

**SIBERIA, LAND OF POLISH MARTYRDOM – (RE)VISIONS OF
THE MYTH. LITERATURE, HISTORY, GEOPOLITICS,
POLITICS, CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

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Abstract: *In Polish historical and cultural consciousness, Siberia is the land of Polish martyrdom. From deportations after downfall of November and January Uprisings (XIXth Century) to GULAG's hell, it has been the land of suffering and despair for Poles. The aim of the paper is analysing changes in depictions of Siberia in literature, journalism, historiography, memoirs, movies, and public discourse. By using terms derived from varied human sciences, such as philology, anthropology of cultures, cultural studies, including postcolonial studies and imagology, I try to answer why a martyrological, Romantic myth of Siberia is still vivid in Polish public discourse, whereas contemporary literature and reportage are trying to undermine it. The depiction and imagology of Siberia in Polish literature, movies, journalism, and public discourse could be understood as an example of "cultural wars" (L. Koczanowicz) and a postcolonial example of thinking about "Others", especially Eastern, based on orientalism (E. Said) I will be analysing among others: literature- *Anhelli*, by J. Słowacki; *Dwanaście lat w kraju Jakutów* [Twelve years in the Jakut's country] by W. Sieroszewski, *Lód* [An Ice] by J. Dukaj, *Jakuck. Słownik miejsca* [Jakuck. Lexicon of the Location] by M. Książek, *Przez dziki Wschód* [Through Wild East]; *Długi marsz do wolności* [The Long March to Freedom]; *Droga umarłych* [The Road of the Dead] by Tomasz Grzywaczewski; movies - *Long Walk Expedition Plus*; *The Way Back* (Dir. P. Weir); *Syberiada* (reż. A. Konczalowski); *Syberiada polska* (dir. J. Zaorski).*

Key words: *Siberia, myth, phantasmatic literary myth, postcolonial studies, geopoetics, historiography, cultural studies, anthropology of culture.*

In Polish historical and cultural consciousness, Siberia is the land of Polish martyrdom. From deportations after downfall of November and January Uprisings (XIXth Century) through Gulag's hell, Siberia has been the land of suffering and despair for Poles. This way of depiction of Siberia is extremely vivid in Polish culture, and still influential. The aim of this article is analysing changes in depictions of Siberia in literature, journalism, historiography, memoirs, movies, and public discourse. By using terms derived from varied human sciences, such as philology, anthropology of cultures, cultural studies, including postcolonial studies and imagology, I try to answer why a martyrological, Romantic myth of Siberia is still vivid in Polish public discourse, whereas contemporary literature and reportage are trying to undermine it.

In this article, I will try to create a holistic vision of human sciences, as combination of literature, anthropology, geography, history, politics, journalism. This comprehensive scope is very important to see why Siberian myth prevailed in Polish cultural consciousness. I believe that nowadays, holistic attitude in human sciences is the only way



towards understanding of contemporary culture and its changes. Fragmentary analysis, made from traditional, partial academic points of view (anthropology, history, literary studies, cultural studies) is able to give us only partial insight. More importantly, staying within the traditional areas of academic research, may cause mistakes, since the outcome of such work is from the beginning faulty due to incompleteness and lack of comprehensiveness. It is my strong belief that that only through integration of human sciences, it is possible to achieve a wider perspective in our research. It is a strong answer to the growing disintegration and fragmentarization of contemporary, post-postmodern culture.

In the first place it has to be observed that Poles attached to the Romantic myth of Siberia as a land of their martyrdom, have often forgotten that they were not the only nation who exiled and suffering *katorga* (penal servitude). Then, there is the issue of onomastic. In Polish, Siberia is a neutral word, whereas Sibir (from Russian) is linked with imaginary, phantasmatic complex of Polish martyrdom. It is the word of the oppressed, of victims¹. Interestingly, in the context of Sibir's symbolic meaning, Sib-ir means „sleeping land”² in the language of native inhabitants of Sibir, Yakuts. Of course, this Yakutian name refers to the Siberian permafrost, but let us notice that even in aboriginal Siberian languages this land has a phantasmatic, „dreaming” character...

