didaskalia
gazeta teatralna

From the issue: **English Issue 2022**
DOI: 10.34762/hyfs-kp59
Source URL: https://didaskalia.pl/en/article/servitude-cognitive-sovereignty

/ LOCAL CULTURES

From Servitude to Cognitive Sovereignty

Research Perspectives on Contemporary Knowledge-Creative Practices of Local Cultures

Ewa Bal | Jagiellonian University in Kraków

Abstract

In this paper, the author attempts to outline the cognitive benefits of studying contemporary knowledge-creative practices of local cultures. She perceives such practices as a response to the demands formulated within decolonial studies and the new humanities to remedy the epistemic injustice typical of the Western world. Beginning with Boaventura de Sousa Santos's concept of epistemicide and its specific relevance to the Polish cultural context, the author shows how it can be opposed within the framework of various models of situated and relational cognitive practices developed within decolonial, feminist and performance studies. At the same time, she enquires what modifications must be made to these models in the context of Central and Eastern Europe to foster the development of humanities, both locally and in a broader global context. Analyzing the recent performances in the cultural milieu of Upper Silesia and Dąbrowa Basin, i.e., Teatr Śląski (Silesian Theatre) in Katowice, Teatr Korez (Korez Theatre) in Katowice, and Teatr Zagłębia (Zagłębie Theatre) in Sosnowiec, the author proposes her concepts of local knowledge, which she calls ethno-nostalgia and ethno-futurism. She treats them as examples of micro-utopias which can, firstly, have an apotropaic function in the face of contemporary challenges and, secondly, be an alternative to the various versions of 'folk histories of Poland' that are currently emerging, and thirdly, develop the idea of pluriversum put forth within decolonial studies. Furthermore, the paper presents the author's future research agenda at the Laboratory for the Study of Knowledge-Creative Practices of Local Cultures that has been recently opened at the Jagiellonian University.

Keywords: knowledge-creative practices; compassionate thinking; epistemic injustice; epistemicide; ethno-nostalgia; ethno-futurism

Epistemicide

Alojzy Pokora, a character in Szczepan Twardoch's novel (2020) and the protagonist in its stage adaptation directed by Robert Talarczyk at Teatr Śląski in Katowice, Poland[1] bears an overtly meaningful surname (*pokora* means humility). This is because he embodies one of the possible life stories of children from working-class Silesian families. At the beginning of the twentieth century, they were given the opportunity to get an education but at the price of humbly acknowledging the supremacy of the system that allowed them to get that education. Alojzy, born into a poor Silesian mining family just before the end of the nineteenth century in the small town of Nieborowitz in Prussia, is the only child in his large family to be sent to a German school at the age of several years. Initially, he is briefly placed under the care of Father Scholtis, who teaches him an adequate German and makes him forget the Silesian language, which the boy had hitherto used at home and which inevitably betrayed his 'simple' origins. Alojzy then goes to a boarding school, where he faces a series of unimaginable humiliations and even physical violence for being a commoner, which is still evident in his manner and speech. Its perpetrators are schoolmates who usually come from affluent bourgeois and aristocratic families and who, unlike the boy, breathe their Germanness like crisp air. They treat Alojzy as an inferior, non-human being, making him bark and whine like a dog.

Alojzy manages miraculously to graduate from the school after several years of this torture (this is actually made possible by an aristocratic German

friend who, captivated by the ‘simplicity’ of the worker’s son, decides to defend Alojzy from his tormentors). He even gets enrolled at the University of Breslau, although he has to interrupt his studies to serve in the imperial army during the Great War. All these achievements, however, prove insufficient to gain recognition in the eyes of the representatives of the upper classes. Their stigmatizing gaze is personified in the novel and staged in the performance by Agnes – the half-imagined addressee of Alojzy’s story, the daughter of a wealthy German industrialist. Alojzy builds his entire life around Agnes while she barely notices his presence in her surroundings. Her contempt is the inexhaustible fuel for his life choices. As a result, he constantly feels as if he is out of place: both in his family home, school, among the imperial soldiers, then among the German communists and, finally, even in his marriage.

Twardoch’s novel thus not only evokes well-known cultural scenarios of colonial mimicry (Bhabha, 2010, pp. 79-80), but also points to the connections between class difference and the racist discourse. Like Jean Veneuse, the protagonist of René Maran’s novel about whom Franz Fannon writes in his essay *Black Skin, White Masks*, Alojzy tries unsuccessfully to climb the social ladder, to rise to a higher level in the gamut of skin colours. For Veneuse, the crowning achievement would be a relationship with a white woman (Fannon, 2020, p. 89). In the play, the impossible scenario of Alojzy’s cultural affiliation is further emphasized by the way in which – played by Henryk Simon – he exists on stage in opposition to his school and military colleagues. He almost always appears before the audience smeared with earth or mine dust, barefoot and defenceless against the upright, well-groomed, and athletic bodies of his schoolmates and army comrades, clad in army jackboots and dressed in well-tailored uniforms, reflecting, as it were, the very racial underpinnings of cultural difference. With his body, Alojzy

also contradicts the patriarchal model of masculinity, which associates success in life with domination and conquest. More importantly, he does not counter it with some alternative model of subjectivity other than his own humiliation. Thus, Twardoch's novel and the play clearly show that the education system to which Alojzy is subjected requires him to forget his Silesianness, but at the same time, does not equip him with useful cognitive tools, self-determination or cognitive sovereignty. It alienates him from his family home and his inherent system of worldview references but does not make him part of the German bourgeoisie and aristocracy or the Polish nobility. The latter treat Alojzy's peasant roots and his later Polonophile patriotism with the usual condescension.

