

**Reportage from the (Post-) Contact Zone:
Polish Travellers' Take on British Colonialism in India**

While Poland never had colonies of its own, it always participated in the creation of European discourses of Othering, exoticising, Orientalising and symbolically subjugating non-European populations. Travel books, in particular, were tools in creating such “domestic subjects’ of Euroimperialism”, in the words of Mary-Louise Pratt. Polish travel reportage is a particular type of travel writing, which encompasses both the subjective experience of the traveller, and journalistic observations of the political scene, social relations, history and culture of the visited country. It is a type of nonfictional writing which has developed in Poland since early 20th century (see: Glensk, Sztachelska, Szczygieł (ed.)), and which acquired a new standing in communism, when individual travel was limited. On the one hand, the genre served as a “window to the wider world”, but on the other hand, it was meant to shape a new perception of the world among Poles. The colonial era was over, and the decolonisation of the so-called Third World attracted much attention among both politicians and the general public in the countries of the Eastern Bloc. That is why, journalists and delegates were encouraged to visit the newly independent countries and offer their accounts from there, supposedly free from the colonial clichés of the earlier time. In this paper, the main question posed is how the Polish reporters describe India’s colonial heritage and what is their own position in this post-colonial contact zone.

This paper is based on my doctoral research on works of Polish reportage from India from 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The research consisted in analysing nine different texts, by authors that were either professional reporters, affiliated with newspapers or the Polish Press Agency, or by official delegates, who published travel accounts following their journey to India. The latter group includes: Witold Koehler, a delegate to an international congress of forestry, Jerzy Putrament, a communist official, representing the Polish Writers’ Union, and Wojciech Żukrowski, a diplomat at the Polish Embassy in Delhi. Among the professional reporters, affiliated with a newspaper, magazine or news agency are: Jerzy Ros, Wiesław Górnicki, Janusz Gołębiowski, Wojciech Gieżyński, and Jerzy Chociłowski. While such a division of authors of reportage into two categories is possible, according to Anne Gorsuch,

all travel in socialist times was to some extent an official mission. It required permits, background checks and was often pre-planned by various state institutions or embassies. According to Gorsuch, sending reporters abroad was also a way for the communist authorities to convince the societies of the Soviet-controlled countries that the wider world is in their reach, that it is also “their world”. Furthermore, bringing India closer to the Second World had an additional goal: to effectuate a sort of rapprochement between a decolonised country with socialist sympathies and the countries of the Eastern Bloc. Such contacts required a new language to be used when talking about India. That language was to offer a new way of describing India, free from colonial prejudice, and appreciative of its modernisation. Indeed, most reporters describe new industrial plants in India, projects of social reforms, as well as the political debates in the Subcontinent.

The key questions of my research were how Polish travel reporters perceived India through the lens of their socialist worldview, and whether they could avoid recurring to typically Orientalist stereotypes. Indeed, the two discourses – a socialist and an Orientalist one – seem to intertwine in their travel narratives. Although the reporters arrived to India after the country achieved independence from the British, they found themselves in what may be called a “post-colonial contact zone”. Mary-Louise Pratt defines the contact zone as a space where “disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (4). Indeed, not only were the reporters confronted with the colonial heritage, but also they were trapped in the web of meanings produced in the colonial era. Their criticism of colonialism did not mean that they were free from reproducing elements of the colonial discourse. Moreover, they could not simply be Polish travellers who have nothing in common with colonialism: as white Europeans, they were often associated with the former colonial masters, with all that it entailed. That is why, India’s colonial past came frequently into focus in their writing, not solely because of ideological reasons, but also as an everyday experience for a European traveller.

In the first part of the paper, I will look more closely at the criticism of colonialism and its consequences as expressed in the analysed works of reportage. In the second part, I will reflect on the ambiguous position of the Polish reporter in post-colonial India.