While speaking about Siberia, we should keep in mind such useful methodologies and paradigms as imagology (a postcolonial tool for showing the manner of depiction of other nations, full of stereotypes and ethnic prejudice; it is the realization of the ethnocentric point of view³) and orientalism (E. Said⁴), elements of postcolonial studies' methodology. Edward Said observed that cultural representations based on orientalism, the western patronizing perceptions and fictional depictions of „the East”, were and remain inextricably tied to the imperialist societies who produced them, which in turn makes many orientalist works inherently political and servile to power, and thus intellectually suspicious. Orientalism influenced the development of literary theory, cultural criticism, and the field of the Eastern studies, especially regarding the way academics and writers practice their intellectual enquiry when examining, describing, and explaining the East. Said's counter-lecture shows how the subaltern is oppressed by the hegemon by means of imperial, hegemonic discourse of „power and knowledge” (M. Foucault). I will argue that analysing the manner of Siberia's depiction in Polish culture has to be supported by postcolonial studies statements. Another applicable methodological instrument is geopoetics. The spatial turn shows that specific locations (towns, lands, nations, nature, wildlife, environment) are social, imaginary, produced facts rather than being natural. In this scope, cultural representations of specific places has been produced and changed in varied cultural, political, historical scopes⁵. Representations of places are a cultural and mental construct. We should be aware of the narrative nature of the representation of specific places and we ought to apply to it the same methodological tools as for the literature.

¹ Z. Kopeć, *Polski dyskurs syberyjski*, In: *(P)o zaborach, (p)o wojnie, (p)o PRL. Polski dyskurs postzależnościowy dawniej i dziś*, red. H. Gosk, E. Kraskowska, Kraków 2013, s. 151-170.

² Cf. M. Książek, *Jakuck. Słownik miejsca*, Wołowiec 2013.

³ M. Beller, J. Leersen (eds.), *Imagology. The cultural construction and literary representation of national character. A critical survey*, Rodopi: Amsterdam&New York, 2007.

⁴ E. Said, *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, Division of Random House, New York 1978.

⁵ D. Lawrence-Zuniga, S. M. Low (eds), *The Anthropology of Space and Place. Locating Culture*, Malden, Oxford, 2003; E. Rybicka, *Geopoetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich*, Kraków 2014.

Putting geopoetics in the centre of the analysis of the depiction of Siberia in Polish culture allows to achieve a holistic vision of this land, constructed with data gleaned from varied sciences, and different kinds of art.

The depiction and imagology of Siberia in Polish literature, movies, journalism and public discourse could be understood as an example of „cultural wars” concerning opposite political visions of the past and conflicting worldviews⁶. The major elements of Siberian nature’s and wild life’s imagology are boundless snow fields, endless winter, horrid frost, severe and cruel tundra, *szatun* (human-devouring bears), mosquitos, swamps, wolves, no food, nature is the best guardian of exiles, it is a cruel land which tried to kill all deportees. This is no-man’s land, where the Russians govern with iron fist with the help of nature. This is hell, Polish Golgota, „ziemia umarłych”, land of the dead. Thus, in the literature the Wild East construct (conf. Wild West) was created. In Waław Sieroszewski’s short stories and novels (*Na kresach lasów*, 1894, *At the end of the forest*; *Czuczcz*, *W matni/Deadlock*) Siberia is depicted in the same manner as the one used by Jack London (*White fang*), James Oliver Courwood, or Fenimore Cooper, also in the figure of American trapper, hunter. Native Siberian nations (Evenks, Yakuts, Buriats, Czuczcz) are supposed to be horrid, savage people, who hate Poles and other exiles, with no civilization, wild, fierce rites, shamanism as an unnatural (sic!) religion. *Balaghan*, Yakutian word for housing estate means in Polish language *via* Russian mess, chaos, disorder. Such representation has an obvious, postcolonial, oriental background. It is surprising that Polish deportees share such imagology with Russians, the hegemony. But in Siberia Poles tended to identify themselves as participants of the Western (higher) civilization. In the perception of Siberian native nations Poles and Russian are partners, notwithstanding the fact that in Polish imagology Russians are members of Eastern civilizations. So, maybe Siberia (part of Russian empire) is a kind of mirror, negative example of civilization?

