Traveling Theory: The Legacy of Edward W. Said in Eastern Europe[1]

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This paper discusses the circulation of Edward W. Said's concepts in Eastern Europe. In his text "Traveling Theory" Said examines intercultural translations of Western ideas for use in new historical contexts. The phenomenon of traveling applies as well to Said's notion of Orientalism. Many researchers of Eastern Europe have applied Said's concept to analyze post-communist societies. The cultural translation has led both to creative interpretations of Said's thought and to an ideological voice trapped in the post-communist discourse of modernization.

Keywords: Eastern Europe, Orientalism, postcolonialism, traveling theory, Said

Cet article étudie la circulation des concepts formulés par Edward W. Said en Europe de l'Est. Dans son texte « Traveling Theory », Said analyse la traduction interculturelle d'idées occidentales en vue de leur utilisation dans de nouveaux contextes historiques. Le phénomène de *traveling* s'applique aussi à la notion d'orientalisme de Said. De nombreux chercheurs en Europe de l'Est ont utilisé ce concept de Sain pour analyser des sociétés postcommunistes. Cette traduction interculturelle a donné lieu à la fois à des interprétations créatrices de la pensée de Said et à une voix idéologique enfermée dans le discours postcommuniste de modernisation.

Mots-clés : Europe de l'Est, orientalisme, postcolonialisme, théorie du *traveling*, Said

Edward W. Said is an icon of postcolonial studies. By many he is treated as its principal founder thanks to his famous work *Orientalism*, which played a crucial part at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s in the formulation of postcolonialism, not only as critical reflection, but most of all as a methodological approach with a specific conceptual apparatus. We tend to forget, however, that the more the notion of Orientalism widened its meaning and changed its context of usage, the more Said distanced himself from this postcolonialism that transformed its own subject. This article discusses the circulation of Said's concepts within a different theoretical field than the one assumed at the start. At the turn of the 21st century many researchers in Eastern Europe decided to incorporate and 'translate' Said's concept of the

historical European invention of the Orient and people from the Middle East with a view to analyzing the relics of communist regimes in Eastern Europe: colonialized man was transformed into *homo sovieticus*. The proliferation of cultural and geopolitical translations in Eastern Europe has led to creative interpretations of Said's thought, many of which, however, disregard the core of his critical approach.

The issue discussed belongs to the wider problem of *translation* as a basic process of cultural production of meaning. A contemporary, very heterogeneous, reflection on the phenomenon of translation highlights the mechanisms of transfer and distribution of knowledge through an intercultural transposition of text and ideas. Translation stops being treated only as a virtually neutral process of one culture's text being made comprehensible for another culture, and more and more often is understood as a necessary practice of knowledge circulation in a world entangled in relations of political, economic and cultural dependence.[2] On the one hand, transmission of meaning seems nowadays to have acquired, within the global market of ideas, the form of a political and cultural "continuous process of re-articulation and re-contextualisation, without any notion of a primary origin."[3] On the other hand, representatives of the so-called *translational turn* in the humanities put the stress on the relation between the original text and its translation.[4] Translation becomes a sort of compulsory adaptation, tailoring and modifying the original, made through the prism of the one who translates and the one who reads the translation. What becomes the pivotal dimension of competing in the field of cultural meanings is the translational aspect of culture. Contemporary transnational culture is based on the translation process, and as a result becomes the object of constant hybridization and displacement of its components.[5]

Still, the decision about what is being translated within humanities and social sciences, and what is being researched and discussed, often remains a result of Western cultural hegemony. What gets translated first are works by authors acclaimed in American and Western European

academia, and their texts to a large extent define the theoretical framework of research conducted by local researchers in other parts of the world. Also, the metaphor, which appears in postcolonial studies, of 'translating' the subjects of the postcolonial world from uncivilized (from the perspective of the metropolis) *natives* to free uncolonised subjects, reveals the utopian nature of slogans calling for a return to the aboriginal culture.[6] It seems that in the face of the present hybridisation and transnationalisation of the *voices of theory* nothing can stop the global migration of ideas, which travel with 'tickets' issued by the Western academia. These processes become particularly meaningful in Eastern Europe, where there is a keen interest today in postcolonial theory 'adopted' from the West. This interest is both a sign of the desire for recognition in the West of Eastern European critical theory discourse (after half a century of isolation and marginalisation connected to Soviet domination), and a manifestation of a 'postcolonial conquest' of Eastern European reflection by foreign 'translated' notions.

In the first part of my article I will briefly present Said's concept of "traveling theory."[7] In the second part I will present the elements of his work that most often 'travel' nowadays within the field of humanities and discuss the main contexts of implementing Said's concept in the Eastern European variation of postcolonial theory, with a particular stress on Polish research. Finally, I shall point to selected theoretical and methodological problems that are connected with applying Said's notions when analysing post-communist societies and that stem to a degree from the very process of translating theory for the use of new historical contexts. Although I refer to a process of translation I will not discuss the actual linguistic questions which may be raised about the editions of Said's works in Eastern Europe, but will focus rather on the intercultural and inter-discursive adaptation of Said's concepts to Eastern European areas of research interest.

Traveling Theory: Peregrinating Notions

"Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel – from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another,"[8] observes Said in his essay "Traveling Theory," where he examines the semantic transformations and cultural translations of György Lukacs' theory of reification and Michel Foucault's concept of power. Even though it is a truism to state that a text or theory once proclaimed stops belonging just to its author, it is worth thinking about the directions and consequences of such circulations: among academic traditions, temporal and spatial frames, political and historical contexts, or among the discourses of rival elites.