A Socialist Critique of Colonialism – Past and Present

The critique of Western colonialism is probably the most obvious element of socialist travel reportage from India. Clearly, it was motivated by both the condemnation of colonialism as a phenomenon, and by the negative campaign against the West in Soviet propaganda. However, a number of researchers remark that in that very period, Soviet Union also led colonialist policies in its neighbourhood (Thompson; Chioni Moore)¹. In spite of its own, rather imperialistic ambitions to dominate (or at least influence) large parts of the world, the USSR was very vocal about the wrongdoings of the British, French or Portuguese colonisers in various parts of the world and it supported anti-colonial movements. The sole fact that Polish reporters were allowed, or even encouraged to go to India, proves that describing a former British colony was deemed politically useful in the propagandist formation of socialist worldview. The reporters are quite vociferous when talking about India's colonial past and they are eager to vilify the British. They are intent on tracing various manifestations of colonialism and its consequences: in politics, society, economy and culture.

According to Jerzy Ros, starting from the first Europeans that reached India, all the successive Westerners that arrive to the Subcontinent can be considered as looters and exploiters. Since their arrival, "violence, like 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 follow their suit "(59)²³. Ros is also critical of the missionary aspect of European presence in India, underlining that religious proselytization and colonial exploitation go hand-in-hand. Asked why did they come to India, the Portuguese used to say: for pepper and for souls. Ros claims that when the "lambs" did not want to get under the "protective wings" of the new faith, the Jesuits would surround a few villages, spread a few drops of water, and declare them converted (99). When the Goans failed to abide by the rules of the new religion, there was always the "gentle persuasion of the Holy Inquisition, imported from the metropolis" (99)⁴, ironically observes the reporter.

¹ The issues of Soviet colonialism and Orientalism were also discussed in-depth at the International Conference "Orientalism, Colonial Thinking and the Former Soviet Periphery", taking place at the Vilnius University on 27-29 August 2015.

² All the translations from the primary texts are translated by the author of this paper.

³ "Od tej chwili gwałt jak cień nieodstępnie towarzyszący pochodowi Europejczyków, którzy pustoszą kraj i grabią nielitościwie. Tradycje portugalskich żeglarzy kontynuują podążający za nimi w ślad Francuzi, Holendrzy i Anglicy" (Ros 59).

⁴ "pozostawała jeszcze łagodna perswazja Świętej Inkwizycji, którą importowano z metropolii" (Ros 99).

Soon, it becomes clear why Ros takes Goa as an example of colonial conquest. Not only because it was the region where Vasco da Gama first landed and European domination over India began, but also because it is a territory that in his time is still not part of independent India. For the reporter, it appears as a contemporary example of colonialism. Ros underlines that Goans are still not free and many of them choose to emigrate: “In their homeland, beautiful and once bountiful, Portuguese governments maintain ignorance and primitivism, opposing a natural, year-by-year stronger drive to join India” (108)⁵, Ros explains authoritatively. It is clear to him that the colonial era is over. In his opinion, the Portuguese should forego their overseas colony, and Goa, as part of the Indian continent, should join the Indian state.

A reporter visiting India just a few years after Ros, Janusz Gołębiowski, could directly witness the decolonisation of the last Western-dominated territory of India. It was not an easy process, says Gołębiowski, because the Portuguese were determined to keep Goa to themselves:

They held tight to this strip of Indian land, even when British India ceased to exist. They forged a theory that Goa is not a colony, but a part of Portugal . . . they referred to papal edicts from centuries ago, they erected in Goa statues for their kings, and they hoped that independent India will tolerate their presence. (100)⁶

It was difficult to push the Portuguese away, because of several factors. Gołębiowski lists the following: Goan intelligentsia’s economic and religious ties to the Portuguese, and the villagers’ “lack of political conscience” and “backwardness” (102), as well as the “occupant’s terror” (102). In the end, the Indian government decided to take action and annexed Goa by force, proving, according to Gołębiowski, that decolonisation cannot be achieved peacefully (110).

