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## The Slav Master. Hegel and Polish Nobility

**ABSTRACT:** The Slav master is the Polish nobleman whose position will be tested in the light of the critique of Hegel's master and slave dialectic. Two places which, according to Hegel, are deserted by the Spirit of history, will be focused on in the light of contemporary critique: the XIX century Haiti and Siberia. In both places Polish nobles (Polish Legionnaires helping Napoleon to put an end to the Revolution of the slaves in Haiti and Polish insurrectionists sent into exile to Siberia) are considered a singular multiplicity (using Alain Badiou's terminology), whose faithfulness to the event (revolution, insurrection) brings to life a truth procedure, which will nevertheless be suppressed by double colonization of the dominant colonial discourse and by post-colonial critique of the dominant West-oriented discourse. Re-reading of Mickiewicz's lectures given at the Collège de France with the use of contemporary apparatus (Badiou), and remapping of the specificity of Polish post-feudal legacy in comparison with its Western European version shows the ongoing relevance of mentally interpretative frameworks of the reality shaped by class division.

**KEY WORDS:** Master slave dialectic • Post-colonialism • Haiti • Siberia • Nobility

### Post-colonial studies of post-feudal legacy

For many political theorists belonging to the post-foundational tradition (linking the post-Heideggerian left, the theory of discourse and philosophies of the event<sup>1</sup>), the universal history project expresses only Eurocentric imperialism. There is clear incoherence between the universalism of European Enlightenment (and its main ideas, such as reason, freedom, historicism and humanism) and its implementation in colonial practice, where those ideas were the expression of white dominance. The era of the collapse of grand narratives clearly implies the critique of Enlightenment epistemologies, as expressed for instance in post-colonial archaeology,

<sup>1</sup> O. Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*, Edinburgh 2007.

Subaltern Studies school of historiography<sup>2</sup> or in feminist thought. All these standpoints are meant to bring about recovery of a marginalized group and build up small narratives of localized subjectivities. Multiple strategies have been created to escape the interpenetration of knowledge and power (Foucault, Said) through signifying practices (Bourdieu), different forms of anthropological linguistics (Foucault, Agamben, Spivak), or psychoanalysis-based theories which emphasise non-exclusivity of the apophantic theoretical discourse. New accounts of the past fight against historical practices related to colonialism and nationalism. Our research draws on “indigenous people” who are the most proximal ones, both historically and culturally – that is, the Polish nobility. Due to that closeness, this indigenous species is invisibly dissociated from its heritage. The fact that we use the concept of nobility is already inconvenient because it is shaped by the Western European definition of class division. In this paper we juxtapose a post-colonial thought with the growing scholarship concerning the ongoing relevance of post-feudal legacy in mapping interpretative and mental frameworks of reality lingering in European discourses. The post-feudal studies concentrate mostly on the institutional aspects of reproducing the noble milieu in the core countries<sup>3</sup>. However, there is an increasing interest in the same legacy in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Hungary and Poland)<sup>4</sup>. The latter studies have shown not only a very strong impact of post-feudal values on Central-Eastern European societies (the evolution of intelligentsia elites, class dualisms generating conflicts or even culture wars<sup>5</sup>, or shaping citizenship ideals),

<sup>2</sup> R. Guha, *Recovering the Subject Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia – Subaltern Studies. Writings on South Asian History and Society*, vol. I, Delhi 1982.

<sup>3</sup> M. de Saint Martin, *L'espace de la noblesse*, Paris 1993. See also: J. Dronkers, *Has the Dutch Nobility Retained its Social Relevance During The 20th Century?*, “European Sociological Review”, 2003, 19(1), pp. 81–96.

<sup>4</sup> See the following works: L. Jakubowska, *Memory-Making among the Gentry in Poland*, [in:] *Memory and World War 2: An Ethnographic Approach*, ed. F. Cappelletto, Oxford/New York 2005, pp. 155–176; É. Sztáray-Kézdy, *Egy eltűnt réteg nyomában. Egykori arisztokrata családok leszármazottai a mai Magyarországon*, Budapest 2009; R. Smoczyński, T. Zarycki, *Współczesne polskie elity postszlacheckie w kontekście europejskim*, “Kultura i Społeczeństwo”, 2012, 56(1), pp. 261–292; R. Smoczyński, T. Zarycki, *Totem inteligencji. Aristokracja, szlachta ziemiaństwo w polskiej przestrzeni społecznej*, Warszawa 2017; M. Minakowski, R. Smoczyński, *Mapping Homogamy of Noble Descendants in Poland. A Case Study of the Genealogy of Descendants of the Great Sejm*, “Acta Universitatis Sapientiae: Social Analysis”, 2019, 9(1), pp. 29–52; T. Jerzyński, R. Smoczyński, T. Zarycki, *Regionalne osobliwości postrzegania i podtrzymywania tradycji post-szlacheckich przez studentów polskich*, “Studia Regionalne i Lokalne”, 2016, no. 1 (63), pp. 129–154.

<sup>5</sup> See: R. Smoczyński, T. Zarycki, *Totem...*, *op.cit.*, T. Zarycki, *The Power of the Intelligentsia: The Rywin Affair and the Challenge of Applying the Concept of Cultural Capital to Analyse*

but most importantly a very different citizenship genealogy, class division dynamics, and normative heritage as compared to core Western European countries. This growing scholarship calls for philosophical reflection on the feudal ghost haunting the peripheral Eastern Europe. This issue places our research at the intersection of post-feudal and post-colonial studies (also engaging the world system studies (East semi/peripheries and Western core) and nesting orientalism studies), and it will necessarily need to make use of such concepts as hybridity<sup>6</sup>, double colonialism<sup>7</sup> and many others acquisitions of post-colonial archeology. This present study opens a few line inquiries concerning the core of any narration about otherness – the fight for telling one’s own story in one’s own language. The playground of this narrative is shared mainly by history and philosophy, but other perspectives are called to be witnesses of this duel; firstly – literature, secondly – religious studies. Both are responsible for the emergence of a hero, a new apostle of truth or, to put it in Hegelian terms, the spirit of history.

In fact, the leading role in this story will be played by Hegel, acting as the villain, denying a great part of the world its share in universality; while the main location will be the Island of Saint-Domingue and the revolution which resulted in establishing the independent republic of Haiti, which is widely considered as the black spot in universal history. The indigenous nobleman who appeared in Saint-Domingue as the militant arm of colonial France under Bonaparte will act as the subject of double colonialism, while the events which took place in 1802, resulting in the independence of Haiti, will constitute the “evental site” (Badiou’s *le site événementiel*) of the short story we are going to tell.

The *mise-en-scène* is authored (among others) by contemporary theorists, particularly by Susan Buck-Morss in her article titled *Hegel and Haiti*<sup>8</sup> (lately developed into a book), and by Földényi in the book to which we will devote the second act. Buck-Morss is focusing on the linker “and” in the title of her essay, which brings together the phenomena which used to be very close, but have been distanced from each other by science and by the history of narrating them. However, it is not only Buck Morss who studied

*Poland’s Elites*, “Theory and Society”, 2009, 38(6), pp. 613–648; T. Zarycki, R. Smoczyński, T. Warczok, *The Roots of Polish Culture-Centered Politics: Toward a Non-Purely Cultural Model of Cultural Domination in Central And Eastern Europe*, “East European Politics and Societies and Cultures”, 2017, 31(2), pp. 360–381.

