vision of modernity – all these ideas for development of India intertwined. More importantly, Indians also voiced their own, indigenous and localised projects of modernity which would be neither Western nor Soviet one.

In the West, the concept of modernity as a period or a condition has been discussed by academics of various disciplines. In cultural studies, modernity is defined as “a post-traditional historical period marked by industrialism, capitalism, the nation-state and increasingly sophisticated forms of social surveillance” (Barker 125). These phenomena can be perceived as institutions of modernity, and they are “inherently dynamic and expansionist” (125). In the last few decades, there have been continuing discussions on what modernity constitutes, what are its workings, how does it affect societies, does it last, has it ended, and so on³⁸¹. Arif Dirlik finds that in the thought on modernity (and on modernisation), two approaches can be

³⁸¹ See the work of: Giddens, Habermas, Bauman, Lyotard, Taylor, Heller, Foucault, Delanty.

identified. According to one of them, modernity constitutes an intrinsic characteristic of a society, which entails that societies can be judged on the extent to which they are modern (pre-modern, modern, modernising etc.) (35). The other approach is structural, and, in Dirlik's opinion, it is associated with the concept of world-system analysis. In times of capitalist modernity, all societies that are part of the world-system are affected by capitalism, positively or negatively (35). In consequence, the "backwardness" or the underdevelopment are also a product of that same capitalist modernity, because the capitalist world-system is all-encompassing. In a globalised world, virtually no society can remain unaffected by capitalism, even if it adopts a different model of development (36). This point of view is significant because it reverses the responsibility for the lack of development: it does not result from the fact that a society is traditional, but from the fact that it is marginalised or exploited by the forces of global capitalism. Therefore, the commonly professed belief (also by reporters featured in this study) that tradition is an obstacle on the path to modernity, may not hold.

In the analysis of reportage from the three decades (1950s, 1960s and 1970s), one needs to go slightly back in time, to the era when socialism was a valid concept of modernity. In theory, Polish reporters are critical of Western European modernity represented in India by the remains of colonialism, although they seem to unquestioningly accept some of its manifestations. For instance, they praise the architecture of colonial Delhi, the efficiency of Indian railways built by the British, and some of them gladly stay in comfortable hotels built in times of the Raj, mostly accommodating foreigners. However, Polish reporters were not only critics of colonialism. They were proponents of a new model, and since they were sent to India by their newspapers or magazines, or as participants of official visits, they can be considered as representatives of a socialist modernity. Even their choice of itineraries suggests that their goal is to depict the political, social and economic change, as well as industrialisation of India - issues at the heart of the socialist modernisation project. In this chapter, it is discussed how the reporters perceive Indian politics, the Indian communist movement, as well as the sphere of economy and technology. The fact that most of them attach a lot of importance to explaining these issues to their readers is a confirmation of the worldview espoused by Soviet Union at that time. The USSR was very interested in the decolonisation and the new developments in the former colonies. According to Zubok, "the Soviets viewed themselves as completely free of the crimes of colonialism" (8), and in that capacity they supported anti-colonial movements across the world. They were actively promoting the project of socialist modernity that they could spearhead as an alternative to colonial modernity formerly imposed by the West.

1. Socialist Modernity and Internationalism

While the historical context of the advent of modernity in Western Europe is generally well known, the same process in Russia, and later Soviet Union, is less discussed. Indeed, Russia's trajectory was different from the Western one, as the change occurred later, in a shorter span of time, and more violently. From a vastly agrarian society, with autocratic power and serfdom abolished by the tsar only in 1861, Russia transformed into a socialist state with centralised economy and officially (but often not efficiently) introduced equality. Already the tsars attempted at modernizing Russia, backed by educated elites discussing what kind of modernity would be best for the country (the two camps were Westernizers and Slavophiles). Nevertheless, the clash between modern economic methods and traditional social and political structures eroded the power of the traditional tsarist state (Christian 5). In consequence, the power passed on to the Bolsheviks, who promised a different kind of modernity, which would not be based on the capitalist inequality. However, it soon turned out that this experiment was not as successful as expected, because the increased reliance on methods of direct mobilization revived the harsh inequalities of the pre-industrial world (Christian 5).

The Second World War, labelled by Russians as "The Great Patriotic War", brought a sense of pride and hope that the Soviet Union is becoming an important power, a modern state and a society that will compete with other global players. Indeed, Stalinism, according to Stephen Kotkin, brought together various elements of what was then understood as a concept of "progressive modernity": "on the one hand, the deployment of a coordinated, purposeful economy, within which small, supposedly inefficient producers were replaced by larger and therefore mightier ones; and, on the other, the formation of a government of national unity that was above the seeming paralysis of parliamentary rule and unequivocally dedicated to the advancement of the commonwealth (20). Such a model, although in some ways successful, meant that it was the society that paid a high price for the Soviet industrialisation, as economy was managed by "one of the most powerful, coercive, and centralised state systems of the twentieth century", and it created new forms of oppression and inequality (Christian 320). The economic and industrial development became in mid-1930s "the new orthodoxy", and its ideological goal was to prove the Soviet superiority over the West (David-Fox 20).

The heavy industry expansion, the quest for more advanced and efficient ways to extract natural resources, the technological progress were not the only elements of the grand project of "building socialism". It also included the introduction of new values, which would give the Soviet Union moral superiority over its rivals. The new values, although anti-Western, were in

fact strongly rooted in the ideas originating in the Enlightenment: belief in progress, development based on reason and science, reduction of inequality. They were also linked with the Futurists' cult of the machine, of the energy and speed. At the core of the socialist plan was the removal of classes, urbanisation and formation of a "new man", with a collectivist mind-set and loyalty to the Party. Ideology had crucial importance, even though, as Kotkin explains, its main tenet, the assumption that socialism is an anti-world to capitalism, was the cause of its eventual demise (360). Even though Soviet Union wanted to culturally "catch and surpass" the West, and present itself as the "vanguard of progressive humanity", it could only affirm such self-image through international opinion-makers— while this could be effective in 1930s, this image eventually came crashing down (David-Fox 20, Zubok 4).

However, the socialist propaganda of success was fruitful in the extent that many governments around the world admired Russian development and progress, and were not always aware of the failures of the system, carefully concealed by the Soviet authorities from outside view. Propaganda, agitation and other forms of "ideological work" were always key to the communist party, who wanted to convince citizens of other nations to the idea of revolution in the competitive world of the Cold War era (Barghoorn 6-7). In Stalin's own words from 1925:

"We are advancing full steam ahead along the path of industrialization—to socialism, leaving behind the age-old 'Russian' backwardness . . . We are becoming a country of metal, an automobilized country, a tractorized country. And when we have put the USSR on an automobile, and the muzhik on a tractor, let the esteemed capitalists, who boast of their 'civilization' try to overtake us. We shall see which countries may then be 'classified' as backward and which as advanced." (qt after Kotkin 29)

Competition with the capitalist world, not necessarily the well-being of citizens, was thus one of the main goals of the socialist modernisation project. The possibility of extending the Soviet modernity project to the so-called Third World would give USSR an upper hand over the United States and provide the West with a proof that Soviet Union could be a model to follow – at least for some.

In the early post-war years, the objectives of international propaganda would be focussed on the revolutionary training of working class in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism, but in mid-1950s, its objectives became milder and more universal in their formulation: "proletarian internationalism", "friendship of peoples", anti-colonialism, and world peace (Barghoorn 14). Also, gradually, more and more anti-American ideas came to the fore. These would often be disguised under the idea of "anti-imperialism". In socialist reportages from former colonies,

like the ones from India, this critique of America would be presented in parallel to the critique of Western European history of colonial domination. Soviet Union would present itself to countries of the so-called Third World as a supporter of national liberation movements, and advertise its model of economic and social development as the only truly progressive one (Barghoorn 41, Katsakioris 135-136). In the propaganda discourse aimed at the neutral, Non-Aligned Countries, Soviet Union would thus appear as a peace-loving, anti-imperialist proponent of modernity, presenting the West as reactionary and dominating. What is more, Soviet Union presented its model of modernisation as a universal one, and promised that it will transform a “backward country into an industrial country within the life-time of one generation and not in the course of centuries”, as it offered “the road to freedom and happiness for the peoples” (Barghoorn 166). This was, however, accompanied by a sense of superiority over the Global South (then labelled as Third World), that the Soviet Union wanted to “educate, modernize, and liberate from Western exploitation” (Katsakioris 136). Indeed, as explains Katsakioris,

The Soviets considered themselves to be the teachers and the Southerners to be disciples, and the lessons were based on the Soviet historical experience, which theorists and policy makers adapted to what they considered to be the political priorities and the developmental needs of the underdeveloped countries. . . . The Soviets were obviously convinced that they already possessed the visible proof to show their prospective partners and allied and that they had the wisdom and the method to allow them to rapidly achieve similar progress. (146)

Nevertheless, these terms – “to educate”, “to modernize”, “to liberate”, sound very similar to the slogans of the civilising mission raised just a few decades earlier by the French and the British. The concept of a one-sided knowledge and progress transfer is indeed symptomatic of an unequal global relation of power. The Soviet Union seemed to have two goals: one, to establish moral superiority over the West (international solidarity vs colonial hangover), and two, to gain power and influence in the recently decolonised states. Perhaps in this case, it was more of a soft power than a real one, it had however impacted the Soviet and Eastern European perceptions of the South, as well as the postcolonial societies of Asia and Africa.

Among them, the appeal of communist ideology was certainly significant. It was strengthened by Soviet successes of science and technology, the space missions, the nuclear weapons, and the large industrial zones. Soviet popular culture, including television, magazines and travel accounts, reinforced this appeal of Soviet modernity. The promise of equality, peace, international brotherhood and quick development could sway many of those who rejected the brutally enforced Western modernity of the colonial era. However, Soviet-style modernization

was not always as enthusiastically welcomed by the Southerners as the USSR would expect. While Soviet aid and expertise could be accepted, the newly independent states were by and large intent on creating their own path of development. This sometimes led to tensions, as any signs of criticism of Soviet Union by the representatives of the so-called Third World were met with accusations of ungratefulness³⁸².

2. Science (Fiction) and Travel (Nonfiction)

Development of science and technology was an important part of the Soviet propaganda message, together with a new opening towards the world. Already at the turn of twentieth century, “science and technology truly began to dominate Russian discussions about the phenomenological, epistemological, institutional and cultural parameters of modernity”, says Anindita Banerjee (8), mentioning the voices of such intellectuals as Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Nikolai Berdyaev, and of course Lenin. Indeed, as time went by, a consciousness that science and technology had become the primary driving forces of modern life became widespread in Soviet Union, underlines Banerjee (2). This was in part due to the explosion of popular print culture in Russia: it promoted learning about science, geography, discoveries, medicine etc. Among the well-known publications was the magazine *Vokrug Sveta* [*Around the World*]. It was actually founded still in tsarist times, and by early twentieth century it became a popular magazine, featuring travel and adventure accounts by such authors as Jules Verne and Rudyard Kipling. After the revolution, *Vokrug Sveta*, together with another magazine, *Na sushe i na more* [*By Land and by Sea*] became a small window to the world for Soviet citizens, as it told them about foreign countries that they could not visit themselves. As Michael David-Fox put it, the Soviet Union was separated from the rest of the world with a “semiimpermeable membrane” (14) – travel in and out was only possible for carefully selected few.

In fact, until 1955, Soviet citizens were not allowed to go abroad, and even their domestic mobility was limited. After Stalin’s death, the ideological rigidity subsided, and in spring 1955 the Central Committee announced that Soviet citizens are finally allowed to cross Soviet borders, at first – only to socialist countries (Gorsuch 10). In her book *All This Is Your World*, Anne Gorsuch describes the cover of the *Pravda* newspaper from August 1955 showing a group of smiling Leningrad tourists with suitcases, heading for a trip abroad – to Poland (1). Trips between socialist countries were a way to bring them together and encourage friendly

³⁸² Katsakioris describes one such instance that took place during a World Peace Movement meeting in New Delhi in 1961. When an Algerian delegate did not back the Soviets, the writer Ilia Ehrenburg rebuked, telling the Algerian delegation that “the Soviet Union is pulling the bread out of her mouth in order to give you”, expecting gratefulness from the Southern partners (149).

relations, but also to reinforce the geographic divisions of the Cold War. Soviet travel opportunities increased in the Khrushchev era, also due to the fact that the First Secretary himself was an avid traveller – he once sent a message to a UN conference on trade and tourism, saying that tourism is “a vehicle of fruitful contacts between people” and it “provides people with an opportunity to see with their own eyes and appreciate the way of living of other peoples as their economic, cultural and social achievements”³⁸³ (Gorsuch 14).

Travel to other countries was also ideological – it was a political statement. Not only it served to expand international connections, but also it strengthened the “international authority” of the USSR (Gorsuch 14). Developing tourism and making it available to Soviet citizens, although it was only possible for the limited few, created the illusion that the USSR can compete with other countries in technological progress (for instance, fast means of transport), and in consumerist lifestyle (showing Soviet tourists on the French Riviera could do the trick). Unlike their Western counterparts, Soviet tourists were less free to move around while on their trip, and they received many instructions how to behave abroad prior to the trip. Travelling was supposed to strengthen their love for the homeland and make them appreciate their Soviet lifestyle – nevertheless, the Soviet state was distrustful of its citizens, deeming only those who are loyal and appropriately “politically prepared” as worthy of being allowed to go abroad (Gorsuch 17). Indeed, the authorities were often dissatisfied with travel accounts even by those writers who were considered to be loyal communists, blaming them for dealing with the “bourgeois” and the “reactionaries”³⁸⁴ (17). Furthermore, travellers were closely monitored and groups were usually accompanied by a KGB agent, especially when travelling to capitalist countries (24). As time went by, the number of tourists from the Soviet Bloc was steadily growing, but going abroad was still limited to the chosen few. Those few knew that travel was a rare opportunity to bring back foreign products and improve one’s social status. In Vladimir Zubok’s words:

The select access to the outside world transformed the Soviet and Eastern European visitors into impromptu merchants: those Marco Polos brought back home the trophies of their travel, which generated a new powerful status hierarchy in their societies, a renegotiation of the division between the “haves” and “have-nots”. In the USSR of the 1970s and 1980s, this dependence grew phenomenally among the elites, particularly cultural elites. (3)

³⁸³Anne Gorsuch found this quote in the records of the Open Society Archive in Budapest, at the section of Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, 300-80-1 Box 1048 (Khrushchev message to tourism conference, 1963).

³⁸⁴ Gorsuch quotes a speech of Khrushchev in which he condemns writer Victor Nekrasov, Ilia Ehrenberg and Evgenii Evtushenko for their travel accounts from abroad.

Nevertheless, it was yet another way for the citizens of the communist countries to be part of a “modern” lifestyle³⁸⁵. Travelling, and writing nonfictional accounts from the journey was closely connected with the idea of Soviet Union as a global leader in technology and science, and a participant of the Space Race. Just as the “global opening” of the Soviet Union is reflected in travel writing, the fascination with technology resulted in a huge popularity of the science-fiction genre in USSR. Anita Banerjee explains that “science fiction became the self-identified narrative of a new, imagined community that Zamyatin called “we modern people” (9). One could venture a statement that travel, and travel writing, played a similar role: it gave the impression to the citizens of the Soviet Bloc that they are exposed to the world just like their Western counterparts, that they are also “modern people”. Science fiction dealt with the “consciousness of being, or wanting to be, modern” (Banerjee 6), and it was the same aspiration that was shared by readers of travel reportages. However, the everyday life of the “modern people” hardly matched the propagandist image of happy life. Outsiders did not have much chance to learn about the hardships of daily life of Soviet bloc citizens, about political persecutions and limitation of free speech and artistic expression. Like reportage, science fiction became a genre in which writers could express their criticism of the system. Banerjee claims that it became a “powerful mode of dissidence” (4-5), because through the use metaphors or dystopic images it could unveil the workings of the communist system. What is more, travel and technology were seemingly apolitical fields, through which both propagandist and counter-propagandist discourses could be disseminated. On the one hand, through describing how traditional and religious other cultures of the world are, the inhabitants of the Soviet bloc could feel positive that their model is based on modern values of secularism, rationalism, and idea of technological progress. On the other hand, however, by seeing different worlds, different lifestyles, different beliefs, they could realise how isolated and constricted they are by the authoritarian communist state.

Socialist travel reportages from India were thus aimed at showing that the Soviet-inspired model can be attractive to other countries, that socialism did not lose its global appeal, and that there is a large community of like-minded activists, or fellow travellers, even in far-away countries. The attractiveness of the Soviet model is displayed in the reportages primarily by means of showing the socialist inclinations of India’s leading politicians, in particular

³⁸⁵ The title of Gorsuch’s book is a good case in point. It is a quote from a 1961 novel, *A Ticket to the Stars* by Vassili Aksenov. The protagonist tells his younger brother: “Dance and then leap into your saddles. . . Dive into the depths of the sea, climb mountains, fear nothing, all this is your world” (18). This statement conveys the idea that Soviet travellers can embrace the whole world, can feel part of the global modernity at par with citizens of other countries. It is thus a particularly relevant title to Gorsuch’s study, which deals with Soviet domestic and international tourism.

