

Poland and Its Eastern Neighbours: A Postcolonial Case Study

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Abstract: *The article presents problematic issues resulting from the Polish presence on the historical eastern border of the II Rzeczpospolita (Republic of Poland), or, as it is called in the Polish national discourse, “Kresy”. The notion of Kresy, to a certain extent, corresponds to the notion of ‘borderland’. However, the latter is neutral and used mostly in scientific discourse, whereas the former alludes to Polish national awareness in literature and much of the historical writings and presents itself as the lost centre of “Polishness”. This way, contemporary Polish historical memory makes substantial claims towards this space, both in a geographical and historical sense, while hardly tolerating the presence of indigenous, non-Polish populations inhabiting the area—Lithuanians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians. In order to revise these issues in the article, I have adopted a postcolonial studies perspective. Looking at Poland through the lens of postcolonial studies reveals that it holds a unique position due to its double status. Historically speaking, Poland occupied both the position of the colonizer and of the colonized. However, popular Polish imagination tends to see Poland only in its role of the oppressed victims of its powerful imperial neighbours. The dominant role of Poland and its version of colonial policy adopted towards its contemporary eastern neighbours is obscured or simply denied both in popular and scientific discourse. The analysis of the role of the “myth of Kresy”, proposed here, hopes to contribute to the understanding of the implications of the Polish contemporary “orientalism”.*

Keywords: *Belarus, borderland, Poland, postcolonialism, orientalism*

1. Introduction

The article is an attempt to outline—to a non-Polish reader—the concept of Polish presence in the so-called “East” with a particular focus on its contemporary consequences. The perspective presented here, which allows a possibility to interpret the Polish past in the spirit of postcolonial studies, is not popular in my country. It evokes emotional attitudes both in casual conversations as well as in scientific disputes (Borkowska, 2010). This is possible because, among other things, in Poland it is difficult to accept a viewpoint according to which the historical role of the Polish state may exist also as a force of exclusion by using an advantage of economic (to a lesser extent military) nature, or the symbolic violence in the fields of religion, culture, science and education.

2. Sources of exclusion

Establishing the feudal system in the former Polish *Kresy Wschodnie* (i.e. *Western Kresy*),¹ originally developed on the territory of the Kingdom of Poland, still stirs up emotions among Lithuanians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. Etymologically, the term *Kresy* refers to the territory “at the edge”. However, the notion of *Kresy Wschodnie* in Polish tradition and history refers to specific Polish provinces, adjacent to Polish ethnic lands in the East. Analogous terms *Kresy Zachodnie* (i.e. *Western Kresy*) and *Kresy Południowe* (*Southern Kresy*), proposed for the western and southern borderlands of Poland, were practically not accepted in public and scientific discourses. The contemporary term *Former Polish Kresy Wschodnie* refers to the territory currently owned by such countries as Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and the eastern part of Latvia’s Latgale region, which is known as the former *Polish Livonia* (*Inflanty Polskie*). Thus, in the historical and geographical context the term *Kresy Wschodnie* conveys a considerably wider range of meanings than the literal translation of the word as “Eastern borderlands”. Polish historical memory claims the right to own the territory in the historical and geographical sense, only tolerating the existence of the indigenous non-Polish population.

This has had a remarkably significant impact on the model of the several hundred years’ reign of Poland in the East. As a result, two diametrically

¹ The term “*Kresy*” is not to be translated into English as “the borderlands” and throughout the text the Polish name of the region will be used.

different opinions of mutual relations were established on either sides of the border. Polish collective memory is preoccupied with the image of greatness and the peaceful domination of Polish civilization. Whereas for Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Belarusians the predominant feeling seems to be being excluded from the history of their own nations.

3. Intra-European colonialism

While introducing this unpopular postcolonial way of perceiving the past, it is not my intention to evoke an impression that Poland used to be a negative exception in Europe. On the contrary, I would like to stress wholeheartedly that at the time Poland seemed a rather unoppressive state. It is worth noting that foreign-language communities and those of different culture and religion were significantly discriminated within the model of the political system which was “in force” in Europe centuries ago. Today, the form of excluding people who were perceived as different, which has been practiced for centuries, is called ‘orientalism’. The author of the term is American scholar of Palestinian origin Edward Wadie Said, who published his work by the same name in 1978 and, this way, introduced a completely new understanding of relations between the East and West, defining orientalism “as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said, 1979, p. 3). This term originally referred to the description of the attitude and feelings that the (Western) Europeans had towards the non-European countries and nations. The existence of its inter-European equivalent was observed much later and not without the opposition of the Western scientific establishment. What seems especially interesting is the case of Russia, whose colonial acts are less and less questioned by Western researchers. Ewa M. Thompson, a specialist in deconstruction of the mechanism of Russian inter-European imperialism, observes that, for years,

the colonizing efforts of Russians in Eastern and Central Europe and in Asia have been ignored in the debates on colonialism. The white-on-white colonialism that took place there does not fit the colonial theory as construed by such nonwhite theorists as Bhabha or Spivak. [...] But tens of millions of white non-Russians who were subjected to Russian military conquest shared [...] the compulsions and suppressions that characterize classic colonialism. Paradoxically, the white Europeans, subjected to Russia or Germany's (or imperial Turkey's, in centuries past) colonial drive, are dead last in coming

to a realization that they were in fact colonial subjects. They have looked at their Russian or Turkish, or German occupiers as a people who won a war against them, not as those who engaged in a long-term colonialist project. (Thompson, 2000, pp. 40ff)

These observations referring to Russian colonialism provoke to ask questions about the role of Poland and its culture in the territory of the former eastern areas.

4. The double status of Poland

The adopted perspective of interpretation places me among the researchers who argue that the phenomenon of colonialism is not limited only to the relations of white Western Europeans with the rest of the world, but that it is much more nuanced. Using the framework of interpretation suggested by the postcolonial discourse, I choose Poland as my point of departure. For me, Poland is a laboratory example of a postcolonial legacy, and the imprint it has left is still present. In other words, I locate my interests in Poland as a postcolonial country burdened with problems resulting from the fact that Poland has not processed its own colonial heritage. Thus, it is a position inspired by the line of thought of Ewa M. Thompson (2000), who successfully tried to include Russian heritage into the postcolonial discourse, and at the same time avoids using this notion explicitly in reference to Poland. Throughout centuries, Poland occupied lands in the east and imposed its laws similarly to the way it was later done by Russia, becoming a colonizer state for the conquered people. The mentioned fact suggests that Poland carried out a policy which places it (at various times) among colonial states. Nevertheless, a one-dimensional view of the past was established in Poland due to the fact that in the last nearly two hundred years Poland has gone through numerous traumatic historical experiences, becoming a victim of its more powerful neighbours (i.e. Russia/USSR and Germany). Therefore, in contemporary Polish historical narration the image of Poland and Polish people presented as victims of its more powerful, imperial neighbours is predominant. The awareness of the dominating role of Poland towards its eastern neighbours seems to be an experience completely displaced from social consciousness as well as from the scientific discourse.