Until 1914 150.000 Polish exiles resided in Siberia at one time or another⁷. Most of Polish exiles were convicted to katorga/ penal servitude, they suffered living in horrid conditions. However, it has to be remembered that well educated exiles (teachers, doctors) obtained special privileges. Doctors could run freely their own medical practice, teachers could conduct private tutoring. More importantly, many Poles chose service in Siberia voluntarily, they were members of official administration of Russian Empire and worked in Siberia during the age of conquest of the Far East. Some of them made magnificent career, for instance Alfons Poklewski-Kozieł (1809-1890), a businessman, social activist, one of the most opulent man in Siberia, owner of distillery, mine of gold and emeralds, and one of the instigators of Trans-Siberian Rail Road⁸. Poles often voluntary serviced in Russian army, as did general Alfons Szaniawski (1837-1905), married with Maria Aleksiejewna Rodstwienna, owner of gold mines in Amur. He accumulated a fortune and moved to

⁶ L. Koczanowicz, *Post-postkomunizm a kulturowe wojny*, „Teksty Drugie”, no 5, 2010, s. 9-21.

⁷ Between 1906-1909 Poles are 34,9% of deportee on Siberia, Russians 36.6%; 1770-1760: first Poles deportees in Siberia were Bar confederates: 6-10 thousands; in the turn of XVIIIth and XIXth Century: Kosciuszko's insurgents; Poles from Napoleon’s Bonaparte army: 10 thousands; 1823- Members of Towarzystwo Filomatów i Filaretów (students’ patriotic organization) 200 people. after collapse of November Uprising (1830-1831): 10 thousands; 1840-1855 members of patriotic organizations; after collapse of January Uprising (1963-1864) 20 thousands; 1870-1914: members of socialist organizations, cf. Caban, *Zsyłka Polaków na Syberię w XIX wieku. Przegląd publikacji polskich i rosyjskich/radzieckich*, „Przegląd Historyczny”, T. CV, 2014, z. 4, s. 99-123.

⁸ cf. *Polacy na Syberii: Polscy Rockefellerzy*, 2005, Documentary movie directed by By Jadwiga Nowakowska.



Moscow. Afterwards, he became a member of Russian aristocracy. Historians emphasize that Poles often married Russian high society women from Siberia. Those marriages were usually happy and long-lasting. Szaniawski and Poklewski-Koziell were philanthropists and they supported Polish exiles. Curiously, in Poland we hardly remember such Poles in Siberia. Alfons Szaniawski is not even mentioned in Polish wikipedia and Poklewski-Koziell has only a brief note. This fact is a strong confirmation of the attachment of Poles to the Sibirak myth. In Polish opinion Sibir is above all the land of suffering and martyrdom.