Jawaharlal Nehru's sympathy towards the USSR. The existence of a large communist movement in India, with its particularities, but also with universal demands, could give the citizens of the Eastern Bloc a feeling of transnational unity. That is why, the Polish reporters meet with members of the Indian communist parties, attend rallies and visit workers in trade unions. Furthermore, given the socialist fascination with technology and industrialisation, the reporters describe the newest projects of mines and power plants, pointing out that some of them are built thanks to Soviet funds and know-how from the Eastern Bloc. This would help to institute a sense of pride among the readers, since they could feel that their co-nationals bring innovation to other corners of the world. In consequence, the citizens of the Soviet Union and its satellite state can also think of themselves as part of that imagined community that Zamyatin labelled as "we, modern people".

3. India and the Eastern Bloc

In the first years of India's independence, Nehru's interest in socialism coincided with Soviet ambitions to bring India to its side in the Cold War conflict. The rather strong relationship that Soviet Union had with India seems, at the first glance, an unlikely one. Peter Duncan, in his 1989 book about Soviet-Indian relations, notices this incongruity: India of his time is an unequal society, divided both by caste and economic differences, and a culture in which atheism is highly unpopular. It is also a multi-party democracy, with free trade unions, free press, and English as one of its official languages – it appears as culturally closer to the West than to USSR (1-2). However, common interests brought the two states together, and in 1971, they signed an Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation. Consequently, Soviet Union supported India in the 1971 war with Pakistan (which resulted in the division of Pakistan and creation of Bangladesh) and did not prevent India from improving its relations with China and USA. India was Soviet Union's largest trading partner in the "Third World", and at the same time, India was, in the years 1964-1985, the largest recipient of Soviet aid (Duncan 3). The impact of this "Soviet Globalization", as Jeremy Wishon calls it, was not only felt in economics or trade. It was accompanied by a public diplomacy offensive to improve the Indo-Soviet relations, especially in 1950s and 1960s (Wishon 104). Steps were taken to facilitate cultural exchange. For example, two Soviet travel agencies, Inturist and Sputnik, were operative in India to coordinate tourist mobility, several friendship societies were established, exhibition of handicrafts and applied art were organised and works of popular culture were exchanged – books, films and magazines (106). The popularity of Indian films featuring Raj Kumar, well-remembered even in today's Russia, speak to how successful was this cultural

exchange. Indeed, the idea of creating a “single cultural space from the Ganges to the Volga” (Bipin Chandra, *qtd* by Wishon), was a long-lived one, even though it did not seem to result in establishing a particularly deep connection between the Indian and the Soviet societies.

Given these efforts towards a rapprochement in the cultural sphere, it is not surprising that it was important for other countries of the Soviet Bloc to intensify their relations with India, and the reporters’ visits, their coverage of political events, their contacts with local communist activists and their support to socialist tendencies of Indian politicians would be encouraged. In the communist period, Polish foreign policy was to a large extent dependent on the one shaped in Moscow. However, apart from official relations, the mutual perceptions depended on depictions of India (to Poles) and Poland (to Indians) in novels, nonfiction, and popular culture. Analysing the way in which the Polish reportage depicts Indian political context can give insight into the Polish interpretation of current events in India in the three decades after Independence.

As expected, Polish reporters in India are on the lookout for signs which indicate that the country follows a socialist model. India is actually a Non-Aligned state, but Polish reporters tend to present it as pro-Soviet, almost socialist. They focus on the way that India adopts the models observed in the Soviet Union, and also on the ways in which it fails to do so. According to Gołębiowski, the image of contemporary India in Poland is based on several issues that the Polish press raises in relation to India. Among them are: non-violent struggle with foreign domination, the path to socialist economic planning (under somewhat socialist slogans), neutralism (avoiding large military pacts), and a role of a negotiator in times of international crises (9). However, as the journalist underlines, these facts do not give a full image of India. Clearly, India is not the exotic land from colonial tales, neither it is a socialist country as the West would like to present it (10). That is why, the role of a reporter is to observe the changes in India, to describe various social groups, trends, and phenomena, in order to complicate these simplified images, Gołębiowski suggests (16-19). His fellow reporters seem to adopt a similar stance, showing both the remnants of the past, as well as the signs of present development (or the lack thereof). To depict how India applies the concepts of planned economy, many reporters visit the pride of Indian industry: large factories, steel mills and mines in Bhilai, Golden Rock, Barauni and Sudamdih. They are particularly interested in those that employ Polish engineers or mining specialists. Furthermore, the reporters explain the trends in Indian politics, paying special attention to the Indian communist parties. Other social issues, such as land reform or demographic planning are also mentioned. The following sections of this chapter explore these depictions of modern-day India in the reporters’ times.

4. Socialism and Indian Politics in Polish Reportages

The reporters, unlike many travel writers, instead of describing in detail their journeys, spend a considerable time describing Indian politics. They do not hide their sympathies: they clearly support the Indian communists, they are also largely appreciative of Nehru and the Indian National Congress, but they are critical of the “reactionary” right wing – the nationalist parties. Their views are slightly varied, because each of them visits India at a different point of time, finding a different political context. Also, each reporter demonstrates a different level of interest and involvement in politics. Finally, they visit India in different roles: of newspaper correspondents, conference delegates, or diplomats. Koehler, for instance, hardly comments on Indian politics, as he comes to India as a participant of the forestry conference, and does not even attempt to explore the complexities of Indian political life. Ros refers to politics much more often, although he describes in greater detail the Indian independence movement and Indian communists, rather than focussing on governmental policies. Putrament, Górnicki and Gołębiowski are the most vocal about Nehru and the power play between different parties, as well as perspectives for the future. Giełżyński and Chociłowski make passing remarks about Indian politics, but their aim is to give a more general view of Indian culture and society.

Gandhi and the Idea of Non-Violence

Two reporters choose to talk extensively about the figure of Mahatma Gandhi and his role in the struggle for independence. Surprisingly, the two reporters are, chronologically, the most far-apart from one another. Ros publishes his reportage in 1957, so one can assume that his journey must have taken place around 1955-56. These are the first few years since India became independent from the British, on 15 August 1947. Chociłowski’s account, published in 1977, is the last account in the timeframe chosen for this dissertation. Maybe this is not accidental. Perhaps precisely the fact that at the time of Ros’ journey around India, Gandhi’s story was still fresh in the collective memory, makes the reporter interested in Mahatma. On the contrary, in case of Chociłowski, perhaps it is thanks to a certain distance from the political events linked with Gandhi’s activity and his death that a new reflection on his achievements is possible.

In describing the story of Mahatma Gandhi, Ros is cautious in his judgements: although he appreciates Gandhi’s role in undermining the power of the British (for instance through promoting homespun cloth, which made the sale of textiles from Britain difficult), the reporter is doubtful of Gandhi’s methods.

. . . the assessment of Gandhi from a European point of view does not stand criticism and does not give results. This man, against the criteria of our logic, would get across to the Indian masses amazingly well and arise their mystical imagination, to which the European way of reasoning would not appeal. . . . Nowhere else, except of India, would this sort of a man make any sense in political existence and action, but also none of the politicians and leaders of Europe . . . could count on such a popularity in India, on such a cult among masses numbering millions of illiterate and superstitious peasants . . . (285)³⁸⁶.

Here, Ros falls into the trap of Orientalist clichés, arguing that Indians require a different type of a leader, as they think and act according to a different logic, a non-European, non-rational one. They have a “mystical imagination”, they are mostly illiterate and “superstitious” (a term that is often a derogatory way of describing religiousness), and thus a European is not able to understand them, believes Ros. It is also a way for the reporter to reconcile his admiration for Gandhi, and the communist ideology’s condemnation of non-violence as a revolutionary method. By explaining that Indians require a different approach, the reporter does not challenge the general logic of communist revolution through struggle, but he merely allows for an exception to the rule, due to a supposedly different mind of Indians.

Chociłowski, coming to India in mid-1970s, offers a different point of view on Mahatma Gandhi. He devotes an entire chapter to the Indian leader of his book, giving it the title: “The Man Who Woke the Sleeping Giant”³⁸⁷. Through this metaphor, Chociłowski underlines the crucial role that Gandhi played in the awakening of Indian society and its national spirit, and the resulting independence struggle leading to the demise of the British empire. The reporter mentions the enormous amount of writings on Gandhi and says that he was compared to a number of legendary figures: medieval saints, Buddha, Socrates, Lenin and Jesus Christ, but some labelled him as a naïve apostle, as a utopian, shady philosopher, and even as a reactionary (139). The reporter admits that Gandhi has had many critics who accused him of being too fixated on the idea of non-violence, or being too eccentric and puritanical. Nevertheless, Chociłowski presents Gandhi as a great figure, whose strength, intellect, charm and charisma caused masses to consider him as their leader, their Bapu – Father (142-143). He explains the rationale of *satyagraha*, i.e. independence through non-violence, and says that precisely because of that philosophy, Gandhi was sceptical about Marxism and socialism:

³⁸⁶ “. . . ocena Gandhiego z europejskich pozycji nie wytrzymuje krytyki i nie daje rezultatów. Ten człowiek, wbrew kryteriom naszej logiki, znakomicie trafił do mas indyjskich i działał na ich mistyczną wyobraźnię, do której z kolei nie potrafiłby dotrzeć europejski sposób rozumowania. . . . Nigdzie indziej poza Indiami człowiek tego pokroju nie miałby racji politycznego bytu i działania, ale też żaden z polityków i wodzów Europy . . . nie mógłby liczyć w Indiach na taką popularność, na taki kult wśród milionowych mas analfabetycznego i zabobonnego chłopstwa, jak ten człowiek . . .” (Ros 285).

³⁸⁷ The original title of the chapter in Polish is “Człowiek, który obudził śpiącego olbrzyma”.

Even the words ‘class struggle’ were, for him, infused with conflict and violence. He would expect the transformation of social relations in India through peaceful ‘conversion’ of *zamindars* (kulaks) and capitalists. He was against a ‘bloody revolution’, not only then, in times of a weak and powerless India, but in general ‘at any time’. The Indian communists were convinced that – Gandhi’s noble intentions notwithstanding – his strategy was *nolens volens* the grist to the mill for the owning classes, the bourgeois, and feudal aristocracy, safely seated under the English umbrella. (146)³⁸⁸

Chociłowski explains why Gandhi’s ideas were problematic for leftists and the reasons for communists to criticise him. However, he situates himself outside of this judgement, he does not identify with this view, trying to remain a neutral observer. The reporter mentions various opinions on Gandhi, also those critical ones, but the gist of his chapter is definitely appreciative of the famous advocate of non-violence. It is enough to mention the quote that opens Chociłowski’s chapter on Gandhi: it is a quotation from Einstein who said that future generations will find it difficult to believe that such a person, with flesh and bones, once walked on this earth (138). Clearly, Chociłowski, travelling to India in the 1970s, is not as bound by ideology as much as Ros, and can present Gandhi as seen from various perspectives. Indians, too, by that time gain more perspective on Gandhi, and look at his actions with less emotions as they did in Ros’ time, only a few years after Gandhi’s assassination.

Nehru’s Semi-Socialism

While Mahatma Gandhi remains probably the most famous Indian in Poland of that time (and even today), most reporters focus on the figure of Jawaharlal Nehru, the follower of Gandhi and the first prime minister of independent India. They discuss Nehru’s ideas on how to organise the independent state, how to plan its economy, and how to align – or non-align – with foreign powers in the world divided by the Cold War rivalry. The reporters consider India as a country that is on its way towards socialism, mostly thanks to Nehru’s leadership. He did not want to blindly copy foreign models, but aimed to create an “enlightened socialism” (Putrament, *Cztery...* 153). The specifics of this Indian model of semi-socialism are discussed at length by reporters.

³⁸⁸ “Już same słowa ‘walka klasowa’ tchnęły dlań konfliktem i gwałtem. Przekształcenie stosunków społecznych w Indiach upatrywał w pokojowym ‘nawróceniu’ zamindarów (obszarników) i kapitalistów. Był przeciwny ‘krwawej rewolucji’ i to nie tylko wtedy, w ówczesnej sytuacji słabych i bezwładnych Indii, ale w ogóle, ‘w jakimkolwiek czasie’. Komuniści indyjscy uważali, że – niezależnie od szlachetnych intencji Gandhiego – jego strategia była *nolens volens* wodą na młyn klas posiadających Indii, burżuazji i feudalnej arystokracji, siedzącej bezpiecznie pod parasolem angielskim” (Chociłowski 146).

India's affair with socialism begins with decolonisation. Putrament sees Marxism as directly connected to the decolonial thought, which in turn makes the decolonised states more sympathetic to socialism:

India today is a particularly instructive object of study for a Marxist. At the beginnings of the post-war decolonisation process, the freshly created countries set off, by and large, from these [Marxist] starting positions. But from the very first moment, they chose different systemic principles. Almost all of them adopted general socialist declarations, although each of them understood them differently. So did China, and Egypt and India... (*Na drogach...* 187)³⁸⁹

Putrament is aware that independence movements across the world refer to Marxism at some point or another, but also that they apply socialist principles selectively and in different ways. In Górnicki's opinion, this presents a danger:

It is possible that while nurturing a wholesale sympathy to postcolonial states and believing in their natural development we omitted a moment of great importance in which the national bourgeoisie of these countries ceased to be a spring of progress and started to be its brake. (186)³⁹⁰

Górnicki believes that India's elites, or "national bourgeoisie", in spite of their allegiance to socialism, eventually acted as a "brake of progress". The reporters repeatedly express their dissatisfaction at the fact that Indian government does not implement more radical socialist reforms. They are convinced that the Polish public opinion has a distorted view of India and has too many illusions about its political leaders. Górnicki underlines that the generation of "idealists" (187) like Nehru is dying out, the capital is accumulating, and that perhaps the future will be different from popular expectations. Hence, it is possible that the Eastern Bloc's hopes of India becoming a socialist ally will not come to a fruition.

There are many ways in which India differs from the communist countries of Eastern Europe. India chose socialism through parliamentary democracy, not through a revolution. Putrament explains it by the enormous diversity of the country. Only the principle of tolerance, he suggests, could initially calm down the burgeoning conflicts, decrease the separatist tendencies and ensure the maintenance of national unity (187). Nevertheless, Putrament finds this principle unsustainable in the long run. During his first visit, the writer notices that even though Nehru enjoys great popularity among the masses, his time is coming to an end, and a

³⁸⁹ "Dzisiejsze Indie są niezwykle pouczającym dla marksisty obiektem badań. W początkach powojennego procesu dekolonizacyjnego świeżo powstające państwa startowały, z grubsza biorąc, z tychże pozycji wyjściowych. Ale od razu na początku wybrały one odmienne założenia ustrojowe. Wszystkie niemal przyjmowały ogólne deklaracje socjalistyczne, każde z nich jednak rozumiało je inaczej. I Chiny, i Egipt, i Indie..." (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 187).

³⁹⁰ "Bardzo możliwe, że żywiąc hurtową sympatię do krajów postkolonialnych i wierząc w ich naturalny rozwój przeoczyliśmy moment o wielkiej doniosłości, w którym narodowa burżuazja tych krajów przestała być sprężyną postępu, a stała się jego hamulcem" (Górnicki 186).

turn towards the right can be expected (*Cztery...* 152). Incidentally, Putrament puts the blame for this state of affairs partly on the media, saying that “like in America, the government does not have the propaganda apparatus at its disposal”, and the major dailies are in the hands of capitalists or right-wingers (152). He seems to believe that had India adopted the same model of concentration of media by the government and of censorship, like in the Soviet Union, Nehru’s position would not be threatened. Also, the principle of tolerance, of peaceful coexistence of diversity and of a political plurality, is in the long run making India weaker, says Putrament.

Thus, the parliamentary democracy that was supposed to be a patron of the Indian incarnation of socialism, during its twenty years it not only failed to give this socialism a shape perceptible for the masses and to rely on these masses, but on the contrary, it allowed for the most violent, right-wing, nationalist fanatics to reach these masses. Under the pretext of defending holy cows they are ready to convince the poor of India that their only salvation is the multiplication of Mister Tatas and letting them take care of the Indian people. (*Na drogach...* 193-194)³⁹¹

Clearly, Putrament deplores the supposedly decreasing appeal of socialism in India, and warns of the “fanatics”, or the right-wing parties’ domination. He is against any promotion of capitalism, personified by Mister Tata – a famous industrialist. All India’s problems, in Putrament’s view, result from this lack of clear adoption of socialist values. A free coexistence of different parties – unlike in the Soviet model in which there is only one, hegemonic party, the communist one – is at the crux of the problem, feels the writer (*Na drogach...* 202).

Another problematic issue in the context of Indian politics is, for the reporters, the idea of non-violence. Górnicki lists three important requirements for a truly socialist India. First, the limitation of political freedom for the owning class, second, a relative financial equality (which can only be reached through “forms of legal coercion” (196)), and third, central planning (196). The reporter suspects that it would be hard to reconcile these principles with what he calls “gandhism”, and in particular the principle of *satyagraha*, but he does not exclude such possibility (196). He finds that some of these Gandhian ideas have a certain value, especially the “deep reflection on the fate of the individual” (196)³⁹², the idea of tolerance, the lack of arrogance and the ability to question. However, certain modifications would have to be made:

³⁹¹ “Tak więc demokracja parlamentarna, która miała patronować indyjskiemu wcieleniu socjalizmu, nie tylko przez dwadzieścia lat nie potrafiła temu socjalizmowi nadać kształtów uchwytnych dla mas i oprzeć się o te masy, ale wprost przeciwnie, pozwoliła na to, że do tych mas zaczynają się przerywać najgwałtowniejsi, prawicowi, nacjonalistyczni fanatycy. Pod pretekstem obrony świętych krów gotowi są wmówić nędzarzom Indii, że jedyny dla nich ratunek – to rozmnożenie panów Tata i oddanie im troski o lud indyjski” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 193-194).

