

Introduction to the Issue: Conceptualizing Generation and Transformation in Women's Writing

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The main objective of this collection of papers is to explore ideas of generation and transformation in the context of postdependency discourse as it may be traced in women's writing published in Bengali, Polish, Czech, Russian and English. As we believe, literature does not have merely a descriptive function or a purely visionary quality but serves also as a discursive medium, which is rhetorically sophisticated, imaginatively influential and stimulates cultural dynamics. It is an essential carrier of collective memory and a significant indicator of group identity. Along with philosophy, literature explores the intellectual and emotional, aesthetic and ethical components of our lives, and, while focusing on a single feeling or unique event or phenomenon, aspires to capture the universal attributes of human experience. Hence, we intend to juxtapose interpretations of literature originating in very different cultural milieus, such as the Central East European¹

¹ The phrase 'Central East European' is not just a geographical description. It is a term cluster loaded with complex geopolitical meaning, involving ethno-cultural and socioeconomic dimensions, which make it highly context-dependent. During the Cold War period

and South Asian,² with the literary treatment of the philosophical dilemmas that challenge authors of various nationalities in times of great political, economic and social upheaval and transformation following long periods of dependency and suppression, caused either by colonial and imperialist domination or by communist ideology.

THE EASTERN LOCATION AND 'POST-' DISCOURSES REVISITED

The 'postdependency discourse' is used here as an umbrella term for diverse issues usually discussed separately by scholars interested in postcolonial and post-communist issues. In recent years, several specialists in cultural studies and comparative literature have been engaged in a methodological debate on the possible extension of postcolonial discourse to the Central and East European region. Some argue for the re-contextualization of postcolonial studies and advocate including post-communist countries within this scope too,³ whereas others stress the uniqueness of the political and social circumstances of this region and promote a newly coined term 'postdependency' that seems more universal and methodologically flexible.⁴

all countries left behind the Iron Curtain (now mostly members of the European Union) were labelled 'Eastern European', regardless their exact geographic location (either Central, like Czech, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia; or Southeastern: Bulgaria, Romania and the post-Yugoslavian states; or just Eastern: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine). Although the fall of the Iron Curtain brought an end to the East–West division in Europe (GARTON ASH 1990), the geopolitical concept of 'Eastern Europe' is sometimes still used for quick reference by the media (cf. WOLFF 1994). Here we prefer to replace it with 'Central East Europe' in order to neutralize any derogating overtones.

² Like the previous term, 'South Asian' is not only a topographic designation. According to the United Nations geographical region classification, Southern Asia comprises the countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. In some contexts, Afghanistan, Burma, Iran, and Tibet are also included. Historically and politically speaking, however, the phrase 'South Asia' commonly means the countries that were part of the former British Empire in the region, the so-called Raj, including the current territories of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh which form its core (KEITH 1936: 440–444), but excluding Sri Lanka, Burma and Sikkim (since 1975 a state of India).

³ Among the adherents of this point of view are Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek (1998), Ewa Thompson (2000a; 2000b; 2005; 2010), and Dariusz Skórczewski (2007; 2009). For a general introduction to postcolonial studies from the perspective of Central and East European countries see BAKUŁA 2011. Bakuła offers a comprehensive bibliographical survey covering the period 1989–2009.

⁴ Some authors claim that analyses of the situation of Central East European countries during the post-communist transformation since 1989, can significantly contribute to post-colonial discourse. And that is why for the sake of historical accuracy they prefer to call this research 'postdependency' rather than postcolonial studies, in order to avoid blurring