Despite the different directions and dissimilar pace of travel of various concepts, Said highlights a certain model of displacement of ideas, comprising four basic stages. First, when a theory starts circulating within the field of scientific and intellectual reflection, what happens is a breach or even negation of its dependence on a specific starting point or the circumstances in which the given idea "came to birth or entered discourse."[9] Second, a theory is a work in progress; each change of the subject on which the theory is to be tested exerts on it the pressure of modification. Third, in new historical and political circumstances the theory is confronted with local axioms and taboo areas to which it is adapted. Fourth, the theory in its new shape becomes a tool for interpreting local social reality; it acquires not only new applications but also a new ethos. The new – but never final – understanding and implementation of the *traveling theory* is defined mainly by the requirement of its pragmatic adjustment to the models of scientific explanation of social facts already in place. What adds to these processes is the academic institutionalisation of theory and recruitment of local specialists on Lukacs, Foucault, who 'guard' the local adequacy of reinterpretation.

Said does not praise the described phenomenon of the circulation of theory, nor does he see in it a great danger. Still, he stresses that *traveling theory* retains its cognitive potential as long as it is confronted with a critical awareness, or even resistance to its expansion. On the one

hand, the lack of delimitation of a field to which a theory might belong could result in "the limitlessness of all interpretation."[10] This may lead to blurring the significance of the key concepts of a given theory. Research inspired by *traveling theory* is often of a "patchwork" nature, combining "anything with anything" and mechanically reducing epistemological differences between the original theory and its new variations, 'translated' according to new circumstances. On the other hand, the circulation of a theory could reveal its historical boundaries or its totalizing foundations – and nourish critical consciousness. In "Traveling Theory Reconsidered" Said suggests, however, that in the process of semantic 'traveling' a theory might actualize its radical moments and regain its rebellious potential. In translation the simplifications and contradictions of the original may be transgressed. Then, one can speak of "transgressive theory,"[11] which in a creative way continues the process of criticizing and destabilizing the main current of social theory. "The point of theory therefore is to travel, always to move beyond its confinements, to emigrate, to remain in a sense in exile," Said claims.[12] It is important for him that theory traveling in new contexts should keep its intellectual core but also not become the subject of orthodox imitative thinking.

The idea of *traveling theory* or *traveling concepts* has been developed, among others, by Caren Kaplan, James Clifford, Mieke Bal, Barbara Czarniawska and Guje Sevón.[13] The circulation of concepts that transgress temporal, spatial and linguistic barriers is regarded as a catalyst of intellectual life, but also as a consequence of the cosmopolitan nomadism of academics and the boom in interdisciplinarity in humanities and social sciences. As stressed by Bal,[14] traveling notions make the meanings of words and theories more flexible. They *move* between science and culture, between disciplines and their subjects and, as a result, play a part in *focusing interest* on particular common problems as well as in the *propagation* (not to be confused with propaganda) of transdisciplinary involvement in the critique of reality. What is more, the phenomenon of the *traveling theory* is based upon the assumption that there

are no universal notions. The latter have to be established through the process of intercultural translation, which is always connected to power relations referring to the selection of what can be translated and what will perhaps never be translated at all.

An example of contemporary *traveling theories* can be gender studies[15] or the theory of reflexive modernisation,[16] which are presently being reinterpreted by researchers all over the world. One should stress the role of the new media platforms of academic and quasi-scientific communication in accelerating the travel of some concepts, which thus acquire the status of "Coca-Cola-Theories" – scientific icons, semantically "overwritten" by the needs of the global market of ideas.[17] As Bachmann-Medick notices, the very concept of the *traveling theory* may also be analysed as a traveling notion, too easily applied to all transfers of ideas.[18]

For Dipesh Chakrabarty, "a problem of a translation" is raised by displacing the conceptual horizons.[19] Stressing that "the idea of displacement-as-translation" is "an explanatory trope in discussion of modernity,"[20] Chakrabarty points to the replacement of local "lower" categories by the 'translated' external "higher" categories, which are ascribed an over-colonial precision of characterizing social reality and a transnational analytical value.[21] Metamorphoses at the level of the language aim at justifying the necessity of modernization in the societies being the recipients of translations. The concept of modernisation too is a *traveling theory* coming from the West, and notwithstanding the many positive effects it may bring about, it is a tool of a one-way process of cultural westernisation. Modernisation is treated like history that has already happened somewhere and as such can be implemented in societies without a history recognised by Western audience. This modernising dimension of translation is also quite prominent in the study of culture in Eastern Europe, which acquires its particular character, understandable for the mainstream of contemporary cultural theory, through diagnosing its own deficiencies and the postulate of "the catching up revolution."[22]

Orientalism: *traveling theory* in Eastern European Postcolonial Studies

The phenomenon of *traveling* applies to Said's own theory of text and author, as well, especially to his famous notion of Orientalism. What is more, most of the time the very notion of Orientalism 'travels' alone, abstracted from Said's concept of secular criticism[23] and the limited frame given to it in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*.[24] Said's idea of Orientalism refers to three problem areas: 1) scientific discipline producing knowledge of an imaginary Orient; 2) a conceptual framework consisting in ordering and differentiating one's idea about the world according to the East/West dichotomy; 3) institutions and discourse relying on political and socioeconomic tradition which establishes domination of the constructed West over the constructed Orient, in which case *civilised* "Westerners" impose on the Other the identity of a *barbaric* Oriental.[25] Even if the people of the Orient become an object of fascination for the imperial eye, it is also through the prism of *lack* – as savages to whom the norms of Western culture do not apply.