Many of Polish exiles in Sibir made significant academic careers, becoming well-known explorers of Siberia. Waclaw Sieroszewski, „Sirko” (1858-1945) was an anthropologist, author of remarkable work *Jakuty* (russ. ed. In 1896). The Polish title of this work is *12 lat w kraju Jakutów* (1900). This splendid ethnographic book was prized by Imperial Geographical Society with a golden medal and until today has been the basic monograph of traditional Yakutian culture. Sieroszewski was exiled to Siberia in 1879, he married a Yakutian girl, had a daughter. The work *Jakuty* cannot be overestimated. Today, when Yakutian cultural self-consciousness is waking up, this book lives a renaissance. After soviet destruction of shamanism, modern Yakutian shamans teach themselves *kamlanie* (shaman magic practices) from Sieroszewski's *Jakuty*.⁹ It has to be observed, however, that in *Jakuty* Sieroszewski is strongly objective as an ethnographer and anthropologist, but in his short stories such as *Czucze* (1911) he used to speak as hegemon with orientalism poetics. *Czucze* are very primitive, have no manners, they trade with Polish businessman Stefek for proverbial beads (like native Americans), they are cruel, uneducated, ferocious but unfair, they are drunkards. *Czuczka* man is called „wonderful example of mate” (p. 10), they language is called „reindeer-like”, Stefek is very angry that dirty, stinking *Czuczka* is sleeping on this „white, European pillow” (p. 10). The protagonist, Polish exile Stefek despises *Czucze* and sees himself as a better person, member of genuine, western civilization. In Sieroszewski's novels Poles exiles often are helpless when they have to trade with natives, and natives cheat Poles while trading. Sieroszewski's protagonist frequently suffered a defeat. He failed in his attempt to make friends with native tribes and to „civilize” them (especially in hygienic behaviours). He discovered that such attempts did not make any sense. Sieroszewski as ethnographer was an academic, but as a writer he was an exile, so he often used to assume the perspective of Polish exiles who despised natives, or were afraid of them. Thus, to gain a wider perspective, anthropology should be supplemented with literary studies. It is a confirmation of necessity of holistic perspective in human sciences. The next Polish exile in Sibir to be remembered is Edward Piekarski (1858-1934). He was a linguist, author of *A Dictionary of Yakutian Language*, still a basic dictionary of this language. Jan Czerski (1845-1892) was an explorer, geologist of Siberia. He was convicted to katorga due to his involvement in January Uprising. He was the first man to create a geological map of Baykal Lake. He undertook many geographical expeditions with Imperial Geographical Society. In Siberia several mountains are named after him. Bronisław Piłsudski (1866-1918), brother of Józef Piłsudski, was an ethnographer who recorded on wax rollers the language and rites of Ain nation from Sachalin. Michał Książek, a young Polish reporter (author of *Jakuck. Słownik miejsca*) reminded that in fact Siberia was conquered for the tsar by Antoni Dobryński (XVI/XVII Century), who founded the first fortress in Yakutian land. Dobryński was a war prisoner and served the first Romanov tsar in the army. Polish explorers and exiles such as Sieroszewski, Piekarski and Czerski may be put in a row with David Livingston and Henry

⁹ Cf. M. Książek, *Jakuck. Słownik miejsca*, op. cit.

Morton Stanley, discoverers of Africa. They were Polish exiles, subjects of Russian Empire, but in Siberia, land of their martyrdom, they became very influential. Sometimes, they considered themselves members of hegemon's culture, as did Sieroszewski in his short stories. This is an example of postcolonial mimicry¹⁰ and comprador class when the postcolonial subject has taken the cultural pattern of the hegemon as his own and worked in the Empire's administration or academic societies, for the benefit of hegemon. Sieroszewski, Piekarski and Czerski were very respected in Moscow, inter alia in Russian Imperial Geographical Society. It cannot be said that Poles are very proud of their achievements. In Poland, they are forgotten outside the academic circle. We do not want to remember successful careers of Poles in Siberia, attached as we are to the martyrological Romantic myth.

This myth was born after 1823, when members of students, patriotic organization Towarzystwo Filomatów i Filaretów were exiled to Sibir. Adam Mickiewicz, Polish Romantic bard, wrote in *Księgi Narodu i Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego* (1832) that for Poles, Siberia was a land of martyrdom and atonement, but most of all a symbol of virtue and spiritual force of Polish nation. In *Dziady* (IIIrd part, 1832) Polish students sing in Russian prison „Nie dbam jaka spadnie kara/ Mina, Sybir czy kajdany” „I do not care what penalty falls: Mine, Sibir or chains”. *Dziady*, IIIrd part, is a foundational literary work of art for Sibir martyrdom myth, Polish Messianism, and will to fight the Russian rule. Jan Sobolewski tells other prisoners about Sibir's hell, death of adolescent students, suffering of exiles' mothers. His story is a boundless depiction of Sibir as Golgota for Poles. Juliusz Słowacki, the second great bard of Polish romanticism, in *Anhelli* (1838) gave a very pessimistic vision of Polish future. The action of this poem takes place in Sibir. Anhelli is a young exile, son of deceased father, who was chosen by Siberian shaman as a saviour of all Poles. He had to take on his shoulders the burden of suffering of all Polish exiles. Poles in exile had no hope, they had been defeated. After Anhelli's death the shaman made a prophecy. Poles in Sibir will arise and they will become a strong nation someday. Sibir is depicted as a land of the dead, there is only snow, it is frozen, no sun, and the death. What is extremely interesting and confirms the phantasmatic background of this myth, Mickiewicz and Słowacki actually had never been in Siberia. Their romantic, extremely influential and vivid depiction of Sibir as a land of martyrdom was based on memoirs and oral relations of the few exiles who managed to escape or return from Sibir, and of their families