This is why—and it deserves a lot of appreciation—it is necessary to stress that unhurried assimilation of the idea by some researchers who deal with Poland from the postcolonial perspective (Skórczewski, Fiut, and others) have now

introduced a brand new approach to the “myth of *Kresy*”. The debate on the colonial status of Poland, which has been taking place for a dozen of years, allowed discovering a unique aspect of Polishness—the so-called double status of Poland. Perhaps the first researchers who realised the need for conducting research on Poland in the context of its double role were American linguists Ewa M. Thompson and Clare Cavanagh. Especially Cavanagh (2003) noticed the ambiguous position of Poland in the postcolonial perspective. A similar view of the problem is shared by a sociologist from Warsaw, Tomasz Zarycki, who wrote:

in specific periods the interpretation of the role of Poland does not necessarily have to be unambiguous, at least because of its geopolitical location, which is rather complex and is characterized by overlapping various areas of influence, potential ambitions of various subjects working in different spatial scale (from regional to global). (Zarycki, 2013, p. 193)

What needs to be stressed is that the development of the postcolonial theory in Poland, in which the central subject of analysis is Poland itself, is a relatively young area of research. Nevertheless, there have been significant achievements already in the field: for example, the opening of the debate deconstructing one of Polish myths, namely the myth of *Kresy Wschodnie* (Fiut, 2003; Bakula, 2006; Dąbrowski, 2008; Golinczak, 2008; Gosk & Krasowska, 2013; Skórczewski, 2013). The revealed postcolonial reflection enables the second nature of the aforementioned myth contribute to the attempt of understanding the contemporary consequences of Polish orientalism.

5. The discourse of *Kresy*

In Polish collective representation, there is a well-established tradition of referring to the former *Kresy Wschodnie* as the lost homeland. The prevailing image in the narration is the dominant void after the loss of the vast eastern land. The “Polonization” mission, carried out in *Kresy Wschodnie* during their centuries-old integration with the monarchy, was in fact considered a mission of civilization. It was proved by the centuries-old unquestionable supremacy of the Polish model in these lands, expressed, for example, in the domination of Polish language as the language of culture and high literature. The prevailing feudal system was equally influential because it was promoting the Polish people (members of the nobility) as opposed to local peasantry. The French historian

Daniel Beauvois, who is one of the most eminent researchers of the former Polish *Kresy*, describes its reality as follows:

A nobleman spent his whole life in his estate, a poorer one in a manor house, a baron—in a palace. Only the lifestyle of wealthy planters from Louisiana or Indiana and owners of great estates in Sicily may provide an idea of the nature of the relations within the landowners' circles, where the overweening arrogance of the masters separated them from the destitution of the serfs. A house, the landowner's residency, became a symbol. The meaning of a manor is emphasized in all memoirs of the epoch. At that time the whole Polish culture focused on the manors. The greatest sophistication was accompanied by the deepest poverty. (Beauvois, 1987, p. 188)

Deconstruction of the well-established myth of *Kresy* in current Polish postcolonial studies (e.g., Fiut, 2003, p. 152) seems to be, in my opinion, one of the events of greater significance, the consequences of which may determine our perception of the relations between the majorities and minorities in Poland and the way of regulating these relations. The myth of *Kresy* defines the standards of “Polishness”, outlines the traditional Polish borders, and sets the model of interethnic and intercultural relations according to the one valid in Poland. The discourse of *Kresy* built upon the myth implies the monolithic and monoethnic model of historical memory. This discourse is totally Polonocentric, consciously ignores the ethnic, cultural and political individualities, and thus clearly opposes to the need of opening up to the ideas of multiculturalism, which is more and more strongly emphasized by some circles of intellectuals. This ideology, which was developed in the West, has been present in the media coverage and scientific publications for almost a decade and strives to awaken, in the Polish society, empathy and sensitivity to particularisms and rights of minorities, including the issues of local identities. Unfortunately, the primacy of the myth of *Kresy* invalidates *de facto* the counter-narrative of cultural pluralism. This is the reason why it should not surprise anybody that

no one in Poland asks whether the Lithuanians, Belarusians, Ukrainians want to be, metonymically, the Polish “Kresy” within its historical borders, and what is their opinion of it. The discourse of Kresy, loudly announced as a form of dialogue and, above all, multiculturalism shows its emptiness at the very preliminary stage of the research. There is no space for discussion in it. The “identity of Kresy” and “studies on Kresy” are in fact reserved for the Polish,

whereas active Lithuanians, Belarusians, Jews or Ukrainians are scarce. (Bakula, 2006, p. 14)

The Polonizing mission conducted in *Kresy Wschodnie* was the realization of a centuries-old project of occidentalization of the marchlands. As a consequence, the Polish feel a post-war (1945) *exodus* from the East in the category of unmerited loss of an important part of the national heritage. The moment the Polish state and a significant part of the Polish population left *Kresy*, ethnic Lithuanians, Belarusians or Ukrainians became the only and ethnically dominant rulers of the land, which had always been regarded as motherland. Benefitting from the position they gained due to the decolonization process, they realize their own national projects in the socio-cultural, ethnic, and language dimension. These projects are to a large extent directed to “decolonization”, which is, in practice, “de-Polonization”. This process evokes strong emotions on both sides, because just as Lithuanians, Belarusians or Ukrainians (re)build their own national potential, numerous Poles wish, even if only symbolically, the merging of their country with the former *Orient*. The classic fields of conflict are: (1) the attitude of the Polish minorities towards the states created on the territory of the former *Kresy*, of which they had become citizens, (2) the policy of the Polish state towards the Polish diaspora in the East, (3) the attitude of the new states towards the Polish minority, and (4) bilateral relations of Poland and its eastern neighbours in the context of centuries-old relationship ‘colonizer vs. colonized’ (Ładykowski, 2014).