<sup>6</sup> H.K. Bhabba, *The Location of Culture*, New-York 2004.

<sup>7</sup> G.C. Spivak, *A Critique of Post-colonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge 1999.

<sup>8</sup> S. Buck-Morss, *Hegel and Haiti*, “Critical Inquiry”, 2000, vol. 26, issue 4, pp. 821–865.

that silence, as is shown by the fact that, comparably to “negationism”, Hegel’s silence does not require adding silence “about what”. Within this issue the most interesting voices belong to persons like Judith Butler or Alain Badiou, who are neither Hegelians, nor experts in Colonial history (like Tavarès), but their critique has a much wider aim. For the purpose of this article we will concentrate on Badiou, mostly because his literal critique of Hegel’s disregard for real slavery can be supplemented by applying his truth procedures to “marginal” historical events<sup>9</sup>. We will start with his open criticism of Hegel’s dialectic, presented in the article titled *Hegel’s Master and Slave*<sup>10</sup>. From the first lines of the text Badiou shares his disappointment about the fact that, despite the title “lordship and bondage”, this passage of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807) “certainly does not really touch upon the real of slavery”<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, Badiou approves its crucial importance: “[T]he dialectic of master and slave in Hegel is an interesting, passionate figure, even from the point of view of the theory of the other and its introduction into philosophy”<sup>12</sup>. He remarks that the dualism of master and slave is based on a pure encounter of two subjectivities, but whether “these two possibilities [to be either a slave or a master] really constitute the fundamental relation of civilization [...] is not really established”<sup>13</sup>. Nor do we know what is the historical determination of who takes which position. Therefore, two subjectivities meet on their way to self-recognition. We have a symmetrical structure:

<sup>9</sup> Alain Badiou has certainly proposed one of the most impressive theoretical systems in contemporary philosophy. He criticizes the postmodernist thesis about the “collapse of the grand narratives” (see: A. Badiou, *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, Paris 1989, p. 11) and various forms of the weak discourse of philosophy (like Gianni Vattimo’s *pensiero debole*). Inspired by mathematical theoretical tools (especially Zermelo-Fraenkel’s axiomatic set theory), Badiou conducts ontological analyses of incredible momentum and wants to present a “strong” philosophical discourse. In his opinion, we are able to think about the being itself and learn its laws, which are universal and unchanging. This effort to grasp the unchanging laws of being also entails a crucial consequence for the methodological potential of this conception. Badiou’s theory can be applied in a universal way to various cultural or social phenomena, in which certain general ontological structures can be manifested. Such an attempt has already been made in our previous article (U. Idziak, B.P. Bednarczyk, *The Noble Family as Singular Multicity. Redefining the Smoczynski’s & Zarycki’s Totemic Defenition of Nobility Throught the Lenses of A. Badiou’s Mathematical Ontology*, “Acta Universitatis Sapientiae: Social Analysis”, 2019, vol. 9, pp. 53–69) where, using Badiouian terminology, we analyzed the social status of a post-noble family during the communism period in Poland.

<sup>10</sup> A. Badiou, *Hegel’s Master and Slave*, transl. F. Ruda, “Crisis Critique”, vol. 4, issue 1, pp. 34–47, <http://crisiscritique.org/2017/march/Alain%20Badiou.pdf>, 29.03.2020.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 41–42.

One of the consciousnesses affirms that a consciousness is ultimately independent from life, and must be recognized precisely in this independence; and, for consciousness as superiority over life to be recognized all the way, it will have to take up the risk of death [...] The other consciousness will assume that, ultimately, the real of self-consciousness is life after all, since without life there is no consciousness; and thus it will protect life but, at the same time, will accept its inferiority in relation to self-consciousness<sup>14</sup>.

And, within this symmetry, no one claims that one is right and the other one is wrong. Hegel tries to deduce dissymmetry – i. e. domination – from “the simple encounter with the other” but, according to Badiou, he fails: “the dissymmetry must be introduced from the outside”<sup>15</sup>.

Symmetry turns into dissymmetry after the introduction of the third term, that is the thing. The master lives independently from the thing, because he neglects the needs of life, whereas the slave occupies “himself with material life to the master’s advantage”<sup>16</sup>. Therefore the slave produces the thing without enjoying it, because the product of his work is destined to enjoy the master. And, in consequence, he appears to be “the man of sublimation”, i.e. “repressed pleasure”<sup>17</sup>. Consequently, some sort of reversal takes place: “the slave is led to defer the satisfaction of his immediate desire for the sake of culture”<sup>18</sup> while “the master is content with immediate enjoyment [...] being an enjoyer without any creativity”<sup>19</sup>.

This is, of course, the exact place where Marxism is grounded in Hegel: “[i]n the bosom of History the fundamental creativity is on the side of the dominated and not on that of the dominating”<sup>20</sup>. But this exchange is not political, and the fact that the slave becomes the master of the master doesn’t mean that, within this dualism, some kind of political subjectivity is born. Therefore, as Badiou asserts, on the basis of this passage from Hegel we cannot explain the logic of slaves’ revolts, such as those led by Spartacus or Toussaint-Louverture<sup>21</sup>. On the contrary, historically this dualism refers only to rule of aristocracy, while the rest, i. e. bourgeoisie, peasantry and all the inferior classes share the position of the slave. Hegel’s standpoint is

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42–43.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 43.

<sup>21</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 45.

revengist, as if he was saying the words which Badiou puts into his mouth: “All this is nice, but one will remember me, Hegel; I will exist eternally, while no one will remember the Count So-and-So, who certainly enjoyed in his life more than I did, but who, in view of universal history, is nothing at all”<sup>22</sup>. And Badiou concludes that Hegel is much closer to this identity of a theoretical slave, like everyone who is not a “lord”, than to “the producer of sugar cane on the Caribbean Islands”<sup>23</sup>.

Contrary to Susan Buck-Morss, Alain Badiou does not investigate what Hegel knew about Saint-Domingue, what he ignored and why he ignored it, but he explains how the political revolution of the slave is theoretically impossible “due to the very structure of the Hegelian development”<sup>24</sup>. The real slave is therefore not the one who works the thing and becomes the subject of culture, but he is the thing himself or itself, and Hegel never escaped the Aristotelian figure of animated tool (“lowered to the thing he handles. He is a thing among other things”<sup>25</sup>). Hegel has guided Marxism by showing the reversal of roles where the slave creates and forms culture, but this is not satisfying for Badiou, who expects more than an “indirect and metaphorical relation to real History”<sup>26</sup>. Real History is an event. And the change of optics which Badiou proposes is undoubtedly of an eventual nature. Any event triggers conflict and requires decisions. The sense of conflict is typical for the experience of the event<sup>27</sup>, as it reveals the possibility of acting differently to the narrative adopted so far, according to which the “inhabitants of the situation” became accustomed to thinking and acting. The positions of the master and the slave are variable. Subjectivity is born not from labour and creativity, but from political decisions. This is called a generic procedure which re-configures the symbolic order and generates its own discourse. The subject will now become the procedure generator.

