

Reportage from the (Post-)Contact Zone: Polish Travellers to Decolonised India (1950–1980)

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Witold Koehler, travelling to India in 1954, was struck by the fact that everywhere he went, he was greeted with a smile. Soon, however, he noticed that not all smiles were genuine, they concealed a nothingness which made him feel strangely “invisible” (Koehler 1957, 47). First, he was puzzled by this, but then he understood the reasons behind such behaviour:

After all, a European has only recently become a guest here. Before, he was a conqueror, oppressor, one of the many plagues of this country. A sahib would demand submission, he taught people to manifest it with a smile. This smile is stuck to the lips of those that had to deal with him. But, under the mask of a smile, there is coldness. (Koehler 1957, 48)¹

Koehler realised that, as a European, he would always be associated with the former colonisers, and it would be difficult to escape

¹ If not otherwise indicated, all translation from Polish are by the author.

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this equation. He relates his experiences in a travel account, *Indie przez dziurkę od klucza* [*India through a keyhole*] (1957), written following his visit to India for the World Forestry Congress in Dehradun. Until the period of the Thaw (1953–1957), opportunities to travel abroad had been limited, which is why the first Polish post-World War II works of reportage from India date from the late 1950s. Other texts analysed here are travel accounts by Jerzy Ros (1957), Jerzy Putrament (1963, 1967), Wiesław Górnicki (1964), Janusz Gołębiowski (1966), Wojciech Giełżyński (1977) and Jerzy Chociłowski (1977).² These authors, categorised broadly as reporters, all published nonfictional accounts of their journeys to India in the first three decades of the country's independence. Their narratives are unique, as they represent India through the lenses of reporters from a country that was not fully independent at the time, situated in a liminal position between East and West. Poland belonged to the socialist bloc, which officially supported Third World countries against what they perceived as imperialistic capitalism. The Second and Third World alliance, an integral part of the bipolar world divided by the Iron Curtain, was an important element of the ideology of the communist bloc (Westad, 2007; McMahon (ed.), 2013). Undoubtedly, sending reporters and official representatives abroad was a way for the communist authorities to effectuate a sort of rapprochement between a decolonised country with socialist sympathies and the countries of the Eastern Bloc, but also to convince the societies of the Soviet-controlled countries that the wider world is within their reach, that it was also “their world” (Gorsuch 2011). Despite these declarations of closeness and sharing the common values of socialism, the reporters clearly marked the fact of their belonging to European culture and values, even though this meant that they had to face the burden of the European colonial past in which they had not directly taken part.

² While Ros, Górnicki, Gołębiowski, Giełżyński and Chociłowski were professional reporters, affiliated to newspapers, magazines or the Polish Press Agency, Koehler and Putrament visited India as official representatives. Nevertheless, their accounts were included in this study since they read like reportage: it is the style of the text not the occupation of the author that qualifies them for this category.

A POSTCOLONIAL CONTACT ZONE

Although the reporters arrived in India after the country had achieved independence from the British, they found themselves in what may be called a “postcolonial contact zone,” to paraphrase Mary-Louise Pratt’s concept of contact zones as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (1992, 4). In this postcolonial contact zone, the direct relation of domination was no longer there, but traces of colonial hegemony were still visible. Although the reporters’ main goal was to depict the decolonisation and modernisation of independent India, their attention frequently shifted to various traces of the colonial past that could be found in India of their time. They arrived in India as envoys of the Socialist Bloc, expecting a country undergoing great change, industrialisation, and a transformation of society and culture. Nevertheless, as white Europeans, they became inscribed in the old binary divisions between the colonisers and the colonised, the hierarchies formed in a previous era, and more or less inadvertently, they stepped into the role of the British “sahib.” This is only one of the paradoxes that characterise this postcolonial—or decolonial—encounter.