The romantic myth of Sibir prevailed through the XIXth Century and was reborn in XXth Century, during IInd World War. Soviet Russian government deported nearly 2 million Poles to Siberia. They were forced to work in the Gulag system. In 1996 the journal „Zesłaniec”/ „Exile” was established, published by Główny Związek Sybiraków Polskich (Society of Polish Sibiraks). This periodical continued the Romantic myth of Polish Golgota, which could be observed in almost every one of its articles. .

The most important Polish literary work depicting Gulag's hell is *Inny świat. Zapiski sowieckie*, the literary masterpiece by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński (1949-1950, published in English in 1951: *A World Apart: A Memoir of the Gulag*). Herling-Grudziński was a prisoner in Jercew gulag, near Archangielsk. This work is linked to Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Wspomnienia z domu umarłych: The House of the Dead* (1862). It is very interesting because obviously, Dostoevsky was not very fond of Poles and as a Russian, he was a

¹⁰ Homi Bhabha, *Of mimicry and man. The ambivalence of colonial discourse*, In: *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London 1994, p. 85-92



member of the nation who convicted thousands of Poles to katonga. *Inny świat* should be put in the same literary category as Varlam Shalamov's *Opowiadania kołymskie* (*The Kolyma tales*) and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Arhipelag Gulag*. A comprehensive analysis of these works is beyond the scope of this study, so I can only say that Herling-Grudziński's diary lived through the peak of public interest after 1989, but even in PRL period it was a basic literary work for people of anti-Communist opposition. After 1989 and the end of communist system and the abolition of censorship, Polish martyrdom in Siber became one of the most important topics for movie directors, journalists, writers, and it is widely commented in public discourse. The next very interesting issue is a story told by Sławomir Rawicz (1915-2004), Polish soldier imprisoned by Soviets during September Campaign (1939). He published a memoir *Długi marsz: A Long Walk* in 1955. He claimed that in company of other Gulag's prisoners, he successfully escaped from Siberia (in 1941) and reached India on foot. His memoir is fabricated, since according to Soviet documents, Rawicz was freed from Gulag in 1942, as a result of the amnesty for Poles in USSR. Indeed, Rawicz often was mistaken about geography of Siberia, Mongolia and Nepal, which undermines his credibility. In 2010 Peter Weir made a movie *The Way Back* on the basis of Rawicz's book, which has contributed to the popularity of the theme of gulag's memoirs and sufferings of Polish exiles in Siberia. In 2009 Witold Gliński, another prisoner of Gulag, claimed that Rawicz's book was written based on his own escape. The relation from a conversation of Gliński with the reporter John Dyson was published in „Reader's Digest” in May 2009. The question of authorship and credibility of the story of Polish successful escape from gulag is still open. The Rawicz's and Gliński's case is a strong argument for the necessity of extreme caution in the research using memoirs, especially as far as their credibility is concerned.