6. Polish perceptions of *Kresy Wschodnie*

According to contemporary Polish social perceptions, the former *Kresy Wschodnie* still includes the citizens of neighbouring countries with which Poland shares centuries-long history (Srebrakowski, 2013). Direct consequences of this state of affairs is the complicated nature of relations which continues to prevail between Poland and its eastern neighbours. The attitude towards neighbouring Lithuania is, perhaps, a good example. Although Polish historical literature acknowledges the subjectivity of Lithuania, a conviction widely held by the Polish that the Polish Kingdom, the so-called historical Lithuania, and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania merged into what became Poland, is very well established. This conviction is based on some selected facts that are presented in the course of primary education which, according to Polish perceptions, Polonize the old Lithuania. By doing so, Polish historiography does not leave

any room for the Lithuanian perspective. Usually the facts that are evoked are the following events and processes from the past:

- Since 1385, Poland and Lithuania concluded numerous unions which successively merged the two states into one organism at the expense of Lithuanian subjectivity;
- Christianization of Lithuania with the help of the Polish Catholic Church, the consequence of which was the fast Polonization of Lithuanian administration;
- The so-called adoption of coats of arms, i.e. incorporation of 40 Lithuanian boyars into Polish heraldic brotherhood (1413), which contributed to almost complete Polonization of the Lithuanian elite of the time;
- Founding a university in Vilnius by King Stephen Bathory (1579), which for several hundred years became one of the most important Polish academic centres; and finally
- Establishing Polish as an official language in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1699).

Perceptions of Ukraine from the Polish perspective seem definitely different. Ukraine is not a “partner” from a historical, or political, point of view. This is why Ukraine is rather perceived by Poland as the “lost territory”, or, more specifically, the area inhabited at present by Ukrainian agrarian population. According to the Polish perspectives, such a territory does not possess any historical subjectivity of the state. Nevertheless, Ukrainians themselves are a significant subject of Polish perceptions on Ukraine. What seems more important in this relationship is the direct relation between the two nations and the mutual historical heritage, which is problematic for both sides.

The historical views of the Polish about Belarus seem rather similar. Belarus is considered a country without a history. There is a prevailing conviction that the existence of Belarus on the map of Europe was accidental and resulted from the collapse of the USSR (1991), and that Belarusians themselves had nothing to do with it. It stands in opposition to the Polish national identity, which is based on military uprisings which aimed at restoring the independence of Poland, and tends to see such kind of experience as normative for the national formation. Therefore, such point of view makes the perception of Belarusians very difficult, because they present different models of self-identification themselves and also do not favour their own national martyrology in the context of regaining independence (Riabczuk, 2013).

As far as Latvia is concerned, it is now also considerably more distant from Poland, both geographically and historically. The territory of today's Latvia,

which has been outside Polish influence since 1772,² almost does not exist in Polish national discourse. The former Polish dominion called Polish Livonia (Inflanty Polskie, today's eastern Latvia), is rarely featured in the fields of Polish interests. Nonetheless, in all the recalled cases, the basic element which governs the attitude of the Polish state towards the so-called East is the relation of Poland to the Polish minority,³ remaining in the countries located along the Polish eastern border.

This, in turn, involves the so-called myth of *Kresy*. It is a narrative in which contemporary Polish memory of the lost *Kresy* assumes the proportions of one of the key pillars of the *universum* of Polish national identity. The popularity of the myth of *Kresy* is associated with a certain form of abreaction of the Polish people after the fall of the Communist system. Poland turned from the East towards Europe and found itself in a comfortable space of common Europe, governed by the rules of political correctness, where the problems of colonial thinking were mostly solved. Belarus and Ukraine, turning away from Russia,

² In 1772, the act of partitioning of Poland was carried out by three neighbouring superpowers: Russia, Prussia and the Habsburg Empire (Austria). At that time, Russia took over, among others, the Polish Livonia (Inflanty Polskie) and the eastern outskirts stretching as far to the east as beyond the rivers Dnieper and Dvina. This way the voivodeships Witebskie, Mścisławskie, Płockie and part of Mińskie and Infancie, were separated from Poland. The succeeding two other partitions took place in 1793 and 1795 and closed the centuries-old history of Polish-Lithuanian Union—the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Polish quasi-state tradition was continued in the Russian partition by the so-called the Duchy of Warsaw (1807–1815), then transformed into the so-called Kingdom of Poland (1815–1831). In the last period of its existence, the Kingdom of Poland was subjected to exceptionally strong Russification processes as the “Vistula Country” (Rus. *Privislinskiy kraj*; 1867–1918). The traditions of Polish statehood in the Prussian partition were continued within the Grand Duchy of Poznań (Ger. *Großherzogtum Posen*; 1815–1848). One of the most exceptional Polish statelike organism was a small state called Republic of Kraków (1815–1846). It was created from the southern patch of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. Since it was controlled by the three partitioners, it was only a half-democratic constitutional republic. The history of this Polish republic ended with the defeat of the Kraków Uprising in 1846, and as a result, the Kraków Republic was annexed to Austria.

³ Polish community inhabiting Polish *Kresy* started to leave the territory at the outbreak of the war (1939–1945). The process of evacuation from the East became even stronger as a result of political changes which started after the end of the Second World War. The new shape of Poland, and in particular the nearly 200 km shift of its borders westward, compared to the previous geographical location, forced the part of the nation to migrate and leave their homes in the East. After 1945, the former Polish *Kresy* became part of three puppet Soviet republics: Lithuanian, Belarusian and Ukrainian, which had already been an integral part of USSR by then. In the years 1955–1959, there was another wave of migrations from the USSR as part of so-called repatriation. Nonetheless, part of the Polish diaspora that had lived there for centuries decided to stay in their new homeland. This is the Polish community which is described as the Polish diaspora in the East.

found themselves not only at Europe's doorstep, but also face to face with the Polish idea of *Kresy* which, again, mirrored their historical and national secondary character and dependence (Bakula, 2007, pp. 45–46). The term *Kresy*, Bogusław Bakula notes, is for the Polish people a space for nostalgia, perfect in its mythological nature, but also a place of suffering. This mythology excludes any 'Others', except for the savage, whom one should tolerate and civilize. The discourse of *Kresy* in Poland is a colonial discourse and it incorporates the ego-building notion of superiority (Boss, 2008; Bekus, 2013, p. 69).