Another paradoxical aspect of this encounter is that in their narratives, two seemingly contradictory discourses—a socialist and an Orientalist one—intertwine. The reporters are confronted with the colonial heritage, but also, they are trapped in the web of meanings produced in the colonial era. While claiming to be anti-colonial and calling for a political emancipation of India along the socialist model, they reproduce Orientalist visions of Indian culture and society. For instance, they reach for a cultural text that determines the European imagination of the Orient: Ros labels a group of people as looking similar to “Ali Baba and his forty thieves” (Ros 1957, 236). Koehler likens his trip to a “journey on a magical carpet” (1957, 38) and Putrament compares an Indian palace to a building from “One Thousand and One Nights” (1963, 114). Although Wiesław Górnicki calls for writers to abandon the notions of the exotic when talking about India, in his descriptions of Indian *nizams* and maharajas, he, too, paints a picture of “Oriental luxury” (1964). One can certainly find the familiar concept of “Oriental despotism” in his characterisation of the feudal system. Furthermore, the fact that the reporters return to the rather clichéd topics of Hindu spirituality, mysterious rituals, “strange-looking” *sadhus* and “holy cows” is already proof

that the long-lasting formulas of Orientalist perceptions of India were not only deeply ingrained in the Polish reporters' minds, but also readily activated, even though on the surface they seemed to espouse different views.³ Indeed, they write about India's industrialisation, the communist movement, central planning and Nehru's socialist sympathies—but their travel observations often remain conspicuously similar to those of their colonial predecessors.

Moreover, the reporters—although anti-colonial in their declarations—could not simply appear as Polish travellers who had nothing in common with colonialism: as white Europeans, they were often associated with the former colonial masters, with all that it entailed. Many of them became conscious of their skin colour for the first time in their life. In India, their white skin meant that they were not able to act as if they were invisible and they could not behave as neutral reporters covering events from a distance. The burden of the colonial past was also the source of their privilege: in no Western European country would a visitor from behind the Iron Curtain receive such attention and special treatment as they did in India. A socialist reporter, expected to champion equality, would thus find themselves in circumstances hardly matching the ideology of their state. Giełżyński remembered how thrilled he was to stay in a luxurious hotel in Mumbai (1977, 8–9), Górnicki noted his impressions from a lavish reception held by a rich German industrialist (1964, 162–163), and Putrament roamed around India with an official delegation, having access to the best products and services India could offer (1963, 96).

Finally, in a larger context, while the reporters inscribed themselves in the ideological discourse of Soviet support of the decolonised Third World, they were themselves not entirely free, since they were subjected to censorship and travel restrictions imposed by Poland's location as a USSR satellite state. They were travellers on an official mission: either, like Koehler and Putrament, they attended international events as representatives of their country, or, like the professional journalists, they were sent as foreign correspondents to India by their news agencies or newspapers. They had to receive permission to apply for a passport and return the document as soon as they arrived back in Poland. To be published, their accounts had to pass through the Central Office for the Control of the Press, Publications and Performances. Certainly, they became part of the

³ For further discussion on Orientalising India, see: Inden (1986), Breckenridge and van der Veer (eds) (1993) and Prakash (1995).

propagandist discourse of internationalism and the promotion of communism in the decolonised countries of the Third World, and thus the reporters, willingly or not, became “troubadours of the socialist empire.”⁴

These paradoxes or inconsistencies are characteristic of such Polish—postcolonial and socialist—encounters with India. To further explore these encounters, the first part of this chapter features a critique of colonialism and its legacies as expressed in the works of reportage analysed here. In the second part, the focus shifts to the ambiguous position of the Polish reporter in postcolonial India.

A SOCIALIST CRITIQUE OF COLONIALISM

The critique of Western colonialism is probably the most predictable and obvious element of any socialist travel reportage from India. In the accounts analysed here, however, it is bountifully laced with contradictions. Clearly, such criticism was fuelled by both a condemnation of colonialism as a historical phenomenon, and by the general negative campaign against the West in Soviet Cold-War propaganda. The Marxist–Leninist ideology of anti-imperialism and the Soviet Union’s official and unofficial support of anti-colonial, communist revolutions in the so-called Third World, which were to put an end to the capitalist system of exploitation worldwide, would influence Soviet foreign policy for several decades. It sometimes meant the direct involvement of the USSR in various regional conflicts, but after Stalin’s death, it was more often a battle of worldviews and ideologies, as well as indirect financial and military support, rather than an armed struggle (McMahon (ed.), 2013). As Geoffrey Roberts points out, the post-Stalin Soviet Union strived to present itself as an advocate of peace (simultaneously projecting an image of an aggressive, belligerent West), and as a supporter of national liberation in the former colonies in the Third World (1999, 36–37). Nikita Khrushchev in particular placed foreign affairs at the centre of his political outlook. According to Roberts, “[H]is foreign policy style was exuberant, bombastic and politically and ideologically militant”; in terms of contents, “he emphasised peaceful, economic competition between socialism and capitalism, but he projected an equally, if not more, competitive policy in the political, ideological and military” (1999, 44). A powerful ally in this