In their reflections on the status of Goa, Ros and Gołębiowski tend to include into the category of colonial oppression a range of phenomena. For instance, they show continuity between the first conquerors, British colonialists, and the contemporary rule of Portuguese

⁵ “W ich ojczyźnie, pięknej i ongiś zasobnej, portugalskie rządy utrzymują ciemnotę i prymityw, przeciwstawiając się naturalnemu, z każdym rokiem silniejszemu dążeniu do zjednoczenia się z Indiami” (Ros 108).

⁶ “Trwali kurczowo przy tym skrawku ziemi indyjskiej nawet wtedy, gdy przestała istnieć British India. Ukuli teorię, że Goa nie jest kolonią, lecz częścią Portugalii . . . powoływali się na papieskie bulle sprzed stuleci, wznosili w Goa pomniki swych królów, i mieli nadzieję, iż niepodległe Indie będą ich obecność tolerować” (Gołębiowski 100).

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 British imperialism of the 19th century to the “American imperialism” of their times – again, choosing to disregard the context.

Traces of Colonialism in Indian Cities

Apart from discussing the Portuguese domination in Goa, the reporters talk about the period of the British colonial rule and its persistent influence on contemporary India. It is also a topic fervently discussed by Indians themselves: as Arjun Appadurai observes, “[i]n every major public debate in contemporary India, one underlying strand is always the question of what to do with the shreds and patches of colonial heritage” (89). Some of these “shreds and patches” are institutional, some ideological, and some aesthetic. In the Polish travel reportages examined here, the analysis of colonial heritage is limited to a rather superficial, albeit interesting picture. It is mostly based on what the reporters can themselves observe while travelling, with occasional references to books or newspaper articles on the history of British colonialism.

To the Polish reporters, even a glance at Indian cities brings about the image of the British Raj. The white bungalows, the stone churches, the colonial residences... Interestingly, while they are critical of colonialism as a form of power, they find colonial architecture aesthetically appealing, perhaps because it resembles the 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, nice city, whose history goes back only a few decades, and calls it an “English foundling, bearing an indelible beauty of its origin” (49)⁷. 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 lawns and alleys. . . A city in constant development. Extremely beautiful, ultramodern houses, multi-storeyed and multi-coloured. American Embassy, an original rectangle. A somewhat classicist

⁷ “. . . New Delhi jest właściwie angielskim podrzutkiem, noszącym niezatarte piękno swego pochodzenia” (Koehler 49).

edifice of the Soviet Embassy. Hotel Ashoka, slightly touched with “Hinduism”, wonderful, comfortable, slightly nouveau-riche . . . (*Cztery...* 89)⁸

Although Putrament puts the term “whites” in quotation marks, he is not particularly troubled with the fact that New Delhi was built by and for the colonisers – the same “Western imperialists” of whom he is so critical. His love for aesthetic gratification and his strong rejection of anything below a certain concept of beauty is noticeable at many points of his account. He seems to aspire to a certain notion of “high culture”, referring frequently to classical art, the monuments of Athens, Rome or Paris, and considering himself to be part of an intellectual elite that looks down upon the “nouveau riches”. Furthermore, given his privileged position of the president of Polish Writers’ Association, he could afford not to worry about his account being censored. Unlike other reporters, he could easily appreciate the design of the American Embassy and compare it with the Soviet one, as well as express his admiration for Western European heritage and culture.

Nevertheless, his anti-colonialism is noticeable in the criticism of British statues. Putrament, arriving on Delhi’s main alley, Rajpath, which he calls “the local Champs-Elysees” (*Cztery...* 90), is struck with the ugliness of the monument of 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?” (*Cztery...* 90)⁹, asks the writer, and describes the lack of proportions of the sculpture, ridiculing the appearance of the British monarch¹⁰. Putrament is similarly disapproving of other colonial monuments that he sees in Kolkata:

The English have arranged this terrain in their own way: they have placed plenty of statues of the subsequent viceroys, and at the other end of the field [Maidan], they have built the horrible “Victoria Memorial”, an edifice in the pseudo-Indian style, honouring the queen, or rather the empress of India, who once visited Calcutta. They still carefully preserve the slippers

⁸ “Miasto kolonialne, obliczone głównie na ‘białych’, zaplanowane zawczasu, bardzo zielone: i trawniki, i aleje. . . . Miasto w ciągłej rozbudowie. Przepiękne, ultranowoczesne domy, wielopiętrowe i wielokolorowe. Oryginalne pudło ambasady amerykańskiej. Nieco klasycystyczny gmach ambasady radzieckiej. Trochę tknięty ‘hinduizmem’ hotel Aszoka, wygodny, trochę nowobogacki. . . .” (Putrament, *Cztery...* 89).