³⁹² “głęboki zamysł nad losem jednostki” (Górnicki 196).

If these values could be boiled down to the role that they really deserve, filter them from the gibberish of mystics and from the hocus-pocus of reincarnation, and blend them into rationalist socialism – India could perhaps reach some new synthesis, a political philosophy that is not yet known to us, but it is certainly familiar and useful. It is conceivable that such process will one day take place. India could then become one of the most important, most creative link of international socialism, its Medina and agora. (Górnicki 197)³⁹³

Górnicki, in his usual, emphatic style proposes a blend of Indian philosophy with socialism, but only if certain ideas are rejected. These ideas – mysticism and the belief of reincarnation – are however at the core of Hindu beliefs, and Górnicki's rejection of them (in rather disparaging terms) makes his proposition of a fusion questionable. The reporter himself is not convinced if a coexistence of these two ideas are possible, he is nevertheless certain of one thing: given India's inequality and poverty, "all principles of Marxism remain in power here . . . [t]o the bitter end" (197)³⁹⁴.

Gołębiowski, too, notices a contradiction in socialist ideas and the principle of non-violence.

His [Nehru's] interpretation of socio-political processes was not parallel to the Marxist interpretation. Above all, Nehru assumed that class conflicts, the existence of which he fully acknowledged and grasped, could be solved by means of 'cooperation' and a certain kind of 'synthesis'. The source of this approach was probably the Gandhian concepts of avoiding violence. (52)³⁹⁵

Gołębiowski notes that Nehru is too idealistic, slowly concedes to the liberals, believes in technological progress, but detaches himself from socialist ideals. Indeed, when Nehru died, the Congress' left proved to be powerless against "the right that took over strategic positions" (55), and could not stop "the process of backward changes in priorities of internal and foreign policies of India" (55)³⁹⁶, concludes the reporter.

Orientalising the Socialists?

³⁹³ "Gdyby sprowadzić te wartości do roli, jaka im rzeczywiście przypada, odsączyć je z bełkotu mistyków i guseł reinkarnacji, wtopić w racjonalistyczny socjalizm – Indie doszłyby może do jakiejś nowej syntezy, do filozofii politycznej dziś nam jeszcze nieznannej, ale na pewno bliskiej i potrzebnej. Niewykluczone, że kiedyś taki process nastąpi. Indie mogłyby stać się wówczas jednym z najważniejszych, najbardziej twórczych ogniw światowego socjalizmu, jego Medyną i agorą" (Górnicki 197).

³⁹⁴ "wszystkie prawa marksizmu pozostają tutaj w mocy. . . . Az do skutku" (Górnicki 197).

³⁹⁵ "Jego interpretacja społeczno-politycznych procesów nie pokrywała się jednak z interpretacją marksistowską. Przede wszystkim Nehru zakładał, że klasowe konflikty, których istnienie w pełni uznawał i doceniał, można rozwikłać na drodze 'współpracy' i pewnego rodzaju 'syntezy'. Źródłem tej postawy były zapewne gandhystowskie koncepcje unikania przemocy" (Gołębiowski 52).

³⁹⁶ "Gdy zabrakło Nehru, lewica Kongresu okazała się niemal bezsilna wobec rozłokowanej na strategicznych pozycjach prawicy i nie mogła powstrzymać pogłębiania się procesu wstecznych przeakcentowań w wewnętrznej i zagranicznej polityce Indii" (Gołębiowski 55).

The reporters' sweeping statements about India's politics, and – in particular – Indian socialism, reveal a somewhat superior attitude. In their criticism, they compare Indian socialism to the Soviet (or Polish) model, pointing out the incongruities between the two. The reporters find it difficult to accept that perhaps the exact implementation of Soviet models would not be beneficial to Indian society and the decision to introduce certain ideas selectively is deliberate. Instead, they suggest that since India is not a fully socialist country, it somehow lags behind the truly progressive countries of the Soviet Bloc.

Putrament explains Indian socialism's problems by the specificity of the country. In "overpopulated, rural and backward countries like India"(202)³⁹⁷, freedom is impossible to be fully realised, says Putrament, given that people are not free from hunger and cold, and are likely to follow different demagogues and their unrealistic promises (202). He offers a different solution:

In such countries, the most just system would be one that would mean a democracy, or freedom to the people, and a dictatorship, or coercion to the rich. Because there is no separate, abstract justice. The justice to the poor must be an unjust to the rich. The justice 'for all' is primarily a justice for the strong. (*Na drogach...* 202)³⁹⁸

Putrament's statement is problematic: he justifies a coercive dictatorship in the name of equality. He would even recommend such a policy to India, explaining that the rich need to be coerced in order to help the poor. As attractive as some would consider it, there is a basic fallacy in this idea: today, it is obvious that the communist rule did not make Soviet society as equal as expected. Most of the population, perhaps except the *nomenklatura*, or the prominent members of the party, was still very poor, and also subjected to coercion, violence and extreme surveillance³⁹⁹. A second problem with Putrament's statement is that there is an underlying assumption that countries are not equal to one another. India belongs to those "backward" and largely illiterate countries, in which people will follow blindly any demagogic leaders, and thus it should not be a democracy, according to the writer. Hence, in his pursuit of equality, Putrament himself gives in to an unequal vision of the world, in which the less "enlightened" societies do not deserve democracy and should experiment with some forms of dictatorship in order to achieve a certain social goal, like universal equality. His view also borrows from the

³⁹⁷ "Ale w przeludnionych, rolniczych, zacofanych krajach typu Indii taka 'wolność' jest nie tylko zakłamana, jest po prostu niemożliwa do urzeczywistnienia" (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 202).

³⁹⁸ "W takich krajach najsprawiedliwszy jest system, który byłby demokracją, czyli wolnością dla ludu, dyktaturą, czyli przymusem dla możnych. Bo nie ma oderwanej, abstrakcyjnej sprawiedliwości. Sprawiedliwość dla nędzarzy musi być niesprawiedliwością dla bogaczy. Sprawiedliwość 'dla wszystkich' jest w pierwszym rzędzie sprawiedliwością dla silnych" (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 202).

³⁹⁹ For more details, see: Figes, Appelbaum, Sakwa.

age-old colonial assumptions that the indigenous populations are immature, cannot form modern societies and political systems, and thus should be ruled in an authoritarian manner.

Furthermore, in various instances, the reporters describe Indian politics using Orientalist clichés. Gołębiowski attends a Congress rally in Rajpur, which is a massive event. He describes the rather kitschy plaster statues of a worker and of a peasant, adorning the large hall where the rally is held, and a huge painting behind the speakers, representing the industrial constructions of “new India” and the figure of Gandhi amongst them. “This is how all Congress Party rallies look like”, says the reporter, and adds that “they always have something of a mass gathering or a caucus that takes place with a theatre decoration in the background” (43)⁴⁰⁰. One can sense a certain irony in this description, although the decorations of general assemblies of the Polish communists, not to mention the May Day parades, would probably not look very different. The journalist observes a certain similarity with other such political gatherings: “[i]f it wasn’t for the colourful setting of Oriental decorations, the clothes and the characteristic position of participants sitting on mats, it could seem that it is some international conference, debating on world situation. (45)⁴⁰¹. It is surprising for the reporter that the meeting resembles an international conference, as if he forgot how large India is and how an all-India assembly of any party is actually comparable to an international conference, just as much as a meeting of leaders from various European states would be. Nevertheless, what makes it different are the “Oriental decorations”, the visible manifestation of Otherness.

Generally, Gołębiowski speaks somewhat condescendingly of the democracies in all Third World countries, perceiving them as somewhat strange or “peculiar” – Indian parliamentary democracy is one of them. He describes how Indian citizens, unaware of how the electoral system really works, would cast, apart from their vote, letters, banknotes, change, or flowers.

Similar cases, and one could find thousands of them, do not happen only in India, but in most countries of the Third World, where archaic social relations and deeply-rooted traditions were supplemented with Western-inspired political forms. The result of this sort of transplantation was twofold: in some countries - above all, India should be mentioned here – under the impact of the local conditions the appropriated form was filled with a different content, in others – e.g.

⁴⁰⁰ “Tak jest na wszystkich zjazdach Partii Kongresowej. Zawsze mają one coś z masówki lub wiecu odbywającego się na tle teatralnej dekoracji” (Gołębiowski 43).

⁴⁰¹ “Gdyby nie barwna oprawa wschodnich dekoracji, stroje i charakterystyczna pozycja zasiadających na matkach uczestników, mogłoby się wydawać, że to jakaś międzynarodowa konferencja debatuje nad światową sytuacją” (Gołębiowski 45).

in Pakistan, Indonesia or Burma – over time, even the form was given up, and experiments with own concepts . . . were undertaken. (121)⁴⁰²

Hence, by presenting the habits of Indian voters in a humorous fashion, Gołębiowski ridicules the idea of Western democracy, which is not an idea native to the “Third World”, and is only “appropriated” by different states, with varying effects. Although he admits that India was successful at “filling the form with a different content”, he still is hesitant whether a Western model can – or should – be “transplanted” into a different context. Nevertheless, he did not express similar doubts when talking about socialism – an idea similarly “transplanted” to India from abroad, only not from the West, but from the Soviet Union.

5. Fellow Travellers: Encounters with the Indian Communist Movement

It is understandable that the reporters from a communist-ruled country are particularly interested in the fate of the communist movement in India. The same democracy that Gołębiowski frowns upon, appears to be a convenient system if it leads to the victory of communists. Reporters are pleased to mention the political situation in Kerala, where the Communist Party of India won the elections in 1957. Putrament announces that Kerala constitutes a proof that communists can come to power through elections (*Na drogach...* 173). Indeed, just a year before, in 1956, at the same 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party at which he denounced Stalin, Khrushchev announced that communism can also be achieved through peaceful means, in parliamentary elections. At the prime of the Cold War, it was important for Soviet Union to keep the support of leftist postcolonial states. It is thus clear that successes (and failures) of Indian communist and leftist parties are of much interest to the Polish reporters. Gołębiowski underlines that the communists exert their influence unevenly, being present in some states more than in others, for instance in Kerala or West Bengal. According to the reporter, the communists are not able to prevail in politics nationally, because of the great stratification and polarisation of Indian society, which requires flexibility in political action and leads to ideological disparities between activists (Gołębiowski 116). Putrament reaches a similar conclusion and explains that at first, the communists had to maintain a united, anti-colonial front with the Congress, and later, especially during the growing Sino-Indian tensions, split into many different parties, CPI Left, CPI Right, and even a Bolshevik one (*Na drogach...*

⁴⁰² “Podobne wypadki, a można ich przytaczać tysiące, zdarzają się nie tylko w Indiach, lecz w większości krajów trzeciego świata, gdzie na archaiczne stosunki społeczne i zakorzenione głęboko tradycje nałożono zaczerpnięte z Zachodu formy polityczne. Rezultat tego rodzaju transplantacji był dwojaki: w jednych krajach – wymienić tu trzeba przede wszystkim Indie – pod wpływem miejscowych warunków zapożyczona forma wypełniła się inną treścią; w drugich zaś – np. w Pakistanie, Indonezji, czy Birmie – z czasem zarzucono również i formę, przystępując do eksperymentów z własnymi koncepcjami w rodzaju ‘demokracji kierowanej, ‘demokracji podstawowej’ etc.” (Górnicki 121).

198). He clarifies to the readers that these divisions were not caused by external agents, but they were a result of internal strife between different wings of the party. Given the difficulties of the Indian communists to gain power due to the fragmentation of their movement, the reporters attach a great importance to the instances in which they actually managed to win an election. The case of Kerala serves as the prime example.

The “Kerala Experiment”

Górnicki, visiting the southern state in early 1960s, still sees traces of the events accompanying the brief time of a communist government in Kerala following the local election in 1959. His take is the following: “On the church wall, there is a slogan written with red paint: ‘Down, down Reds’ rule!’. This is for export. Underneath, a second one, written with chalk in Hindustani language: ‘Kerala swarda zindabad!’ – long live red Kerala. This is for domestic use.” (Górnicki 197-198)⁴⁰³. The reporter suggests that opposition to the communists in Kerala was an externally organised one, pointing at the fact that protesters slogans were written in English, and that “red” sympathies are authentic ones, since they were expressed in Hindustani. Nevertheless, he does not realise that the use of Hindustani is hardly a proof of authenticity: Kerala’s official language is actually Malayalam.

Górnicki stresses that Indian communists gained power in a perfectly democratic manner:

For the first time, the birth of a communist government was accompanied not by the shots of a cruiser or the barking of Mauzers, but by the rustling of sheets, taken out of the ballot box. The Kerala experiment had all chances to serve theoreticians as a test for new, creative tendencies in Marxism. (188)⁴⁰⁴

Górnicki notes with excitement that the eyes of “all India, Asia, and probably all postcolonial countries” (187) were in that moment on Kerala. The reporter goes as far as to declare that the fourteen months of communist rule in that state constituted the most significant event in Asia since the creation of People’s Republic of China (187). His colleague, Janusz Gołębiowski, calls the day of 5th July 1957, when the new government was formed, a “historical date [marking] the beginning of an experiment: a local communist government functioning within a bourgeois state” (30)⁴⁰⁵.

⁴⁰³ “Na kościelnym murze napis czerwona farbą: ‘Down, down Red’s rule!’. To na eksport. Poniżej drugi, nabazgrany kredą w języku hindustani: ‘Kerala swarda zindabad!’ – niech żyje czerwona Kerala. To na użytek wewnętrzny” (Górnicki 197-198).

⁴⁰⁴ “Po raz pierwszy narodzinom rządu komunistycznego towarzyszyły nie salwy krążownika i szczekanie mauzerów, lecz szelest kartek, wydobytych z urny wyborczej. Eksperyment keralski miał wszelkie szanse, aby się przysłużyć teoretykom jako sprawdzian nowych, twórczych tendencji w marksizmie” (Górnicki 188).

⁴⁰⁵ “Była to historyczna data zapoczątkowania eksperymentu funkcjonowania lokalnego rządu komunistycznego w ramach państwa burżuazyjnego” (Gołębiowski 30).

The reporters underline how successful the communist government was at introducing reforms in Kerala. The plan to reorganise the agriculture, limiting the rights of the local “kulaks” and lending support to peasants, could bring a major change in the state. Nevertheless, says Gołębiowski, “it is not difficult to guess that such policy was met with a staunch resistance of landowners, and not only in Kerala. The entire large landowners strata in India, that had a lot to say in other state governments and in the central government, protested violently against it” (Gołębiowski 30)⁴⁰⁶. However, the true conflict was caused, according to reporters, by a planned reform of education. Putrament tells this story in the following way:

At the first attempt to introduce a rather non-communist, or not even socialist programme – the secularisation of education, they [the communists] clashed with fanaticised crowds, which served as an excuse for the central government to nominate a commissary power. The repeated elections, announced soon after, gave the communists even more votes⁴⁰⁷, but the great democrats from Delhi did not listen to this voice of the people. The example of Kerala proves that the result of elections alone does not give a guarantee of taking power: the matter is more complicated and the general formula of ‘peaceful transition to socialism’ is not enough. (175)⁴⁰⁸

Who is to blame for the communists’ failure? The strong influence of the “fanatical” Catholic church as well as the central government, which – for Putrament – is democratic only in name. Saying this, Putrament makes a very strong statement, as he in a way denies the Indian state legitimacy. Górnicki concurs: “[t]he communists were deprived of the power with all deviousness, by using trivial tricks of the new electoral system, already clichéd in Europe. The Kerala experiment was gagged, because it was too dangerous as an example for other states and countries” (189)⁴⁰⁹. The suggestion that the communists lost power due to the “tricks” of the electoral system, created supposedly on the European example, puts the blame outside – it is the West’s fault, as India is following a European model model that does not work. Furthermore, Górnicki explains that the communist government in Kerala posed a threat to the Congress, because it managed to start reforms that the Congress was too slow and inert to

⁴⁰⁶ “Nietrudno się domyślić, że polityka ta napotkała zacięty opór obszarników, i to nie tylko w Kerali. Ostro zaprotestowała przeciwko niej cała wielkoobszarnicza warstwa w Indiach, która przecież miała wiele do powiedzenia w innych rządach stanowych i rządzie centralnym”(Gołębiowski 30).

⁴⁰⁷ In fact, the communists only got 29 seats out of 126, while Congress got 63. Data according to the *Statistical Report on General Election, 1960 to the Legislative Assembly of Kerala*.

⁴⁰⁸ “I przy pierwszej próbie realizacji całkiem niekomunistycznego, ani nawet socjalistycznego programu – laicyzacji szkolnictwa, starli się z rozfanatyzowanymi tłumami, co rząd centralny natychmiast wykorzystał dla mianowana władzy komisarycznej. Rozpisane niebawem powtórne wybory dały komunistom jeszcze więcej głosów, ale wielcy demokraci z Delhi nie posłuchali tego głosu ludu. Przykład Kerali dowodzi, że sam wynik wyborów jeszcze nie daje gwarancji objęcia władzy: rzecz jest bardziej skomplikowana i ogólnikowa formuła ‘pokojowego przejścia do socjalizmu’ nie wystarcza” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 175).