⁴ This term refers to the Polish title of Ewa M. Thompson’s book, *Imperial Knowledge* (2000), translated into Polish as “Trubadurzy imperium”—troubadours of the empire.

competition, in Khrushchev's view, were the national liberation movements in the non-aligned countries, as it was expected that their victory would eventually lead to the adoption of socialism in these newly independent states. Support for the decolonised countries of the Third World continued in the Brezhnev era of détente.⁵

Nevertheless, relations with the West remained tense. Even though mutual contacts increased in the late 1960s and 1970s, the propaganda still talked of "American imperialism," the "rotten West," "enemies of the people" and "revisionists with foreign connections"—such language was particularly noticeable in Poland in the Stalinist period, and then again during the nationalist, antisemitic campaign led by the communist authorities in March 1968 (Głowiński 2009, 96). Thus, it was convenient to denigrate the West when the occasion presented itself, especially in the context of the colonial heritage of Western European states. The narrators of reportage accounts from India take many opportunities to deplore India's colonial past and they are eager to vilify the Western colonialists. The intensity of their critique decreases with time, reflecting the change in propaganda newspeak: Ros, travelling to India in the mid-1950s, obviously uses much stronger language than Chociłowski, whose account dates from 1977. The following quotation illustrates Ros' criticism of imperialism:

On the way to India, once called "the pearl in the British crown",⁶ turning the pages of the history of organised robbery—imperialism—it is worth wondering, how long will Egypt and the Suez Canal remain the Aesopian goose laying golden eggs to foreigners? The last months have given an answer to this question. The nationalisation of the Suez Canal by Egypt and the liquidation of the parasitic Company—became one of the most important political events of the last decade. The spring of the colonial

⁵ For contemporary research on Soviet involvement in the Third World, see: Roberts, McMahon, Westad; for scholarly articles on Soviet support to the Third World from the Cold War era, see: Steven R. David's "Soviet Involvement in Third World Coups," *International Security* 11, no. 1 (Summer 1986): 3–36; Mark N. Katz, "The Soviet Union and the Third World," *Current History*, (October 1986): 327–339; Gu Guan-Fu, "Soviet Aid to the Third World: An Analysis of Its Strategy," *Soviet Studies* 35, no. 1 (January 1983): 71–89.

⁶ The reporter used an imprecise translation of the British labelling of India as the "jewel in the crown," calling it, instead, "the pearl" in the crown (this corresponds to the analogous expression in Polish).

peoples rejecting the old yokes is an undeniable fact of our era. (Ros 1957, 50–51)

Ros not only calls imperialism “organised robbery,” but he uses this opportunity to comment on a contemporary debate on the future of the Suez Canal. Egypt’s president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, backed by the Soviet Union, decided to nationalise the Canal in 1956. The Suez Canal was previously managed by the mostly French-owned Suez Canal Company (which Ros calls “parasitic”). This caused international outrage and led to a British–French–Israeli intervention, and to high tension between the Cold War rivals. Eventually, the United States and the Soviet Union exerted pressure on all parties to negotiate a ceasefire, and Egypt kept control of the Canal. Ros underlines the importance of this event, treating it as a symptom of a larger phenomenon of decolonisation. Chociłowski, on the other hand, throughout his account from India does not refer to colonialism or imperialism in a contemporary context—these are memories of the past, certainly negative ones, but without any larger impact on the world politics of his day.

Understandably, the British colonial past features in all the accounts from India analysed here. It is presented as one of the most important aspects in Indian history, marking India’s perception of the West forever. According to Jerzy Ros, starting from the first Europeans that reached India, all the successive Westerners that arrived on the Subcontinent can be considered looters and exploiters. Since their arrival, “violence, like a shadow, was ever-present in the march of Europeans, that ravage the country and plunder mercilessly. The traditions of Portuguese sailors are continued by the French, Dutch and English, who followed their suit” (1957, 59). Thus, India is presented as a victim of European oppressors, who continuously attacked it and tried to subjugate it throughout its history. The logic of European conquest and domination was, moreover, prominent in the Marxist–Leninist world outlook, and could serve as a warning to Third World independent states against closer ties with the West.