The concept of Orientalism is strongly intertwined with other strands of Said's thought. As of the 1970s he was dealing with the problem of the author acting within his/her work and through it, and especially with the question of exile as the condition of intellectual activity in the postcolonial but still imperially determined world.[26] He was skeptical about the postulate of interdisciplinarity and commercialisation in the humanities, still ascribing to them an important public role: "Humanism is, to some extent, a resistance to *idées reçues*, and it offers opposition to every kind of cliché and unthinking language."[27] The areas of Said's academic reflection overlapped with his involvement in current events in the Middle East, such as the case of Palestine, and his status as a public liberal-leftist intellectual, taking the floor with regards to US foreign and immigration policy. Yet, the abovementioned aspects of Said's writings have not met with a wider reception in Eastern Europe. With the exception of *Orientalism* which has been translated into Bulgarian, Czech, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian and Ukrainian, many of Said's key works have still not been published in the

languages of the countries of this region. In the last decade, however, *Culture and Imperialism* was translated into Polish and Ukrainian, *After the Last Sky: Palestinians Lives* as well as *Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society* into Polish and *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* into Ukrainian.[28]

It is important to note that Said understood the Orient as an imaginary non-European space, seen by Europeans as the reverse of their culture and identity. He was not concerned with Orientalism in its inter-European dimension, reducing to some extent the category of Europeans to the inhabitants of Western Europe who had colonies overseas.[29] Still, he always stressed "that history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and re-written, always with various silences and elisions, always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated, so that 'our' East, 'our' Orient becomes 'ours' to possess and direct."[30] His invitation to rewrite history again by those who have so far been silent or marginalized has been accepted not only by the representatives of former colonies in the legal sense, but also by researchers of Eastern European post-communist democracies who search for tools for diagnosing and settling accounts with their own peripheral status.

According to the Eastern European variation of postcolonialism, Eastern Europe, just like the colonial Orient, was "invented" in the 18th century by Western merchants and travelers, and its stigmatizing image as a backwater of the continent and an inferior culture survived until the present day,[31] blocking a positive self-identification of the region's inhabitants. A critical moment was the subjection of Eastern European countries to the Habsburg Empire or the Russian Empire and in the 20th century to the Soviet Union, perceived as a colonising and imperialist power, which, instead of conducting overseas expansion, subordinated its neighboring territories.[32] The cultural dimension of Soviet domination over this region has been compared to colonial dependence *à rebours*, to an "anti-civilising mission" by the barbaric coloniser over the "more Western" and civilised European nations.[33] The societies of

Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Hungary, etc. are therefore treated as subjects of double *orientalisation*: by the West as peripheral countries, but also by their Eastern coloniser, interfering with its neighbors' sovereignty on the pretext of representing its weaker "brethren" who are unable to represent themselves on their own in the international arena.

Reading the notion of Eastern Europe from a postcolonial perspective, one cannot miss its orientalising character which consists in representing this part of the continent as being on *the edge of Europe*, *not-quite-European* or *the shadow of enlightenment Europe*, a region which cultivates *values born at the dawn of European modernity*.[34] The notion of Central Europe, proposed by Milan Kundera and promoted by Polish and Hungarian intellectuals, was supposed to be an answer to the odium of Eastness and enable this region to feel appreciated. However, it turned out to be exclusive of the Ukraine, Belarus or Moldova, locating them in the Euro-Asian "post-Soviet space"[35] and arbitrarily assuming the existence of common interests and values within the Central European region. "Europe has a West, it has a Center, but holy cow! it has no East. Foucault would have loved this geographical gaping wound,"[36] John-Paul Himka, a Ukrainian-Canadian historian, jokingly comments upon this phenomenon.

Indeed, according to the Foucauldian concept of diffused social power, the dislike for the label of the East may be a result of the production of knowledge taking place for many hundreds of years, which was to explain and justify the political, economic and cultural dominance by the West. Being aware of this symbolic baggage, in the present article, I consistently use the term 'Eastern Europe', even though in the cultural sense Eastern Europe is a construct hiding tensions between the societies of the region and within each of them, their mutual wrongs, and an ambiguous attitude towards the European Union. Applying the category of Orientalism to the analyses of the relation between the West and the *Orient* of Europe, starting with the pioneer works by Milica Bakić-Hayden and Maria Todorova

concerning the Balkans,[37] is connected to an attempt at grasping a complex Eastern European historical landscape, where discourses of pro-western modernisation intersect with nationalist discourses, and nostalgia for one's lost empire (especially in Poland and Hungary) overlaps with a pro-Soviet self-orientalisation (especially in the countries which used to belong to the Soviet Union).[38]

The Conception of Orientalism in the Study of the Postcolonial Condition in Poland