Thus, the educational process and social advancement of Alojzy Pokora are, in fact, a model of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos, in his book *The End of the Cognitive Empire. The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of The South*, called 'epistemicide,' caused by the Eurocentric modern sciences and the genocide resulting from European colonialism (Santos, 2018, p. 9). For years, Santos, one of the most articulate and radical decolonial theorists, has been demanding that we overcome the primacy of Western epistemology, marked by a Eurocentric, patriarchal, and colonial perspective from nowhere. One that privileges the philosophy of civilizational progress, the dominance of the culture of writing over the culture of experience and the body, and the culture of the metropolis over the peripheral one. He also calls for contrasting it with the so-called epistemologies of the Global South, which emerge as part of the struggling resistance against oppression and against the knowledge that legitimates such oppression (Santos, 2018, p. 2). He provides a coherent justification for this need. Today, according to Santos, societies affected by historical colonialism may be free from direct political and administrative tutelage. Nonetheless, they are still struggling

with the experience of epistemicide, which includes the loss of their native languages, their systems of cognitive references, cosmology or spatio-temporal conceptualization of the world – in other words, those components of culture that did not fit and unfortunately, still do not fit within the Western paradigm of knowledge production and distribution.

And since colonialism, as Walter Mignolo (2011) always reminds us, was the *sine qua non* of the Western concept of modernity, it called colonized communities to live exclusively within their own proper and privileged system of cognition. It also relegated their stagnant ways of conceptualizing the world to the realm of supposedly primitive, backward customs, beliefs, and expressions of emotional states, which could, at most, be the subject of anthropological or ethnographic studies. Only an erudite researcher rooted in the Western university tradition could speak competently about colonized communities, as they supposedly lacked the appropriate discursive devices, skills, and resources to achieve even minimal self-awareness or to engage in producing academic knowledge[2].

This is why Santos advocates that local knowledges of communities subjected to imperialist pressure should not only be recognized and recovered, but their epistemic value should also be restored within the framework of a new ecology of knowledges, that is, the recognition of the copresence of more sustainable and glocally diverse systems of knowing (Santos, 2018, p. 8). This objective is worth accomplishing, even if it involves dismantling many paradigms of scientism, such as understanding what knowledge is, changing research methodology, and the relationship between the subject and object of study or university and school pedagogy. At stake in this endeavour is the decentralization of the geopolitics of knowledge, something scholars from decolonial and feminist standpoint theory have also

fought vigorously for (Escobar, 2018, pp. 63-85; Harding, 2018, pp. 39-62).

In the face of this challenge, several questions come to my mind almost spontaneously. First, how to use them effectively in the cultural context of Poland, as well as Central and Eastern Europe more broadly? This is one of the territories where the discourses of the Global North and Global South, as well as the geopolitical divisions between the East and West of Europe, intersect. Second, how to relate the concept of epistemicide to a range of local knowledges and knowledge-creating practices of communities that have experienced cognitive annihilation in this part of the world? Even if it only happened as a result of feudalism that prevailed for nearly three hundred years or nationalist policies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (including the exclusionary practices of Polonization, Germanization, Russification, ethnic cleansing, and forced displacement), as well as the disciplinary effects of ethnographic and anthropological research. Not to mention the contemporary pressure of civilizational progress and constant 'catching up' with the West, also in the field of humanities. And finally, we need to answer the question of what onto-epistemological benefits can come from studying the knowledge-creative practices of local cultures, including recovering lost or marginalized but locally situated ways of knowing in this part of the world.

I am not alone in posing these questions, of course. Ewa Domańska called for the remedy for so-called epistemic (in)justice in at least several papers. She argued that, contrary to appearances, it is important not only for Latin America and Canada, but also – and equally – for the Central and Eastern European region (Domańska, 2012, pp. 85-101; 2011, pp. 220-226; 2017, pp. 41–59). However, she was primarily concerned with the production and distribution of academic knowledge. She reasoned that in Western Europe

and the United States, where the so-called centres of knowledge creation are located, Central and Eastern Europe is still sometimes considered a province or, at best, a *case study* for testing theories created in 'the West'. Her concerns, therefore, corresponded with Santos' thinking about the gap between the epistemologies of the Global South and the Global North. According to him, these geographically distinguished epistemologies are, in fact, indicative of the world's economic divisions. Santos argued that epistemicide is not just a historical process but the result of a seemingly invisible yet deep and ever-widening *abyssal line* – an irreconcilable disparity in society's wealth levels. These neo-imperial practices translate directly into the availability and distribution of a particular paradigm of knowledge and, consequently, trigger the mechanism of excluding a range of local knowledges (sociology of absence). Therefore, the primary objective of Santos and other theorists from the decolonial studies circle (Grosfoguel, pp. 73-90; Escobar, 2017) is to overcome this abyssal line and the process of epistemicide by reformulating the academy so that the image of the world produced within it consists of multiple locally produced worlds.