⁴⁰⁹ “Komunistów pozbawiono władzy z całym wyrachowaniem, przy użyciu trywialnych, oklepanych już w Europie kruczków nowej ordynacji wyborczej. Zadławiono keralski eksperyment, ponieważ był zbyt niebezpieczny jako przykład dla innych stanów i krajów” (Górnicki 189).

undertake (189). That is why, even though the reporter finds that Congress' and Communist Party's goals are by and large similar, a strong anti-communist feeling grew among Congress members – and the Kerala government underestimated these forces (188). Górnicki describes this change of heart among Congress members in harsh terms: “[a] melancholic deliberator on ahimsa transforms suddenly into a raging anti-communist; Gandhi's disciples – into followers of Denikin⁴¹⁰ and Maurras⁴¹¹; “satyagraha” into McCarthyism; freedom and tolerance – into a brutal witch-hunt” (190)⁴¹². By juxtaposing peaceful attitudes to such strong examples of conservatism, the reporter stresses the contrast between the behaviours of Congress members before and after the debates on Kerala and the two-faced nature of Indian mainstream politicians. Górnicki emphasises the fact that Jawaharlal Nehru was sympathetic to the Kerala communists, but was gradually overpowered by the right-wing forces in his party (190-191). The reporter also raises the question whether any revolution is at all possible (assuming that the only revolution that would be beneficial to India is a communist one). Janusz Gołębiowski, shares these critical assessments of Indian political developments and considers the Kerala case, together with India's support to the Dalai Lama in the aftermath of the Tibetan Uprising (in the same year), as ultimate signs that India is turning away from its leftist course.

Indeed, contemporary historians view the 1959 elections in Kerala as particularly important and note that they were closely observed by other countries of the world (Guha, Jeffrey). Guha confirms that the Congress saw communists' victory in the southern state as a threat to India's federalism; New Delhi was also worried about the fact that the new ruling party was until recently an underground one, that it professed allegiance to the idea of armed revolution, and that its leaders were known to sometimes take orders from Moscow (Loc 6080). He agrees that the new communist government of Kerala, led by E. M. S. Namboodiripad, acted with impressive efficiency and commitment to the people (Guha Loc 6151). Nevertheless, when their opponents grew stronger, the “people's” government replied with “organised brutality” (Guha Loc 6268), beating up and even killing protesters (around 20 people died), and putting around 150 thousand people in jail (Guha Loc 6288). Like the reporters said, Jawaharlal Nehru supported the idea of land and education reforms and was not opposed to communists; however, upon seeing the polarisation between supporters and opponents of communists, the level of hostility and hatred, as well as the suffering of ordinary citizens of Kerala, he decided to end

⁴¹⁰ Anton Denikin was a tsarist general in Russian Empire, and after the revolution – leader of the White Movement in Russia that tried to fight the Bolsheviks.

⁴¹¹ Charles Maurras was a French monarchist and counter-revolutionary, who collaborated with Marshall Petain in the Vichy regime.

⁴¹² “Melancholijny roztrząsacz ahimsy przedzierza się nagle w rozwścieczonego antykomunistę, uczniowie Gandhiego – w wyznawców Denikina i Maurrasa, ‘sattiagraha’ w macCarthyizm, wolność i tolerancja – w ordynarną nagonkę” (Górnicki 190).

the communist rule in the state (Guha Loc 6307). Polish reporters conveniently omit the story of government-ordered brutality against the protesters. They put the blame for the defeat of E. M. S. Namboodiripad's government solely on the rising "reactionaries" in the Congress. It is also untrue that when Nehru called for a second election in Kerala, communists received even more votes as in the first one – in fact, their support decreased dramatically, while Congress and its allies gained many more seats. Hence, it is clear that in their support to the communists of India, Polish reporters are far from objective, and they use facts and data liberally and selectively.

Reporters in "Red Calcutta"

Some reporters go beyond merely commenting on political events, but try to directly engage with Indian communists, workers and activists. They describe working-class districts of big cities, the everyday concerns of people, and talk to party members or attend party meetings. An obvious destination for all of them was Kolkata, the "flagship of the Indian left" (Chociłowski 125). Moscow, and other political centres of the Eastern Bloc, were certainly interested in the events there, given that Kolkata could serve as an example for other Indian cities. If a communist revolution broke out there, the Soviets could count on India becoming an even closer ally. This is how Ros describes the city:

Calcutta is a large centre of workers' movement, industry and transport here gave birth to a strong working class, organised in trade unions and in the Communist Party of India. But at the same time, Calcutta is a centre for reactionary, orthodox groups, preying on chauvinism and religious fanaticism. (Ros 176)⁴¹³

Indeed, Ros notices slogans that call for cooperation with China, and for the struggle for "peace and bread" (176), but also "nationalist" and "backward" ones, for example those against "murdering" of cows (176). Ros visits poor neighbourhoods, meets a variety of city-dwellers: among them are a rickshaw-puller, a president of a trade union of textile workers, as well as a "proletarian Bengali poet", with whom the reporter toasts to Polish-Indian friendship, to Stalingrad, and to "heroic Warsaw" (250). The history of the Second World War and fight with Nazi Germany – a common enemy for Poland, British India and Soviet Union alike – provides a safe frame of reference. At the same time, it allows the reporter to find common ground with

⁴¹³ "Kalkuta jest wielkim centrum ruchu robotniczego, przemysł i transport zrodziły tu silną klasę robotniczą, zorganizowaną w związkach zawodowych i w Komunistycznej Partii Indii. Ale jednocześnie Kalkuta stanowi ośrodek reakcyjnych, ortodoksyjnych ugrupowań, żerujących na szowinizmie i fanatyzmie religijnym" (Ros 176).

a Bengali poet and show his interlocutor's awareness of the Polish capital's fate, which can certainly move his readers.

Giełżyński, too, visits the "red" Kolkata, where "all troubles and failures of India reflect" (82). The reporter notes that the poverty and social divisions in Kolkata cause a ferment that may lead to revolutionary changes. He mentions the important role of the university in Kolkata, that he believes to be "the best in all of India", but also the most politically radical: "They say that it is the cradle of the socialist revolution, that it maintains close links to the worker activists" (83)⁴¹⁴. Of course, says Giełżyński, there are also many "fanatics" and "reactionaries" in Kolkata, but workers are not as divided by caste there as it is the case in other parts of India, which makes the city more progressive:

All this does not mean that in Calcutta the castes are only a cultural anachronism and that everyone is a conscious fighter for new, socialist and fair social relations. This is still very far away. But if one worker out of fifty carries an ID card with a hammer and sickle, and one in ten understands exactly what do 'exploitation' and 'class struggle' mean – that, in Indian conditions, is a lot. It means that 'Red Calcutta' is the most progressive city in all India. (85)⁴¹⁵

Giełżyński praises Calcutta's progressive outlook, inscribing it again in the binary dynamic of tradition and modernity. For him, it is a logical sequence: the more workers espouse communist views, the faster the "cultural anachronism" will fade away.

Chociłowski, travelling to India in late 1970s, is much less vocal about the communist movement on the Subcontinent, he considers it only as one of the many political fascinations of the youngest generation of Indians. He sees Calcutta as a highly politicised city, saying that one can bet on the fact that within half-an-hour one would witness a manifestation, an explosion or a protest (127).

For now, it is calm, so let's take a tramway, before there is any fire, and let's go to College Street, the street of book-sellers, which is a terrain where it is easiest to find the elite of Calcutta's Maoists. The stalls on the sidewalks and the countless box-like tiny bookshops are swamped from top to bottom with literature that would surely cause disgust on the face of any CIA officer. There is Engels, Stalin and Marx, Trotskyists and sectarians of different countries and all epochs of the international workers' movement. There is Guevara and Regis Debray, there are, side-by-side, publications of Moscow and Beijing publishing houses. Young people,

⁴¹⁴"Mówią o nim, że jest kolebką socjalistycznej rewolucji, że utrzymuje ściśle więzy z działaczami robotniczymi" (Giełżyński 83).

⁴¹⁵"Wszystko to nie znaczy, iż w Kalkucie już kasty są tylko obyczajowym przeżytkiem i że wszyscy są już świadomymi bojownikami o nowe, sprawiedliwe, socjalistyczne stosunki społeczne. Do tego wciąż bardzo daleko. Ale jeśli jeden robotnik na pięćdziesięciu nosi legitymację z sierpem i młotem, a jedno na dziesięciu dokładnie rozumie, co znaczy 'wyzysk' i 'walka klas' – to, w indyjskich warunkach, bardzo wiele. To już oznacza, że 'Czerwona Kalkuta' jest najbardziej postępowym miastem w całych Indiach" (Giełżyński 85).

dressed in white, browse through them – present, failed and former students that we might see tomorrow or the day after burning the writings of Gandhi – “traitor in the service of English imperialism”. (127)⁴¹⁶

Chociłowski, unlike previous reporters, maintains a certain distance from the Indian leftists. There is a touch of irony in his description, and by mentioning the critical approach of students to Gandhi, he presents them as extreme and radical. Surely, Chociłowski would not go as far as to openly criticise the communist movement as such, but his detachment from the leftists is clearly visible. To counterbalance his point, he quotes the words of his hostess, an English pension owner, Mrs Gade, married to an Indian. When the reporter returns to the pension after a long walk around the city, Mrs Gade welcomes him as if he was “saved from a plane crash” (131), and complains about the lack of security in Kolkata, which she compares to “a Wild West, a Chicago” (131). By placing her words at one extreme, and the activities of the Maoists at the other, the reporter situates himself somewhere in the middle, and does not reveal his own views. He admits, however, that Kolkata “has its reasons to be communist” (132), underlining that it is India’s biggest city (at the time), but also a gigantic “pool of poverty” (132). He calls it “the sick man of India”, who faces death every day (132). He wonders if one day, this huge disparity between the rich and the poor will bring some kind of cataclysm, some apocalyptic end (125). Or, will it lead the way to a social revolution in India, according to the Indian saying that what Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow, concludes Chociłowski.

There are many instances in the reporters’ narratives in which they mention a meeting with a local leftist journalist, or a conversation with a communist party member. It is not clear to what extent such meetings were planned: the reporters were certainly encouraged to write about socialism in India, but it is difficult to judge how free they were in choosing their interlocutors. It is also possible that upon their return, they were expected to write a report about the people they met to the Polish secret services⁴¹⁷. There is a clear difference between the level of ideological engagement among the reporters, that can most probably be explained by the fact that each visited India at a different point in time, in a different political context. Earlier visitors

⁴¹⁶ “Chwilowo jest jednak spokojnie, wsiądźmy więc w tramwaj, póki się jeszcze nie pali i pojedźmy na College Street, ulicę bukinistów, która jest terenem, gdzie podobno najłatwiej o spotkanie z kwiatem kalkuckich maoistów. Stragany na chodnikach i niezliczone klitkowane księgarenki zavalone są od góry do dołu literaturą, która z pewnością wywołałaby grymas odrazy na obliczu każdego funkcjonariusza CIA. Jest tam Engels, Stalin i Marks, trockiści i sekciarze ze wszystkich krajów i wszystkich epok międzynarodowego ruchu robotniczego. Jest Guevara i Regis Debray, są leżące obok siebie publikacje moskiewskich i pekińskich domów wydawniczych. Przeglądają je młodzi, na biało ubrani ludzie, obecni, niedoszli i byli studenci, których być może jutro lub pojutrze zobaczymy jak ciskają na stos pisma Gandhiego – ‘zdraycy w służbie angielskiego imperializmu’”(Chociłowski 127).

⁴¹⁷ As it happened with Kapuściński. The copies of his secret service reports can be found in Domosławski’s biography of the reporter.

were obviously more ideological, while later ones, like Chociłowski, preferred to avoid political topics.

Indian Economy: Central Planning vs. Private Capital

While most Western travel writers are interested in history, culture, everyday life, customs, and sometimes politics of a given country, socialist reporters go beyond this scope, often discussing economics, industrialisation and technological development. Since India adopted a mixed economic model, borrowing ideas of planned economy from the Soviet Union, but also reserving space for the private sector, it was vital for the reporters to discuss these solutions and their efficiency (or the lack thereof). Here, again, the reporters tend to underline the diversity and coexistence of different models. In Putrament's words,

India is not only a mosaic of languages, nationalities, races, religious beliefs, historical traditions – but also economic systems. Different states exist at various stages of development, ones close to the tribal system, others very close to contemporary capitalism. (*Cztery...* 153)⁴¹⁸

Indeed, it was puzzling for the reporters to see ultra-modern technology side-by-side elements of traditional village life. Żukrowski, for instance, visits a hydro power plant that provides electricity for all Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. The reporter remembers how proud was the engineer that guided them around the plant and how he encouraged the visitors to take pictures. “All of this was built after attaching Kashmir to India, [as] an investment of India in its own *Kresy*”⁴¹⁹, explains Żukrowski, hinting at an important political meaning of investing in a region disputed between India and Pakistan. Żukrowski is, however, surprised by the fact that

[j]ust behind the twentieth century, on a stone cliff – a hut, if one can call this way a shapeless block with no windows, with walls made of slate fixed with clay, a roof of muck, with weeds growing on top, and the smoke from the fire coming from inside. A woman in a reddish rag, crouching over the doorstep, picks out lice from her child's hair. (137)⁴²⁰

Actually, poverty neighbouring high technology is an image presented repeatedly by the reporters. Gołębiowski visits a large steel plant in Bhilai, and, still on the same day, he arrives to a village inhabited by a tribal community. “In the morning, I admired the huge blast furnaces,

⁴¹⁸ “India stanowi nie tylko mozaikę języków, narodowości, ras, wierzeń religijnych, tradycji historycznych – ale i systemów gospodarczych. Poszczególne ich stany żyją na rozmaitych stadiach rozwoju, jedne niedalekie ustroju plemiennego, inne bardzo bliskie współczesnego kapitalizmu” (Putrament, *Cztery...* 153).

⁴¹⁹ “To wszystko zostało zbudowane po przyłączeniu Kaszmiru, inwestycja Indii w swoje *Kresy*” (Żukrowski 137). The use of the word *Kresy* is significant, as it denotes the interwar territories in the east of Poland, which were during Second World War annexed by the Soviet Union, an action that led to massive deportations and forced migration. Poland, in its post-1945 shape, did not regain these territories, receiving formerly German lands in the West in exchange. A nostalgia about the lost *Kresy* would however last for decades to come, resurfacing especially after the end of communism in 1989.

⁴²⁰ “Ale tuż za wiekiem dwudziestym, na kamienistym upłazie – chałupa, jeśli tak można nazwać bryłę bez okien, ściany z łupku uszczelnionego gliną, dach z mierzwy, poroślej gęstwą zielska, dym ogniska wali przez drzwi. Kobieta w buraczkowych lachmanach iska dziecko, przycupnąwszy za progiem” (Żukrowski 137).

transporters and enormous cranes, while in the evening I watched arrows and the dance of a buffalo, sitting among people from a different epoch” (68)⁴²¹, he remarks. In his mind, the people with traditional lifestyles do not belong to twentieth century, they are almost frozen in time, acting as a reminder of a pre-industrial era. In most accounts, such belief in linear progress can be observed. This makes the reporters even more surprised to see traditional, or “primitive” communities, alongside examples of cutting-edge technology.

The reporters are convinced about the need for industrialisation and technological progress, overlooking the fact that it might be happening at the expense of people, community life, customs and traditions. For them, a modern power plant is worth more than the “dance of a buffalo”, practiced perhaps for centuries. The belief in fast-paced technological progress was undermined by such events as the 1984 Bhopal tragedy, during which poisonous gas leaked from a pesticide plant in Madhya Pradesh, causing thousands of deaths in the region. In recent years, too, many private and government investments cause controversy, as they are considered by activists as dangerous to local communities and natural environment⁴²². In their blind belief in industrialisation, the socialist reporters are also sceptical about ideas of self-reliance promoted by Gandhi (for instance the idea of producing one’s own clothes by weaving one’s own cloth - *khadi*). Gołębiowski even concludes that the idea of self-sufficiency only made sense in colonial times, and now it “ goes in favour of those who would like most to see India as a resource base for the industrialised West” (44-45)⁴²³.

Thus, the best choice for India, is – in the eyes of the reporters coming from communist Poland – a planned economy. Gołębiowski even thinks that it is an obvious and widely shared belief among Indians. He claims that “[a]part from a small group of right-wingers, who in their concepts did not go beyond the nineteenth-century idea of “freedom of economics”, actually nobody in India questions the legitimacy of economic planning and state’s role in the development of economics” (42)⁴²⁴. The same is also clear for Górnicki, who ponders on various economic models as well as on philosophical foundations of liberalism and socialism, and concludes his reflection in the following way:

The path of a classic capitalist development is closed for India; there is no doubt about that. The repetition of the entire cycle – from primitive accumulation through crises to a relatively

⁴²¹ “Rano podziwiałem wielkie piece, transportery i potężne suwnice, wieczorem zaś oglądałem łuki i taniec bawołu, siedząc wśród ludzi z innej epoki” (Gołębiowski 68).

⁴²² See, for instance, the nonfictional writings by Arundhati Roy.

⁴²³ “idą na rękę tym, którzy najchętniej widzieliby Indie jako surowcowe zaplecze uprzemysłowionego Zachodu” (Gołębiowski 44-45).