How Said's concepts[39] are used in research on the Polish postcolonial condition is especially symptomatic. Polish identity discourse is built upon a constant tension between the idea of the East and the West. Since the late Middle Ages Poland has aspired to being a part of Western Europe, and during the Jagiellonian dynasty's reign from the end of the 14th century to the end of the 16th century, it realized its own colonial policy on the continent. Still, at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, in the period of its most pronounced greatness, the elites started to be afraid of being absorbed by the West and looked for a symbolic differentiation from Western elites, but also from the lower strata of their own society, by recalling the ancient Sarmatians, an Indo-Iranian people who were supposedly their ancestors. At the end of the 18th century when Poland disappeared from the map of Europe as a result of being partitioned by Russia, Prussia and Austria, it was difficult even to speak of the nation being deprived of its sovereignty, as the privileged Polish nobility had more affinities with the invaders' nobilities than with the people of their own country. According to Jan Sowa,[40] the partitions of Poland only made visible what had happened much earlier, that is, the *lack* of an objectified concept of Polishness, which would also result in the present divisions within post-communist Poland. This *lack* is often analysed now through the categories of the Orient and Orientalism, which in Polish research are understood in three ways. Such a tripartite system of referencing the notion of Orientalism, as the one I propose, takes into account the standpoints and the social *imaginarium* behind the voices in question.[41]

First, the local impact of Orientalism is seen as a one-way process endangering national identity. In the light of this conservative viewpoint, which I call the conception of *victim Orientalism*, it was the Poles who were the victims of colonisation by other countries (especially Russia and the Soviet Union), and at present are being neo-colonised by particular ideological options (neoliberalism in economic issues, and relativism in axiological issues).

One of the precursors of this Polish variety of postcolonialism is Ewa Thompson, an American researcher born in Poland, thanks to her work *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*. Thompson takes from Said above all the thought of the intellectual ground of colonial discourses. For Thompson and the researchers inspired by her approach, the colonisation of Poland began in the 18th century along with the betrayal of the then elites, who instead of proudly defending the integrity of their own country, collaborated with neighboring superpowers. This mental colonisation has been taking place until the present, and the responsibility for perpetuating the orientalising complex among the Poles is attributed to the liberal-leftist intelligentsia that came to power as a result of the democratic political transformation. "Polish intelligentsia has been used to injecting into itself and society these ideologies which confirm the superiority of the West and inferiority of Polish society,"[42] Thompson claims. Here Orientalism is treated as a tool of (neo)colonisation, against which it is necessary to defend oneself by fostering a traditional, conservative way of thinking of Polishness. The critical dimension of *victim Orientalism* is a discourse directed against some elites, who are charged with self-orientalisation (i.e. imputing to their society a *lack* when compared to the West) by other elites, ascribing to themselves the role of keepers of national pride.

Secondly, visible in Polish postcolonial studies is a liberal-leftist approach which I call the concept of *compensational Orientalism*. Some researchers highlight the equivocality of the roles entered in by Polish society. "Who is the colonizer? Russia towards Poland? Or maybe

Poland towards Ukraine?,"[43] ask Grażyna Borkowska and other researchers who postulate settling accounts with Polish myths, including the one of the Eastern Borderlands, built upon fantasies of the civilized Republic of Poland and the savage Eastern frontier. I describe this approach as the concept of *compensational Orientalism,* which deals with collective guilt towards other nations, for two reasons. On the one hand, its representatives postulate the necessity of acknowledging the wrongs experienced by other societies because of Poland's colonial policy. On the other hand, the subject of criticism here becomes the concept of victim Orientalism, and the elites representing it are charged with the "impossibility of autonomously shaping their own habitus,"[44] and imputed a one-sided, clichéd, and resenting description of the Polish postcolonial condition. "If […] they could analyze and reconstruct Polish colonial and imperial discourse with the same proficiency and zest with which they expose the imperialism of Russia, Poland would probably already be a world leader in postcolonial studies,"[45] writes Sowa with irony. Paradoxically, what is orientalised here are the conservative elites, who are ascribed intellectual impotence and ethnocentrism veiling an inferiority complex towards the West.

When Thompson refers to the colonial relation of Algeria and France, she compares Poland to Algeria oppressed by the metropolis. However, when Daniel Beauvois, a French historian dealing with 18th- and 19th-century Poland, refers to the Algerian-French example, he ascribes to Poles the attitude of the French, mythologizing their lost territories. In his works Beauvois declares the intention of "combatting nationalist megalomaniacs."[46] In his view, Polish landowning nobility throughout the whole period of the partitions performed economical colonization of Lithuanian, and above all Ukrainian, peasants. Up until the anti-Russian uprisings in 1830-1831 and 1863-1864, which resulted in a wave of brutal Russification of Poles, the nobility had kept many of its privileges, the "tamed and harnessed nobility […] was licking the hand of the lord [the czar – M.N.]."[47] Through alliances with the occupant and by

refusing to acknowledge the Ukrainians' national separateness, Polish nobility strengthened the feudal social system in the Russian Empire.

The reflections of *compensational Orientalism* also stress that historical prejudices leave their mark on the contemporary culture of Poland, but the subject of criticism is defined differently than in the *victim Orientalism* conservative approach. What is the key object of criticism is the so-called Polish Orientalism or Orientalism *à la polonaise* that signifies a discourse of a hybrid Polish identity, half-Western, half-Eastern. According to Maria Janion, that discourse is connected to cultivating Polish collective memory through messianising and angelising one's own nation, along with satanising its enemies (especially Russia and the Soviet Union).[48]

This Polish Orientalism is criticised for its own orientalisation of the lands East of Poland, by imposing on them the identity of an "East more Eastern" than Poland, which nonetheless still has the inferiority complex of being Europe's Orient. The efforts of separating Poland from the post-soviet world consist of stressing the moral and intellectual superiority of Poles and in ascribing to the "East more Eastern" a fatalistic susceptibility to political and mental subjection. In modernization discourses, that East can be the inhabitants of countries where the Polish army is stationed, "needing the help of the West" (e.g. Iraq, Afghanistan), or immigrants, e.g. the Vietnamese working in Poland, perceived as the mute people from the marketplace, or Ukrainians performing for the most part low-paid housework, care work, or renovation work, jobs that are not attractive to Poles, and perceived as menial work "fitting people from the East." At the same time, in populist discourses people from the East are seen as barbarians taking away from Poles – a struggling society – work opportunities.