Although the British colonial rule in India was much more extensive and well-known than the Portuguese domination of parts of the Subcontinent, Ros and his fellow reporter, Janusz Gołębiowski, choose the case of Goa as an example of colonial conquest, not only because it was the region where Vasco da Gama first landed and where the early European conquest of India began, but also because this territory was

in the reporters' times still not part of independent India. Goa features in the reportages of Ros and Gołębiowski as a contemporary example of colonialism. In their reflections on the status of Goa, the two reporters tend to include in the category of colonial oppression, a whole range of phenomena. For instance, they show links between the British colonial domination before India's independence and the contemporary rule of the Portuguese in Goa. In this attempt, they disregard the actual historical and political context only to underline the evils of colonialism in the face of a current event: the ongoing discussions on Goa joining independent India. This eventually happened in 1961, when Goa became annexed to the Indian Union. At other points of their narratives, the reporters liken nineteenth-century British imperialism to the "American imperialism" of their times—again, choosing to disregard the context (Ros 1957, 108; Gołębiowski 1966, 100–105). It is significant that all forms of colonial or imperialist domination by Westerners, real and hypothetical, are boxed together. Indeed, while talking about India's colonial past, the reporters tend to use the term "Western imperialism," rather than British, Portuguese or French imperialism. It is clear that the discussion on Goa and, more generally, on European colonialism, is meant to be a commentary on contemporary world events, affirming the ideological location of the reporters in the worldview of the Eastern Bloc. In fact, their critique is not very far from the views of well-known contemporary critics in postcolonial studies, who unveiled the workings of various forms of Western imperialism. While the Polish reporters did not apply the vocabulary or the theoretical instruments of postcolonial studies, and the style they used was, intentionally, not scholarly, their engaged, bottom-up approach and observations of daily life could very well illustrate the postcolonial condition of India. Thus, their texts in some way anticipated the appearance of postcolonial critique, in a Marxist spirit, which would explore the complex and deep-rooted consequences of European colonial presence in various parts of the world.

TRACES OF COLONIALISM IN INDIAN CITIES

The anti-colonialism of the reporters is also manifested in their descriptions of British heritage in India. To the Polish reporters, even a glance at Indian cities conjures up the image of the Raj. Jerzy Putrament, arriving on New Delhi's main avenue, Rajpath, which he calls "the local Champs-Élysées" (1963, 90), is struck by the ugliness of the monument to King

George V, placed in the vicinity of India Gate. “What kind of a devil of bad taste has led the English to locate this monstrosity here?” (1963, 90), asks the writer, and describes the lack of proportions of the sculpture, ridiculing the appearance of the British monarch.⁷ Putrament is similarly disapproving of colonial monuments that he sees in Kolkata (then Calcutta):

The English have arranged this terrain in their own way: they have placed plenty of statues of a series of viceroys, and at the other end of the field [Maidan], they have built the horrible “Victoria Memorial,” an edifice in a pseudo-Indian style, honouring the queen, or rather the empress of India, who once visited Calcutta. They still carefully preserve the slippers she wore here, and other such relics. We were invited to see this wonder from close up. Somehow, we did not feel like it. (1963, 16)

The colonial monuments are thus a metaphor for the British presence in India, and by demonstrating his disinterest and displeasure with them, Putrament shows his negative attitude to colonialism.

The reporters describe the other specimens of urban architecture left behind by the British: white bungalows, stone churches and colonial residences. Interestingly, while they are critical of colonialism as a form of power, they find such architecture aesthetically appealing, perhaps because it resembles European buildings and evokes a feeling of familiarity among the otherwise vastly different surroundings. Witold Koehler, for instance, observes that New Delhi is a young, pleasant city, whose history goes back only a few decades, and calls it an “English foundling, bearing an indelible beauty of its origin” (1957, 49). Putrament—although a communist official—is even more enthusiastic about the Indian capital:

A colonial city, designed mostly for “whites,” planned in advance, very green: both the lawns and the avenues . . . A city in a constant state of development. Extremely beautiful, ultramodern houses, multi-storeyed and multi-coloured. The American Embassy, an original rectangle. The somewhat classicist edifice of the Soviet Embassy. Hotel Ashoka, slightly touched with “Hinduism,” wonderful, comfortable, slightly nouveau-riche . . . (1963, 89)

⁷ Indeed, King George V statue was removed from this prominent position in the 1960s and joined many other statues of prominent figures from the British Raj era at the Coronation Park, situated rather far from the centre of the city, in North Delhi.