⁹ “Jaki diabeł złego gustu podkusił Anglików, żeby to monstrum tu ulokować?” (Putrament, *Cztery...* 90).

¹⁰ Indeed, King George V statue was removed from this prominent position in 1960s and joined many other statues of important figures from the British Raj era at the Coronation Park, situated rather far from the centre of the city, in North Delhi.

she wore here, and other such relics. We were offered to see this wonder from close up. Somehow, we did not feel like it. (*Na drogach...* 16)¹¹

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 criticism of colonialism. He is similarly disapproving of the statue of Subhash Chandra Bose, calling him an “Indian Quisling¹²” (*Na drogach...* 16), because he formed an anti-British legion with the help of the Japanese. He comments on the fact that these two statues, Bose’s and Victoria’s, are situated close to one another: it is the embodiment of Indian tolerance, Putrament comments with sarcasm (*Na drogach...* 17).

For the reporters, another manner of explaining the sins of colonialism to their readers is to compare the colonial exploitation of labour to the exploitations of workers in early capitalism. In order to do that, they juxtapose images of modern-day Kolkata with those of nineteenth-century London. For instance, Putrament describes Kolkata and focuses on a bridge joining two sides of the city: “A huge bridge on 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.” (*Na drogach...* 27)¹³. London’s ugliness and Bengali poverty come together in an explosive mixture, which causes the tragedy of Kolkata’s most underprivileged inhabitants. Surprisingly, Jerzy Chociłowski who visits Kolkata ten years after Putrament, makes an almost identical observation: “Calcutta was built by the English, that is why, a European walking around the city centre or the factory/port district at the banks of the Hooghly river – might feel a bit like in London, Hamburg, Amsterdam, or even Łódź¹⁴ of the previous century” (119)¹⁵. Thus, in both reporters’ accounts, Kolkata is placed side-by-side

¹¹ “Anglicy urządzili ten teren po swojemu: nastawiali pomników wszystkim kolejnym wicekrólom, a w drugim końcu pola zbudowali koszmarne ‘Wiktoria Memorial’, budynek w stylu pseudoindyjskim ku czci królowej, a raczej cesarzowej Indii, która niegdyś odwiedziła Kalkutę. Przechowuje się tam pieczołowicie pantofle, w których tu była, i tym podobne zabytki. Proponowano i nam pokazać to cudo z bliska. Jakoś się nie chciało” (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 16).

¹² Vidkun Quisling was a Norwegian leader who collaborated with the Nazis and was at the head of the pro-German Norwegian government during World War II.

¹³ “Ogromny most na Hugli, na tutejszej potężnej, brudnej rzece, odnodze Gangesu. Most wiktoriański, wysoki, o gęstej sieci wiązań, zapchany samochodami, rykszami, rowerzystami. Koszmarne połączenie brzydoty dziewiętnastowiecznego Londynu z bengalską nędzą” (Putrament 27).

¹⁴ Łódź is a city in central Poland, famous for its nineteenth-century development of textile industry.

¹⁵ “Kalkutę budowali Anglicy i dlatego Europejczyk, który będzie chodził po Śródmieściu czy dzielnicy portowo-fabrycznej nad rzeką Hugli – poczuć się może trochę jak w Londynie, Hamburgu, Amsterdamie, albo nawet ubiegłowiecznej Łodzi” (Chociłowski 119).

the main centres of European industrial revolution, it is one of the elements of the capitalist system that they see as exploitative and unfair.