The Haitian revolution had to be silenced by Hegel not for the reasons it was silenced in the 18th century France, as twenty percent of the French economy income was based on the Saint-Domingue plantations, and neither because the Enlightenment thinkers like Rousseau were themselves economically dependent on the production of sugar cane (as Buck-Morss notes), but because the slaves’ position, identity and subjectivity was

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46.

<sup>27</sup> *Idem*, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, transl. P. Hallward, New-York & London 2001, p. 48.

founded on their slavery condition (a dystopic analysis by Judith Butler). Badiou denounces here the ethics of the victims. He therefore denounces the revolution of the slaves as victims of the *ancien régime*, which was still in its rights miles away from revolutionary France; instead he advocates for the revolution of the “producers of sugar cane in the Caribbean Islands”, who discovered that the motto *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, expressing generic ideals applied to them *par excellence*. If these ideas express *l'esprit français*, then, paradoxically, African slaves from distant Haiti, fighting for their own freedom, were more French by spirit than the native French against whom the insurgent activity was directed.

Speaking about the event instead of the victim's condition can correspond to what Susan Buck-Morss called the “moments of clarity in practice”. This expression appears when she asks for the reasons of rescuing Haiti from oblivion, together with the event “the truth of which has managed to slip away from us”. Her aim is to rescue („redeem” or “reconstitute”<sup>28</sup>) the idea of universal history from the distortion made by the white domination discourse. Therefore Buck-Morss juxtaposes Hegel's moment of clarity with that of others („Toussaint Louverture, Wordsworth, Abbé Grégoire”). And by “others” she does not only mean those who play a part in theoretical clarity, but also in “clarity in practice”. And she mentions, as an example, “the Polish regiment under Leclerc's command, which disobeyed orders and refused to drown six hundred captured Saint Domingans”<sup>29</sup>.

As we said at the beginning, Buck-Morss is the *metteur-en-scène*, the director of that drama, but not necessarily in the positive way. Although she generously ascribes that “moment of clarity” to the Polish legionnaires, she unfortunately darkens this same clarity in the footnote, by saying: “Dessaline, in gratitude, and in acknowledgement of what the Poles suffered at home (he referred to them aptly as “the white negroes of Europe”, as Polish serfdom was not distinguishable from slavery) allowed them to stay in Haiti after independence”<sup>30</sup>. In the light of elementary knowledge about Polish history, this statement is clearly spurious (the Polish edition regrettably repeats this sentence without any comment). Firstly, because the metaphor of being a negro did not refer to serfdom, but to the fact that Polish soldiers were part of the French army due to the current non-existence of Polish statehood since the 1795 partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. If the Polish soldier could share the condition of a slave, it is because of political

<sup>28</sup> S. Buck-Morss, *Hegel and Haiti*, *op.cit.*, p. 865.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 865. See also: C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, New York 1963, p. 318.

<sup>30</sup> S. Buck-Morss, *Hegel and Haiti*, *op.cit.*, p. 865, f. 127.

dependence from foreign countries – Austria, Prussia and Russia, and not due to his social status. Secondly, the suggestion that Polish serfdom could not be distinguished from slavery is also disputable. For the above-mentioned reason, the anti-serfdom policy needs to be analyzed in three different parts of partitioned Poland, taking under consideration the particular decision of the Partitioning Powers (the abolition of serfdom took place in Prussia, Austria and Russia in 1807–1848, and 1861 respectively). If we want to speak about Polish serfdom *ad literam*, we must be mindful of the “Proclamation of Połaniec” issued by Władysław Kościuszko in 1794, as the last document of independent Poland. It was the only Polish voice in the abolitionary process guarantying limited freedom, ownership of land, right to legal help in case of being abused by nobility, and was nullified after the downfall of the Insurrection, together with the 3<sup>rd</sup> May Constitution (the latter, being the first d e m o c r a t i c constitution in Europe, also addressed peasantry rights). The only legitimized comparison of Polish serfdom and slavery has been analyzed with reference to vast properties in the Eastern part of Poland (now Ukraine), and concerns local populations (because of ethnic differences: language and religion). But, regardless of our current opinion, one thing is irrefutable; namely that among the Polish Legionnaires there were none who could share that slavery condition in the 19th century Poland. The soldiers sent to Saint-Domingue by Napoleon were not of peasant descent, but they mainly originated from the stratum of impoverished nobles. Nevertheless, we can turn a blind eye to this unfortunate footnote, because this issue is marginal, but we will use it to develop this noble moment of clarity with which we deal here, and we will continue along Susan Buck-Morss’ line, following her words:

There are many examples of such clarity, and they belong to no side, no one group exclusively. What if every time that the consciousness of individuals surpassed the confines of present constellations of power in perceiving the concrete meaning of freedom, this were valued as a moment, however transitory, of the realization of absolute spirit? What other silences would need to be broken? What undisciplined stories would be told?<sup>31</sup>

Following this incentive, we will put on this stage the story of Polish nobles becoming white negroes of Europe during the Haitian revolution. In this drama the Poles will play two roles – the first one is the aforementioned non-recognition, which wipes things out from History, the second is the

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 865.



universal potential of Polish nobility ethos<sup>32</sup>. The fact that this is an “undisciplined story” adds a fabulatory law to this clarity and vision, which occurs at a “transitory” moment and has the power of breaking the theorist’s silence. Therefore, it is not without reason that the choir of this drama includes two poets who will become the lyrical *I* of the story – Adam Mickiewicz and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. The first one will be quarrelling with Hegel in his lectures given at the Collège de France, the other will cry after reading Hegel’s *History in Siberia*.

### Mickiewicz – Haiti

In 1843, when discussing German idealism during the 21st lecture concerning Slavic literature, given at the Collège de France, Adam Mickiewicz was saying:

German philosophers don’t realize that the fight left the sphere of books and education a long time ago; that there are nations – that is the French and the Polish nation, which have continuously been executing for centuries what German philosophy only states as an issue: that, in order to put an end to the battle between minds, one must push forward work initiated by the political folk (pol. *ludy polityczne*)<sup>33</sup>.

By the battle between minds Mickiewicz meant the discussion between materialism and idealism, but it is the “political folk” or the “political people” term referring to the French and the Poles, which is surprisingly modern. In particular, in this lecture an equation is made between France in the last years of restored monarchy and Poland under partition, which means that it is not the actual politics that is taken under consideration, but the autonomous practice of the people [the Polish term *ludy* is the translation of the Rousseauian *le peuple* – subject of the revolution] (even under foreign domination). The second context to be encompassed is the reference to practice – “life and force” – which is opposed to a philosophical system or theory. Mickiewicz’s philosophy of practice is strictly related to the historical experience of Poland, and to himself as a Pole in exile<sup>34</sup>, and has an unquestionable theological realm, for Mickiewicz sees the only escape from the conflict between materialism and idealism in the action

<sup>32</sup> See: U. Idziak, B.P. Bednarczyk, *The Noble Family...*, *op.cit.* and R. Smoczyński, T. Zarycki, *Totem...*, *op.cit.*

<sup>33</sup> A. Mickiewicz, *Literatura Słowiańska*, t. III i IV, Warszawa 1953, p. 152.