Although Putrament puts the term “whites” in quotation marks, he is not particularly troubled by the fact that New Delhi was built by and for the colonisers—the same “Western imperialists” of whom he is so critical. Clearly, the Polish reporters’ gaze on British heritage in India is not as ideologically consistent as it may initially seem, and there are ruptures in their anti-colonial stance. When they stray from political and social matters, the reporters do not feel obliged to maintain their criticism of the West—quite the opposite: they take pleasure in being surrounded by aesthetically pleasing and familiar-looking edifices. This troubled, contradictory approach could be seen as a typical instance of colonial ambiguity: on the one hand, colonial power is despised and rejected, but on the other hand, underneath this negative attitude, there is the recognition of the “cultural authority” of the colonisers, as Homi K. Bhabha would call it, and a creeping desire (1994, 105). It is a desire to plunge into the beauty of the colonial creations, to feel part of them—to become *like* the European sahibs in India—in a manifestation of almost colonial mimicry (1994, 107).

CAPITALISM AND COLONIALISM INTERTWINED

For the reporters, another way of showcasing the evils of colonialism to their readers is to compare the colonial exploitation of labour in India to the exploitations of workers in early capitalism in the West. In order to do so, they juxtapose images of modern-day Calcutta with those of nineteenth-century London. For instance, Putrament describes Calcutta and focuses on a bridge joining two sides of the city: “A huge bridge on the Hooghly, the local mighty, dirty river, a tributary of the Ganges. A Victorian bridge, tall, with a thick network of bindings, clogged with cars, rickshaws, cyclists. A horrendous mix of the ugliness of nineteenth-century London with Bengali poverty” (1967, 27). It is striking that Jerzy Chociłowski, who visits Calcutta ten years after Putrament, makes an almost identical observation: “Calcutta was built by the English, which is why a European walking around the city centre or the factory and ports district on the banks of the Hooghly river—might feel a bit like in London, Hamburg, Amsterdam, or even Łódź⁸ of the previous century”

⁸ Łódź is a city in central Poland, famous for its nineteenth-century development of the textile industry.

(1977, 119). Thus, in both reporters' accounts, Calcutta is placed side-by-side with the main centres of the European industrial revolution; it is one of the elements of the capitalist system that they see as exploitative and unfair. In drawing the readers' attention to these similarities, the reporters attempt to connect various historical phenomena which perhaps are not fully comparable. Indeed, Johannes Fabian, in his analysis of how anthropology has been constructing the notion of Other, places great emphasis on the use of temporal distancing, describing such anti-historical approaches as the "denial of coevalness" (1983, 50, 73). Time and history are disregarded by the reporters, as India appears to them as removed in time. However, by highlighting this connection of the two different places in two different epochs, the reporters skilfully present capitalism as a global, interconnected system which benefits only the privileged.

This emphasis on the fact that economic inequality is a lasting, global phenomenon can also be observed in Górnicki's description of the banking district of Calcutta. He presents it as a dark, gloomy place, haunted by the spirits of the past, which are embodied by the dirty, classicist pillars with figures of Atlases on the buildings' façades. This landscape is static and unchanging:

For a hundred or two hundred years, the dark fingers of Indian clerks have been writing the same words, names and addresses into white books. Only the numbers are ever increasing. This is the only thing that changes. The dirty Atlases over the gates and the goddesses from allegories, faded from the sun's heat, point their lifeless stare at the crowd . . . (Górnicki 1964, 159)

Górnicki clearly labels those who are the oppressors and those who are the oppressed, introducing a visual (or even racial) difference between "dark fingers" and "white books." He mentions the "increasing numbers," representing the growing income of the colonisers—a fortune made at the expense of the colonised. In his opinion, colonial domination led to a standstill and froze India in time, hindering its development.