Such viewpoint can also be observed in Górnicki's description of the banking district of Kolkata:

Morrison and Sons, Ltd., Eastern Trade Co., Calcutta Banking Corp., India and Far East Trade, Oriental Transport, Ltd. Banners – ghosts, houses – nightmares. Houses – delusions of a dishevelled bourgeois: dirty Atlases picking their dirty beards with their dirty fingers, keeping Greek pillars on one arm, and Gothic arches on another. . . All of Victorian London's endless hideousness, imported, half-a-century ago, carefully and flawlessly. (158)¹⁶

It is an imaginative, yet very harsh critique of Kolkata's British heritage. Górnicki emphasises the colonial character of the district which he associates with ruthless exploitation of India by the British, and presents it like a nightmarish landscape, inhabited by greedy, dirty and repulsive spirits, embodied in the form of sculpted figures of Atlases on the buildings' façades. This landscape is at a standstill:

Since a hundred or two hundred years, the dark fingers of Indian clerks write into the white books the same words, names and addresses. 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 . . . (159)¹⁷

Górnicki clearly labels those who are the oppressors, and those who are the oppressed, introducing a visual 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, not allowing for its development or progress. The reference to lifeless sculptures is a metaphor of the colonisers' nature, heartless and cold like a stone. The statues stare at the Indian crowd in an almost defying way, affirming the British strength. Finally, 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

¹⁶"Morrison and Sons, Ltd., Eastern Trade Co., Calcutta Banking Corp., India and Far East Trade, Oriental Transport, Ltd. Szyldy-upiory, domy-koszmary. Domy – przywidzenia niechlujnego burżuja: brudne Atlasy dłubią brudnymi palcami w brudnych brodach, na jednym ramieniu trzymają greckie pilastry, na drugim gotyckie łuki. . . Cała bezdenna brzydota wiktoriańskiego Londynu importowana przed półwieczem troskliwie i bezbłędnie" (Górnicki 158).

¹⁷"Od stu chyba czy dwustu lat ciemne palce hinduskich urzędników wpisują do białych ksiąg te same słowa, nazwy i adresy. Tylko cyfry są coraz większe. To jedyne, co się zmienia. Brudne Atlasy nad bramami i zwierzęta od żaru słonecznego boginie na alegoriach patrzą martwo w tłum. . . (Górnicki 159).

anything that would allow not to hate you till the end" (170-171)¹⁸. This personification of England presents it as a malicious, cruel and arrogant old lady (England in Polish is female).

Although Górnicki comes to India in 1960s, he still feels the effects of the colonial era. Once, walking around the crowded streets of Kolkata, Górnicki spots a Chrysler car. "Hallucination?", he asks himself, and describes the passenger sitting in the back of a car as a "pink, robust gentlemen with side-whiskers" (159)¹⁹. The reporter makes an instant connection: "although he does not wear a cylinder 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?" (159)²⁰. 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 the British keep taking advantage of India till now, for instance through the banking sector. Certainly, from a socialist's point of view, banks should be nationalised rather than left at the hands of "bourgeois capitalists", as it happened in Soviet Union. It is not the only instance in which Górnicki criticises independent India for being not socialist enough; he expresses similar concerns about the lack of collectivisation of farms, about the failure to nationalise the wealth of the maharajas and nizams, and about the strong position of religion in society. It is a suggestion that if no radical changes are introduced, the effects of colonialism will never disappear.

The Ambiguous Position of Polish Reporters in India

The reporters visiting India assume that they represent a new, post-colonial world order. They are envoys from socialist Poland, part of the Soviet-dominated Eastern Bloc, which supported decolonisation. Nevertheless, their position is not always clear and their loyalties are often questioned. To average Indians, they are simply Europeans, representatives of the Western culture. As such, the reporters have to face the baggage of the colonial past associated with the presence of white travellers in India.

¹⁸ "Ach, wiktoriańska Anglio, tiurniurowa, ruda, purytańska, Anglio Panująca nad Morzami, Anglio okrutnych admirałów i przewrotnych dyplomatów – nie zaniedbałaś tutaj niczego, aby cię znieawidzić do końca" (Górnicki 170-171).