<sup>34</sup> T. Herbich, *Niepodległość a filozofia. Wokół pewnego wątku prelekcji paryskich Adama Mickiewicza*, “Teologia Polityczna”, 2018, <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/tomasz-herbich-niepodleglosc-a-filozofia-wokol-pewnego-watku-prelekcji-paryskich-adama-mickiewicza>, 17.05.2020.

which occurs as *Deus ex machina*. The reference to “God in the machine” is not only proverbial, it corresponds to the ethical side of theory in practice. We can therefore try to read Mickiewicz’s philosophy, critical towards the German speculative philosophy, as another kind of “anti-philosophy” using the typology which Badiou borrowed from Jacques Lacan.

As a representative of the nation whose state had been partitioned, and thus – as Alain Badiou would say – was an element of a singular multiplicity, Mickiewicz had a special perspective from which he perceived the geopolitical situation at that time. For the anti-philosopher, constellations of subjective life experiences are considered as inseparable from the truth. For Badiou, anti-philosophers included, among others, Rousseau, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. According to their model of thinking, the truth is not possible without a truth-telling person, without someone’s experience. As Badiou writes: “For an anti-philosopher, the enunciative position is obviously a part of the statement’s protocol. No discourse can lay claim to the truth if it does not contain an explicit answer to the question: Who speaks?”<sup>35</sup>.

In the first book of *Mr Thaddeus, or the Last Lithuanian Foray* (1834) Adam Mickiewicz mentions a Polish Legionnaire who comes back home and tells his family a story more strange than fables

[...] how Jabłonowski had reached the land where pepper grows and sugar is produced, and where woods are fragrant in eternal spring bloom: there, with the legion of the Danube, the Polish general smites the negroes, but sighs for his native soil<sup>36</sup>

It is not surprising to find this reference to our line of inquiry in a book which is widely considered as the very essence of Polish patriotic mythology, treasuring in its Olympus the divine Emperor Bonaparte (depicted on the famous Father Robak’s snuffbox containing tobacco from Częstochowa, *sic!*). It is not important that this myth ends in disillusionment, because

<sup>35</sup> A. Badiou, *Saint Paul: the Foundation of Universalism*, transl. R. Brassier, Chicago 2003, p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> A. Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz or the Last Foray in Lithuania: a Story of Life among Polish Gentlefolk in the Years 1811 and 1812 in Twelve Books*, trans. G.R. Noyes, E.P. Dutton & co, New-York & Toronto 1917, p. 31, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/28240/28240-h/28240-h.html#toc7>, 3.04.2020. A more refined translation might be found in Rypson: “Jabłonowski where the sweet canes grow / And woods with vernal fragrance ever blow, / Has with the Legion of the Danube come. To crush the Negroes and still sighs for home”. (A. Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz, czyli ostatni zajazd na Litwie/Pan Tadeusz: or the Last Foray in Lithuania*], trans. K.R. Mackenzie, London 1997. (After: S. Rypson, *Being Poloné in Haiti: Origins, Survivals, Development, and Narrative Production of the Polish Presence in Haiti*, Warszawa 2008, p. 48).

disillusion itself can indicate rationalization, but on the other hand, it is also an important *topos* of Polish mythology, related to the issue of being betrayed by the Western countries (Rypson speaks about the “obsession of foreign treachery against Poland”<sup>37</sup>). Poland under partition expected a lot from “the spirit of history sitting on a horse”, from the very beginning of Napoleon’s career, as his emerging legend was being spread by soldiers and legionnaires, such as Wybicki or Dąbrowski, who had seen general Bonaparte on the battlefield. General Dąbrowski formed three legions, the first two in 1807, and the third, the Légion du Danube, in September 1799 (i.e. a few weeks before the *coup d’état* of the 18<sup>th</sup> of Brumaire). They were formed mainly from Polish political migrants and soldiers who had deserted from the Austrian army and had been caught by the French. In 1800-1801 they fought against the Austrians in the battle of Marengo. But after the treatise of Lunéville, when the Poles realized that their interests had been betrayed, some of them, including their general Karol Otto Kniaziewicz, resigned. The remaining ones were regrouped into the 113<sup>th</sup> French demi-brigade under the command of Władysław Franciszek Jabłonowski (the one mentioned in *Pan Tadeusz*) and sent to the “land where pepper grows”. And here our story becomes tangled, because it seems very ironic that the general immortalized in *Pan Tadeusz*, who went to Saint-Domingue with the Polish troops, was called “the little negro” (*Murzynek*). He was, in fact, a mulatto, the illegitimate son of an English aristocratic lady Maria Delaire and her servant, adopted at birth by Maria’s Polish husband Konstanty Jabłonowski. Moreover, this young general who joined the Kościuszko’s Insurrection and bravely stood out in the battles of Szczekociny and Maciejowice, as well as in the defense of Saska Kępa in Warsaw, knew Bonaparte from the military school in Brienne-le-château, where they both received their military education<sup>38</sup>. Some gossip says that Napoleon bullied Jabłonowski because of his skin colour. Jabłonowski could certainly dispute the title of the “first black general” in the French army with Jacques Toussaint Louverture, leader of the slaves’ insurrection in Haiti. In Polish literature one can even find a book devoted to Jabłonowski, titled “Black General”<sup>39</sup>, but although he was sent to pacify Toussaint-Louverture’s revolution, they never had an opportunity to confront each other. Louverture was captured and sent to France in summer 1802, while in September of that year Jabłonowski contracted yellow fever, shortly after his arrival on the island, and died. He shared that fate with

<sup>37</sup> S. Rypson, *Being Poloné in Haiti, op.cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 47.

<sup>39</sup> W. Gąsiorowski, *Czarny General*, Warszawa 1987.

general Charles Leclerc (+ November 1802) and a great number of the Poles under his command.

We will shed here some light on the alleged betrayal of Leclerc by the Poles, which, even though it probably did not happen, is crucial for our paper's argument. We refer here mostly to Sebastian Rypson's book *Being Poloné in Haiti* (2008), where he includes numerous historical accounts, but most of all, as an anthropologist who was enchanted by that story, he is very close to our interdisciplinary and – so to speak – metaphoric methodology<sup>40</sup>.

At the very beginning of his mission Jabłonowski was sent to the port of St. Marc, occupied by Charles Belair, a general who had joined the slaves' uprising, but was soon after deployed to Port au Prince, where he died a couple of weeks later<sup>41</sup>. It was in St Marc that general Philibert Fressinet and general Quantin, who took over the command from Jabłonowski, gathered Captain Désiré's unarmed black demi-brigade on the place d'Armes and ordered the *baionettage* of 400 people. It was during that event, according to Haitian historians, that the Poles refused to execute the order<sup>42</sup>. But it must be added that the Polish first-hand testimony of those events, which is Wierzbicki and Lux's account<sup>43</sup>, did not confirm the Haitian version and refuted any form of dereliction of duty on the Polish side. That is why in Stefan Żeromski's *Popioły* (1904) the Polish Legions were charged with the massacre and blamed for its atrocity. Rypson concludes: "Whatever might have happened on that fateful day will probably be shrouded in mystery forever, yet it seems that Haitian-Polish relations underwent something of a change for the better"<sup>44</sup>.