In this volume, we do not intend to abandon the ‘postcolonial perspective’ bearing in mind that colonization basically means a relationship of structural domination, and the discursive or political suppression of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question.⁵ What we wish to contest and redefine is the so-called ‘Eastern location’ often perceived as ‘peripheral’ on the map of literary criticism and philosophy making. The point of view marked out by the Eastern location, here identified with the Central East European region and at the same time with the area of South Asia, is tacitly assumed to be less important than the Western — that is, the allegedly ‘central’ or ‘universal’ — perspective. The need to subvert this tacit assumption and restore a sense of agency, subjectivity and axiological equality by the marginalized Eastern/Oriental cultures of Asia has often been expressed by the leading spokesmen of postcolonial and subaltern theories⁶ — Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Partha Chatterjee, and Leela Gandhi. However, there are rather few voices raising this issue in the context of Central East European cultures, which still receives relatively little critical attention and has not been properly theorized.⁷ According to Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, a (Hungarian and Austrian) Canadian scholar, who publishes widely in the field of comparative literature and cultural studies, the Central European cultures elude the simple distinction centre *versus* margins and are not — as implied by the numerous Western scholarly publications — unambiguously peripheral. Moreover, the post-communist countries, still labelled as ‘Eastern Europe’, are located, not merely in the geographical sense but also culturally and politically, on the margin of both Western Europe and ex-Soviet Russia, which makes this region doubly peripheral, or as Tötösy aptly puts it ‘i n - b e t w e e n p e r i p h e r a l’.⁸

the differences or ignoring certain factors affecting this particular region. Cf. e.g. GOSK 2010; KOŁODZIEJCZYK 2011; BORKOWSKA 2011.

⁵ Cf. MOHANTY 1988: 61.

⁶ The term ‘subaltern’, inspired by the work of Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), is even more capacious than ‘postcolonial’ or ‘postdependency’. Literally, ‘subaltern’ refers to any person or group of inferior rank and situation, whether due to ethnicity, class, gender, religion, or sexual orientation.

⁷ Cf. THOMPSON 2010: 1–2. Ewa Thompson, commenting on the situation of Poland colonized by Russia and Germany, notes that “acceptance of the intellectual primacy of France, Germany, Great Britain, or the United States inscribed a sense of ‘being worse’, or at least being less developed intellectually, into the consciousness of the Polish elite, thus confirming the hegemon’s narrative about the primacy of metropolis over periphery. The fact that the surrogate hegemon was freely accepted, as it were, made the Polish elite’s subjugation to it even deeper than similar internalizations among the Pakistani, Hindu, Finnish, or Irish intellectuals” (THOMPSON 2010: 6–7).

⁸ Cf. TÖTÖSY de ZEPETNEK 1998: 13–42.

Significantly, the category 'post-communist' is not simply a political or historical description, useful for periodization. The prefix 'post' introduces another element into the picture: the notion of being in a situation where one set of rules and practices has terminated and another has not yet been fully established. This implies that the 'post-' state may easily be manipulated, and misinterpreted as being highly vulnerable to various invading economic, political and socio-cultural influences. This is where postcolonial or subaltern discourse meets post-communist studies. Since postcolonial theorists have been developing strategies, for over three decades, for tracing such power relations between 'the weak', 'inferior' or 'subaltern' regions and the dominating 'superior' countries that seek hegemony, their deconstructive methodology would also appear to be useful in the context of Central East Europe. As one general introduction to postcolonial studies states:

Newer concerns for the postcolonial have emerged in the age of economic globalization, neocolonialism and cultural imperialism (often coded as 'Westernization' or even 'Americanization'). [...] Globalization, especially of the twentieth century, is the expansion of trade, the development of transnational and global communication networks, the diminished role of the nation-state, the rise of transnational cultural, economic, political networks and the increased circulation of Western consumer products and cultural artifacts. Globalization has a significant cultural component. 'Cultural globalization' is the circulation of Western media: television, pop/rock music and Hollywood icons, sartorial fashions and Pepsi-Coca Cola in a global consumer culture. But globalization is not simply a one way traffic of Western culture across the world (JASEN and NAYAR 2010: 191–192).