⁴²⁴ “Poza niezbyt liczną częścią prawicy, która w swych koncepcjach nie wyszła dotąd poza dziewiętnastowieczne wyobrażenia o ‘wolności gospodarki’, nikt właściwie nie kwestionuje w Indiach słuszności gospodarczego planowania i roli państwa w rozwoju ekonomiki”(Gołębiowski 42).

permanent prosperity – is now impossible. Capitalism ultimately lost its driving power for backward countries, it cannot guarantee their advancement neither as an economic system, nor as a financier [creditor]. . . Thus, India has only one path to choose: socialism. What socialism? The one without quotation marks, in any case. I do not think about empty slogans, or a “socialism” of Guy Mollet⁴²⁵ or Carlo Schmid, but of an actual, functioning system – the only one that in today’s world can ensure a fast progress, a dynamic of development, and a way out of the impasse. (195-196)⁴²⁶

Hence, the only economic model that would be beneficial to India, is – in Górnicki’s eyes – the centrally planned one. Any half-measures, or a socialism in quotation marks, will not be enough.

Janusz Gołębiowski is even less optimistic about the Indian economic model and Indian socialism as a whole. He notices that it does not bring expected results:

Because the range of the state’s influence on the dominating private-capitalist sector is minimal, the methods of [central] planning borrowed from socialist countries turn to be of little use. The concept of society construction according to the socialist model is undermined, furthermore, by the lack of a numerous radical reforms and by the insistent use of half-measures, while fundamental decisions are required. All this, as well as a traditional conservatism of the society and relatively weak influence of the organised left, makes the Indian “middle way” time and again stray to the sides. (47)⁴²⁷

Furthermore, Gołębiowski quotes after an Indian newspaper (presumably a leftist one), that the problem of Indian central planning lies in the contradiction between socialist aspirations and capitalist habits of Indian society (48). Another problem, in his view, is the rapid – and tolerated by the government – development of private trade and services, which are for the reporter an unwelcome phenomenon (49). Moreover, says Gołębiowski, although the assumptions of the five-year-plans were right, they did not bring about the expected result because of the “specifics

⁴²⁵ Guy Mollet (1905-1975) was a French socialist and prime minister in years 1956-1957, criticised, among others, for trying to regain control over the Suez Canal after its nationalisation by Nasser, and for his hardline policy towards Algeria. Carlo Schmid (1896-1979) was a German academic and Social Democratic Party politician, one of the founders of SPD. He was behind the reform in SPD as a result of which Marxist ideas were abandoned by Social Democrats. Thus, Górnicki considers these two politicians to be socialists only by name, and in reality – supporters of liberal democracy.

⁴²⁶ “Droga klasycznego rozwoju kapitalistycznego jest dla Indii zamknięta; co do tego nie ma wątpliwości. Powtórzenie całego cyklu - od pierwotnej akumulacji przez kryzysy do względnie trwałej prosperity – jest dziś niemożliwe. Kapitalizm utracił ostatecznie swą moc napędową dla krajów zacofanych, nie potrafi już zagwarantować im awansu ani jako system gospodarczy, ani jako finansista. . . Indie mają więc tylko jedną drogę do wyboru: socjalizm. Jaki socjalizm? Ten bez cudzysłowu, w każdym razie. Myślę nie o czcnych formułkach, czy ‘socjalizmie’ Guy Molleta czy Carlo Schmid [prawicowi socjaliści], lecz o faktycznym, funkcjonującym systemie – jedynym, jaki w dzisiejszym świecie potrafi zapewnić szybki postęp, dynamikę rozwojową, wyjście z impasu”(Górnicki 195-196).

⁴²⁷ “Ponieważ zakres oddziaływania państwa na dominujący sektor prywatno-kapitalistyczny jest minimalny, zapożyczone od krajów socjalistycznych metody planowania okazują się mało przydatne. Koncepcję budowy społeczeństwa na wzór socjalistyczny podważa ponadto brak szeregu radykalnych reform i nagminne stosowanie półśrodków tam, gdzie potrzebne są zasadnicze decyzje. Wszystko to oraz tradycyjny konserwatyzm społeczeństwa i stosunkowo słabe wpływy zorganizowanej lewicy sprawia, że indyjska ‘pośrednia droga’ coraz to skręca na manowce”(Gołębiowski 47).

of Indian political-economic model, which limits the efficiency of planning” (43)⁴²⁸ as well as the “meagre capabilities of the ruling Congress Party in implementing the most radical socio-economic programmes” (43). Clearly, the reporters believe (or are expected to demonstrate) that only truly socialist measures, based on a full control of the state on all sectors of economy, can lead to a successful outcome.

The problems in Indian economic model are illustrated on the example of a large, government project of a power plant. Jerzy Putrament, on his visit to the construction site of the plant in Barauni talks to the Polish engineers working there. The construction supervisor explains the problems that are caused by the clash of public and private interests. Big industrialisation projects are sponsored by the state, but executed by private companies. In order to increase their income, the companies pay their workers low wages, or even employ children to keep more money to themselves, says the engineer (*Na drogach...* 75). Public employees who supervise the construction earn far less than the private contractors, and as a result, are more vulnerable to pressures and easily corrupted. For this, both the anonymous engineer and the reporter blame the “two-sector economy” (75). Putrament concludes:

One thing is to tolerate small shopkeepers or craftsmen, but another thing is such an attempt at a symbiosis of large capitalist companies with the public sector. The experience of many countries teaches [us] that in the long run this becomes impossible: private capital has at its disposal many means of exerting pressure on social economy, on the psyche of public sector managers, and even on the public opinion. And the latter one [the public sector], with all its might, is sluggish, and as such, defenceless, like enormous lizards [dinosaurs] from Cretaceous period. (78-79)⁴²⁹

He finds that it would have been much more profitable for the government to form and employ state companies (78). This would be a solution based on those that were commonly adopted in countries of the Soviet Bloc, but – as the Polish example often proved – such model did not guarantee neither a trouble-free process of construction, nor high-quality outcomes. The poor quality of, for instance, the socialist-era residential buildings (*bloki*) remains a subject of jokes till this day⁴³⁰. Also, it is a widely acknowledged⁴³¹ fact that corruption and nepotism were

⁴²⁸ “specyfika gospodarczo-politycznego modelu Indii, ograniczająca skuteczność planowania, oraz skromne możliwości rządzącej Partii Kongresowej w zakresie realizowania radykalniejszych programów społeczno-gospodarczych” (Gołębiowski 43).

⁴²⁹ “Co innego tolerowanie drobnych sklepikarzy czy rzemieślników, co innego taka próba symbiozy wielkich kapitalistycznych spółek z sektorem państwowym. Doświadczenie bardzo wielu krajów uczy, że na dalszą metę staje się to niemożliwe: prywatny kapitał dysponuje bowiem wieloma środkami nacisku i na gospodarkę społeczną, i na psychikę kierowników sektora państwowego, i nawet na opinię publiczną. A ten drugi, przy całej swej potędze, jest nieruchawy i przez to bezbronny, jak ogromne jaszczury z epoki kredowej” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 78-79).

⁴³⁰ The poor quality of socialist blocks of flats became a running joke, even already in communist times, for instance in the super-popular 1980s series, “Alternatywy 4” [No. 4, Alternative Street], directed by Stanisław Bareja.

widespread in public sector companies in the Soviet Bloc (Childs 85). Finally, as it turned out just a few decades later, the socialist central planning led to economic crises and large international debt in all countries of the Eastern Bloc. The economic problems partly contributed to social and political unrest, which resulted in the fall of socialist governments in Central Europe, and soon after, to the collapse of Soviet Union as a whole.

Socialist Industrialisation in India: The Steel and the Rooster

Many hopes rested also on the development of modern industry, in Eastern Europe and in India alike. Giełżyński is convinced, for instance, that it is the only way of improving the fate of the poor (77). Upon his arrival to India, he notices that industrialisation is indeed growing, partly thanks to loans received from socialist countries (81). He stresses the role of the Soviet Union in the creation of the steel mill in Bhilai and the one in Bokaro. In Ranchi, says Giełżyński, a factory of heavy machinery and mining equipment was created, and in Sudamdih and Monidih Polish specialists assisted in digging coal mines (81). In fact, “[s]ome of the Indian factories use tools that provoke jealousy of the Polish engineers”⁴³¹, remarks Giełżyński (14). He also mentions that India has a nuclear power plant – something that seemed to him a proof of ultimate modernity, as Poland did not have any nuclear power plants.

Many reporters visit various sites of technological progress to witness that “socialist modernity” first hand. Ros is very clear about the reasons of his visit to Jamshedpur, the centre of the Tata Industries company: “To be honest, I was encouraged for this escapade by Karl Marx . . .” (251)⁴³². Putrament also passes through Jamshedpur and comments on Tata industries. He explains that Tata is well-known for his “paternalist” approach to employees, who get accommodation and some form of social welfare (*Na drogach...* 52). In the Indian context, among all the poverty and overpopulation of villages and underdeveloped industry, Tata industries are “sort of islands of relative order and well-being” (52)⁴³³. Nevertheless, Putrament stresses that precisely because of the general poverty it is profitable for Tata to be generous (52). His choices are important in the context of the “struggle of ideologies, struggle of concepts for the future of this huge country” (52), explains Putrament, and asks: “Socialism? Capitalism? And if the latter one, will it not be the most bountiful, most concentrated capitalism

⁴³¹ “Niekłóre z indyjskich fabryk posługujĄ się urzĄdzeniami, wzbudzajĄcymi zazdrość polskich inżynierów” (Giełżyński 14).

⁴³² “Prawdę mówiąc, do tej eskapady zachęcił mnie Karol Marks” (Ros 251).

⁴³³ “Na tle straszliwej nędzy przeludnionej wsi indyjskiej, na tle niedorozwiniętego przemysłu państwowego, przedsiębiorstwa Taty są jakby wysepkami względnego porzĄdku i dobrobytu” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 52).

à la Tata?” (52)⁴³⁴. To the Polish writer’s mind, the mere fact of allowing for such large private company to exist constitutes a threat that the Indian economic model will turn towards capitalism rather than towards socialism. Putrament is of the opinion that the workers of Tata will not further the communist cause if they are offered flats and welfare. This statement is obviously problematic: should poverty be preserved so that people become desperate and start a revolution? Putrament does not say that, but in the reporters’ descriptions of Kolkata, there is a sense of cynical hope that the dire circumstances in which people live will accelerate a radical change of system.

As one can find out from Ros’ account, the employees of state-owned industries show a considerable understanding for leftist ideas, or at least the reporter wants to believe so. He describes his visit to the Golden Rock Railway Workshop in Tamil Nadu. Apart from the technology, he is interested in the views of the workers and invites some of them to a local tea shop. The workers welcome him warmly and make toasts to Warsaw (344). “Here, they are the inquisitive listeners, wanting to find out as much as possible about the country and the system that is for them the symbol of equality between free individuals” (344)⁴³⁵. The new friends even accompany Ros to the train station, from which he starts his journey back to Poland. Ros is moved by their warmth and the emotional goodbyes. This farewell scene conveniently figures at the very end of the reporter’s account and it symbolises the brotherhood of socialist India and socialist Poland, through the unity of the working population.

Throughout his reportage, Ros tries to establish a link between the Indians that he interviews and his readers, bringing them together in the same cause, bound by the same wish for development and similar political ideas. It is also the aim of Górnicki and Gołębiowski, although they are less sure of whether India really can be defined a socialist country. Giełżyński, despite his calls for withholding judgment on other cultures or understanding different points of view, still draws a line between the European “us” and the Indian “them”. After finding out that at some construction sites of factories, sponsored through Soviet credits, children are employed, Giełżyński concludes: “[s]till, for us, people from Europe, especially from socialist countries, from Poland, it is difficult to accept many customs that one encounters there. It is particularly hard to close our eyes to the social relations, so contradictory with our ideals”

⁴³⁴ “I choć jedno z drugim jest najściślej związane, choć ‘szeroki gest’ Taty opłaca mu się właśnie na tle i na koszt nędzy ogólnej, gra to określoną rolę w walce idei, walce koncepcji przyszłości tego ogromnego kraju. Socjalizm? Kapitalizm? A jeśli już ten ostatni, to czasem czy nie najbujniejszy, najsilniej skoncentrowany kapitalizm *à la Tata?*” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 52).

⁴³⁵ “Tu oni są dociekliwymi słuchaczami, chcącymi dowiedzieć się jak najwięcej o kraju i ustroju, który jest dla nich symbolem sprawiedliwości panującej między wolnymi ludźmi” (Ros 344).

(20)⁴³⁶. Thus, for the reporter, even though India can boast about its industrialisation and technological development, these do not go hand-in-hand with cultural modernity.

The contrast between modern industrialisation and traditional culture is perhaps best illustrated by Jerzy Ros. After his visit in one of the industrial sites, Ros notices people watching a rooster fight. He treats this image as a metaphor of India:

Steel and roosters – this is also India. For many years only the colourful, rooster-like exotic of this enormous country would be seen. Now, some would like to see here only iron. But the life and the truth of this country means that roosters fight at the threshold to large factories, in which steel is melted. (260)⁴³⁷

Through this metaphor, Ros suggests to the readers that neither an Orientalist view is a correct one, nor an exaggerated belief in modern technology. What defines India, he seems to say, is the contrast between the two, the exotic and the industrial.

Indian Socialism or the “Third Way”?

There are two types of modernity to which the reporters refer: the traces of colonial, British-made modernity, as well as a socialist modernity, along the Soviet model. They assess the first, colonial model of modernity in a definitely negative way, while they idealise the Soviet one, presenting it as a solution to all India’s problems. While Putrament is more radical in their view of socialism, and critical of Nehru’s “incomplete” introduction of socialist reforms, Górnicki and Gołębiowski at least attempt at presenting a more balanced view. Despite the reporters’ insistence on promoting socialism, at various points of their accounts they underline India’s specificity and the need for India to create its own model of development. They believe that a middle path is possible and try to switch perspectives to allow the reader to look from a different point of view, from an Indian one. Górnicki, for instance, says the following:

What gives the European visitor the right to arbitrarily judge this country? Statistics. 1440 calories per day, 360 million of illiterate, a standstill, thus regress. That is true. But where is it stated that for instance 3500 calories per day brings happiness? That the ability to read, some shoes and shirt, a television and a car, a house with air conditioning, a freezer, and finally 2,000 dollars of national income per capita, like in USA, rather than 70, like in India – that all of this

⁴³⁶ “A jednak nam, ludziom z Europy, zwłaszcza z krajów socjalistycznych, z Polski, trudno przystać na wiele zwyczajów, które się tam spotyka. Trudno przede wszystkim przymknąć oczy na stosunki społeczne, tak bardzo sprzeczne z naszymi ideałami” (Giełżyński 20).

⁴³⁷ “Stal i koguty – to też Indie. Przez długie lata widziano tylko barwną kogucią egzotykę tego wielkiego kraju. Teraz niejeden chciałby tu widzieć tylko żelazo. Ale życie i prawda tego kraju polega na tym, że koguty walczą na progu wielkich zakładów, w których przetapia się stal.”(Ros 260)

guarantees a fullness of humanity? On the contrary, the experiences of the wealthy societies of the West seem to negate these general beliefs. (193)⁴³⁸

As an example of these problems in the West, Górnicki mentions depressions, anxieties, the chase after money in the West (as if India or the countries of the Soviet-controlled sphere were free from those problems). He also challenges the ideas of contemporary “fashionable philosophers” (136), who do not believe in the idea of progress and, allegedly, think that political activism brings new grievances and new conflicts. He admits that there might be some truth in these statements, but by and large, he disagrees with them. He is of the opinion that such beliefs are professed mostly in Western Europe and America, by those who – presumably – do not know the reality of other countries around the globe. “As for me”, says Górnicki, “I think that if believers in such ideas came to Telangana, they would understand this simple truth, so hard to disseminate: that at the core, only one thing is immoral – the failure to act” (136)⁴³⁹. Górnicki is thus critical of Western ideas, presenting them as Eurocentric and detached from global problems. He also underlines the Westerners’ indifference to other peoples’ suffering, which is conveniently contrasted in various points of the book with the remarks on Soviet aid to India. In this way, the readers are presented with a biased image of a rich, but selfish capitalist West and a less rich, but helpful socialist East. Certainly, India was politically closer to the Soviet Union than to United States in times of the Cold War, but American aid was actually more extensive (throughout 1950s and 1960s, half of the foreign aid provided to India came from US)⁴⁴⁰. Even though Górnicki expresses his criticism of Indian politicians, for not undertaking sufficient reforms (for instance, allowing for the existence of princely states and failing to introduce a radical land reform across the country), he is aware that India is a non-aligned state. Although he would recommend a more decisive turn to the left, the reporter respects India’s subjectivity and independence.

It also is the case with Gołębiowski, who is well-aware of the fact that India does not conform to the binary division imposed by the Cold War order. In his first chapter, he presents different views on India prevalent in the Polish society, only to conclude that both are wrong: India is neither an exotic land straight of colonial tales, nor a staunchly communist nation, “tool

⁴³⁸ “Co uprawnia przybyśca z Europy do arbitralnych sądów o tym kraju? Statystyki. 1440 kc na dobę, 360 milionów analfabetów, zastój, a więc regres. To prawda. Ale gdzie jest powiedziane, że na przykład 3500 kc dziennie przynosi szczęście? Że umiejętność czytania, buty i koszula, telewizor i samochód, dom z klimatyzacją, zamrażalnik, wreszcie 2 tys dolarów dochodu narodowego na głowę, jak w USA, zamiast 70, jak w Indiach – że to wszystko gwarantuje pełnię człowieczeństwa? Raczej odwrotnie, doświadczenia zasobnych społeczeństw Zachodu zdają się przeczyć tym obiegowym sądom” (Górnicki 193).