7. Moral obligations towards Polish diaspora in the East

The aforementioned historical context and the difficult interethnic relations are the starting point for making an attempt of analyzing the issue of *Karta Polaka*, or Pole's Card.⁴ Had it not been for the historical trauma after the loss of the Polish East, this document would have never been created.

This special document possessing features of an "ethnic passport" is almost a legitimized certificate of "Polishness". It is based on the national universe constructed by the legislator in a doctrinaire fashion, built upon the ethnocultural, romantic and mythologized vision of the nation. It is an example of political interpretation of ethnic affiliation. Legally, it legitimizes not only the ethnic and national identity, but also a set of laws and titles authorizing the status it gives.

⁴ Pole's Card is a kind of document which, in its assumption, confirms, as the legislator put it, national affiliation. This document may be granted to a person who has not got Polish citizenship but declares the affiliation to the Polish nation and meets the conditions, as provided in the Act on the Pole's Card from 7 September 2007 (*Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland*, 2007, No. 180, item no. 180, item 1280). In the preamble of the act the motifs of creation of the document and the addressees of the Card have been defined as "fulfilling the moral obligation towards Polish people in the East who lost Polish citizenship in the course of the changing fate of our Country, meeting the expectations of those who have never been Polish citizens but due to their sense of national identity want to obtain confirmation of affiliation to the Polish Nation in order to strengthen the bonds between the Polish in the East and the Motherland, and supporting their struggle to preserve Polish language and national tradition". In order to obtain the card it is necessary to prove one's affiliation to Poland through at least basic knowledge of Polish language, which they consider as a mother tongue, and knowledge and cultivation of Polish traditions and customs. It is also necessary to prove that at least one parent or grandparent or two great-grandparents were of Polish nationality or had the citizenship of the Republic of Poland. If the aforementioned documents cannot be submitted, the legislator allows Polish or Polonia organizations (running their activities on the territory of the countries where the Pole's Card is valid) to submit a certificate confirming active engagement in activities for Polish language or culture or Polish national minority for at least three years (Ładykowski, 2014).

It is a pass to the laws restricted to “our own people”, sets the new framework of a specific ethnicity and nationality, and to some extent it redefines the frames for citizenship.

The emergence of an initiative to establish a document, the Pole’s Card, which in a symbolic way dismantles and invalidates current borders of the neighbouring countries and with a Polish ethnic code outlines a new political map, was a reason—and it seems understandable from the perspective of historical experiences—to express objections of the neighbouring countries, especially Lithuania and Belarus.

During the works on the foundations of the project of the Act on the Pole’s Card, politicians and legislators stressed that it is the form of fulfilling a moral obligation resting on the state of Poland towards the fellow countrymen who had found themselves outside the borders of their country due to the changing fate of Polish history. According to the constitution, this moral obligation should be expressed by the readiness of the state to help all Polish people living abroad to preserve their contact with the national cultural heritage. A group of Polish people who were especially entitled to receive help were those living on the territory of the former Soviet Union, as they had experienced the greatest suffering and still remain an underprivileged group due to historical, legal and financial reasons. The Pole’s Card was originally supposed to be a form of repayment of the aforementioned obligation owing to the fact that it would, on the one hand, be a kind of a certificate confirming adherence to the Polish nation, and on the other, it would grant its owner certain privileges. Thus, this document should be treated as an element strengthening the sense of Polishness. It should make it easier for the youngest generation of Polish born in the diaspora in the East to start free education in Poland, moreover it should support the efforts to keep up the Polish language and cultivate national tradition. While respecting the principles of generally accepted rules of international law and preserving the best possible relations with the neighbouring countries, the Act aims to contribute to halt or inhibit the “process of depriving the Polish of their national identity”. Passing the Act on the Pole’s Card was also supposed to be a political signal informing that the Polish state has changed its attitude towards the Polish diaspora in the East by empowering it.

The most important provision of the document in the symbolical dimension is the written confirmation of Polishness, supported by the standing of the highest state authorities. The holder of the card is legitimized to hold the acknowledged and state-sanctioned adherence to the Polish nation (Ładykowski, 2011).

8. Poland and the East

Probably hardly anybody in the Polish Parliament thought that passing by the Polish legislator a Polish national card, functioning as a quasi-passport, was going to be noticed outside Polish eastern borders and that its reception there would be marked by restraint. The sense of injustice resulting from the loss of the East is so strong in the Polish society that it obscures any possibilities of counter-interpretation of the Act. The authors of the Pole's Card relied on this idea, claiming that the document is a moral obligation towards the compatriots who involuntarily stayed in the East. The legislator interpreted the category of the East in a very broad sense, including the entire territory of the former Soviet Union. Thus, the notion which originally stood only for *Kresy* has broadened immensely to include the largest country of the world. Traumas in Polish history are a reason for this semantic transition. These traumas include the sequence of spectacular defeats of the anti-Russian nationalist uprisings in Poland (1830, 1864),⁵ as a result of which the defeated Polish insurgents and their families were deported to Siberia. The events that happened a century later proved equally important. These were connected with the dissolving of Polish autonomous regions in the Soviet Ukraine (*Marchlewszczyzna*)⁶ and

⁵ On the eve of 30 November 1830, an anti-Russian uprising broke out in Warsaw. It is known today as the November Uprising. Lasting until October 1831, it spread throughout the then Kingdom of Poland and part of the so-called "lost territories", namely Lithuania, Samogitia and Volhynia. As a result of the defeat, more than 11,000 people left the country during the Great Emigration to Western Europe. During repressions following the November Uprising, the autonomy of the Kingdom of Poland within the Russian Empire was significantly weakened and the process of gradual Russification of all kinds of Polish institutions was started. More than 30 years later, on 22 January 1864, another uprising broke out, which is established in the Polish tradition as the January Uprising. It spread over similar territories as the previous one. The insurgents were defeated and tens of thousands killed in battles, nearly 1,000 executed, about 38,000 sentenced to be deported to Siberia and ca. 10,000 people managed to emigrate to Western Europe. Both Poland and Lithuania were punished for their rebellious bid for independence with the Russification policy on a scale never seen before. It was not until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 that the Russian goal of depriving the Polish of their national identity was successfully finished.