Hence postcolonial studies and many of the questions they have taken into consideration also remain relevant to Central East European contexts. Among these questions are: (1) What forms of agency does the local have in the context of globalization? (2) What power structures regulate relations between the centre (Euro-American) and the periphery (Asian, African, South American and, perhaps, Eastern Europe)? (3) How does a native culture contest, co-opt or become erased in the globalization of culture? (4) What are the mechanisms — economic, political, social, juridical — that determine the globalization of culture today?⁹ Apparently, globalization has become, in a sense, a natural subject for postcolonial research because — like colonial or communist oppression in previous decades — globalization is marked by Western, or more precisely Euro-American domination in the global sphere. The old slogan: "Oh, East is East, and West is West,

⁹ Cf. JASEN and NAYAR 2010: 194.

and never the twain shall meet"¹⁰ may have been true during Rudyard Kipling's lifetime, when the British colonialism was at its peak. But today, in the era of globalization, East and West are not only meeting but permeating, and pervading each other.

In the seven contributions that make up the main body of this volume a postcolonial strategy has been adopted in the reading of Polish, Czech, Russian and Bengali literature, in order to investigate how imperialist dependency, be it British or Soviet, has resulted in a hybridization of these national cultures through the apparatus of education, economy, religion, literature and law. In doing so, we are specifically interested in highlighting the perspective of gender-sensitive literary criticism commonly pushed to the margins of the mainstream debate. In fact, critical reflection on the cultural constructs of 'femininity' contributes to the postdependency discourse as its most pervasive, cross-cultural aspect. In the context of contemporary women's writing, the postcolonial perspective helps us to uncover the techniques of domination, and replication of the patriarchal and androcentric structures of society. Meanwhile, the comparison between Central East European and South Asian narratives by women and, most often, as they relate to women's experience of transformation and generation, will enable us to understand some striking analogies in this experience as well as intriguing divergences in the stylistic figurations applied while articulating it.

GENERATION AND TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE GENDER LENS AND BEYOND

Both terms that introduce the leading theme of this volume — generation and transformation — are heavily loaded with philosophical meaning. Here, we intend to discuss only specific selected senses. On the one hand, what we mean by generation is a process of creation, of coming into being, of beginning and also giving birth to something. This sense of 'generation' implies the activity of *m a k i n g*, through which change appears and which is later conceptualized as a transformation, while regularity of transformation is another aspect of generation. On the other hand, we also mean by generation an age-group or group of people sharing similar experience and being both witness and agent of political, social and cultural transformation.

¹⁰ Opening and closing verse of his famous *The Ballad of East and West* (cf. KIPLING 1892: 85–94).

Returning to Pre-Socratic Greek philosophy, generation, or genesis (Gr. γένεσις), may be conceptualized by distinguishing its two basic schemas: p a r e n t a l and t r a n s f o r m a t i o n a l.¹¹ In the parental schema, the 'offspring', or product, inherits the qualities of its 'parents'. This relationship of identity is called imitation (Gr. μίμησις). Thus, understood in this perspective, a generated object must have its originator which is different from the originated object, yet they are similar because they belong to the same kin or class. In the schema of transformation stress is put on the radical difference between the originator and the originated. From the transformational point of view, the originator and the originated cannot belong to the same class because generation involves negation, or destruction, of the originator. Since in the course of generation the substrate undergoes radical changes, the transformation goes beyond imitation and results in releasing, or producing, entirely new qualities.

When contextualizing generation and transformation in the literary production of the 'Eastern peripheries' we must keep in mind both these conceptual schemas, because the postdependency situation forces us to witness both at the same time: (1) the remains, or relicts of the past, sustained, or passively 'imitated', despite the formal shift (e.g. the end of the colonial era, the fall of the Iron Curtain, or the regaining of political independence); and (2) the transformed reality, now markedly altered in the form and function of its various social, political, and economic practices and existing in radically changed cultural conditions. In the context of cultural transformation, to generate means both to last, preserve and survive, but also to modify, or even violate and destroy. However, the prevailing aspect of transformation still seems to reveal 'the new'. But this development is never a linear progress, based on accumulation, or on an evolution from simple forms to more advanced and complex ones. In fact, to 'generate' in terms of cultural studies means nothing more than to redefine, rearticulate, rearrange, reconfigure, or reorient.