¹⁹ "Halucynacja? Na tylnej kanapce rozpięta się różowy, dorodny dżentelmen z bakenbardami . . ." (Górnicki 159).

²⁰ "Nie nosi cylindra i tabaczkowego surduta, jego szyję zdobi dyskretny krawat zamiast płomiennego halsztuka, ale te rysy... blond bokobrody... grymas wokół ust... Któryż to wiek, doprawdy?" (Górnicki 159)

For many reporters, it is the first time when they find themselves among mostly non-white population, and they seem disturbed by the fact that suddenly, their skin colour matters, they cannot blend in or pass unnoticed. Koehler devotes an entire chapter to this issue. He recalls how, together with his co-travellers, they were amazed by the polite smile with which everyone greeted them. He admits that all these niceties make the visitor feel happy and welcome, until the day he discovers that it is an artificial smile, because when one looks into people's eyes, they show indifference. The reporter was at first puzzled by this, but then he understood the reasons behind such behaviour:

After all, a European is a guest here since recently. 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 smirk stuck to the lips of those that had to deal with him. But under the mask of a smile, there is coldness. (48)²¹

Koehler realises that as a European visitor, he will always be associated with the former colonisers and it will be difficult to escape this equation.

Ros, a reporter with a strong socialist outlook, who wants to get to know 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. When visiting the brush-makers at the poor Bombay neighbourhood, he notices how one of them looks at him, "the white sahib" (80), with "flattery and expectation" (80) in his eyes. Similarly, child beggars on the streets follow him, calling the reporter "raja sab", or "maharaja sab" (82). Whenever Ros wants to talk to someone, they do not react, either not wanting to get in trouble, or expecting that he will demand something of them. In Goa, the reporter curiously observes how a local woman prepares coconut milk, wants to ask her questions about village life. But the peasant woman only breaks the coconut and gives the juice to him. "The peasant returned to her work, sure

²¹ "Zagadka nie jest trudna do rozwiązania. Ponadto, wbrew pozorom, uprzejmość śródmięscia nowoczesnego Delhi nie stanowi kontrastu z obojętnością jego przedmięscia. Jest to zjawisko wynikające z podobnych pobudek. Wszak Europejczyk od bardzo niedawna jest tu tylko gościem. Do niedawna był zaborcą, ciemięzycielem, jedną z licznych plag tego kraju. Sahib żądał uległości, nauczył manifestowania jej uśmiechem. Tym, którzy musieli się z nim stykać, grymas ten przywarł do warg. Poza maską uśmiechu jest chłód." (Koehler 48).

that she has guessed his wish. What else could bring a white man to her hut, if not thirst?" (105)²².

The association with the British colonisers even lands the reporter in trouble. Ros goes to a large communist rally held at Kolkata'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. (248)²³

Indeed, Ros realizes that his skin, his clothes, and his equipment, together with the memory of the colonial officers, provokes instant association with the former rulers. Finally, Ros manages to pull out the passport from his pocket and the atmosphere suddenly changes. When he proves to be a Pole, he is surrounded by people patting him on the back and cheering "long live the USSR and Poland!" (249). The fact of belonging to a socialist country is often emphasised by the reporters, who show pride that they come from a country that has no colonial history. This makes the connection with the Indian population easier. Ros, in an emotional passage, mentions this Polish-Indian solidarity: "wrapped in a Bengali shawl, I listen to the words about peace and my heart beats in the same rhythm with the heart of this people, that feels and thinks like me" (217)²⁴.

Nevertheless, coming from Europe, the reporters enjoy a privileged status in India. That 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

²² "Wieśniaczka znów zabrała się do pracy przekonana, że odgadła moje życzenie. Cóż innego mogło przyznać do chłopskiej chaty białego, jeśli nie pragnienie?" (Ros 105).