⁶ *Marchlewszczyzna* is a popular name of the so-called Julian Marchlewski Polish National District (Ukr. *Польський національний район імені Юліана Мархлевського*)—the autonomous administrative unit established in the Volhynia region on the territory of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic in 1925. The initiators of creating the Polish autonomous region were Polish Communists inhabiting the USSR. The area marked out for the autonomous region was inhabited by a very populous Polish community. It consisted of more than 60% of all Polish people living

Belarus (so-called *Dzierżyńszczyzna*⁷). The elimination of the structures of Polish autonomies in the USSR resulted in deportation of their inhabitants, Soviet citizens of Polish origin, to the Kazakh steppes (1938). The provision expanding the area of influence of the Pole's Card over the former USSR was included mainly in reference to the descendants of these Polish deportees. It is justified mainly due to the "compensatory" nature of the Pole's Card, because for Poland this document is an instrument for restoring, in a symbolical way, the dignity of the post-exile diaspora. It is worth mentioning that the Polish-Russian dispute over historical memory comprises numerous fields which are the reasons for constant arguments.⁸ Nevertheless, it seems that the relations with Russia in the postcolonial context have hardly been restored. These relations might become more positive once the approach assumed by Thompson was reversed and Poland was seen from a new perspective. The deconstruction of Polish postcolonial discourse in the context of the "compensatory" nature of the Pole's Card which includes the USSR and today's Russia as the area of its influence raises questions as to the purpose of such decision. One of the reasons might be the need to emphasize the martyrological motif in the Polish presence on

in the USSR. At that time the Polish living in Ukraine only accounted for about 1.6% of the population, while in some districts (especially the western ones) the Polish population reached up to 10%. Dovbysh (Ukr. *Довбиш*) became the capital of the autonomous region, and it was renamed Marchlewsk in 1926. In 1930, a number of neighbouring villages inhabited by Polish were added to the region, enlarging its territory by almost one-fourths. The population of the region was about 52,000, with the Polish constituting 70%. Other majorities were Ukrainians (about 20%), Germans (about 7%) and Jews (about 3%). On the territory of the autonomous region there were 55 Polish schools, over 80 reading rooms, regular Polish newspapers were circulated, and books in Polish were published. In 1935, the highest Soviet authorities decided to dissolve Marchlewszczyzna, shortly after which the Polish intelligentsia living in the region and its political elite were subjected to repressions. Within several years, over 10,000 people, mostly Polish, were deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan. The region of former Marchlewszczyzna was divided into five neighbouring Ukrainian regions and the former capital city Marchlewsk was renamed Szczorsk in 1939. In 1946, the name was changed back to its original name—Dovbysh.

⁷ *Dzierżyńszczyzna* is the popular name of the so-called Feliks Dzierżyński Polish National District (Bel. *Польскі Аўтаномны Раён імя Дзяржынскага*), an autonomous administrative unit established in the Minsk district on the territory of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1932. At the time the district's autonomy, it was the cultural-linguistic centre of the Polish diaspora in the region. Polish schools and reading rooms were active in the district, and Polish newspapers and books were published. However, as soon as in 1938, a decision about dissolving Polish autonomous units in the USSR was made in Moscow, bringing about more large-scale activities of closing Polish educational and cultural centres and deporting Polish people from the whole territory of the Belarusian SSR to Siberia and Kazakhstan.

⁸ Further on the subject of the complicated Polish-Russian dialogue, see Kabzińska, 2013, pp. 53–73.

the territory of the USSR/Russian Empire. Constant perception of Poland as a victim is in accordance with traditional Polish historical narration. Moreover, it allows reaching several goals simultaneously. Firstly, the symbolic inclusion of the Polish who were deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan, and persecuted for their patriotism, into the race of subsequent “Polish generations”. Such activities result in alleviating the concerns of the Lithuanian, Belarusian and Ukrainian neighbours. An impression that the Pole’s Card is a document which symbolically reconstructs the former *Kresy Wschodnie* becomes, at least to some extent, blurred. Secondly, “Polish” holders of the Pole’s Card in Russia, grandchildren of the deportees, gain a high symbolical status owing to the “genetic” participation in the glory of the indomitable national heroes. It is the continuation of Polish-Russian bipolar relations: Russian imperial colonizer *versus* Poland, the colonial victim, which is logical within the framework of tasks set out by the Act on the Pole’s Card—it gives the holders of this document a moral compensation. However, a thorough analysis of the reasons why the Pole’s Card was established leads to the conclusion that the problem of Polish diaspora in Russia is marginal. The first beneficiaries of the document were supposed to be the citizens who declared their Polish origin, living in countries directly bordering Poland in the East. The East is not only a geographical category: since it functions in the Polish tradition as a territory of former Polish domination, it is a multidimensional, metageographical and metapolitical quasi-subject in relation to which the Polish historical policy is conducted. This is reflected in the fact that the notion of the East is not limited only to such countries as Belarus or Ukraine, the geographical location of which, namely, the direct bordering with Poland from the east, cannot be questioned, but it also

⁹ Polish authorities have made an attempt to define the beneficiary of the Pole’s Card—namely, a Pole *in spe* or a “novice of Polishness”, according to the formula within which at least one of the parents or grandparents, or both great grandparents of the applicant were of Polish nationality or possessed Polish citizenship. What is peculiar is that the applicant’s “Polishness” may be confirmed in writing by a Polonia organization if he or she can prove—in the organization’s opinion—active engagement in the activities for Polish language and culture of Polish minority for at least three last years. Among others, the Polish diaspora in Buryatia benefits from this possibility. Albert Jawłowski, who studies this diaspora group, observes that “on the one hand it is a rather rational solution and favourable to those who do not possess any documents proving their Polish origin, allowing them to apply for the Pole’s Card. Furthermore, the stipulation makes it possible to apply for the Pole’s Card also to people who may not be of Polish origin but to whom the card should be granted because of their activity and affinity with the Polish culture. This way it is possible to meet the feelings of particular people and their self-identification. The Pole’s Card may be granted not only to those who possess an “appropriate” share of “Polish genes” but also those who feel Polish. On the other hand, the stipulation of the act about the “active engagement for...” is rather vague and leaves too much room for loose interpretation and making the final decision on the subject of the “engagement” to the management of the organization.” (Jawłowski, 2012, pp. 133–134)