Although Górnicki comes to India in the 1960s, he still feels the effects of the colonial era. Once, walking around the crowded streets of Calcutta, Górnicki spots a Chrysler car. "A hallucination?" he asks himself, and describes the passenger sitting in the back of the car as a "pink, robust gentleman with side-whiskers" (1964, 159). The reporter makes an instant connection: "although he does not wear a top hat

and a tobacco-brown overcoat, his neck is adorned with a discreet tie instead of a necktie, but these traits... the blond sideburns... a smirk on his lips... Which century is it, really?" (Górnicki 1964, 159). Thus, for Górnicki, every wealthy Englishman in an expensive car is a living memory of the colonial era; in different clothes, but with the same attitude. He suggests that the business ties between Britain and India were not fully severed at the end of political dependence, and that the British have continued to take advantage of India up to that point through the banking sector, among others. Controlling the finances is, for the reporter, equivalent to having real power over a country. This is not only a critique of economic dependence inherited from the colonial era. It is also a call for reform: if no radical changes are introduced, the effects of colonialism will never disappear. Such calls for reforms, which the reader can easily assume would be reforms in the socialist spirit, appear throughout Górnicki's account, whether he is talking about feudalism, agricultural reform, religion or social systems.

Nevertheless, the attitude towards the former colonisers in India is not merely a rational one, justified by the reporters' political views. In an emotional outburst, Górnicki exclaims: "Oh, Victorian England, red-haired, puritan, with your stiff bustle, England Ruling the Waves, England of cruel admirals and deceitful diplomats—you did not neglect anything that would allow you not to be hated till the end" (Górnicki 1964, 170–171). This personification of England serves to present India's former metropolis as the main villain of history, the cruel, cold and rigid character who imposes its will on others. This depiction of England is not only helpful to Górnicki in describing India's colonial past, but it is certainly meant to reinforce a negative perception of England—representing the capitalist West—among his readers in Poland.

The critique of India's colonial oppression is thus a way to express very contemporary ideological concerns: the growing role of the United States of America in the world, the Cold War rivalry with the West and the pervasiveness of the capitalist system which India—to the displeasure of its socialist partners—is also gradually embracing. Apart from competing for international influence, the two main players in the global arena, the United States and the Soviet Union, are also competing for prestige. By exporting its technology and lending support to the Third World, the Soviet Union not only asserted its military and economic power, but also tried to "woo 'hearts and minds' of the new Third World" (Engerman 2013, 228). The reporters' narratives can be considered as part of this

“wooing”: by presenting colonialism and capitalism as outdated Western systems which exploit and create dependence, the Soviet Union appears as a force of modernity, with an ambitious vision and an active global presence. These accounts could also be instrumental domestically: they could help in convincing the citizens of the Socialist Bloc that their leaders are efficient and successful, and that communism is a valid ideology in the world.

THE AMBIGUOUS POSITION OF A POLISH REPORTER IN INDIA

It is exactly with this goal in mind that selected writers and reporters were allowed to travel abroad, serving partly as “ambassadors of socialism” (Gorsuch 2011, 108). Not only were they representing their country, and by extension, the entire Eastern Bloc, but they were encouraged to document their experience abroad in travel accounts. These accounts were intended to inform the public at home about the “spring of the colonial peoples” (as Ros put it) and about the global outreach of socialism. It is thus not surprising that the Polish reporters in India describe the activity of the Indian communists, the Indian governments’ policies inspired by Marxism, the socialist sympathies of India’s leaders and the technological development aided by Eastern European experts. While they are mostly inquisitive and committed to understanding the complexities of Indian society, they tend to offer simplistic explanations for the events they observe. India’s poverty and social inequalities are attributed solely to colonial exploitation, and, after Independence, the incomplete adoption of socialism. The reporters tend to diminish the role of other factors, for instance long-lasting social hierarchies, rooted in religious beliefs and hardened by customs, patriarchal models, widespread corruption, distrust between religious communities, difficult access to natural resources or even the challenging climate.⁹ Traditions and customs are, however, labelled as “obscurantist,” “superstitious” or “backward.” Their judgmental and categorising gaze is once again the gaze of an outsider, a Westerner imposing their authoritative view on India.