Now, if we refer to the second sense of 'generation', namely an age-group, we can capture both leading ideas more comprehensively. The creative, especially literary, expression of each generation may depict emerging new cultural qualities, such as redefined criteria of self-identity, in the light of a multi-dimensional transformation which challenges the members of a given generation, and which includes such things as the transformation of socioeconomic, legal and political relations, the transformation of technology, and the transformation of individual con-

¹¹ Cf. ŠILEIKIS 2006: 8–21. Author discusses in detail the concept of generation in early Greek philosophy.

sciousness, as well as aspirations to personal freedom of choice. Naturally, to appreciate the contribution of a particular generation we need to see these transformations in their interconnectedness.

But why, one may ask, focus on women's writing? Well, the short answer is: because people of the 'East' and 'women' in particular may be perceived as Others. More precisely, our special interest in giving the postdependency generation of women authors a voice is motivated by the fact that in the case both of postcolonial India (post-1947) and the post-communist states of Central East Europe (post-1989), the great political transformations proved to be a highly stimulating turning point for female writers. Many women, many more than in previous generations, have felt themselves to be in a position to express themselves freely through creative writing. Thus, they have contributed immensely to the cultural communities of praxis as artistic or formal innovators, as severe critics of social injustice, and as transmitters of cultural, gender, and linguistic identities. Perhaps this has come about because no generation has ever faced a greater challenge, because the cultural transformations have been so profound and multi-dimensional.

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This volume was initially conceived and designed during the International Symposium entitled *Generation and Transformation in Women's Writing* held in Kraków on 14–15 May 2010, when a group of scholars from Glasgow, Honolulu, Kolkata, Kraków, London, Prague and Tampere met together and discussed such issues in an interdisciplinary perspective. We debated the intersections between the experience of different generations, as well as existential, social, political and cultural transformation as captured and interpreted in women's writing. The majority of papers included in the present collection were originally delivered during this Symposium. Some contributions, however, were invited at a later stage in order to make the whole set more complete. The first three papers consider ideas of generation and transformation in the work of Polish, Czech, and Russian authors. Ursula Phillips discusses two novels by contemporary writer Inga Iwasiów (b. 1963) in the context of geopolitical, ideological, social and psycho-cultural transformations as they specifically affect different generations of inhabitants of the Polish city of Szczecin (pre-1945 German Stettin) from 1945 until the first decade of the 21st century. This text addresses the very important problem of cultural memory of the Polish communist past through the notion of women's generations. In the second essay, Elena Sokol offers an overview of the diversity of women's prose writing that

emerged on the Czech cultural scene in the post-communist era. She concentrates on the writing of Lenka Procházková (b. 1951), Iva Pekárková (b. 1963), and Eva Hauserová (b. 1954). The papers by Phillips and Sokol emphasize the importance of re-telling the communist past and examining the paths taken by political and cultural transformations for understanding the mechanisms at work in recent history. The author of the third paper, Marja Rytönen deals with women-centred prose texts of the 1990s and 2000s by Russian authors, and focuses especially on generation narratives by Liudmila Petrushevskaja (b. 1938), Liudmila Ulitskaja (b. 1943) and Elena Chizhova (b. 1957). All the articles on Central and East Europe may be read as complementary accounts of generational changes seen through the gender lens.