In 2010, three young men from Łódź, reporters Tomasz Grzywaczewski, Filip Drózdź and Bartosz Malinowski, moved by Gliński's story, made an expedition following the route of Gliński's escape. They met in England, where Gliński lived, and set off to Siberia. It was a „Long Walk Plus Expedition” crowned by a documentary movie and Tomasz Grzywaczewski's reportage book *Przez Dziki Wschód* (*Trough the Wild East*), 2012. *Przez dziki Wschód* is a tribute to Wojciech Gliński's heroic achievement. Three young men travelled through Siberia, Mongolia and Tibet on foot, bikes and horses. They covered the same way he did, although in autumn rather than in winter, comfortably, with a little hazard. Grzywaczewski wrote about contemporary Siberia and its people with no prejudice, but still, he has seen Siberia as Sibir, the wild land of suffering and death camps. Grzywaczewski's second Siberian book (*Życie i śmierć na Drodze Umarłych/ Life and Death on the Dead Road*, 2015) was dedicated to forced constructors of Transpolarna Magistrala Kolejowa/ Main Transpolar Railway from Salechard on Ob river to Igarka on Jenisej. This road was constructed by Gulag prisoners and its colloquial name refers to the fact that thousands of prisoners died there and were buried beneath the railway. Grzywaczewski was trying to get to the lager „zero”, the most northward gulag. Unfortunately, lager zero was burned down a month before Grzywaczewski and their team reached it. In Grzywaczewski's book, history as well as the present day of Siberia and their inhabitants may be found, with the Romantic myth of Siberia as the martyrdom land of Poles prevailing. In introduction to *Przez dziki Wschód* Grzywaczewski wrote that he has seen Siberia through Solzhenitsyn's eyes. His grandfather used to listen the Radio Wolna Europa during the PRL period, where Solzhenitsyn's book was read. He listened to *Arhipelag Gulag*, recorded it on tapes and then wrote Solzhenitsyn's book down with the typewriter. In PRL times *Arhipelag Gulag* was forbidden by censorship, anybody who possessed it risked imprisonment. Therefore, it is no wonder that for Grzywaczewski, who

is only 30 year old, Siberia is still Sibir, the land of Polish martyrdom. Ryszard Kapuściński, the most important Polish contemporary reporter, wrote about Siberia in *Imperium*. Kapuściński was an enemy of communistic totalitarianism, so it is not surprising that in his book Siberia is viewed through glasses of exiles' hell. The fragment titled *Transsyberyjska '58* tells about the journey from Siberia to Moscow. In Kapuściński's relation it is a journey from white hell to the sun. The symbols of Siberia are snow, horrid cold, strange people afraid of almost everything and guardian German sheepdogs. He refers to Mickiewicz's lectures in Collège de France (1842) about gen. Kopeć memoirs from Siberian exile. The reporter remembered *kibitka*, the wagon for transporting of prisoners, and then their horrid way on foot for thousands of miles. Kapuściński, overwhelmed by Siberian's length, used to measure it by suffering of Poles forced to march through Siberian snows, as it was written in exiles' memoirs. His quite comfortable journey from Siberia to Moscow is a tribute for exiles, whose journey was a hell of suffering. Second Siberian fragment of *Imperium* is titled *Workuta. Zamarznąć w ogniu/ Workuta. Freeze in fire*. It tells about Workuta, a city in Republic of Komi, lying behind the Arctic Circle, where mines in which gulag's prisoner used to work were situated. Although Kapuściński writes about the years 1989-1991, he refers to gulag's prisoners almost on every page. For Kapuściński Siberia is still an inhuman land, where every single mile reminds about people who died there beneath endless snow fields. Jacek Hugo-Bader also wrote about Russia and Siberia: *Biała gorączka*, 2009 (*White fever*: the title refers to the snow and alcohol delirium) and *Dzienniki kołymskie*, 2011 (*The Kolyma Diaries*- the title refers to Shalamov book). Jacek Hugo-Bader knows Russia and Siberia very well, he is in close relations with their inhabitants, but even he looks at it through Romantic martyrdom glasses. In *Dzienniki Kołymskie*, we can find a photograph of young, smiling girls. The note under this photo is an open question, how dare these girls smile when standing directly over a grave of Polish prisoners of Gulag?