Such orientalisation can even be seen implicitly in current messages on the Ukrainian crisis. Although public opinion in Poland sympathizes with pro-Western Ukrainians, Ukraine is represented as being too immature for democracy and lacking political competence. The case

of the Ukraine reveals at the same time the trap of the totalising dimension of the concept of Orientalism. Is any criticism of the East possible that could not be accused of orientalising the Other?

Thirdly, Polish postcolonial thought contains another dimension which focuses on the phenomenon of dividing society into "winners and losers, ultimately translated into those wise and able to adapt and those half-witted and unable to adapt, apt and inept."[49] Instead of speaking of an *internal colonization*,[50] I define this process as *internal social orientalisation*, as it is mostly discursive and communicational, and not formal and legal. It does not refer to the Poles' self-orientalisation because those who orientalise (mostly intellectual and political elites) do not think of themselves as being burdened with an Eastern, *inferior*, mentality. They ascribe it to the near Other: the unemployed, the farmer, or the electorate of anti-European political parties.

After the parliamentary elections of 2007 in Poland the cover of the widely read leftist and liberal weekly *Polityka* represented a slice of bread shaped like Poland. Its left half was buttered, which in a metaphorical way represented the wealthier, enlightened, civilised West voting for Platforma Obywatelska (a pro-EU center-right party that won those elections). The other half had no butter on it, which illustrated the poorer, parochial East, the electorate of the Eurosceptical right-wing party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość. This orientalising representation of the divisions within Polish society is not far from the voices of theory which often blend with the sociopolitical discourses that are criticized by them. An example is an article by Bohdan Jałowiecki, a professor at Warsaw University's Center for European Regional and Local Studies, published in the book titled *Eastern Poland and Orientalism*:

> The inhabitants of particular parts of Europe, but also of Poland, live in a different historical time, which is shown by many indicators of spatial development, infrastructure equipment, access to modern information technology, but also education level. These differences are visible also within other countries of Central Europe […]. Members of these communities, turned towards the past, are mentally unprepared for the changes taking place, to which they react with hostility, and they do not at all fit the other, Western part of Europe.[51]

Thus researchers, often with the noble intention of equalising the chances of different groups and communities, reify the division into a modernized West and a backward East, albeit looking for it within a single society.

Problems with *Eastern European Orientalism*

The ambiguity of the notion of Orientalism results in an intriguing concept focused on social criticism, which is, however, to some extent self-contradictory. It is founded upon a phantasmatic attitude towards both the imaginary Orient and the imaginary West. The ideas of a pro-Western modernization and an Eastern primitiveness or Slavism at the same time attract and repel each other in scientific and public discourses in Eastern European societies. A typical manifestation of this tension would be the idea of "returning to Europe" in post-communist countries, which in a geographical perspective have always been in Europe, and in a symbolic and political perspective have for a long time been in a sphere between what is believed to be civilized and what is thought of as barbaric. The racial and economic (from a Marxist perspective) aspects of dividing the world into East and West disappear from Said's original concept, 'translated' for the Eastern European context. Such a translation of Said's theory results in problems which have not yet been solved by Eastern European and Polish postcolonial theory.

First, by choosing such a well-known and appealing category as Orientalism, researchers universalise the Eastern European experience, and inscribe it into the global thought on liberty and serfdom. Thus, they escape localness of criticism, even though the notion of Orientalism does not take into account for example the exclusively Polish context for relations of dependence and the different status of Poles as compared to African or Asian colonized societies. That is why Hanna Gosk suggests that one should speak of a post-partition Poland (in the interbellum period) and a post-dependence one (after 1989 and the democratic transformation), but not a postcolonial one.[52] However, it seems that it would only be a

cosmetic change, since the proposed terms also stem from the logic taken from postcolonial studies concerning the East/West relation.

Second, Polish thought reinterprets the colonial heritage in two ways. In the conservative version, Poland's postcolonial condition results in absorbing and uncritically imitating cultural models from Western Europe, from European Union directives, or in the expansion of neoliberal discourses. This proposition has traits of a conservative utopia. According to this line of thought, the alternative for Poland is either westernization and a consecutive loss of its own identity, or, as advised by Ewa Thompson,[53] going back to national pride and pre-partition values. These conservative utopian traits are identified with Sarmatism, an ideology of the nobility's pride reaching back to the 17th century, born in the period of feudal economy and growth of political privileges of the nobility to the disadvantage of lower social strata. What is interesting, in Polish conservative thought Sarmatism stops being connected with feudalism, and instead it is regarded as a historical source of Polish modern republican thought resembling American and British political ideas. As Thompson claims:

> Sarmatism is not oriented towards conquest or submitting to the emperor; instead it values republicanism. […] Sarmatism is based on a sort of 'helpfulness principle': people on top should not be dealing with things which can be successfully dealt with by people at the bottom. All these features are also present in British Distributism and American Agrarianism.[54]

Understood in this way, *neo-Sarmatism* keeps not only the elitist character of its prototype, but is also imitational and political.