⁹ So did the Polish authorities—Janusz Gołębiowski describes the failed project of exporting Polish trucks and motorbikes to India: their engines would simply stop working in high temperatures (see: Gołębiowski 1966, 160).

Indeed, to average Indians, they are just like other Europeans, representatives of Western culture. As such, the reporters have to face the baggage of the colonial past associated with the presence of white travellers in India. Ros, a reporter with a strong socialist outlook, who wants to get to know the average inhabitants of India and understand social and cultural phenomena, is particularly troubled by this fact. He realises that wherever he goes, his presence will alter the way people work, the way they refer to his guide, the way they look at him. Whenever Ros wants to talk to local workers, they usually do not react, either not wanting to get into trouble, or expecting that he will demand something of them. The association with the British colonisers even lands the reporter in trouble. Ros goes to a large communist rally held at Calcutta's Maidan. He merges with the crowd, but his presence does not remain unnoticed. People start hissing, pushing, labelling him as an Englishman:

[D]espite the seriousness of the situation, it would be hard not to notice the paradox of this incident: any time now, a Polish journalist will be beaten up for allegedly being a war instigator. In my thoughts, I curse my light canvas hat, the camera, the freshly ironed shorts and those almost two hundred years of British occupation which taught Indians to see a representative of the despised imperialist world in every white person. (1957, 248)

Finally, Ros manages to pull out his passport from his pocket and the atmosphere suddenly changes. He claims that when he proves to be a Pole, he is surrounded by people patting him on the back and cheering, as he recalls, "long live the USSR and Poland!" (1957, 249).

Apart from this incident, the reporters most often enjoy a privileged status in India. This fact is difficult to reconcile with their socialist beliefs. Putrament faces this problem: while he admits that being a white visitor is sometimes helpful, he openly expresses his ethical concerns. In hotels, there are so many employees, says Putrament, that whenever you want to do something, call the elevator or open the door, someone is there to help. "You know that he is counting on a tip, you don't have money for the tip, you are ashamed that you don't have any, and ashamed that you let them serve you, as if you were an old, impotent man" (1967, 15). However, special treatment is sometimes welcome. When Putrament travels by car with three other Poles, they are stopped by the police. The officer asks for documents, and it turns out that their passports had been

left back at the embassy. The reporter is relieved when the officer lets them go, seeing “three white sahibs” inside the car (1963, 114).

What differentiates them perhaps from their predecessors of the colonial era is that they try to maintain an attitude of a certain humility—they understand that their knowledge of India is limited and that they are not able to escape the burden of being a European in this former colony. While enjoying their privileged status as white foreigners—albeit, with a guilty conscience—the Polish reporters try hard to underline how different they are from their Western counterparts. Górnicki describes his interaction with American visitors to India. He is very critical of these tourists, ridiculing their naiveté or even stupidity:

A couple of American tourists: Fantastic! Have you seen the snake charmer? How can they live in such poverty? And how many prostitutes! It's so hot, hotter than in Manhattan in the summer! Are you also going to Madurai? Why is this Coca-Cola so warm? What do you think about Nehru? Fantastic! No, we are tourists. (1964, 171)

Górnicki tries to present the American tourists as those who think in stereotypes, who see India as the land of “snake charmers,” and of extreme poverty and destitution (surprisingly, he does not notice similar tendencies in himself or his compatriots). He is appalled that they compare everything to what they know from home—heat, Coca-Cola, etc. By painting such a picture of American tourists, the reporter places himself outside the Western travel industry. He is more than a tourist—he is a reporter on a mission to depict the decolonised Subcontinent, and as such, he has more authority to talk about India. Clearly, as representatives of communist Poland, all the reporters analysed here distance themselves from colonialism presented as a Western phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

The reporters criticise Western influences over India and lament India's colonial past. This criticism is incorporated into the Cold War narrative of rivalry between socialism and the capitalist West. The term “colonialism” is frequently replaced by “imperialism,” so that it is possible to draw a parallel between the European and American global presence in their times. It was typical of Soviet propaganda to accuse America of imperialism and of following in the footsteps of colonialism. Nevertheless,

this criticism is not uniform: when it comes to buildings from the colonial era, the reporters appreciate their beauty. They deplore the effects of colonialism on Indian society, but they sometimes reap benefits from their status as Europeans in India. Finally, they ridicule American tourists, but are they really that different from them? Their itineraries are not planned by a tour operator—but are certainly to some extent pre-planned by their superiors or by the Polish embassy in India. Their agency and freedom of expression are also limited, even though they claim to represent a freedom- and peace-loving ideology. In a wider sense, although critical of Western imperialism, they are victims of another imperialism themselves—the Soviet one.