²³ "mimo powagi położenia trudno nie dostrzec paradoksalności incydentu: oto lada chwila dziennikarz polski dostanie po łbie jako domniemany podżegacz wojenny. Klnę w duchu mój jasny, płócienny kapelusz, aparat fotograficzny, świeżo odprasowane szorty i tych bez mała dwieście lat okupacji brytyjskiej, która nauczyła Hindusów widzieć w każdym białym przedstawiciela znienawidzonego świata imperialistycznego" (Ros 248).

²⁴ "Owinięty w bengalski szal słucham słów o pokoju i serce moje bije zgodnym rytmem z sercem tego ludu, który czuje i myśli jak ja" (Ros 217).

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" (*Na drogach...* 15)²⁵. Similarly, the writer feels awkward having waiters around while eating, he sees them looking at his food, almost salivating over the guest's meal. Perhaps it's only an illusion, wonders Putrament, but at that moment, he recalls hearing about the occurrence of famine in Bengal (*Na drogach...* 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 stayed back at the embassy. The reporter is relieved when the officer lets them go, seeing "three white sahibs" inside the car (*Cztery...* 114). Ros, similarly, does not hesitate to make use of his privilege as a white tourist and put the mask of the "enemy power" when the situation demands it. The Polish journalist takes the ship from Bombay, but upon his arrival to the shores of Goa, still under Portuguese rule, he realises that Poland does not have diplomatic relations with Portugal and the customs officer refuses him entry. The reporter does not give up. He impersonates an American tourist, by putting on a colourful tie and a hat, and taking chewing gum into his mouth. His trick works and he succeeds in getting into Goa. These examples prove that although the reporters oppose the concept of race privilege, they sometimes benefit from the same inequality that they condemn.

Conclusion

Overall, however, the Polish reporters try 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 on 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. (171)²⁶

²⁵ "Wiesz, że liczy na grosz napiwku, grosza tego nie masz, wstyd, że nie masz, wstyd, że dajesz się obsługiwać, jak byś był starcem-impotentem" (Putrament, *Na drogach...* 15).

²⁶ "Para amerykańskich turystów: Fantastyczne! Czy pan widział zaklinacza węzów? Jak oni mogą żyć w takiej nędzy? Ile tu prostytutek! Ależ upał, gorszy niż latem w Manhattanie! Czy pan też jedzie do Maduraju? Dlaczego ta coca-cola jest taka ciepła? Co pan myśli o Nehru? Fantastyczne! Nie, my jesteśmy turystami" (Górnicki 171).

Górnicki tries to present American tourists as those who think in stereotypes, who see India as the land of “snake charmers”, and of extreme poverty and destitution. They also compare everything to what they know from home – heat, cold Coca-Cola... By painting such a picture of American tourists, the reporter places himself outside of 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 reporters analysed here underline that they are not merely tourists, and not only that – they are visitors from the Soviet Bloc, they have no connection to colonialism, like the Westerners.

What is noticeable in the reporters’ take on colonialism, is that they criticise British domination over India, incorporating it into the Cold War narrative of rivalry between East and West. They often use the term “imperialism”, so that they are able to make a parallel between the British rule in India and America’s global presence. It was typical of the Soviet propaganda to accuse America of imperialism and of following in the footsteps of colonialism.

Nevertheless, their own identity is manifold, and different facets of it are manifested at different times. Generally, the reporters underline their Polishness, comparing what they see in India to the familiar views and sites and occasionally even bringing in the memories of the Second World War. Many of their descriptions of India include domestication strategies (see: Spurr) Furthermore, they stress their belonging to the sphere of socialist countries, for instance in the context of their relations with Westerners. The 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” (Giełżyński 20). It seems like it gives them a particular satisfaction to be treated at par with other visitors from Europe, although it 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 the one of their Western European colleagues. Nevertheless, their attempts are not always successful, and their behaviour is full of contradictions.

A reflection on one’s identity, the sense of self and Otherness is an inherent part of travel, and often features in travel writing. Polish travel reportage from communism, by being situated in a particular historical, political and ideological context, is a particularly interesting

genre in this regard. It displays the complex symbolic location of the Polish visitor to India – fellow socialist, but also, indirectly, an heir to the European colonial heritage.

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