The appeal of this conservative agenda is possible only when, in translating Said's concept and the works of the representatives of postcolonialism inspired by his thought, we overlook their Marxist origin. As Marxism can be easily reduced to an inconvenient source of communism, in Poland we read Said selectively, forgetting that he was inspired by Antonio Gramsci and Franz Fanon. Evoking nowadays the idea of Sarmatism seems rather like invoking exclusive ghosts of the gentry past, and not as a way of opening the discourse to people's narrations. What is more, if we remembered that the concept of Orientalism is based

upon a Marxist vision of cultural and economic inequalities, we would have to admit that we must analyze Eastern and Western European relations with the same tools as, for instance, Indochinese and French relations. Researchers, particularly those representing the *victim Orientalism* approach, are reluctant to accept this comparison, as if they thought that Poland is an "East less Eastern" than Indochina.[55]

Within the liberal and leftist option, Poland's postcolonial condition becomes linked with a mental inclination towards the imaginary Orient and a failure to settle accounts with its own attempts at colonizing Ukraine or Lithuania, but also the subjection of peasants in past centuries. Postcoloniality in this sense becomes an obstacle on the way to social modernisation. Thus, overcoming postcoloniality becomes connected not with creative social de-orientalisation, but with adapting oneself to external standards. One can see this as "an expression of the ideology of imitational modernization, accepted mainly in public discourse and visible in programming development strategies, but also present in scientific analyses."[56] Paradoxically, Eastern Europeans, to whom are attributed a tendency to self-orientalisation, that is, to cultivating their own insularity, are re-orientalised as individuals unable to emancipate themselves on their own. The alternative offered to the societies of Eastern Europe is either an inclusion of what is Eastern into the European symbolic universe, or a strategic self-orientalisation, aiming at creating in the West a fashion for Eastern European Otherness.

Third, the identity of an Oriental always refers to someone weaker, poorer than the one who appeals for its rebuff. Translations of Said's work do not escape the shallow places of the original theory, which has been accused of elitism or essentialising and antagonizing the Eastern and the Western. Despite significant differences in historical experiences, Poland has been presented as a role model and an example of a pro-Western transformation path for

Ukraine and Belarus.[57] Thus, postcolonial heritage becomes re-mythologized as an eternal tale about throwing off the shackles and undertaking a civilizing mission towards the weaker.

At the same time, the *near* Oriental is sometimes constructed in research on the so-called dependency culture. The poor, the unemployed and those not fitting in with the neoliberal model of the entrepreneur of himself[58] are attributed with chronic stagnation, believed to be a constant element of their personalities. The source of this passivity is found not in structural factors, but in the mentality imputed to the *losers of the transformation*, namely a mentality of the *homo sovieticus*, who in capitalism is reliant upon social welfare and whose perception of the world is supposedly trapped in resentment or nostalgia for the ancient regime. Thus, the poor becomes excluded from mainstream culture, as his/her culture is constructed by the researchers as the reverse of what is socially desirable.[59] In this context, orientalisation means imputing the cultural lag to those who cannot or do not want to modernise themselves. One can therefore ask whether the *traveling theory* of the critique of Orientalism, which was aimed at giving voice to the degraded, has not paradoxically changed into a theory that can degrade the Other.

In this context, it is worth recalling the words opening the already classic *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak:

> Postcolonial studies, unwittingly commemorating a lost object, can become an alibi unless it is placed within a general frame. Colonial Discourse studies, when they concentrate only on the representation of the colonized or the matter of the colonies, can sometimes serve the production of current neocolonial knowledge by placing colonialism/imperialism securely in the past, and/or by suggesting a continuous line from that past to our present.[60]

If for Spivak, fifteen years ago the basis for the production of objectifying knowledge was the need to counter a disciplinary ghettoization of postcolonial studies and negative self-affirmation of their research subject, the doubts formulated in this article concerning the Eastern European variation of postcolonial theory stem most of all from the ways in which intellectual reflections interfere with discourses about current political options by 'translating' them into the language of Western critical theory.[61]

Does Eastern Europe Need *traveling theories*?

Bachmann-Medick, reflecting upon the contemporary proliferation of *traveling theories*, asks:

> Does this lead to a critical 'displacement' of western European theory or, even, to its "provincializing" […]? This is questionable, at least so long as the concept of 'traveling concepts' itself remains imprisoned in the tradition of a European history of travel, discovery and expansion.[62]

Similar doubts can be put forward regarding Eastern European translations of the concept of Orientalism, which lead to a divergence of the *translatum* and *translandum.* On the one hand, new translations highlight the complex and multidirectional character of social discourses, and this is certainly an added value of *traveling theory*. The Eastern European conception of Orientalism shows that the East/West relation does not have only a one-way character; locating the East and the West each time depends on the shape of the social *imaginarium*. What is more, reproaching each translation and each criticism of Eastern Europe for being orientalising and pro-Western seems to be a serious misunderstanding. Traveling concepts make scientific communication possible, and critical thought regarding social realities becomes, thanks to them, deeper and more complex. There are no national humanities or social sciences that would be self-sufficient and that, without any external inspiration, could fully diagnose local culture and society.