refers to such independent countries as Lithuania, Latvia or even Moldova,¹⁰ which are located in the north and south. The Polish “East”, stretching out far beyond Poland’s existing borders, is governed by the still alive vicissitudes of history. The current policy of the Polish state, whose political and economic advantage is supported by one of the most powerful economic and political body, the European Union, is directed at its former dominion and uses tools which reinforces the feeling of being orientalised by today’s “host countries” of these lands. In order to grasp the emerging parallel between the Polish East and Said’s Orient, it is worth referring directly to the findings of Edward W. Said himself. Said noticed that in Europe, Orient as a representation “is formed—or deformed—out of a more and more specific sensitivity towards a geographical region called the ‘East’” (Said, 1979, p. 273). The former Polish *Kresy Wschodnie* are parallel to Said’s East, both in symbolic and real dimensions. These two notions may be, to a large extent, considered equivalent—the Orient and *Kresy*, stereotypically seen as the area of the social world, which is principally different from the West. It is a vision of “an area which was immemorially backward both in the economic and civilizational sense. The area which is dangerous and unforeseeable at the same time, being torn by irrational emotions including those of religious nature, cultural or connected with ethnic or national divisions” (Zarycki, 2013, p. 186). This description is perfectly inherent in the memory of the civilizational backward Belarusian Polesie, wild Ukrainian steppes and brutal ethnic-religious massacres in Volhynia and Podolia. Nonetheless, these memories are accompanied by the enchanting and different beauty of the East. Said (1979, p. 2) made an apt observation “that the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting idea, personality, experience”. If this observation was to be adapted to the Polish context, it would contribute to a double discovery. Firstly, Polish *Kresy Wschodnie* are not only a romantic area of old Poland but also a contemporary abode of the still excluded ‘Others’. Secondly, it is an area where and upon which Polishness was redefined and the backbone of which is the so-called myth of *Kresy*.

¹⁰ Nowadays, Moldova is of little importance in the Polish tradition of *Kresy*. However, due to the fact that there still is Polish diaspora, it is also within the field of interest of the Polish state.

9. The Pole's Card in the context of Belarus

There is little coverage in the Polish media on the shift in the social moods of Polish neighbours related to the establishment of the Polish national card. Only trite communications and short articles have reached the Polish audience.¹¹ Therefore, it is worth emphasizing that the Pole's Card was not received well in any of the countries to which it was addressed, evoking feelings of concern and reluctance among the indigenous nations of those countries and their sovereign authorities.¹² In Belarus, as Belarusian MPs claimed, numerous calls were made by anxious Belarusian citizens as a reaction to the introduction of the Pole's Card.¹³ Therefore, local deputies, who are also members of the

¹¹ On 17 August 2009, the daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* (which, in turn, quoted the announcement of PAP) published a news piece entitled 'Lithuanians hostile towards the Pole's Card', which writes: "Every fourth inhabitant of Lithuania thinks that the Pole's Card and the Russian Card indicate making commitments to foreign countries and that they stand in opposition to the obligations resulting from the citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania". This opinion was taken from the analysis of the survey conducted by RAIT for the BNS Press Agency. The survey claims that "about 26 per cent of the respondents agreed with the statement that the Pole's Card and the Russian Card are equal in commitments to a foreign country. Eight per cent chose the answer 'I fully agree', and 18 per cent voted 'I agree'. At the same time, about 24 per cent of the respondents agreed with the opinion that the Pole's Card and the Russian Card are contradictory in the obligations resulting from Lithuanian citizenship. Seven per cent 'fully agreed', 17 per cent chose the answer 'I agree'". The survey itself "was conducted from 16 to 24 June among 1,009 people aged 15 to 74". (*Rzeczpospolita*, 2009; Ładykowski, 2011, p. 23)

¹² The only country which not only refused to express its concern but was rather effectively inspired to undertake works on its own document of similar kind was the Russian Federation. Soon after the victory of the Orange Revolution (2005) in Ukraine, the works on the Russian Card (Rus. *Карта русского*) began in the Russian State Duma. This document was originally supposed to be addressed to the Russian-speaking citizens of the eastern part of Ukraine. There is an often neglected nuance worth noting, namely in Russian language there are two terms: *russkii* (Rus. *русский*), referring to an ethnic Russian person and *rossianin* (Rus. *россиянин*), referring to a citizen of the Russian Federation, regardless of one's ethnic or religious affiliation. The distinction of these two terms is of considerable importance in the context of the quasi state yet ethnic character of the document (see further Ładykowski, 2011, pp. 15–41).

¹³ According to Piotr Kościński, author of 'Is Poland going to take over Kresy?', published on 17 September 2009 by the Polish national daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*, also Belarusian media are concerned about the establishment of the new Polish document. Belarusian newspaper *Zwjazda* gives vent to concerns. As Kościński wrote: "Newspaper *Zwjazda* is published in collaboration with Belarusian government and the Parliament." The newspaper claims that Warsaw wishes to join western Belarus and Ukraine with Poland. The Pole's Card is supposed to be an instrument to fulfil

Parliamentary Committee of International Affairs, began a debate on the results of the appearance of a foreign document within Belarusian sovereignty that grants certain exclusive rights to a part of Belarusian population. Chairman of the Committee of International Affairs Igor Karpenko noted that “the Act on the Pole’s Card does not take into consideration the Belarusian stance on the matter, and this ‘stands in opposition to the good neighbouring relations and mutual respect between our countries’. This discriminating document divides citizens into those who possess the Pole’s Card, being entitled to certain privileges, and those ethnic Poles who were denied the Card, because they failed to follow certain procedures” (Polish Radio, 2011). Karpenko also observed that “some articles of the Act on the Pole’s Card, among others Article no. 20, might be repealed if someone ‘defames Poland or the Polish people and acts to the detriment of the Polish interests’.” This way a Belarusian has to act in favour of another country, and not his own. And he asked: “Is this an attempt to influence