The reporters' identity is also manifold, and different facets of it are manifested at different times. Generally, the reporters clearly identify themselves as Polish, as in Ros' encounter with the local crowd at a communist rally. Furthermore, they stress their belonging to the block of socialist countries. Soviet modernity—rational, secular, egalitarian (at least in theory)—is presented as an alternative to the Western European one, the by-product of which was colonial domination. However, the reporters do feel European, frequently referring to “our norms” or “our, European culture” (Chociłowski 1977, 20). It seems that it gives them particular satisfaction to be treated on a par with other visitors from Europe, although this entails the unwanted association with the colonial past. They actively try to present themselves as anti-colonial and anti-imperialist, and to differentiate their approach from that of their Western European colleagues, but their attempts are not always successful, and their behaviour is full of contradictions. Their symbolic positioning on the world map when visiting India is deeply ambivalent and very telling. They are Europeans, unintentionally reproducing an Orientalist mindset, at times manifesting their superiority towards Indian people and culture and observing India with a colonial gaze (Spurr, 1993). But, they are also Poles, who feel a certain inferiority as citizens of the lesser, socialist world, isolated and marginalised by their Western counterparts. In their ideological statements, they expect India to closely imitate the socialist model of development, and as a result, through this mimetic act, to recognise the legitimacy of such a model and Eastern European authority in the matter. Nevertheless, they are themselves imitating Western Europeans, trying to become like them, subconsciously mimicking their behaviour. This sense of insecurity, barely hidden, reinforces their tendency to objectify, if not degrade, the non-European Others. While denouncing imperialism

and capitalism, they are forever torn between their loyalty to the actual socialist power, embodied by the Soviet Union, and their aspiration to be part of the Western cultural power, even at the cost of embracing colonial attitudes and discourses.

This ambiguous condition in which the socialist-era reporters find themselves reflects a typically Polish condition, described by Hanna Gosk in her 2010 book about the various forms of domination and dependency in Polish literature, *Opowieści "skolonizowanego/kolonizatora." W kręgu studiów postzależnościowych nad literaturą polską XX i XXI wieku* [The "colonised/coloniser narratives." Postdependence studies on the Polish 20th and 21st c. fiction] (2010, 247). In relation to the long history of being dominated, if not colonised, by foreign powers, rich literary traditions exist of presenting Polishness in relation to victimhood, suffering and resistance to hegemony. However, Polish literature also produced discourses of domination over other groups: its neighbours, particularly those in the east, its minorities or its Others. The various instances of subjugation, dependence, erasing of memory, uncertainty of one's own position, which Sławomir Mrożek humorously described as "to the east of the West and to the west of the East" (Janion 2014, 13), all create an anxiety, deeply influencing the Polish collective identity. In Gosk's words, "Polish identity, suspended between the East and the West, insistently emphasizes its own peculiarities as if afraid that someone will subvert and diminish its belief in its exceptionality" (2010, 247). Hence, the coexistence of guilt and privilege, inferiority and superiority, disapproval and admiration, which characterise the socialist travel accounts, is yet another trait of this ambivalent condition. The narrators of these works of reportage frequently switch sides and loyalties. At times, they refer to one symbolic power, and at times, to another. They can be a *homo sovieticus*, but they can also act as true Europeans. They can drink *chai* with Indian factory workers in the spirit of socialist brotherhood, but they can also mingle with rich industrialists and India's elite at diplomatic parties and complain about India's "backwardness." They may stay in Western-style hotels, where they will write radical critiques of colonialism, but they may also attend communist rallies in colonial-style clothes. These inconsistencies reinforce the impression that the Polish reporters are indeed in a liminal position, culturally identifying themselves with the West, but politically, with their Eastern neighbour, the Soviet Union. They are victims of the Cold War divide, which forces them to take strongly ideological positions, leaving little space for nuance. However, their accounts offer a

unique perspective on India in its first few decades of independence, and on the political atmosphere of those times of decolonisation.

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