The following four contributions address the leading theme in the context of contemporary Indian literature, where women's subjugation is portrayed as linked to the oppression of caste and class.¹² The author of the first paper in this section, Suchorita Chattopadhyay introduces Ashapura Devi¹³ (1909–1995), a prominent Bengali woman novelist who focuses on women's creativity and enlightenment during the colonial and postcolonial period in Bengal. In the next essay, Blanka Knotková-Čapková analyses concepts of femininity in selected texts by two outstanding Bengali writers of different generations, a prose writer — Mahasweta Devi (b. 1926), and a woman poet — Mallika Sengupta (1960–2011). The subsequent contribution by Prasita Mukherjee highlights the similarities and differences between Mahasweta Devi and another distinguished Indian author, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880–1932), thus representing two generations writing almost a century apart. In the paper closing this section, Neela Bhattacharya Saxena offers a reading of short stories by Jhumpa Lahiri (b. 1967), a remarkable Indian American diasporic writer,¹⁴ in the context of postcolonial

¹² Readers unfamiliar with Indian women's writing may refer to the two-volume anthology edited by THARU and LALITA (1993), comprising over 140 selected texts translated into English from 13 Indian vernacular languages. This rich collection of texts together with the useful critical introductions, and biographical head-notes map women's shifting roles and varying responses to the great social, political and cultural upheavals through 2600 years, from 600 B.C. to the late 20th century.

¹³ Some Indian terms used by the authors of this volume, especially proper names, appear in various spellings, either in the spellings of Bengali language, or Hindi, or Sanskrit or in a simplified English version (e.g. Debi/Devi, Bidyasagar/Vidyasagar, Ray/Roy, Thakur/Tagore, Kalkata/Kolkata/Calcutta, etc.). The editors decided to accept different notations according to the authors' preferences.

¹⁴ On the Indian Anglophone diasporic writers, including Lahiri, see for example, the collection of papers published in *Families: A Journal of Representations*. As the volume editor, Sanjukta Dasgupta, emphasizes, the process of emigration, involving re-location, dis-

criticism and the theoretical framework derived from Saxena's own concept of the 'Gynocentric matrix' of Indic sensibility, which she combines with James Hillman's polytheistic psychology and Wallace Stevens's notion of Supreme Fiction.

The three remaining papers, which constitute a separate subsection, are not focused on women's writing. Nevertheless, they share an interest with the other texts in the culturally conditioned process of transforming paradigms, myths and stereotypes. From the paper by Lidia Wiśniewska, who traces mythic transformation in an ode of Horace, Shakespeare's drama, and the fictional biography of Karen Essex, we can learn how the image of Cleopatra — depicted as queen, mother and lover — evolved over the centuries and across cultures. The author of the next paper, Bijoy Mukherjee discusses the scientific achievements of Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858–1937), an outstanding Bengali botanist and physicist, the first Indian scientist to be widely respected in Western academia.¹⁵ Bose conducted landmark research into the response of plant and animal life to various stimuli, including electricity, light, sound, and touch. The final paper by Antonina Łuszczkiewicz, the only Polish-language contribution to this issue of *Argument: Biannual Philosophical Journal* (<http://www.argument-journal.eu>), apart from a book review by Alicja Kukuła, characterizes the cultural stereotypes and prejudices against the Indians depicted in the writings of Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), one of the most popular British novelists of the Victorian era. As the starting point for her reflections, the author takes a thought-provoking statement by George Orwell (1903–1950), who described Kipling as a racist and imperialist.

We hope that this unique collection of papers, none of which have been published before, will find readers among students and scholars of various national origins and research specializations interested in postdependency issues. Perhaps it will also throw some light on our mental 'peripheries' and arouse interest in women's writing of the 'East', whatever geographic region this may imply — European or Asian.

placement, uprooting and also re-rooting of individuals and communities, often leads to "an identity crisis in the case of new migrants, but in the succeeding generations it is the hybridity of cultures, the dual identities, the fluidity of identities that heralds the birth of new ideas and identities that break free from traditional demarcations, normative practices and rigid local, regional and national lines of control" (DASGUPTA 2009: 5).

¹⁵ Among the numerous books discussing Bose's contribution to the philosophy of science cf. e.g. SEN GUPTA, ENGINEER and SHEPHERD 2009; DASGUPTA 1999; EMERSON 1997. A broader view of the modern history of South Asian science is offered by RAJ 2007.

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