Regardless of historical facts we need to establish two genealogies of this mythic story– one is related to the Poles and their relationship with Napoleon, the other is Haitian recognition of Polish sympathy. When applying Badiou's ontology to this genealogy we can agree that, in the middle of the insurrection, both Haitian slaves and Polish Legionnaires discerned the dawn of a new reality. They sensed their mutual conditions. They recognized themselves in each other. And their sense of freedom united them, despite the differences. In his letter addressed to general Quantin, the leader of black insurgents, Jacques Dessalines, wrote:

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 25–26.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46–47.

<sup>42</sup> B. Ardouin, *Études sur l'Histoire d'Haïti, Suivies de la Vie du Général M. Borgella*, Paris 1854. (After S. Rypson, *Being Poloné in Haiti*, *op.cit.*, p. 52).

<sup>43</sup> J. Pachoński, R.K. Wilson, *Poland's Caribbean Tragedy: a Study of Polish Legions in the Haitian War of Independence 1802–1803*, New York 1985. (After S. Rypson, *Being Poloné in Haiti*, *op.cit.*, p. 53).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 54.

I warn you that I have in my possession many European soldiers who are concerned, loyal and tormented because they are men who, like me, have taken up arms for their own liberty, and they are considered my friends<sup>45</sup>.

At the beginning of his account of the Polish-Haitian story, Rypson describes secret meetings which triggered the slaves' insurrection. During those conspiratorial activities they had "all the trappings of a Vodou ritual" (named after "Bois Caiman" – the place of the gathering), where sacrifices were offered to *Papa* "Legba, Ogou Feray and Ezili Dantò"<sup>46</sup>. It is worth noting the appearance of the latter Vodou spirit – Ezili Dantò, because she would act as the *deus ex machina* of the analyzed mythology. Ezili Dantò is one of many loa (spirits) of the Haitian Vodou. She is responsible for independence and vengeance, and that is one of the reasons why she became a symbol of the Haitian revolution, but one cannot tell whether her role in the pantheon of Vodou spirits was attached to independence before the revolution. Perhaps that was why Ezili "appeared" at the ceremony in the Bois Caiman, imparting a woman character<sup>47</sup> of the revolution and, later, she turned the attention of Haitians to the statue of the Virgin Mary of Częstochowa, brought by Polish soldiers to Saint-Domingue. Catholic saints used to be syncretized by Vodou religion regularly, but that merging of Ezili Danto with the Black Madonna of Częstochowa was exceptional. The icon of the Black Madonna wearing a robe covered with *fleur-de-lys* (a symbol of the French monarchy, by the way) was crowned by Jan Kazimierz in 1656, after the 1655 "miraculous defense" of Jasna Góra from the Swedish siege. The tradition of soldiers carrying, in the pocket nearest to their heart, small silver gorgets with the Image of the Black Madonna had been followed ever since. Why that specific figuration of Virgin Mary gained substantial prominence among Haitians has been an open question for anthropologists<sup>48</sup>. But at least three important reasons can be discerned: Firstly, Ezili Danto is a mother, although the child of the icon has been interpreted as Ezili's daughter Annais (and the question of maternity is related rather to Ezili Freda); secondly, the Virgin Mary is represented as a dark skinned woman (thus it is called the "Black Madonna"); thirdly, they both have scars on their faces<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 54.

<sup>46</sup> S. Rypson, *Being Poloné in Haiti, op.cit.*, p. 41, 41n14.

<sup>47</sup> Her origins date back to the Dahomeyan kingdom and the tradition of female army (Mino); additionally, she was summoned by a woman, Cécile Fatiman.

<sup>48</sup> S. Rypson, *Being Poloné in Haiti, op.cit.*, p. 84–85.

<sup>49</sup> McCarthy-Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, Berkeley 1991. (After S. Rypson, *Being Poloné in Haiti, op.cit.*, p. 88).

Apart from these three physical similarities, the prime reason might be related to veneration of the Black Madonna which, unlike other nationals who fought in Haiti, was widespread among the Polish soldiers. From the moment the insurrection was ritually launched in Bois, Caiman Ezuli “appeared” in the disguise of the Madonna on those Polish gorgets, which could be perceived as a sign of shared ideals or interests. That theory could provide the grounds for the legend about friendship between Polish Legionnaires and Haitians, since there is no actual historical evidence to explain it<sup>50</sup>.

Finally, the last anthropological hint which should be included in our reflection concerns the development of Polish identity among some Haitians, who self-reported their alleged Polish ancestors. One thing, very important for our reflection, deserves to be mentioned. Sebastian Rypson, sharing his own empirical research, refers to names which, according to Haitians, were formerly Polish – the modification logic they underwent (whether it is true or false is beside the point) is based on adding the supposedly lost ending “ski”, typical for Polish names. Rypson rightly notices that the root of the names provided to him as examples of those of Polish origin resemble French rather than Polish names, (*Fleuri-*, *Dorlu-*, *Cheri-*). The only feature which made them Polish was the suffix “-ska”. But what is even more puzzling is that, in accordance with Polish grammatical rules, this form is a feminine version of a surname. This fact is striking because there were no women among Polish Legionnaires<sup>51</sup>. But what Rypson did not mention is that this suffix (*-ski/-ska*) is traditionally related to Polish names of noble origin, and is the equivalent of French *de* or German *von*. All three of them mean that a given person descends from a place whose names constitutes the morpheme of the proper name. This, potentially, might be a proof that the majority of Polish Legionnaires were members of the nobility. What is more, in accordance with our hypothesis, the female ending may be a direct reference to the Black Madonna of Częstochowa – often called *Częstochowska*.

Having made this quick research into the Polish-Haitian encounter, we can interpret it within Badiou’s conceptual framework. The Poles will act as a singularity, because they were deprived of their political state.

<sup>50</sup> There is also a story related to language, which says that, during the war of independence, Ezili has had her tongue cut out. Since then she has been able to pronounce only indistinct sounds “dey-dey-dey” – (see McCarthy Brown after Rypson, *Being Poloné in Haiti, op.cit.*, p. 90). This phonetical aspect of that Vodou figure related to the conflict of languages, i. e. numerous African dialects, Creole and languages of the colonial armies. We might devote a longer reflection to those sounds, which are the only distinctive feature of identity, playing the role of a local shibboleth.

<sup>51</sup> S. Rypson, *Being Poloné in Haiti, op.cit.*, pp. 91–92.

Therefore, the great expectations associated with Napoleon's operations implied normalization of the Polish state of affairs, as it was the case with the establishment of the Duchy of Warsaw. Under the Haitian colonial conditions, black slaves acted as a radically singular multiple, and their uprising manifested the desire for emancipation and normalization. The Poles, confronted with that situation, took on radically new optics to consider their own political condition. The question which arose was: should one remain loyal to France associated with some political hopes, or should one stand on the side of the oppressed? In the fate of the local slaves the Poles perceived an analogy to their own situation, an eager fight for freedom against an imperial power charged with social and political marginalization of such a singularity.

That change of optics was undoubtedly of an eventual nature. And, like any event, it caused a conflict and required a decision. The decision can only be "yes" or "no"; we deal here with binary logic<sup>52</sup>. The Poles in Haiti who decided to betray France and join the slaves, those who said "yes" to the insurrectional event, initiated a procedure in which creation of a generic set was at stake. How can we understand this unexpected brotherhood of nations which had previously had nothing in common?