this aim. In the article ‘Pole’s Card: who is silent and who is shouting’ published on 15 August, the author refers to the critical assessment of the card presented by the Lithuanian right wing politicians. For instance, a Christian democratic Lithuanian MP Ginteras Songalia and “experts” are widely cited by the author of the article. In addition, he urges that the document is a Polish “mini-quasi-citizenship”, and it is binding to its holder to be loyal to the Polish country. He also claims that Ukrainians are also very concerned about the Pole’s Card, because “until 1939 in practical terms all indigenous inhabitants of western Ukraine were citizens of Poland”, and soon it is possible that an “enclave will be created” where the interests of its inhabitants “will be directed to a greater extent towards Poland rather than Ukraine”. All this is supposedly aimed at joining the western regions of Belarus and Ukraine with Poland. “There are certain forces massively represented in the Polish community that would like Poland to be as great as it was when its borders spread from the sea to the sea or, if not that far, then at least having the borders it did before 1939. Of course, speaking of changing the borders by military force in contemporary Europe is unreal, however it is possible to tear off a piece of land from the sovereign country by means of pseudo-legitimization, as the example of Kosovo showed. For example, by conducting a referendum,” the author of *Zwjazda* claimed. Suggestions that Poland would like to separate western Ukraine are not new. In February, *Zaria*, a newspaper published in Brest, claimed that “Poland is still interested in territories on the east of its borders”. The newspaper further reports that a long-term program of Polonization of these territories is being carried out. Supposedly, this was the aim behind the introduction of the Pole’s Card. The aim is the same as described in *Zwjazda*: to force the people inhabiting the districts bordering with Poland recognize themselves as Polish and (in a longer term) to demand to be unified with their historical country. The co-author of the Act on the Pole’s Card, advisor of the President of RP, Michał Dworczyk was appalled at the article in *Zwjazda*: “The authors of the Card did not have any hostile intentions regarding the countries where it is valid. The aim was to help the people feel more Polish in their contacts with Poland. The ones who aim at provoking conflicts are rather those who make accusations against the Card,” Dworczyk told *Rzeczpospolita* (2009; Ładykowski, 2011, pp. 23–24).

the internal matters of a sovereign country? Is it an attempt to destabilize the internal situation of the country from the inside?”¹⁴ (Polish Radio, 2011). Having failed to find any ways to block the emergence of the Pole’s Card in Poland, the Belarusian government started to defend their interests on their own territory. In order to limit the number of potential holders of the Pole’s Card and simultaneously for the sake of protecting from the risk of the dilemma of double loyalty, already in 2012 certain restrictions were introduced for the holders of the cards. Then, all citizens of Belarus who were already working or were planning to start work in the state bodies were obliged to submit a special declaration. They were to submit in the HR departments of relevant offices a written declaration that they do not possess documents granting any allowances on the territories of foreign countries. Not submitting this declaration was considered grounds for dismissal from a job. In 2013, subsequent amendments were made, including the Law on Military Service and other uniformed services. The proposed changes were accepted at first reading by the lower house (House of Representatives) of Belarusian Parliament. In practice it meant that all people working professionally in the army, bodies of internal affairs and financial investigations were subject to the new legal regulations. Eventually it resulted in introducing a total “ban on obtaining any foreign documents which grant any allowances and privileges because of one’s political or religious views or national affiliation” (Polish Radio, 2013). The above-mentioned legal changes were approved by the Constitutional Tribunal at the beginning of summer 2014, and entered into force on 1 July, after being signed by President Aleksander Lukashenko. Members of the Tribunal published an announcement in which they stated that obtaining allowances and preferences may lead to a situation in which soldiers and workers of the bodies and sub-units for extraordinary situations might be put under certain dependency and thus result in a conflict of interests (Kosz, 2014). Actions taken by the Belarusian state are, first and foremost, designed to make it more difficult to distribute the Polish national card among the citizens of Belarus. Belarusian authorities are against realization of the Law on the territory of Belarus, regarding the Card as “an element of interfering with the internal matters of Belarus and a ‘factor undermining the unity of Belarusian nation’” (EMN, 2014). Belarusian policy-makers also do not give their consent to hire consuls to handle the Pole’s Card, in order to

¹⁴ Similar arguments were quoted in the Lithuanian debate. In Vilnius, a young local historian and aspiring politician Tomas Baranauskas also spoke on the matter: “The Republic of Poland has made a step towards the revision of Polish state borders established after the Second World War. The step has been made on the highest level and approved by the Act. [...] It is simply nonsensical—Poland has started to pass laws for our citizens!” (Baranauskas, 2008 in Tarasiewicz, 2008).

make the procedure of granting the cards more difficult (EMN, 2014). Since the very moment the first cards reached Belarusian citizens, the Belarus government have regarded the document a hostile gesture towards the Belarusian nation (Suszczyński, 2013).

In order to help to understand the phenomena accompanying the introduction of the Polish document in Belarus a little better, it is necessary to shed light on the local context. Foreign researchers tend to be rather unfamiliar with some phenomena in Belarus. In Poland there is also little interest in and understanding of the processes related to Belarusian self-identification. The context of administrative actions controlled by the elite of Belarusian authorities is not without importance. As Mykoła Riabczuk observes, in Belarus the model of Belarusian nationalism does not evoke great interest among the Belarusians themselves. Nonetheless local elites work actively to shape the modern Belarusian identity. Local post-Soviet elites found the model of state identity, and not the civic or ethnocultural one, an optimal choice as far as keeping the authoritative power in their hands was concerned,

while the weakness of alternative projects saved them [...] from the need of showing any consideration for these projects or incorporating them to any degree into their own project. Natalia Leshchenko (2008, pp. 1419–1420) aptly observed that it is the specificity of nationalism, propagated by the Belarusian regime, that ensures the necessary stability and legitimization. She calls this form “egalitarian” and specifies it as “strategic ideological tool which defines the Belarusian nation and its statehood in an ethnically inclusive way, but performs it according to the principles of collectivism and anti-liberalism” (Riabczuk, 2013, p. 55).

Simultaneously, for almost a decade, the Belarusian state has spared no efforts to formulate a new type of nation—the nation of Belarus [*sic*] (i.e. not the ethnic Belarusian nation). The project includes the multiethnic community of Belarus and unites it through the ideology of the anti-Western anti-liberalism. Therefore, the government elites have recognized the emergence of a rivalling national model in Belarus (with Polish ethnic grounds) as an exceptionally dangerous one, which is symbolized by the Pole’s Card. The latter, by revitalizing the idea of an imaginary national community with ethnic origin (i.e. Polish people, in this case), proved to have effectively undermined the primacy of the ideology of the Belarusian nation. Over the course of several years since the Act on the Pole’s Card entered into force, only in Belarus almost 60,000 Belarusian

citizens have obtained the card.¹⁵ However, it needs to be said that there are various motives behind the eagerness to obtain the document. Not without importance, of course, are those which refer to the emotions related to boosting the Polish self-awareness of the local Polish diaspora. Nevertheless, in the light of the high public interest in obtaining the document (not only among the local Polish), it may be assumed that the attraction of the card is also based on other issues. The problem was described, among others, by Siarhiej Astraviec in his article ‘Why Belarusians dream of the Pole’s Card’. The project has proved to be attractive enough so that in Belarusian border town Grodno one often encounters its inhabitants looking for possible arguments for legitimizing their potential “Polishness”:

On the streets of Grodno people meet and discuss how to get the Pole’s Card. This is what you call a dream!! “You haven’t got it yet?” asks one from another. – “Me? No, I haven’t, I have no grounds to apply for it.” – “Me neither, although someone told me that my grandmother attended first grade at a Polish school. All I need to do is to prove it.” – “Well, it’s obvious that she went to a Polish school, because there was no other.” (Astraviec, 2014).