⁴³⁹ “Co do mnie, myślę, że gdyby tak ich wyznawcy przyjechali do Telangany, pojęliby tę prostą, a tak opornie rozprzestrzeniającą się prawdę: że w gruncie rzeczy niemoralne jest tylko jedno – zaniechanie działania” (Górnicki 136).

⁴⁴⁰ See: Siddiqui 46.

of Moscow” as the Americans would like to present it (10). He criticises the fact that the Polish – socialist – take on India was excessively optimistic, and too much credence was given to the political statements that had no reflection in reality. Consequently, another false image of India was formed: “[a]n image of a huge, revolutionary country, which, after throwing off the chains of colonial domination, entered its own, fascinating path towards socialism” (12)⁴⁴¹. This is not a full picture, says Gołębiowski, and many attempts at describing it may result in simplifications and superficial opinions, given India’s scale, its complexity and diversity (16). The reporter encourages the readers to take all these factors in mind and abstain from easy categorisations. This, in itself, is already a step forward to a new narrative, which allows a more balanced and less ideological view. Logically, if one followed this argumentation, neither Western or socialist modernity would be fully applicable to India, as it would be up to Indians themselves to decide about what kind of modernity they expect.

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The socialist modernity project appeared as an attractive alternative to the capitalist one, but, as history demonstrated, it did not succeed. It lost its appeal in political and cultural terms, especially when “world intelligentsia” became disillusioned in the USSR (Zubok 5). “The Soviet Union during the Brezhnev zastoï (stagnation) became boring and futureless for Western intellectuals – a verdict more terrible and damning than the verdicts of the historian Robert Conquest and the dissident writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.” (5). The planned economy proved not to be the most sustainable economic system, leaving countries of the Soviet Bloc heavily in debt. Finally, the Soviet feeling of superiority eventually appeared to be hollow, letting show an inferiority complex towards the West⁴⁴². Nevertheless, Western capitalist modernity proved problematic too, given the growing radical nationalisms, the lack of democratic control over global business, the increasing surveillance and decreasing privacy of the citizens, the destruction of natural environment by industry, technology, people and excessive consumptionism. The crisis of these two models of modernity lead to a widespread doubt about modernity as a whole and to questions whether we live now in a post-modern, rather than modern, age, full of doubt towards any political and economic models altogether.

⁴⁴¹ “Był to wizerunek wielkiego rewolucyjnego kraju, który po zrzuceniu pęt kolonialnego panowania wkroczył na własną, fascynującą drogę do socjalizmu” (Gołębiowski 12).

⁴⁴² See Ilija Ehrenburg’s quote “Unending talk about one’s superiority is linked with grovelling before things foreign – they are but different aspects of an inferiority complex” (David-Fox 21)

CONCLUSIONS

The key assumption of this book was to determine whether Polish accounts on India can serve as a showcase of a particular type of Orientalism which can be called a “Socialist Orientalism”. That kind of Orientalism was a product of a specific time, political system and cultural context. It had some common characteristics of the Western European Orientalism, but also it shared some traits of the Soviet Orientalism and its belief in introducing Soviet-style modernisation among the “backward” Third World countries. Texts of travel reportage display in particularly interesting manner a variety of representations of the Indian Other and the use of Orientalist tropes. This fact justifies the selection of such primary material and gives reason to assume that a further analysis of travel reportage from a wider spectrum of countries could lead to even deeper understanding of mutual perceptions between Eastern Europe and the “Far East”.

Many scholars agree that travel writing is a genre that showcases in a particularly evident way various forms of Western (American and European) objectification of other cultures (Pratt; Clifford; Youngs; Lisle; Said). Mary Louise Pratt even talks about “Euroimperialism” of travel writing and its strategies of creating support to the expansionist enterprises through interpreting and subjugating the “rest of the world” (4-5). Travel accounts were often tools with which the colonial states created an image of a different culture which placed that culture in an inferior position. This legitimised their intervention to – supposedly – help that culture, or in other words, their “civilising mission”, and, by extension, their political and economic domination. If considered as envoys from the metropolis, travellers served at best as cultural intermediaries, and at worst, as frontrunners and promoters of a colonial enterprise. As a result, certain patterns, clichés and modes of representing Others became prevalent in European collective perception of “the rest of the world”. Even when the colonial era came to an end, travel writing maintained its dubious tradition of Othering. In the words of Debbie Lisle, “travel writers continue to secure their privileged position by categorising, critiquing and passing judgement on less-civilised areas of the world” (3). Nevertheless, if travel writers of the postcolonial age reproduce colonial and Orientalist tropes, they are restructured and repositioned in a contemporary setting, and thus assume new forms and expressions.

In this book, travel accounts highlight a hybrid form of Orientalism, which partly draws on well-known clichés originating in the colonial era, and partly on the political ideology of their time. Although they claim to introduce a fresh, unbiased, and well-intentioned perspective, they often willingly or unwillingly reproduce the Orientalist tropes of their Western European

predecessors. The narrators of these travel accounts are not tourists, vacationers or adventurers, who decide to share the impressions of their journey. They are not fiction writers, seeking new insights through the means of travel as a metaphor for transgressing one's boundaries and facing the unknown. Their travel is an official one, planned, controlled and also limited by the institutions of the state that have sent them to India. As such, they are not entirely free in the way they recount their journey and in the way they represent India. Interestingly, they have one point in common with the accounts of the colonial era: the fact that, like in nineteenth century, travel opportunities were limited for most people, and as a result, the travel writer became an intermediary between the larger public and the wider world. Despite technological progress and new possibilities for international mobility in the post-war era, in the Soviet Bloc, the authorities' full control over the right to such mobility made it *de facto* as difficult for an ordinary person to travel, as it was, for instance, for an ordinary person in Victorian times.

Because of that fact, the adoption of a particular timeframe – the communist period – and a particular local context – Poland – allows to investigate a different dimension of travel writing. In this incarnation, travel writing appears as travel reportage. Reportage is a journalistic genre and as such it differs from travel writing in its scope and style. Furthermore, reportage has a tradition of being socially or politically engaged, exposing a variety of issues and forcing the readers to rethink their position on these problems. Travel reportage can thus be considered as a subgenre of travel writing (and a subgenre of reportage), but it is often less personal than travelogues and it explores larger issues than the journey itself⁴⁴³. As such, it is a particularly relevant type of writing for an analysis of social and political discourses.

Travel writing from the communist period is a convenient vehicle of such discourses, because it displays a particular relationship, which is often overlooked by postcolonial studies. It is the relationship between the so-called Second World and Third World. While postcolonial studies focus on the interactions between the metropolis and the colony, the interaction between the Soviet-dominated states and the former colonies transcends a simple structure of coloniser's hegemony over the colonised. Travel writing from communist Poland, itself a satellite state of the Soviet Union, about India, a recently decolonised, non-aligned, but left-leaning country, presents a more complicated structure of power. On the one hand, the communist traveller, like any European traveller to India, reproduces the tropes of power and control over the foreign land and objectifies it through his gaze. On the other hand, he claims to present a fresh perspective, based on the ideological principles of equality and internationalism in a socialist

⁴⁴³ In fact, many examples of travel writing in English would be, in the Polish context, considered to be travel reportages. For instance, this would be the case with travel accounts by William Dalrymple or Colin Thubron.

spirit. However, he is not free – he is also subjugated to the power machine of the communist state, which decides who should be allowed to have a voice and what kind of message this voice can spread. The interplay between the communist ideology and the old Orientalist tropes is thus characteristic to travel writing of that period.

Poland and India were two countries chosen as examples of such type of writing. Their respective histories and political lines are one reason, but another is the long history of their mutual contacts. Even in times of political turmoil, partitions of the Polish state and shaky independence, there were travellers who visited India and wrote about it. Both countries also have an interesting cultural location. Poland, throughout its history, was always thorn between the East and the West, and it was always occupying a liminal position on the map of Europe. India, too, witnessed exchanges and clashes of various cultures: between numerous cultures coexisting on the Subcontinent, but also the cultures of India's visitors and invaders – the Greek, the Persians, the Moghuls, the British... Hence, both countries make excellent cases for studies on collective identities, colonial/postcolonial structures of power and cultural representations.

There are even analogies in the trajectories of Indian and Polish history. The battle of Plassey (1757), which led to the establishment of East India Company's rule in India almost coincided with the first Polish partition in 1772. Throughout nineteenth century, both India and Poland were under foreign domination. In both places, there were major armed rebellions against the colonial oppressors (1857 in India, 1863 in Poland). Finally, Poland gained independence in 1918, around the same time that Gandhi arrived to India and gave a new push to the Indian independence movement. The Polish traumas of the Second World War and the following change of borders, resulting in forced resettlements of millions of people, coincided with India's involvement in the war and the trauma of the Indian Partition. Finally, both countries began their affair with socialism at a similar time, India in a voluntary, while Poland in an imposed manner, to also end it at the break of 1980s and 1990s. While the scale of events in India – a huge country and an old culture – cannot match the Polish one, it is striking how the experiences of the respective countries run in parallel.

Finally, another reason for selecting Polish travel accounts on India and not on any other country, was that India has always been very strongly present in European discourses. Europeans' representations of India were rich and diverse, including various depictions of Indian mysticism as well as those of poverty and backwardness. These clichés affected the travellers from communist Poland too, even though they tried to avoid stereotypes. However, these clichés were complemented by a very particular worldview, the socialist one. It involved a belief in progress and technology, the abolition of class (and caste) divisions, the

secularisation and the fight with “superstitions”. The Polish reporters travelling to India were, in a way, emissaries of this “socialist modernity”, and as such, they opposed all that was linked with tradition, understood as the embodiment of backwardness and an obstacle to development. However, their rejection of tradition was not very different from a colonial view that India’s “backwardness” clashes with the modernity that the British were trying to implement. Similar strategies of exoticisation, debasement, objectification or naturalisation, found in colonial writing, can be observed in the Polish accounts⁴⁴⁴. Thus, labelling the Polish travel reporters’ discourse on India as “Socialist Orientalism” seems appropriate.

Summary of Chapters

The first chapter began with an overview on Orientalism as a discourse of the West – a term referring to Europe and North America – in the understanding of Edward Said. While Said was not the first, nor the only one to question how the Orient is constructed in the Western imagination, his analysis remains one of the most influential texts pertaining to this issue. Although he was criticised by various representatives of academia – most prominently by Orientalists and historians – his attempt at providing a wide range of diverse examples that together form Orientalist discourse was a successful one and his work is now considered as a classic reference for academics. Scholars of postcolonial studies took his work further, providing even more examples of the workings of Orientalist discourse in various disciplines and various geographical contexts. Polish academics, too, found the notion of Orientalism useful, both in the way the West perceives Poland, recurring to well-known stereotypes on everything “Eastern”, and in the way Polish texts of culture objectify and use cliché images of other cultures, whether located just beyond the Eastern fringes of Poland, or farther to the East, or South-East: in the historical Levant and South Asia. India features prominently among cultures Orientalised by Westerners, who invariably focused on its spirituality, often fascinated with India’s alleged “mysticism”. Another common cliché on India is that its society is divided in castes, and this social order is perceived as the main characteristics of the country. Indeed, different elements of Indian culture, thought and spirituality became of interest to Europeans and a large body of works, from travel accounts to philosophical works, is a heritage of this fascination.

In the second chapter, the different representations of India in European and particularly Polish discourses are discussed. The Polish presence in India dates back to the times of Vasco

⁴⁴⁴ Some of these strategies are studied by Spurr.

da Gama's arrival – Vasco was greeted by a Polish Jew who lived in India already for many years before the Portuguese set sail to India. Through the centuries, many Polish travellers visited India and their accounts can be read till this day. But India's thought was present in Poland not only through travellers, but through the work of Orientalists – or Indologists – as well as through Western European thinkers who would discuss concepts of Indian philosophy in their works. Polish intellectuals were also affected by this scholarship and philosophical discussions. As a result, several generations of poets and writers were inspired by Indian thought, among them such famous figures as Adam Mickiewicz or Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy). In early twentieth century, when travel abroad became more widespread, many Poles visited India, some even settled there, like Wanda Dynowska. Furthermore, India offered refuge to Polish children rescued from Soviet Union, and other Poles fleeing the destructive force of the Second World War. When the war ended, Poland became – unwillingly – part of the Soviet Bloc. This book focussed on accounts of reporters that visit India precisely in that period – from late 1950s to the end of 1970s.

The texts analysed in this study belong to the wide category of travel writing on the one hand, and of reportage, on the other. Both travel writing and reportage are nonfictional genres with long traditions – one rooted in documentary prose, memoirs and travel journals, and the other originating from journalism. While travel writing is a genre widely discussed in Anglophone academia, Polish academic works on the topic are not as numerous. However, travel writing has long traditions in Poland. Reportage, on the other hand, is a more recent genre, which became popular in twentieth century, both in Poland and abroad. From its beginnings, it was linked with leftist agenda, as it aimed at portraying various sections of society and at presenting the view of those who do not usually have a voice. Indeed, after the Russian revolution, the Bolsheviks preferred realism to fiction and reportage gained a new appreciation in countries with communist regimes. Nevertheless, what the history of reportage in Poland demonstrates, since reportage traditionally took the side of the oppressed, in a communist state, too, it became a vehicle of resistance, expressing, in veiled terms, a critique of the system and of the authorities.

The analysis of texts of the 1950s, 60s and 70s demonstrates that travel reporters were less inclined to contest the communist regime than their colleagues writing about domestic issues. While it is difficult to define the real views of the reporters visiting India, it is clear that one of the conditions for them to travel abroad was their loyalty to the communist state. Dissenting views are rare in the analysed reportages, as the reporters either used self-censorship, or they would be removed by the actual censorship bureau. Furthermore, many intellectuals

actually believed in communism in the first decades of the new system, despite the terror of the Stalinist years. Ros' reportage, for instance, demonstrates a rather genuine belief in socialism as a tool to bring equality and advancement for the least privileged. Jerzy Putrament, highly placed in the hierarchy of the communist regime, was also, as if by default, a proponent of socialism and as part of the establishment, identified with the idea of promoting the socialist model in other countries. Other reporters represent different degrees of politicisation, some expressing their views openly (Górnicki), and some avoiding political matters as much as possible (Koehler, Chociłowski). Certainly, the political regime in Poland assumed different forms and practiced different policies throughout this period, there are, however, similar trends in all the accounts analysed here. The close reading of primary texts revealed what are the similarities and differences among the reporters describing India: the results of such analysis can be found in chapters four, five and six.

Chapter three focuses on the reporter – the actual author of the text, as well as the reporter's figure presented in the text. If the discussion on the reporter and his work was to be placed in a wider context, three famous Poles come to mind: the most famous Polish author of reportages, Ryszard Kapuściński; equally well-known Bronisław Malinowski, anthropologist; and finally, a celebrated writer, Joseph Conrad. This trio of Poles famous abroad, connected by their interest in Otherness and their experience of living in different cultures, is exemplary of the different roles that a reporter must assume. On the one hand, he (or she) is a journalist, a foreign correspondent, focussed on truthfully representing what they observe to the readers in the home country – like Kapuściński. On the other hand, a reporter is like an anthropologist that has to study and understand a different culture, through first-hand observation and participation – like Malinowski. Finally, a reporter needs to relate his/her observations in writing, in a lively and interesting language, in order to make it an attractive and insightful read for the general public – like a fiction writer, here exemplified by Joseph Conrad. Of course, reporters succeed at these tasks differently, just as their models do (all three, Kapuściński, Malinowski and Conrad, at some points of time were subjects of controversies or critiques).

All reporters whose works are analysed here declare that they want to present India differently than their predecessors. Some of them confess that the India of their imagination is not the same as the India that they experienced in reality. Indeed, given that a large part of their knowledge was based on sources that Said would qualify as Orientalist, their image of India was full of “Oriental riches”, snake charmers and mysticism. What was then their reaction to what they have seen upon their arrival to India? In his notes, published in several volumes of *Lapidaria*, Ryszard Kapuściński reflects on reportage and travel, and enumerates various

reactions to what is perceived a different, “inferior” culture (in an Eurocentric understanding): first reaction results in a didactic attitude, in which the visitor acts like a teacher, treating the Other like a child; second, is an “aristocratic” attitude, which is manifested in underlining one’s own superiority, a cold and contemptuous approach to the Other; third, is the “ironic-mocking” attitude that means treating the Other as the object of satire, as someone funny and silly; fourth, is the “aggressive domination” attitude (marked by hatred, maliciousness, anger), fifth, is resignation, which ensues an acceptance of the Other in the way they are, but still treating him/her as inferior; sixth – a benevolent approach (slightly paternalistic, but friendly), and seventh – the partner position, which assumes that the Other is someone equal to us (*Lapidarium* III, 114-115)⁴⁴⁵. When observing the attitudes of reporters visiting India, a mix of approaches can be identified. The attitude of “aggressive domination” is practically absent, as the reporters by and large declare their positive approach. Nevertheless, although Polish reporters attempt at presenting themselves as equal to Indians (claiming to adopt a partner attitude), in reality, their attitudes vary. Their didactic and prescriptive tone is often discernible, as well as their irony and mockery. At times, resignation overwhelms the reporters, since they feel that much will not change in the Indian society and attempts at “modernising” are futile. Finally, their benevolence is often lined with a feeling of paternalist superiority.