### Dostoyevsky – Siberia

The Hungarian philosopher L.F. Földényi opens the second act of this spectacle with a very dramatic staging appearing in the title of his book: *Dostoyevsky reads Hegel in Siberia and Bursts into Tears*<sup>53</sup>. This dramatic scene introduces all the elements required to build up a myth deprived of universality – a writer, the ends of the earth and a tragic sorrow. Why did Dostoyevsky cry after reading Hegel? According to L.F. Földényi Dostoyevsky, who spent 4 years in exile in Siberia (Omsk and Semipalatinsk), received from his friend, the town prosecutor Aleksander Yegorovich Vran- gel<sup>54</sup>, Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837). In that book, a few words about Siberia must have caught Dostoyevsky's attention and, at the same time, cause him a profound disappointment. Hegel stated:

<sup>52</sup> A. Badiou, *Huit thèses sur l'universel*, 2004, point 6, <http://www.lacan.com/baduniversel.htm>, 29.03.2020.

<sup>53</sup> L.F. Földényi, *Dostoyevsky Reads Hegel in Siberia and Bursts into Tears*, New Haven 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Mackiewicz devotes to this figure a number of pages of his monograph: S. Mackiewicz, *Dostojewski*, Warszawa 1957, pp. 86–90.

We must, first of all, eliminate Siberia, the northern slope of Asia. For it lies outside the scope of our enquiry. The whole character of Siberia rules it out as a setting for historical culture and prevents it from attaining a distinct form in the world-historical process<sup>55</sup>.

Földényi explains that Hegel writes very little about Siberia, because before turning to it, he describes Africa as falling outside history “[a]nd what he says about Africa is equally valid for Siberia”<sup>56</sup>. According to Hegel, neither Africa nor Siberia contribute to the rational. Dostoyevsky’s experience of reading Hegel in Siberia was crucial for realizing that

no epoch of human history had ever refuted the fact of human suffering so conspicuously as the era which commenced with the Enlightenment. And the result of this was not the cessation of suffering, but merely the concealment of its own roots in suffering<sup>57</sup>.

During his exile in Siberia Dostoyevsky wrote *The House of the Dead* – “the Bible of the Rebellion”, says Földényi<sup>58</sup>. Since the 15th century Siberia had been a land-made prison, inhabited by criminals and outcasts”, who no longer [saw] any sense in returning to that place from whence they were expelled”. But there was another face of Siberian “lost souls” and another Siberia or “Siber” (pol. *Sybir*), which plays a memorable role in Polish history, namely the one of Polish “political deportees”<sup>59</sup>. In that aspect those “deportees” were

<sup>55</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, transl. H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge 1975, pp. 31–32, L.F. Földényi, *Dostoyevsky Reads Hegel in Siberia*, *op.cit.*, pp. 37–38.

<sup>56</sup> L.F. Földényi, *Dostoyevsky Reads Hegel in Siberia*, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 40.

<sup>58</sup> According to Földényi the reason for placing Africa & Siberia outside universal history is “a dread of perceived darkness”. Additionally, this repudiation acquires a psychical realm of denial of one’s own dark shadow (“he would not have to deny them so vehemently had he not discovered the roots of these qualities in his own heart”, L.F. Földényi, *Dostoyevsky Reads Hegel in Siberia*, *op.cit.*, p. 34). Hegel denies the irrational, he denies the suffering of Africans, which cannot be realized by the rational mind. Földényi speaks about Dostoyevsky’s “consternation” and “despair”, but most of all, of a possible conversion based on the fact that “there are dimensions to life which cannot be compartmentalized into history, and the criteria of existence within history cannot be the only proof of existence”. L.F. Földényi, *Dostoyevsky Reads Hegel in Siberia*, *op.cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>59</sup> It is impossible to establish even approximate numbers of Poles sent to Siberia during the partition of Poland and of those who, after gaining independence, were left on the other side of the river Bug following the treaty of Riga (1921). But especially after the two great insurrections of the XIX century (the November uprising 1830–31 and the January Uprising 1863–64) those numbers increased to tens of thousands. However, the story of deportation of the whole nations (Tatars, Kazachs) started much earlier, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and lasted until the ones ordered by Stalin after 1940. The Stalinian massive deportations



similar to Dostoyevsky, who was sentenced to death (a sentence changed into 4 years of hard labour in Siberia) for his participation in socialist anti-Tsar movements (the “Pietraszewski circle”). Siberia, apart from being a prison camp, was also a place destined to isolate insurrectionists from the rest of the people living in Poland under Russian partition. Polish nobles were neither exterminated, nor tortured, but they were deprived of land, privileges and the possibility to return to their country<sup>60</sup>. That neighborhood (the vicinity of criminals and political prisoners) is particularly important in Dostoyevsky’s works. It can be detected in Dostoyevsky’s account in the “House of the Deaths”, where he emphasised his noble descent, but at the same time reproached the same practices among the Poles “with their aristocracy linked with contempt towards other convicts”<sup>61</sup>. It is worth noting that Szymon Tokarzewski (functioning in Dostoyevski’s literature as *T-ski*), a Polish fellow prisoner of Dostoyevsky’s, whose diaries are another source of knowledge about the life of convicts in Omsk, recalls such an event with Dostoyevsky in the leading role:

How is it possible that this man [Dostoyevsky] could aspire for the freedom of the people, he who accepted only one class, who granted to only one class – nobility – the rights to stand for the people forever and everywhere? ‘Nobility’, ‘noble man’, ‘I -noble man’ [...] he repeated constantly. Whenever he addressed us, Poles, he was saying ‘we – nobility’ while I was always interrupting: – Excuse me, Sir, I think that in this donjon there is no nobility, only people deprived of rights, convicts. Thenceforth he was foaming at the mouth – And you, Sir, are of course happy with being a convict, he yelled with anger and irony<sup>62</sup>.

show how difficult it is to estimate the numbers which, according to Polish historians, reached 1.5 mln, while in accordance with the NKWD archives, did not exceed 350,000 (G. Kucharczyk, *Deportacje Polaków na Syberię w XX wieku*, [https://www.nck.pl/upload/deportacje\\_polakw\\_na\\_syberii\\_w\\_xx\\_wieku433.pdf](https://www.nck.pl/upload/deportacje_polakw_na_syberii_w_xx_wieku433.pdf), 29.03.2020). Although it is generally accepted that, from the reign of Peter the Great to the year 1918 the number of deportees rose from 100,000 to 600,000, it is perhaps more significant that, in the years 1910–12 6% of the population of Siberia were Poles (see: J. Wiśniewski, *Liczebność Polaków we Wschodniej Rosji na Syberii w latach 1914–1918. Zarys problematyki*, [in:] *Polacy na Syberii. Od XIX do XXI wieku*, ed. S. Leończyk, Warszawa 2019, p. 63).

<sup>60</sup> See: W. Śliwowska, *Ucieczki z Sybiru*, Warszawa 2005.

<sup>61</sup> M. Wilkońska-Karpierz, *Porównanie relacji pamiętnikarskich z zesłania na Syberię Fiodora Dostojewskiego i Szymona Tokarzewskiego*, “Przestrzenie Teorii”, 2009, 11, p. 248.