Siberia is also depicted in Polish movies. Andrei Konchalovsky made an epic movie *Syberiada* in 1979. It tells the story about two peasant families from Siberia, from the beginning of XXth century to 1970-ties. Of course, this movie says nothing about Gulag system. In 2001 Zbigniew Domino wrote a novel *Syberiada polska*. Afterwards he wrote novels *Czas kukułczych gniazd/ The time of cuckoo nests*. *Syberiada polska* refers to Konchalovsky's film and its action takes place during the IInd World War. Protagonists are several Polish families deported to Siberia by Soviets. In this novel, the revival of the gulag's myth from Herling-Grudziński's book may be observed, and *via* Herling the rebirth of Romantic myth. In has to be said, however, that Domino also depicted „good” Russians and Siberian native inhabitants. The representation of gulag's hell seems to be balanced. What is interesting, Domino was deported to Siberia as a child, but afterwards he became a soviet prosecutor in Poland during Stalin's Age and after the collapse of Stalinism. On the basis of Domino's book Janusz Zaorski made the movie *Syberiada polska* in 2013. It was a blockbuster in Polish movie theatres. It collected very good reviews, but there were also opinions that this subject should not be taken on any longer. Nowadays, Siberia as an imaginary land is waiting for a movie or novel not polluted with the martyrdom myth.

In the period between world's war and even before that time also a different attitude towards Siberia could be observed in Polish literature. A source of nonMessianistic vision of Siberia was the periodic „Sybirak. Organ Związku Sybiraków” edited after the rebirth of Poland in 1918 by a society linked to Józef Piłsudski, who was a Siberian exile together with his brother. Józef Piłsudski's aide-de-camp capt. Mieczysław Bohdan Lepecki wrote in 1934 a novel *Sybir bez przekleństw/ Sibir without curses*. This book was a perfect



realization of a new attitude to Siberia as a literary topic. Lepecki intentionally used the word *Sibirak* in the title, he made it in the purpose of demythologizing it. *Sybir bez przekleństw* is the fruit of Lepecki's journey to Siberia, undertaken before the IInd World War. What is extremely interesting, Lepecki was trying to see Siberia without prejudice and title curses. He wrote about Siberia under soviet rule, about inhabitants of this land and their struggle, or maybe more correctly, their coexistence with nature. His book was written in vivid language, he gave a lot of attention to anecdotes and pictures from contemporary existence of Siberian inhabitants. Lepecki showed that Siberia was not only a history, full of phantasmatic pictures of Polish sufferings, but it was also very interesting land where a life goes on. Lepecki's novel and papers in „*Sybirak*” propagated another vision of Siberia, as a land of great opportunities, wonderful wildlife, careers of Poles, a land which Poland should start economic and commercial relations with. The most important fact was the depiction of Siberia as the second homeland of Poles. Henryka Poznańska claimed that Siberia ought to belong to Poland as a colony; it would be a recompense for the age of deportations¹¹. Poznańska wrote that Poles were genuine discoverers and conquerors of Siberia... This statement has a strong postcolonial potential. It has to be mentioned that in those times Poland used to have colonial ambitions. An example is the activity of “Polska Liga Morska i Kolonialna”, “Polish Sea and Colonial League” (1924-1939) which was supposed to acquire African, American (Peru, Brazil) or Siberian colonies for the Polish State. Polska Liga Morska i Kolonialna was established in 1918.

Journalists of the „*Sybirak*” postulated a new type of Siberian literature, written by Poles. They proposed specific geographical locations, genuine Siberian themes. They had had enough of Messianism and martyrdom. The model of such literature was a humorous novel *Dzieje Bałki Murmańskiej. Historia o białej niedźwiedzicy*, 1922 by Eugeniusz Małaczewski. This novel tells the story of a domesticated polar bear female, who served as a soldier („daughter of the regiment”) in the Murmańsk squad under the command of col. Julian Skokowski. Kazimierz Wyka, famous Polish academic and literary critic, wrote in 1935 that „Siberia in Polish consciousness has such obsolete emotional colours that it is high time to undo the old charms¹²”. An example of earlier literature using a depiction of Siberia different from the Romantic one, is *Anima villis* (1893), a novel written by Maria Rodziewiczówna. It tells the story of Poles who chose to stay in Siberia after the end of katorga. For them Siberia was a land of great opportunities and wonderful nature. The protagonist collected a small fortune with his hard work. The same path (hard work for improving of life situation) was chosen by the characters of the novels by Ferdynand Ossendowski, *Mocni ludzie (Strong people)*, 1935) and Edmund Jeziński's *W tundrach Sybiru (In Siberian tundra)*, 1916). They are like Robinson Crusoe on his island; they are „Robinsons of tayga”. Such an expression may be found in Kamil Gizycki, *Przez knieje i stepy*, 1938 or in *Odnalezieni* by Alicja Montrouge, (1937).