The following chapters explore more in depth how the reporters see India. In a rather stereotypical fashion, India is presented as a “land of contrasts”, in which tradition and modernity clash or coexist. Chapter four focuses on the elements that the reporters categorise as traditions, or elements belonging to the past. They are centred around the concept of religion and spirituality, as well as their manifestations in rituals and customs. In order to analyse the reporters’ perceptions of these concepts, several case studies are presented. First, the notion of the “holy cow”, to this day probably one of the images most frequently associated with India; second, the presence of “naked gurus”, or renouncers, whose appearance is considered by foreigners as bizarre or even repulsive; and third, the *loci* of spirituality – holy places, temples, and pilgrimage sites. It results from this chapter that even though the reporters declare to be

⁴⁴⁵ “Możliwe postawy w zetknięciu z inną, „niższą” kulturą:

- postawa belferska (pouczanie, traktowanie innego jako dziecka),
- postawa arystokratyczna (podkreślanie własnej wyższości, chłodny, pogardliwy stosunek do innego),
- postawa ironiczno-kpiarska (traktowanie innego jako obiektu satyry, jako pajaca, jako półgłówka),
- postawa dominacji agresywnej (nacechowana nienawiścią, złośliwością, wściekłością),
- postawa rezygnacji (akceptowanie innego takim, jakim jest, jednak z przekonaniem, że jest niższy),
- postawa życzliwości (trochę paternalistyczna, ale serdeczna),
- postawa partnerska (przyjmowanie innego jako równego sobie.”

Excerpt From: Ryszard Kapuściński. “Lapidarium II.” iBooks. 114-115

objective and neutral observers, they harbour rather strong emotions when exposed to these manifestations of difference. In that, they are not very different from the Orientalists, many of whom tried at least to understand the spiritual rationale behind the religious practices. However, there is another reason for their criticism of all things religious: a Marxist-based rejection of religion as such. Indeed, their criticism of pilgrimage places, for instance, is to some extent a criticism of Catholic pilgrimages in their home country. This transfer of criticism of Catholicism on the Indian ground is one of the propagandist aspects of travel reportage: it encourages the Polish readers to see religion as a relic of the past, as an expression of ignorance and irrationality.

The other element of Indian tradition that the reporters focus on is the idea of caste, explored in chapter five. Presented as the main organising principle in Indian society, it is – as can be expected – condemned by reporters, who promote the idea of equality. Nevertheless, their view of caste is somewhat simplistic, treating caste structure as parallel to class structure. The critique of caste discrimination is not only declarative, but also performative: reporters take actions that contradict the logic of caste. They either engage in heated discussions with Indians (Górnicki) or make a point to talk to underprivileged sections of society (Ros, Żukrowski, Gołębiowski), and to represent their worldview and interests. They show compassion and solidarity, and they appeal to the readers' emotions. Often, they are embarrassed and confused by the fact that as foreigners, they are treated similarly to other Westerners – sometimes with reverence, but often with distance and diffidence, as intruders. Their attempts at establishing a connection with people of lower classes is not always successful: for instance, the rickshaw pullers or leather workers that Ros was approaching were confused and intimidated, not knowing why the reporter takes such deep interest in their life. Some reporters, for instance Giełżyński, although deploring caste discrimination, seemed actually rather satisfied with their special status of a foreign guest. Another common reaction to the caste system is resignation: Chociłowski, for instance, is aware that although caste divisions are an unwelcome phenomenon, it is a long-lasting custom and it will not change overnight. Although the reporters demonstrate their solidarity with people of lower caste and class, their attitude remains somewhat paternalist. With a certain superiority, they seem to suggest that caste is linked to ignorance and underdevelopment, expressing a belief along evolutionary lines that these traditional customs will be eradicated once India achieves a higher level of development (which, they presume, their home country already achieved).

Finally, the last chapter reveals how the reporters describe the India of their times, commenting on politics, economy and social issues. Although they underline the fact that by

remaining non-aligned, India has chosen the “third way”, they advocate for more socialist measures to be taken, taking countries of the Soviet Bloc as an example. Among the aspects of Indian modernity that the reporters describe are the visible traces of colonialism: they manifest themselves in urban life, social relations, privileges to princes and maharajas, and in racist attitudes. It is predictable that reporters from communist Poland would be critical of colonialism, but once again, this criticism goes beyond commenting on the past subjugation. In fact, the reporters try to portray America, Soviet Union’s rival, as a direct continuator of the British Empire, planning to exert influence over India and eventually subjugate it as well. Here, too, the reporters seem to appeal to their Polish readers and present America – which, despite propaganda’s efforts, was deemed to be a “promised land” for many Poles – in a negative light. In contrast, Soviet Union is presented as a benevolent and helpful state, which imparts its know-how with India, perceived as a fellow traveller, and offers financial assistance for the industry development. The reporters’ take on Indian politics is also peculiar: the problems that Indian leaders have to tackle – poverty, social and economic inequality, or the dissent from the opposition – can only be explained in two ways: either they result from colonialism, or from insufficient socialism. In many instances, the reporters blame Nehru for hesitating to copy the Soviet solutions: land reform (Górnicki), silencing the opposition (Putrament), control over the media (Putrament), no religious sentiments and efficiency in handling the “cow issue” (Giełżyński) etc. In fact, Putrament believes that India, as a “backward” country, should introduce more drastic measures, even possibly a form of dictatorship. In this way, he demonstrates his superiority and belief that Indian society is in some way inferior, if reform has to be introduced by force. Clearly, he also does not understand the values that made Gandhi and Nehru such popular leaders, specifically – the idea of non-violence. Other reporters are more aware of Indian thought and cultural heritage and they try to describe them to their readers, nevertheless, by and large, they do keep a somewhat Orientalist frame of mind. Their descriptions of India’s modernity are often accompanied by references to “Oriental decorations” or “exotic looks”, and they often describe Indians as irrational, immature, or fanatical. The blend of these long-lived clichés and socialist propaganda seem to be a version of Orientalism typical in Poland of that time, and perhaps in other countries of the Soviet Bloc as well – a Socialist Orientalism.

Central European Socialist Orientalism, or Anti-Orientalism

Central Europe, home to a plethora of national and ethnic groups, languages and religions, is itself an excellent case to study Orientalist, colonial, postcolonial (and post-Soviet)

discourses. Many of its inhabitants were at both ends of the equation: as those who dominated over smaller groups or minorities, and as those that were the object of their imperial neighbours' expansionist policies. Central Europe was also Orientalised in Western European accounts (Wolff), as its underdeveloped, wild and immature younger cousin. Central Europeans themselves were often unsure of their place on the European map, at times leaning East, and at times West. Although Central European states did not possess any colonies themselves (if, at all, they were lucky to have their own state), many individuals, educated at Western European universities, well-read in colonial literature, would be exposed to a colonial worldview. Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, Slovaks – they were also students of Orientalist departments, both in the empires of which they were part, and in other academic centres across Europe. Róbert Gáfrik, in his paper on “Representations of India in Slovak Travel Writing during the Communist Regime”, mentions several famous Central European Indologists and Orientalists: starting from the Hungarian Csoma Korösi Sándor (1784-1842), founder of Tibetan studies, the Czech Sanskrit scholar Moriz Winternitz (1863-1937), and ending with the linguist Anna Rácová (1946-), who was, till recently, practically the only Slovak Indologist (286-287). The traditions of Polish Orientology and Indology were also very strong (as it was discussed earlier, in Chapter 1). Apart from academic study of Sanskrit and India in general, among many literary cultures of Central Europe, there was an interest in Indian thought and spirituality. According to Gáfrik, the key figures of the Slovak national revival movement, Ján Holly (1785-1849) and Ján Kollár (1793-1852) romanticised about India as the “homeland of the Slavs” (287). The romantic perception of India was followed by a realist, or indeed, a socialist realist one.

In his article, Gáfrik analyses a travel account from India by Miloš Ruppeltdt, who served as *chargé d'affaires* at the Czechoslovak embassy in Delhi from 1949-1951. There are many similarities between his account, titled *India, krajina davnych mudrosti [India the Land of Ancient Wisdom]* (1956), and the reportages analysed in this book. Ruppeltdt frequently criticises the colonial rule, and like his Polish counterparts, “wages the Cold War on the pages of his book” (Gáfrik 290). In his view, while the British were the villains of the past, Americans are the villains of the present (290). Ruppeltdt, like the Polish visitors to India, is particularly interested in the local communist movement and its attempts to bring India out of its “backwardness” (290). Furthermore, according to Gáfrik, the travel writer's interpretations of key aspects of Indian tradition – caste, religion, Oriental despotism etc. – is “vulgar Marxist” (290). Another travel account analysed by Gáfrik is Dušan Kerný, who published his book *India nie je dal'eko [India Isn't Far Away]* in 1974, displays similar tendencies as the Polish travel reportages from the same period. Like Górnicki and Gołębiowski, Kerný focuses on West

Bengal and Kerala, where communists have won elections, and praises the prospects that socialist modernity would bring to India (290-291).

Gáfrik mentions two other travel accounts from India, but he classifies them as neo-romantic, given that they were not focussing on political aspects, exalting India's culture instead. He analyses the accounts by Elena Androvičová, *Od Himaláji po Cejlón* [*From the Himalayas to Ceylon*] from 1978 and *India, černo-biely kontrapunkt* [*India, a Black and White Counterpoint*] from 1984. Androvičová's travelogues are different than the ones of her predecessors and offers a less ideological view, except of occasional references to communism, Marx and the Soviet Union. Gáfrik categorises them as "mere decorative flourishes which were necessary for the book to pass the communist censorship" (294). In spite of her initial shock related to India's poverty and the surrounding dirt, Androvičová eventually finds the country "fabulous", explores Hindu spirituality, and learns yoga (294). Her account has probably no counterpart among the reportages selected for this study: while Polish travellers occasionally exoticised or aestheticized India, it would be difficult to see them as neo-romantic.

Gáfrik separates the Slovak travel accounts from the communist period into two categories: socialist and neo-romantic ones. He concludes that because of the fact that they presented a belief that socialism will once become prevalent in the Third World, the Second World merely helping in this inevitable process, the discourse of these accounts can be considered as a form of latent colonialism (298). Even the neo-romantic travel accounts are part of this process, as in Gáfrik's view, they are filtered through the communist viewpoint (298). While his analysis is an interesting one and offers a perspective into the Slovak travel writing, it does not take into account the possibility of these two strategies intertwining in the same account, like it happens in many Polish reportages. This book asserts that it is precisely the contradiction between the declared belief in socialist viewpoint and the Orientalist, romanticising/patronising perception of India that makes the analysis of such texts worthwhile.

Another insight into Czechoslovak writing from the communist period, 1950s in particular, is offered by Martin Slobodnik in his article: "Socialist Anti-Orientalism: Perceptions of China in Czechoslovak Travelogues from the 1950s". A rapprochement between Czechoslovakia and the People's Republic of China resulted in an intensified cultural cooperation. Consequently, a number of Czechoslovak writers and journalists were sent to China on a mission to describe the country and its inhabitants, in order to bring the two nations closer. Slobodnik observes that the travelogues from these state-sponsored trips, written by pro-regime writers or reporters, were a tool of the communist propaganda (301). He specifies that these trips were carefully organised and monitored by the local authorities, and foreign visitors

were not allowed to leave the group, change the schedule, or plan any individual tours. Even though the Czech and Slovak travellers described the local population, especially the so-called progressive classes, in fact they had practically no opportunities for spontaneous interactions with the ordinary Chinese (304-305). Like in some of the Polish reportages from India, the tone of the Czechoslovak accounts is often didactic and its goal is to familiarise the readers at home with the developments in the “New China” (305). The Chinese were presented as fellow travellers, socialist brothers, with whom the Czechs and the Slovaks should feel in solidarity (306). The authors of the accounts contrast China’s past and the oppression of the poor in the previous era of the Kuomintang, with the benefits and successes resulting from the introduction of the communist system in the country (309). Slobodnik’s points on Czechoslovak travel accounts from China and their ideological character could well be applied on Polish accounts from India. However, Slobodnik does not find these accounts Orientalist. He explains that,

In the representation of the Chinese ‘Other’ the authors deliberately suppress the exotic features of Chinese society and traditional culture in order to stress the shared values, common historical destiny of the exploited classes, and the sense of comradeship which transgresses any cultural or ethnic differences as was required by the communist concept of proletarian internationalism. (Slobodnik 311)

Hence, in the travelogues analysed by Slobodnik, the Other is not the Chinese, the Other is the ideological enemy (Kuomintang, the West), as well as the class enemy (landowners, bourgeoisie etc.). The scholar concludes that there are two main dynamics that appear in most travelogues: the one of ideological solidarity with China, and the one of a clear separation between the past (negative) and the present (positive) (311-312). He adds that similar narrative strategies can be observed in other socialist travelogues, for instance the ones from Korea, or Soviet travel accounts from China (312).

Central European travel accounts from the communist period are similar to Yugoslav ones. In her anthology of Eastern European travel writing, Wendy Bracewell includes a passage by a Bosnian, but at the time, Yugoslav writer and journalist, Fadil Hadžić (1922-2011). In his introduction to a collection of journalistic travel sketches, *Put oko svijeta: putopisi* [Travel around the world: travel accounts], Hadžić formulates the principles of the new, socialist approach to travel writing⁴⁴⁶. In the very opening of his text, Hadžić makes a truly anti-Orientalist statement: “[i]t seems that one particular breed of travel writer is fast vanishing – the man with a beard, carrying a gun, leaning over a map of some dark continent in the pose of

⁴⁴⁶ Although, as Wendy Bracewell observes, “there is an unmistakably non-aligned and Yugoslav flavor in the denunciation of those ‘for whom the war between the blocs is the only perspective’”. (292)

a scholar explorer” (292). The travellers of the new, socialist era, are radically different, says Hadžić. A new traveller is not a private individual, he does not “go to hunt butterflies in Central Africa”, and he is not a “chance wayfarer who desires to feed his eyes on exotic landscapes” (292). Instead, he is an “engaged individual” with a clear affiliation with an important newspaper, whose mission is to portray the contemporary world to the readers.

The travel writer has gone with open eyes into these neuralgic hotbeds of the modern world, and his pen has carried with it the zeal of his young, socialist republic, the zeal which has inspired him to grasp not just his own but also other people’s struggle for independence and for a better future for all the world’s people. (Hadžić 293)

Clearly, there is an anti-colonial agenda underlining Hadžić’s words – his text dates from 1962, when decolonisation of many parts of the world, particularly Africa, was still under way. Moscow saw a political and strategic opportunity in declaring support to decolonisation, and reporters from many Soviet-dominated states were sent to describe the events in the “Third World”. Among them were many of the reporters mentioned in this study. The role of reportage and of direct foreign correspondence increased. Hadžić finds that this is the future of travel writing, and contrasts it with the accounts of the previous era: “[n]ot even tiny children can any longer be amazed by operatic photographs of palms and cathedrals, descriptions of starry nights and the azure blue of far seas, and the literary value of such false travel poetry resembles a bad tourist guidebook . . .” (293). The work of the new era reporters is the opposite of these dull, clichéd, “falsely poetic” accounts. It is the work of “engaged citizens” who went out into the “world of experiences” and related them to the readers (293).

To conclude, as the examples above demonstrate, there are numerous common points and links between accounts from different countries of the broad Central- and South- Eastern Europe, but also some differences. Clearly, the common socialist perspective is rooted in the same worldview, and it is closely linked with the foreign opening of the Soviet Union, its propaganda goals, and its strategy to win over the “Third World”. These similarities are also related to the realities of life in a communist state, obsessively controlling its citizens and maintaining them in isolation. They are the following: firstly, all travel had to be organised, or at least approved by state authorities. Secondly, the travellers were usually writers or reporters/journalists with a clear affiliation to a public medium or to a writer’s association controlled by the regime. Thirdly, the range of subjects that they discuss is limited by ideology. Whether a Polish reporter visits India or a Czechoslovak one visits China, there would be a similar dichotomy between the past and the present, or between tradition and modernity. In this perspective, modernity is associated with the socialist/communist worldview, while tradition is

grounded in “superstition” and feudalism. All travel accounts from this period are critical of religion, presented as a hindrance to progress. They are also pragmatic, rationalistic, and utilitarian. Furthermore, many of them have a didactic role, explaining to the readers various aspects of the visited cultures and interpreting their observations in a Marxist (or, in Gáfrík’s words, “vulgar Marxist”) framework. Finally, they become a tool of propaganda, providing to the citizens of the communist states an illusion of contact with the wider world, and acting as a safety valve that releases the popular frustration with the repressive state.