<sup>62</sup> Sz. Tokarzewski, *Siedem lat katoggi*, Warszawa 1918, pp. 167–168; M. Wilkońska-Karpierz, *Porównanie relacji pamiętnikarskich...*, *op.cit.*, p. 247; S. Mackiewicz, *Dostojewski*, *op.cit.*, p. 81.

Siberia and Africa (through the agency of Africans brought to Saint-Domingue as slaves) appear as two stages (we refer to them, using Badiou's terminology, as evenemential sites) of double silence: the first related to geographical margins and therefore also their natural or incoming inhabitants – the second one affecting the Poles or, more accurately, the Polish revolutionists whom history threw there. When reading Buck-Morss or Földényi from the Polish perspective, one must be struck by the fact that there is a profound difficulty in the process of achieving a Polish political subjectivity.

It seems that the possibility of the “Polish Lords” (*polskie pany*) revolution is denied out of hand. Susan Buck-Morss confers to the Poles the “clarity in action” only under the condition that they share the social status of slaves by living in serfdom. And the same attitude, in accordance with Foldeny's account, characterizes the perspective of Dostoyevsky who, in the dualism of outlaws and political prisoners, accepts only one dialectic, the ethical and literary one of the writer's fascination with the figure of the saint sinner. In fact, Dostoyevsky's attitude towards Polish political prisoners wasn't pretty much tied to one sentence pronounced by *M-ski* (probably Aleksander Mirecki) *Je haisces brigands*<sup>63</sup>. This exclamation became the symbol of social distancing practices which were, according to Dostoyevsky, characteristic for the Polish deportees in Siberia. Tokarzewski's anecdote could give the lie to this generalization, but we are not here in the domain of true and false. We are in the domain of dialectic and recognition by alienation.

### The Pan & Cham dialectic

In our previous article we applied Badiouian ontology to the Polish case<sup>64</sup>, referring to the Smoczyński and Zarycki's research of the totemic aspect (in the Durkheimian sense) of the Polish nobility<sup>65</sup>. According to Smoczyński and Zarycki, the totem represented the migration of symbolic content from class (nobility) to class (intelligentsia). Merging the symbolic of nobility and intelligentsia produces peculiar practices of social distance strategies<sup>66</sup>. This peculiarity is caused by the fact that very different social milieux, and people coming from all possible social classes are using the opposition “lord-yokel”

<sup>63</sup> S. Mackiewicz, *Dostojewski, op.cit.*, p. 81; L. Szestow, *Dostojewski i Nietzsche. Filozofia tragedii*, transl. C. Wodziński, Warszawa 1987, p. 123.

<sup>64</sup> U. Idziak, B. P. Bednarczyk, *The Noble Family...*, *op.cit.*

<sup>65</sup> R. Smoczyński, T. Zarycki, *Totem...*, *op.cit.*

<sup>66</sup> R. Smoczyński, I. Fitzgerald, T. Zarycki. *The Intelligentsia Informed Habitus in Social Distance Strategies of Polish Migrants in the UK*, “Ethnic and Racial Studies”, 2017, 40(6), pp. 951–968.

(pol. *pan-cham*) to play a social game of difference. This dialectic has played a very significant role in Polish literature (E. Orzeszkowa, Z. Kraszewski, A. Dygasiński, S. Wyspiański, T. Dołęga-Mostowicz, S. Mrożek, L. Kruczkowski), historical studies<sup>67</sup>, but most of all, in everyday social practices. This universality can be explained at different levels – genealogically, when analyzing the social structure of Polish ancestors, politically, sociologically etc. However, the most revealing thing is the linguistic aspect, because the first term of the dialectic – “Pan” corresponds to the term “Sir” and is the usual way of addressing strangers (Fr. *vouvoyer*). On the other hand, the second term “Cham” originally denoted peasants, but recently its meaning has been changed into a „boor”, regardless of the social positions one holds<sup>68</sup>. In the choir of our drama the poet develops a more ancient genealogy of this dualism – which complies with our suggestion that we deal here not only with social practices, but also with mythological figures

We are all derived from Adam,  
but I have heard that the peasants proceed from Ham  
the Jews from Japhet, and we gentry from Shem;  
hence we are lords over both, as the elder brothers.

Prawda że się wszyscy wywodzim of Adama  
(Alem słyszał że chłopci pochodzą od Chama,  
Żydowie od Jafeta, my szlachta od Sema  
A więc panujem jako starsi nad obiema)<sup>69</sup>.

Mickiewicz is ignobly drawing on the famous biblical legitimization of slavery<sup>70</sup>. Ham was the son of Noah who was cursed (through his son Canaan) because he saw Noah’s nakedness (*Gen 9, 20–27*). The reason for racial interpretation of the curse of Ham was that the Hebrew word *hām* allegedly meant “hot” and “dark”. These two features somehow transferred the curse put on Canaan and Ham into a different geographic ancestry placed in Africa. The correctness of this etymology, present both in antislavery and anti-racist writings, has recently been questioned and discussed by

<sup>67</sup> J. Tazbir, *Pokuszenie historyczne. Ze świata szabel i kontuszy*, Łomża 2011.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 174.

<sup>69</sup> A. Mickiewicz, *Mr Thaddeus*, 1916, p. 540.

<sup>70</sup> Mickiewicz expressed his antislavery position in the lectures which we have already mentioned. He said: “Philosophers have not done anything against slavery [...] You see how is it more difficult to love a slave than to write about slavery and how is it terribly hard to widen our soul so it might embrace with equal love the tribes of the voiceless world”. (A. Mickiewicz, *Literatura Słowiańska*, t. III i IV, Warszawa 1953).

Goldenberg<sup>71</sup>, because it has a crucial meaning for the story of racism and the prejudice against black colour of skin. However, etymology provides us with another overview. Slaves come from distant lands; they are imported and, as Weinberger notices, slaves are “ethnically other, conquered or devastated peoples” (only in Muscovy were the Russian slaves Russian)<sup>72</sup>. That is the reason why the South-Eastern Europe supplied Western Europe with slaves during the Middle Ages, and a false etymological merger occurred between “slavic” and “slave” in the English language<sup>73</sup>. Mickiewicz gives a very different interpretation of that biblical myth, in which all the sons of Noah (or, literally, of Adam) belong to the same nation (even the Jews). But an unusual change deprives the Jews of their due part in the father’s blessing bestowed on Sem, and demotes them to Japhet, while the Polish nobility takes the best part of the patrimony. Nevertheless, this mythical genealogy of social differences based on universality and equality offered by religion (“We are the sons of Adam”) is presented as some kind of paternalism, making use of the argument of seniority.

Concluding, this lord-yokel relationship taken from the Polish post-noble culture can be treated as a similar symmetry to that between master and slave. In both cases the dissymmetry is external to the nature of this dialectic. In that anti-essentialist approach the two dualisms no longer have any historical realm (lordship-yokel/slave); they both represent a game in which one individual meets another and achieves universality.