In contemporary Polish literature there also exists a similar attitude towards the depiction of Siberia. *Jakuck. Słownik miejsca/Yakuck. The dictionary of the location* by Michał Książek (2013) is a reportage book. Książek refers to works by Waclaw Sieroszewski and Edward Piekarski. It is a memoir of one single year which Książek spent in the city of Yakutsk with his family. The book tells about Yakutian history and culture, as well as about the present day of people from Yakuck. Książek, who had fallen in love with Yakutia via Sieroszewski's *Jakuty*, went there for cultural and linguistic studies. In effect, *Jakuck. Słownik miejsca* is full of descriptions of Yakutian words and customs, history is

¹¹ H. Poznańska, *Dwie powieści syberyjskie*, „*Sybirak*”, no 2, 1938, s. 27

¹² quot. for. Z. Kopeć, *Syberia przepisana*, „*Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich*” 2014, z. 2, s. 142

blended with the present. Because Książek is an ornithologist and forest keeper, he gave a lot of attention to describing Siberian wildlife. As a result, his book gives a complete picture of the location, he exploited the methodology of the anthropological „thick description” (C. Geertz). Książek fulfilled the assumption of spatial turn, and gave the reader a reportage being the perfect realization of the holistic vision of human sciences. *Jakuck. Słownik miejsca* allows to hope that to Poles, Siberia will become a „tabula rasa” of history, and will finally receive its own face. Sib-ir, the sleeping land, will wake up in Polish culture in a new shape.

Finally, I would like to mention *Lód/The Ice* (2007), a novel written by Jacek Dukaj, famous science-fiction writer. This epic novel (over 1,000-page) is the realization of the alternative history genre. *Lód* is founded on the idea of “freezing history” as the effect of the Tunguska meteorite fall in 1908th. Poland was ice-bound even in 1924th and there is no independent Poland, in fact Poland has been annexed by Russian Empire. The protagonist, Benedykt Gierosławski, travels by Trans-Siberian Express, forced by Russians to search for a father he actually cannot remember, who has the power to talk with the *Luty*, angels of ice, the power which gives him hope to control the course of history. Dukaj refers to *Anhelli* (Słowacki). This is an opportunity for Dukaj to undermine the Messianism and the idea of suffering of Poles in Siberia. In his book Poles are successful businessmen, they are real Siberian aristocracy of money. Because Gierosławski obtained a gift of speaking with *Luty*, he established a manufacture of history in Siberia. He could freeze history in a given moment, or defrost it, to make changes in the world’s politics. In Dukaj’s novel Siberia became a promised land for Poles, the most important place in the whole world, where the history and politics are governed by a Pole, Benedykt Gierosławski. Of course, Dukaj’s novel may be accused of postcolonial background, but it is more important that in this novel, as in Książek’s *Jakuck. Słownik miejsca*, Siberia is the one of the main protagonists, and it is depicted not in Romantic, martyrdom poetics, but in the opposite way. Siberia is a land of great opportunity, wonderful wildlife and interesting native people. This is a land which, finally, is awaking for Polish cultural consciousness. Maybe this signals the fact that there will no longer be a Sib-ir “sleeping land”, but only a Siberia.

I call with this paper for a holistic vision in human sciences, blending in research fields of literary studies, anthropology of culture, goepoetics, history, journalism and public discourse analysis. I believe that it is the best opportunity to understand our world and the best way to teach students respect for world’s cultural heritage and diversity.

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