On the other hand, despite the big output of Eastern European variations of postcolonialism, the latter is still treated by its representatives as an intellectual potential waiting to be used. This stems perhaps from a too easy and methodologically naïve transposition of fashionable categories such as Orientalism onto the local context. Igor Bobkov claims that "the basic concepts are not introduced but rather are presented as readymade and 'understandable for everyone.' […] It is insufficient to simply declare today that something was invented, designed or imagined."[63] Even though Said stressed the materiality of Orientalism's effects, references to his concept are connected to a study of Eastern European phantasms, myths, and narrations. Quite often the researchers link Said's concept with the instruments of psychoanalysis, and they push into the background the political and economic basis of the

studied phenomena,[64] also different from the context considered by Said.

I do not mean here to glorify methodological purism. Even for the author of *Orientalism* himself, the very phenomenon of theory circulation is a condition for the theory's worldliness, which was understood by Said as a material grounding of the text's presence, through each instance of its implication in the social world.[65] Still, it is worth asking whether, because of the impassable differences between the original and its translation, Eastern Europe does not need its own analytical categories, instead of a distorted reflection in the mirror of the famous Said, a researcher from the West, from the metropolis.

Postcolonial theory itself, developed at American and Western European universities, and so eagerly used in Eastern Europe, should perhaps itself become an object of criticism as an element of academic imitational modernisation and intellectual (neo)colonialism, adopting (with a delay) categories and research subjects fashionable in the West and treated as progressive. The escape into postcoloniality becomes an escape from the marginalisation of provincial theories. In other words, observing Eastern European resentments and complexes through the prism of postcolonial studies, in a way also has the effect of reinforcing a local inferiority complex. If there is an Eastern European cultural theory recognizable in an extra-regional scale, it is almost only thanks to a translation of what has 'traveled' from the outside.

The abovementioned problems refer also to this article, in which translation (not only linguistic, but also cultural) applies to the presentation of Eastern European research, so that it would become "legible" to the Western reader.

Nonetheless, joining the voices of postcolonialism, which today belong to the mainstream of social theory, allows one to be heard and to reflect in someone else's mirror. This cannot, however, exempt one from a critical view of such borrowings. Maybe after some time, this discussion will no longer be a dispute over the postcoloniality of Eastern Europe, but will establish its own categories referring to the post-socialist situation of this region. They will be

less appealing and less recognizable than Orientalism, but perhaps they will allow the condition of the region to be shown in a way that will highlight its socio-historical particularity, which easily gets lost when translated into the discourse of Western theory of culture.

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Notes

[1] This paper was supported by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education through a grant to young scholars research. My thanks to Justyna Fruzińska for the translation of this paper.
[2] Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2006), pp. 238-239.
[3] Stuart Hall, Kuan-Hsing Chen, "Cultural Studies and the Politics of Internationalization: An Interview with Stuart Hall by Kuan-Hsing Chen," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley, Kuan-Hsing Chen (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 393.
[4] See *Translation Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009, special issue: *The Translational Turn*).
[5] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Oxon/New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 247.
[6] See Robert J.C Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[7] The term 'traveling theory' has a double meaning in the present paper. When I use it as a concept, the words are in small letters and italicized. When I point to the title of Said's essay from 1983, the words are capitalized and in quotation marks.
[8] Edward W. Said, "Traveling Theory," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 226.
[9] Edward W. Said, "Traveling Theory," p. 227.
[10] Edward W. Said, "Traveling Theory," p. 230.
[11] Edward W. Said, "Traveling Theory Reconsidered," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000 [1994]), p. 439.
[12] Edward W. Said, "Traveling Theory Reconsidered," p. 451.
[13] See Caren Kaplan, "Traveling Theorists," in *Questions of Travel. Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (London: Durham, 1996); James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1997); Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2002); Barbara Czarniawska and Guje Sevón, eds., *Global Ideas: How Ideas, Objects and Practices Travel in the Global Economy* (Malmö: Liber & Copenhagen Business School Press, 2005).
[14] Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*, pp. 25-34.
[15] See for instance: Nalini Visvanathan, Lynn Duggan, Laurie Nisonoff, eds., *The Women, Gender and Development Reader* (New Dehli: Zubaan, 2005).
[16] See Urlich Beck, Anthony Giddens, Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1994).
[17] Doris Bachmann-Medick, "The Trans/National Study of Culture: A Translational Perspective," in *The Trans/National Study of Culture: A Translational Perspective*, ed. Doris Bachmann-Medick (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 17-18.
[18] Doris Bachmann-Medick, "From Hybridity to Translation. Reflections on Travelling Concepts," in *The Trans/National Study of Culture: A Translational Perspective*, p. 121.
[19] See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000).
[20] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Place and Displaced Categories, or How We Translate Ourselves into Global Histories of the Modern," in *The Trans/National Study of Culture: A Translational Perspective*, p. 53.
[21] Dipesh Chakrabarty, , "Place and Displaced Categories…," p. 54.
[22] Boris Buden, "Translation and the East. There is No Such Thing as an 'Eastern European Study of Culture,'" in *The Trans/National Study of Culture: A Translational Perspective*, pp. 172-173.
[23] Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, pp. 1-30.
[24] See Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) and *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).
[25] Edward W Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 2-3.
[26] Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996) and *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (London: Granta Books, 1997 [1975]).
[27] Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 43.