There are, however, differences in the way that the cultural Otherness is portrayed in these accounts. Gáfrík does see Orientalist, or even somewhat colonialist tropes in the Slovak travelogues from India, while Slobodnik does not observe any similar ways of Othering in the Czechoslovak relations from China. Hadžić indirectly declares that there is no place for Orientalism in socialist travel reportage, but one would need to closely analyse the Yugoslav travel accounts in order to tell whether, indeed, these Orientalist tropes are no longer used. Moreover, apart from the homogenising dialectic of Marxism and socialist modernisation projects, each of the Central and Eastern European countries has had different traditions of describing others, both academic (schools of Orientalism or Indology), literary, and artistic. These traditions are also influenced by the histories and cultures of each country and even in a time of rejection of tradition, they might play a significant role in foreign travel accounts. Thus, the conclusions drawn from these few works of analysis would have to be verified in a more comprehensive, comparative study of travel writing, or travel reportage, by representatives of countries of the “Second World”, visiting the countries of the “Third World”.

The Manifold Polish Orientalisms

Poles, like other inhabitants of Central Europe have been Orientalised by Westerners, but also produced a variety of Orientalist discourses on their Others, whether close ones (minorities, Eastern neighbours etc.), or more distant ones, in the Middle East and India. The discussion on Poland as a victim of Orientalism (Wolff) and of colonialism (Thompson), was eagerly exploited by the more right-wing part of the Polish intellectual scene. The feeling of victimhood, of being betrayed by the West and abandoned to the brutal regimes of Nazism and communism, is a popular interpretative frame in the recent discussions on Polish 20th-century history. However, such one-sided view of Poland as only a victim of colonialism and Orientalist discourse is problematic. It presents the Polish culture in essentialist terms, and Poland’s fate as unique, while – says Koczanowicz – it should be perceived like the history of other countries, in a similarly peripheral position towards the West, with its own economic and cultural issues,

that are by no means exceptional in a global scale (179). Aleksander Fiut, too, sees in the application of postcolonial theory in the Polish context the “danger of replicating, albeit not vociferously, of the worn out and exhausted image of Poland as martyr, unjustly persecuted and always crushed under the invader’s heavy boot” (37). He draws the attention to a different dynamic of domination, the one of Poland’s hegemony over its neighbours and minorities:

Until the end of the 19th century the supremacy of the Polish cultural pattern in the territories of today’s Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine was regarded, as least by the Poles themselves, as self-evident, and suitable for the purpose of fostering a sense of a civilizing cultural mission. This attitude is amply documented by the Polish-language literature of these regions. In short, the question arises as to the role of this literature in both accurately reflecting and distorting the relationship between the dominant Polish culture and the mostly folkloric culture of nations under Poland’s domination. Are the reciprocal cultural connections between Poland and other cultures presented truthfully, or do they simply reflect the Polish point of view? Were the distortions caused by lack of knowledge or by the conqueror’s pride? (Fiut 37)

Aleksander Fiut finds that to answer these questions, the terminology introduced by Said, Bhabha, Spivak, and other postcolonial scholars can be useful, as notions of mimicry, mockery, asymmetry, Orientalist imagery can very well be applied in describing the relations between the Polonising centre and its Orientalised borderlands. Scholars such as Bogusław Bakula or Hanna Gosk addressed the discourse on the Polish Borderlands in detail, but also found that the notion of colonialism is not entirely adequate in this context. Aleksander Fiut proposes the term of a “velvet” colonisation” (39) in reference to some territories (for instance, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania), Bakula identifies it as “dyskurs kresoznawczy” (Eastern-Borderlands-discourse), which is loaded with particular meaning much more than any other march-land (102)⁴⁴⁷, while Hanna Gosk talks about dependency and post-dependency, which are better terms to explain the Polish condition of being at the same time objects and makers of dominating, or Orientalising, discourses. Furthermore, as a number of scholars suggest, although Poland was at various times of history dominated by Russia, it would also Orientalise it, presenting it as inferior, primitive, and uncivilised, and at the same time threatening (Janion, *Niesamowita...*; Gosk, *Opowieści...*; Waldstein).

⁴⁴⁷ Bakula enumerates the characteristics of these Eastern Borderlands, so vivid in the Polish collective imagination: they are a frontier, but also a “line of defence of Polishness” (102); they are multinational, but their Polish character is underlined; they are marginalised, but subjected to the centre’s cultural mission; they are associated with youth, masculinity and adventure (103); and they give a sense of satisfaction derived from acquisition or appropriation. These elements, says Bakula, can be frequently found in the genre that developed in early 20th century, “the Borderlands novel”, as well as in nonfictional accounts - memoirs from these territories, in particular written in the communist period, after these territories were lost (104).

Equally complex as the images of the Eastern neighbours, is the Polish perception of the Western ones. After the collapse of communism in 1989, Polish elites adopted by and large the assumptions of the anti-communist intellectuals who believed that Poland is part of the Western culture. This assumption led to the expectation that free from Soviet rule, Poland can drift towards the West. Politically, it was justified – the West represented the values of which Poles were deprived during communist rule: democracy, rule of law, freedom of expression, freedom to travel and to make individual choices. The belief in European unity and stronger integration on the continent was attractive to Poles, bringing a perspective of safety and collaboration rather than conflict and division that was their share in the past decades. Nevertheless, there were also proponents of an opposite view: Ewa Thompson, in her article “Said and the Polish Case”, expressed the opinion that Polish society, with its Western aspirations, shares the same characteristics as other postcolonial societies. Among them were: poverty, pessimism, “necessary fictions” (tendency to mythologise the distant past, serving as a post-traumatic therapy), and culturalism (reducing the problem of postcolonialism to the area of culture). Thompson observed that in the case of Poland, once again foreign trends are what defines Polish culture, they are internalised by Poles themselves, for whom the old hegemon was replaced by a new one: the West⁴⁴⁸. In her article, she did not hesitate to call Polish history colonial and equate it with the fate of countries of the “Third World”; she did not, however, discuss whether and how was Poland Orientalised by the West or colonised by its neighbours. Thompson’s view was eagerly accepted by the conservatives and Eurosceptics, even though it presented many inconsistencies. Thompson, permanently residing in United States, was perhaps unaware of how retrograde the idea of an isolationist Polish identity, turning to its Sarmatian roots, could seem to the younger generation of Poles. Leszek Koczanowicz, referring to Ewa Thompson’s enthusiastic adoption of sarmatism as an original expression of true Polish identity, warns of the fact that such a formulation of Polish culture and identity narrows it down to a set of values synonymous to the slogans of the right-wing political entities (172). “The concept of sarmatism imparts a certain grandeur on these entities and introduces a conviction that we are dealing not with a consciously constructed narrative of culture, but the universal destiny of a nation”, says Koczanowicz, underlining that it leads to asserting the political hegemony of such a right-wing discourse (172).

On the other hand, the idea of “return to the West”, as formulated by Kundera, today seems overly simplistic. Throughout the years, Polish culture was constantly torn between

⁴⁴⁸ See: Thompson, “Said...” .

opposing forces – of Westernisation, and of a quest for a unique, Polish (Slavic) identity. The concept that Thompson advocated, the one of sarmatism, gained prominence among Polish nobility in sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. Its key assumption was that Poles originate from the ancient tribe of Sarmatians, and thus have a distinct identity, closer to the East than to the West. For instance, in a sarmatian fashion, Polish noblemen would dress similarly to the Tatar or Ottoman warriors, used sabres rather than swords, and decorate their houses with Persian rugs and decorations. As Maria Janion underlines, Orientalism was at that time very much part of the experience of Polish nobility, which they used to differentiate themselves from Western Europe, to – in a way – Orientalise themselves (*Uncanny Slavicdom* 170). In the era of the Enlightenment, sarmatism was perceived as an expression of ignorance and backwardness, but its influence can still be perceived in the never-ending discussions between those who advocate a pro-Western, enlightened Poland, and those searching for the Polish authentic, the essence of the Polish culture. As Janion demonstrates, neither is possible. The Polish self is forever haunted by the spectre of ancient Slavic culture, repressed by Christianity which came from the West. The Slavicdom returns, as Janion demonstrates, in a variety of texts of the Romantic period: either as a secret rite of communication with the dead, as visions of utopian past, “pastoral and cruel at the same time”, as “a tale of imposed Christianity, feudalism and annihilation of the Slavic freedom”, as a vision of a sublime figure of a Slavic female vampire, or through images of ruins, disasters and destruction (19-20). The “uncanny Slavicdom” is thus part of the Polish Self and cannot be simply eradicated. This puts in question the uncritical adoption of Western culture which could be observed in early 1990s, in the time of intensive transformation of political system and economy, but – perhaps even more so – of society and culture.

Indeed, in the recent years, the Polish mental map reflecting a sense of spatial and cultural belonging, appears to be shifting. Przemysław Czapliński finds that the lack of common narratives which would connect Poland to Europe, despite the country’s accession to the EU, creates an uncertainty. It is no longer easy to define Poland’s location, although it appears that “Poland is no longer where it used to be” (6). “We are in a phase of moving out from the current map, and this movement happens in an unknown direction and with an unknown goal” (6). Czapliński draws two types of axes, a horizontal one (Eastern – West) and a vertical one (North and South), investigating a variety of literary narratives that explore these notions. He suggests that a shift has begun, from the horizontal to the vertical axis, although it is fraught with crises, interruptions and question marks:

. . . it seems that Poland enters a particular state of intracontinental drift. Ever more loosely connected to Europe, with a conflicting attitude towards Russia, with a phantom union with the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania, it disconnects from its neighbours and flows in an unknown direction (400).

Indeed, a feeling of being left behind, of not belonging, of fearing change and fluidity, is rather characteristic of late modernity as described by Bauman, and is recently eagerly exploited by various populist and illiberal movements. For Eastern Europeans, experiencing a fast change from the known world of set, Cold War era divisions, and rethinking their own position in the contemporary, fast-paced world, is an important challenge. Exploring how socialist-era reporters perceived themselves while being abroad can provide interesting insights into the dynamics of Polish identity construction just a few decades ago. This, in turn, can lead to a broader discussion on how these notions affect the contemporary self-perception of Poles in the global dimension.

The Polish Travel Writer: Homo Sovieticus or Homo Europaeus?

At a first glance, Polish travel reportages from India seem to inform Polish readers about the Subcontinent's past and present, in an attempt at fostering solidarity between socialist nations. Certainly, the texts display the communist dream of an ideological conquest of the Third World, but – perhaps more importantly – are a mirror that reflects the identity of the writers themselves and the society from which they originate. Jan Kieniewicz, historian, writes in his essayistic book, *Drogi do Indii [Paths to India]* (1983) about his ways of understanding India, learning about India, and interpreting Indian history and culture. He finds that “[r]eportages from India are a wonderful source of knowledge about Poles in general” (172)⁴⁴⁹, much more than they are a source of knowledge about India, in fact. Although he appreciates that thanks to the popular travel reportages India becomes less of a distant culture in the Polish collective conscience, he would rather have the Poles learning about India from Byrski [well-known Polish Indologist]⁴⁵⁰ than from Putrament and Żukrowski (172). Kieniewicz is frustrated with the Polish reporters:

For many years I relished the thought of whaling into our reporters. I was imagining how it would be right and fair to extract from the Indian texts of Piekarowicz, Gielżyński, Chociłowski or Górnicki the entirety of our Polish [inferiority] complex and demonstrate the hollowness of the Eurocentric stereotype.

⁴⁴⁹ “Reportaże z Indii są wspaniałym źródłem wiedzy o Polakach w ogóle” (Kieniewicz 172).

⁴⁵⁰ Maria Krzysztof Byrski (1937-) is a Polish Indologist, graduate from the Benaras Hindu University and for many years, professor at the Warsaw University. In the 1980s, he joined the opposition and became an important member of the Solidarność movement. After the fall of communism, he became Polish ambassador to India (1993-1996).

There are still fragments of their texts that I should polemicize with. There are some, increasingly more often, that I would like to write myself. However, long ago, exactly at the time when I first saw and experienced India, I stopped feeling inclined to such settling of accounts. Maybe I gained humility. Or maybe it is my hope that their books are not only a testimony of their own paths and enquiries, but also an important factor guiding the social consciousness in Poland? [A factor in] overcoming indifference? (Kieniewicz 171)⁴⁵¹

It is exactly the indifference that constitutes the main problem for Kieniewicz. Writing his book in 1983, he already realises the importance of understanding other cultures and building a oneness, a unity in the more globalised world of the future. Introducing artificial categories and boundaries, thinking in Eurocentric terms, will impede this goal. Kieniewicz thus appeals to his readers to find their own path to India, which will require them to abandon set patterns and prejudices and overcome their limitations in a quest for a new identity. The historian recognises that Poland is at the cusp of a fundamental change and says that Poles have shed the blinders from their eyes and understand that success was only illusory (175). The era of that deceptive success, presumably based on the socialist model of development, is coming to an end. Kieniewicz suggests that a deeper look at the relations with the wider world, and more specifically India, will help formulate a new collective identity and an alternative for the even more interconnected world (175).

Nevertheless, the authors of the travel reportages analysed in this study seem to be unable to transcend the old patterns of Orientalism and Eurocentrism, as well as the more recent pattern, the one of socialist modernity. At the same time, their own location sometimes remains fluid. They often refer to themselves as Europeans, not without a certain satisfaction and sense of superiority. This can be observed when Giełżyński says that Indians are deaf to “our European, rational advice” to reduce the population of cows (16). Or, when Górnicki describes an impoverished nizam, saying that “in our European measures” he is incredibly rich (114). Ros, visiting Mumbai, admires the modern city, full of buses, cyclists, advertisements; he opens the window and exclaims, with awe: “Europe” (76). Here, Europe stands as a high standard of development and urban life, despite of the fact that Western Europe is in Ros’ account placed in the role of the ideological enemy.

⁴⁵¹ “Przez wiele lat pieściłem w sobie myśl o dobraniu się do skóry naszym reporterom. Wyobrażałem sobie jak to będzie słusznie i sprawiedliwie wydobyć z indyjskich tekstów Piekarowicza, Giełżyńskiego, Chociłowskiego czy Górnickiego całość naszego polskiego kompleksu i ukazać nicłość europocentrycznego stereotypu. Są nadal fragmenty ich tekstów, z którymi powinienem polemizować. Są coraz częściej i takie, które sam chciałbym napisać. Toteż już dawno, właśnie gdy po raz pierwszy zobaczyłem i doznałem Indii, odeszła mi ochota do takich rozrachunków. Może przybyło mi pokory. A może to nadzieja, że ich książki nie są tylko świadectwem własnych dróg i poszukiwań, ale istotnym czynnikiem kierującym świadomością społeczną w Polsce? W przełamywaniu obojętności?” (Kieniewicz 171).

Indeed, while criticising the West, the reporters are not opposed to being treated as special guests from Europe. Although they do not demonstrate it in a direct way, the fact that they describe lavish hotels and receptions, full of elegant guests from both India and the West, proves that they draw a certain satisfaction from being included in such an elite club. Ryszard Kapuściński recalls that since the communist state did not provide much funds to reporters, and even to diplomats travelling abroad, it was difficult for Polish correspondents to feel at par with their Western European counterparts. This feeling of being a European of a second category, a substandard one, is a result of both stereotypical images of Eastern Europe in the Western Europeans' collective consciousness (Wolff), but also of the Cold War isolation. Apart from propagandist reason, precisely this sense of inferiority causes the reporters to become rather Polonocentric in their accounts. Ros recalls the disappointment of a little boy begging for money upon learning that the reporter is not an English engineer, but merely a "comrade from Poland" (137). During this very telling scene, Ros talks about Poland as a country where "land belongs to farmers, factories to workers and schools are open to everyone free of cost" (137). Although the reporter praises his homeland, the boy is not impressed. Górnicki, Putrament and Gołębiowski are equally determined to show Poland in a positive light, not only to their Indian interlocutors, but primarily to their Polish readers. They are happy to convey the respect with which Polish specialists are treated in India, the successes of Polish products, and the positive opinions about their country. While this serves to legitimise and strengthen the communist authorities in their endeavour to build a new model of modern development, it might also be significant of an inferiority complex. If Europe (or the West) rejects us, at least there are places in the world where we are accepted, the reporters seem to suggest.

Furthermore, even those reporters who clearly stated that they consider themselves as communist do not identify with the Soviet Union. They only briefly mention the Soviet aid, placing in the foreground the Polish presence in India. It is clear that their national identity, the Polish one, is stronger than their sense of belonging to the Eastern Bloc. In their descriptions of India, they constantly refer to their own homeland, praising the beauty of its landscape or underlining the country's suffering during the war. Their location is thus one of Europeans, members of the Eastern Bloc, but above all, Poles. Nevertheless, their Polish identity is often challenged when travelling around India: some of their interlocutors do not know anything about Poland and they confuse it with Holland (Chociłowski 102), some take them for Westerners. The reporters protest against being mistaken for people from the capitalist West, but, as mentioned earlier, they are also somewhat flattered to be recognised as Europeans. Perhaps this conflicted attitude is yet another incarnation of the perennial dispute whether

Poland belongs to the East or to the West. As Maria Janion said, Poles are to the East of the West, and to the West of the East, and as a result of this unclear location, they feel foreign to themselves⁴⁵². This creates an anxiety that perhaps leads to more pronounced assertion of the national identity, but it is an identity full of contradictions. The superiority towards other cultures, reflected in Polish relations with its minorities, but also the inferiority resulting from years of subjugation, create a strange discourse on Otherness, in which seemingly opposing ideas intertwine. This dichotomy is also present in the Polish travel writing on India during communism, bringing together two seemingly contradictory images: the Orientalist one of an exotic Other, and the socialist one, of a fellow traveller.

⁴⁵² See: Maria Janion, *Uncanny Slavicdom*.

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