### Conclusions – the discourse of the apostle

We can draw a parallel between different versions of the lordship and bondage dualism, colonial masters and African slaves, political prisoners and brigands (outcasts) sharing their hardship in the same donjon in Omsk, capitalists and the working class. In each of these dualisms history, literature or political science stand for, and speak as the voice of the “silenced other”, whose story has not been told – a criminal turns into Raskolnikov, a Haitian slave becomes a Black Jacobin, a labourer obtains political subjectivity. But both Buck-Morss and Földényi discover that there is another realm of this life-and-death struggle: Hegel himself, or Western philosophy stand unwillingly on the side of the lord, while on the side of the slave we have Siberia and Africa. Their story is not untold – (because we do have Dostoyevsky’s

<sup>71</sup> D. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Princeton 2005, pp. 144–149.

<sup>72</sup> E. Weinberger, *Karmic Traces, 1993–1999*, New York 2000.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 159–160.

literature, and we know that Hegel, Rousseau, and others were reading works of abolitionists and could have even supported the events occurring in the colonial “hic sunt leones”) – but their story is untellable. This follows the understanding of dystopic position by Foucault and Butler – they cannot be freed from oppression because they are the result of oppression. Badiou’s criticism of the nihilism of ethics, based on the discourse of the victim, is another version of this problem.

The post-colonial discourse is paradoxical from the threshold. It cannot and does not want to contribute to the (European) rational. Its song is sung according to a different tune; its culture is oral, not written in archives; its time is not linear, and its tongue is cut off. The insurrection of slaves, whether it was led by Spartacus, Toussaint Louverture or Kościuszko, cannot be part of the schema, because it was not carried out through work<sup>74</sup>, but through religious practice. Hence, can we tell that it corresponds to what was called by Badiou the discourse of the apostle? In his monograph about Dostoyevsky, Mackiewicz told the story of how, on the way to Omsk:

In Tobolsk an aristocratic lady gave [him] a book, which Dostoyevsky used to read for the rest of 4 years of his hard labour in exile; even if he had the opportunity of reading something else, he did not take advantage of it. [...] Dostoyevsky is the direct pupil of the Apostles. [...] Before the exile Dostoyevsky is a secondary writer and Gogol’s apprentice; after the exile, Dostoyevsky becomes a genial writer, but at that point he is the apprentice of the Apostles. He wanted to be a Russian writer, but by his relationship with the Gospel he became a universalist writer<sup>75</sup>.

This universality starts only at “this last moment of consciousness”, which Michail Bachtin called the time of “crisis”. This time is shared by gamblers playing roulette and by Tsar’s prisoners; both lead a „life beyond the pale of life”, both are “carnavalised crews”<sup>76</sup>. According to Bachtin, this time corresponds to the consciousness at the last moment before execution or suicide; we can therefore truthfully say that Dostoyevsky experienced that moment himself, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1849, the day of the execution of the Pietraszewski circle members. Just before hearing the shots (or perhaps was it after?) he and the other condemned had heard the French words *vous*

<sup>74</sup> A. Badiou, *Hegel’s Master...*, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>75</sup> S. Mackiewicz, *Dostojewski*, *op.cit.*, p. 78–79.

<sup>76</sup> M. Bachtin, *Problemy poetyki Dostojewskiego*, transl. N. Modzelewska, Warszawa 1970, p. 262.

*serez graciés tous, tous*<sup>77</sup>. With this “aristocratic” haughty French declaration of “mercy” begins the procedure of universal truth. Is it therefore the mercy (*la grâce*) of the Tsar or is it God’s mercy?

Respectively, the Polish poet’s works resound with that universalism due to his feeling the sufferings of his fatherland. At the end of *Pan Tadeusz*, when war finally breaks out, a young man cheerfully calls “God is with Napoleon and Napoleon is with us!”<sup>78</sup>. When giving his Lectures at the Collège de France, Mickiewicz himself used to call, even louder: “the word of Napoleon reminded us about speaking in tongues [glossolalia]. There were times when this peculiar man discovered the secret of the Apostles”<sup>79</sup>. Napoleon, this godlike emperor, turns from being the spirit of the world mounting a horse into an apostle of the alien tribe. This folie-à-deux of a messiah and his prophet resulted in Mickiewicz being dismissed from lecturing at the Collège de France. But Mickiewicz was very well aware that he was neither a theologian, nor a preacher<sup>80</sup>; he knew that his only argument (but does an apostle need an argument?) was the fact that the subject of his lecture, the Slavic literature, was an *objet petit*:

I was called to make you know the spirit of an alien tribe, which appears as the last to take part in European life, I discovered in my very own position the plan of my task and the measures to achieve it. My position as the translator of the new spirit of the unknown tribe, although natural and clear, could appear extraordinary and unbelievable, because I was forced to speak in front of attitudes and cognitions which draw their strength from the past<sup>81</sup> [the emphasis has been introduced by us].

We would like to emphasise the intriguing specificity of this frankness – Mickiewicz addressed the Europeans described as people building on the past, on cultural grounds, theories, books, philosophies. Was Poland lacking all those? No, but although it had great warriors, important books and victorious history, it was not possible to hear their titles and names when travelling to that country. The secret of that alien face of Slavic countries does not lay in some West-European oblivion, but in immanent silence on themselves, as if their secrets were sealed and guarded<sup>82</sup>. Are we to understand

<sup>77</sup> S. Mackiewicz, *Dostojewski, op.cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>78</sup> A. Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz*, Book XI, *op.cit.*, p. 280.

<sup>79</sup> *Idem, Literatura..., op.cit.*, pp. 422–423.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 426.


<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 427.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 428.

that as some kind of auto-orientalism of the Poles? Whatever is our answer to this question, the poet's answer is an "undisciplined story":

It is not theories, nor books, nor deliberations that have awakened the spirit of the Slavic people but invasions, slaughters, chains, exiles, endless anti-religious practices that made them feel the need of active religion and brought among the Slavs the Word of the epoch<sup>83</sup>.

The word of the new epoch is very characteristic for the eventual truth of Badiou, and confirms our hypothesis that Mickiewicz is an anti-philosopher. Apostleship, according to Badiou, differs from prophecy and philosophy, because it does not require legitimization, nor is it based on empirical or conceptual knowledge. It consists in a declaration which fulfills the condition of adherence to the truth of the event (the Paulinian *pistis*, understood not as a belief but rather as fidelity). The content of this declaration is null, because the declaration is not apophantic, but rather performative. "What is actually declared is a fable" – says Badiou, but we should rid that *point de fable* of its negative content. A fable is not opposed to facts, because those were invalidated in the first place. A fable is not fiction. The fact that Badiou uses the term *fabuleux* (fabulous) means that a fable is something that reaches beyond.

Mickiewicz is the apostle of that fable of an alien tribe, of white negroes of Europe whose revolution is permanent, because they are constantly enslaved by non-recognition of the colonial reason. Their fable draws its universality from suffering. Suffering forms their social status, their historical achievements, their books and theories, and all the great names ending with the noble ending – *ski* are vain and anonymous, like the sound made by the Haitian goddess of independence, whose tongue has been cut off. But the Slav/slave will never achieve this discursive position because of the paradoxical status of being the count-so-and-so, or the count *T-ski* or *M-ski*; a nation of Polish lords (*Polskie pany*) who once expressed, in haughty aristocratic French, their distance from Russian outcasts and who, according to their own military word of honor, executed the orders of Napoleon in Saint Marc. The rest is silence or a myth. 

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 435.

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