[28] See a list of book translations of Said's works in Eastern Europe in the Bibliography of the present article under Primary Sources.
[29] See Edward W. Said, "The Politics of Knowledge," in *Debating PC: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*, ed. Paul Berman (New York: Dell, 1992).
[30] Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Once More," *Development and Change* 35, no. 5 (2004), p. 871.
[31] Comp. Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).
[32] See: Ewa Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (Westport/London: Greenwood, 2000); David Chioni Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Towards a Global Postcolonial Critique," *PLMA* 116, no. 1 (2001).
[33] Tomasz Zarycki, "Debating Soviet Imperialism in Contemporary Poland: On the Polish uses of Post-Colonial Theory and Their Contexts," in *Empire De/Centered: New Spatial Histories of Russia and the Soviet Union*, eds. Sanna Turoma, Maxim K. Waldstein (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) p. 198-202.
[34] Comp. Larry Wolff, *Inventing…*
[35] Mykola Riabchuk, *Western 'Eurasianism' and the 'New Eastern Europe': Discourse of Exclusion* (2011), <http://www.postcolonial-europe.eu/pl/essays/116-western-eurasianism-and-the-new-eastern-europe-discourse-of-exclusion.html>. Website consulted June 10, 2014.
[36] John-Paul Himka, "*What's in a Region? (Notes on 'Central Europe')*" (2002), <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgibin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=habsburg&month=0205&week=b&msg=3O6SvI4sAD4TgW/J3wLcxQ&user=&pw=>. Website consulted June 10, 2014.
[37] See Milica Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995); Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[38] Mykola Riabchuk, *Dwie Ukrainy* (Wrocław: Kolegium Europy Wschodniej, 2004).
[39] In Poland two translations of Orientalism have been published; at the linguistic level they are both rather faithful to the original: Edward W. Said, *Orientalizm*, trans. Witold Kalinowski (Warszawa: PIW, 1991) and *Orientalizm*, trans. Monika Wyrwas-Wiśniewska (Poznań: Zysk i S-ka, 2005).
[40] Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą* (Kraków: Universitas, 2011).
[41] To compare, Tomasz Zarycki arranges three ways of approaching the problem of Orientalism in the discourse of Polish elites according to the criterion of the symbolic and physical distance from the Other who becomes the object of orientalization, and moral and axiological distance from the Polish society and rival elites. Tomasz Zarycki, *Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe* (London/New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 81-84.
[42] Ewa Thompson, "W kolejce po aprobatę. Kolonialna mentalność polskich elit," *Europa. Tygodnik Idei* 180, p. 8.
[43] Grażyna Borkowska, "Polskie doświadczenie kolonialne," *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2007), p. 15.
[44] Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą*, p. 434.
[45] Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą*, p. 473.
[46] Daniel Beauvois, *Szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1973-1914* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2005), p. 735.
[47] Daniel Beauvois, *Szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1973-1914*, p. 371.
[48] Maria Janion, *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006), pp. 228-235.
[49] Michał Buchowski, "The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother," *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 3, p. 469.
[50] Alexander Etkind, "Internal Colonization and Russian Cultural History," *Ulbandus* 7 (2003).
[51] Bohdan Jałowiecki, "Polskie granice – na wschód od zachodu i na zachód od Wschodu," in *Polska Wschodnia i orientalizm*, ed. Tomasz Zarycki (Warszawa: Scholar, 2013), p. 49.
[52] Hanna Gosk, "Polskie opowieści w dyskurs postkolonialny ujęte," in *(Nie)obecność. Pominięcia i przemilczenia w narracjach XX wieku*, eds. Hanna Gosk and Bożena Karwowska (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2008), p. 75.
[53] Ewa Thompson, "Said a sprawa polska. Przeciwko kulturowej bezsilności peryferii," *Europa. Tygodnik Idei* 65 and "Sarmatyzm i postkolonializm. O naturze polskich resentymentów," *Europa. Tygodnik Idei* 137.
[54] Ewa Thompson, "Sarmatyzm i postkolonializm. O naturze polskich resentymentów," p. 11.

[55] Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą*, pp. 443-448.
[56] Agnieszka Kolasa-Nowak, "Użyteczność obrazu Polski wschodniej w dyskursie akademickim i publicznym," in: *Polska Wschodnia i orientalizm*, p. 106; see also Tomasz Zarycki, "Polska i jej regiony a debata postkolonialna," in *Oblicze polityczne regionów Polski*, ed. Małgorzata Dajnowicz (Białystok: Wyższa Szkoła Finansów i Zarządzania, 2008), pp. 31-48; Leszek Koczanowicz, "My skolonizowani? Wschodnioeuropejskie doświadczenie i teoria postkolonialna," *Nowa Krytyka* 26-27 (2011), pp. 98-109.
[57] See Nelly Bekus, *Struggle over Identity: The Official and the Alternative Belarusianess* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2010).
[58] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p. 226.
[59] Tomasz Rakowski, *Łowcy, zbieracze, praktycy niemocy. Etnografia człowieka zdegradowanego* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2009), p. 10-16.
[60] Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Towards the History of Vanishing Present* (Cambridge MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 1.
[61] Tomasz Zarycki, *Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe*, pp. 89-91, 111-112.
[62] Doris Bachmann-Medick, "From Hybridity to Translation. Reflections on Travelling Concepts," p. 120.
[63] Igor Bobkov, "To the East from the Center: Configurations of Modernness in Eastern European Borderland," *Crossroads Digest* 5 (2010), p. 96.
[64] Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą*. See also Dušan I. Bjelić, *Normalizing the Balkans: Geopolitics of Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).
[65] Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, pp. 33–35.