People of Belarus interested in the Pole’s Card are strongly aware that the Polish legal definition of Polishness is a very wide one. As Astraviec writes,

All descendants of the citizens of prewar Poland, the former Kresy, which spread as far as Vitebsk, may count on obtaining the document. Today they live on the territory of the whole Belarus, they mingled and entered into marriages with people from the East. It may mean that, in a while, because of one man [Alexander Lukashenko – Author’s note], theoretically the whole country will not love Belarus as much as Poland, which along with the Pole’s Card grants certain privileges. In this sense, Poland acts like a trade union, let’s say, like “Solidarność”. It reaches its hand to you, supports you. Wants

¹⁵ According to the European Migration Network portal: “[F]rom 1 January to 30 September 2013 approximately 122,000 applications for the Pole’s Card were submitted to consular offices abroad, and most of them were granted. The main burden of the realization of the Act rests on Polish consular offices in Ukraine and Belarus, which realize over 88% of all applications (Ukraine over 53,000 applications, Belarus over 58,000 applications). The office with the highest burden is the General Consulate in Lwów, which realizes almost 30% of all applications (over 35,000), followed by the General Consulate in Grodno (almost 27,000 applications) and subsequently the offices in Brest, Minsk, Winnica, Vilnius, Lutsk and Kyiv. By 30 September 2013, approximately 5,000 applications had been submitted in Lithuania (EMN, 2014).

people—on massive scale—to become its members... (Astraviec, 2014).

The negative economic balance, which reveals itself daily in the modest family budgets in Belarus, is also an important motivation to apply for the Pole's Card. A vision of convenience in obtaining a Polish visa, the right to take up a legal job, having free medical coverage and a discount package for travelling on the territory of Poland is a very tempting goal. It is necessary to consider the fact that the definition of Polishness in the Act on the Pole's Card is exceptionally fluid and *de facto* purely discretionary, because it is the consul who makes the final decision about the Polishness of the candidate.¹⁶

Therefore, on the market of private language schools there are companies who offer a special service addressed to those who want to become Polish—a preparatory course for the Pole's Card exam.¹⁷ Thus, because of its grass-root social response and its creative transformation of the issue, "Polishness" has become, against the intentions of Polish legislators, a commodity on the services and privileges market. Moreover, its range is a fluid and discretionary issue. "Polishness" may be both acquired as a result of family socialization while living in the Polish diaspora as well as "learned" on preparatory courses. The

¹⁶ The consular examination of "Polishness" meets the criteria which, in reference to Edward W. Said's observations, might be described as orientaling those who take the exam. The process of proving in front of an officer of a foreign country (Poland) one's own and inalienable right to the ethnic identity, i.e. being affiliated to the Polish national community is—as it has been described by those who already passed it—an extremely humiliating event. The outcome of the procedure of granting the Pole's Card this way are the situations which often take place on the Polish-Belarusian border: "On the border crossing in Kuźnica Białostocka a Polish sergeant, a joker, gets on the bus and collects the passports. A lot of girls and women (10–12) among the passengers hold out the Pole's Card. The sergeant smiles and asks them questions from the Pole's Card examination. When is the Constitution Day? The Independence Day? The woman sitting next to me is asked an overused question: Who was the first king of Poland? "Bolesław the Valiant," she answers. The sergeant goggles at her and admits, "This is the second time I have heard the correct answer since I started asking this question." (Astraviec, 2014)

¹⁷ "Intensive preparatory course for the 'Pole's Card' examination. Our policy is to offer perfect preparation for people who are going to be interviewed in the course of the Pole's Card examination at the Embassy of the Republic of Poland. With this card, citizens of Belarus or other countries of the CIS can re-enter and stay in the territory of Poland, as well as work officially in this country. In addition, this card allows free access to medical care and free education on the territory of the Republic of Poland. In the course of three months of training at our International Language Centre "Step by Step" (90-minute lessons three times a week), you can easily pass the oral examination at the Embassy of the Republic of Poland, and thus quickly obtain the valued document." (Step by Step, n.d.)

everyday social practices clearly show that national ideology, which Polish parliamentarians tried to place in a legal framework (the Pole's Card), is overtaken by reality. Some are granted the right to enter the Polish national community, others are denied this privilege, but the reasons for the refusal are often vague. In conclusion, it is worth emphasizing that being a Pole—pursuant to the Act—is limited by a time frame, as the card is granted for the period of ten years. After this period, one has to pass the exam of Polishness again. Stating the issue of the national community in such terms has not been matched by any existing contemporary definitions of the nation. It is also a vivid example of what Said defines as the process of orientalization of 'Others'. What seems peculiarly intriguing, due to the procedure of granting the Pole's Card—also the Polish living in the East have become 'Others'. The Polish state—surely unconsciously—have subjected them to the process of orientalization.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, it needs to be repeated that contemporary Polish orientalism rooted in the historical past becomes evident only in the perspective of postcolonial studies. While Polish historical imagination denies its status of the colonizer, some of the state's policies towards its eastern neighbours seem to prove that this status is slowly becoming to be acknowledged. Another issue is the socio-cultural and material dimension of the former Polish Eastern "*Kresy*", identified directly as Said's "Orient", since in the Polish perception both represent a social space qualitatively different from the "West", to which Poland aspires. As a result, those spaces, seemingly inhabited by culturally and economically ever-incapacitated "Other", seem to ask for "occidental help". Aspiring to fulfil this role, Poland becomes an everlasting hostage of the perpetuating itself "myth of *Kresy*".

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