Domańska, on the other hand, encouraged double decolonization of Poland: external – to shed the stigma of the periphery in opposition to Western centres of knowledge production, and internal – to overturn the marginalized position of small academic centres, as well as smaller institutional and social initiatives as compared to the flagship academic centres of knowledge production associated with Kraków and Warsaw (Domańska, 2017, pp. 41-59). It does not quite seem to me that Domańska and Santos' appeal has been heard in Poland. It requires, above all, a reorientation of research methodologies, a demonumentalisation of erudite knowledge, and a turn to alternative, local practices of its production, which have rarely been the focus of attention in the Polish humanities. The latter instead strives to

constantly catch up with the West for fear of being accused of provincialism.

Therefore, my answer to the questions and challenges outlined above is a study of the knowledge-creative practices of local cultures. It has the added advantage of significantly shifting the researcher's attention to the kind of knowledge production process that, instead of taking place in the academy, takes place in environments that are not directly associated with it but rather rooted in local creative communities that demand recognition of their epistemic subjectivity.

Knowledge-creative practices of local cultures and 'knowing-with'

At first glance, the Polish term I am proposing, *praktyki wiedzotwórcze kultur lokalnych* (knowledge-creative practices of local cultures), could be considered to be equivalent, at least in its first part, to the English term 'knowledge-making practices,' which can also be explained as 'practices of knowledge production.' However, in the term *knowledge-creative practices*, I mainly mean to capture the creative nature of this activity, for example, in the field of art and, at the same time, its performative character. They can be viewed, as Diana Taylor wished long ago, as prisms through which researchers gain insight into ways of producing knowledge about the world that are different from those previously recognized. After all, her definitions of performance have always included the term *epistemic lens* (Taylor, 2003), which shifted the burden of academic reflection from the realm of performativity aesthetics to the field of theories of cognition and its socio-cultural conditioning, including direct political intervention. I have also recently written with Mateusz Chaberski about the epistemic perspectives of performance studies and their role in the process of situational and

relational cognition (Bal; Chaberski, 2021). We showed where the theories of performative cognition intersect with the findings developed by feminist philosophy (namely, *feminist standpoint theory*) and the sociology of science (Bruno Latour). We also investigated what cognitive benefits result from this meeting. As we have tried to explain, they chiefly lead to a change in the paradigm of knowledge based on the superiority of the subject of research on the subordinate object, or the paradigm of '*wiedza, że*' (as discussed in Polish Ryszard Nycz, 2017, p. 11), or in English 'knowing about,' to the paradigm of knowledge arising from the mutual relationship of multiple subjects who co-evolve in interaction, that is, 'knowing with'. Therefore, starting with the title of our study, we pointed out a significant shift in emphasis from the category of 'situated knowledges' (referring to a corpus of existing local knowledges) proposed by Donna Haraway (Haraway, 1988, pp. 575-599) to 'situated knowing,' i.e., the process of knowledge production, in which the ways and processes that condition our knowing matter more than their effects. Together with the authors accompanying us in the volume and the case studies they conducted, we showed that the performing arts and various tangible and intangible techno-naturo-cultural affordances provide a medium for this relational cognition and are capable of redefining, for example, Western concepts of time, space, the ocularcentric paradigm of knowledge, performance as research, the production and persistence of cultural identities, or offering utopian or speculative visions of the future and the past at the interface of the human and the non-human.

Our perspective also took into account the decolonizing potential of such situated knowing, but – more importantly to me in this context – it did not directly include the need to restore epistemic causality to local communities that have experienced or are still experiencing the process of epistemicide in

Central and Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, the concept of 'knowing-with,' understood by Santos as 'entering into relationships with spaces and times inhabited by subaltern social groups' (2018, p. 147), encourages one to consider such geopolitical cognitive conditions: 'it may claim to be present and share a certain action or ongoing experience, it may consist of opening up the past to understand the present or closing down the past to open up the future; it may (…) require a strong emotional and bodily investment of the five senses' (p. 147). Therefore, Santos emphasizes direct contact with hitherto marginalized subjects and groups, embedded in the experience of practices that engage the body, such as dance, music, singing, and the affective dimension of cognition, which he elsewhere calls using the Spanish neologism *corazonar*. The Spanish verb *corazonar* has a double meaning: as *razonar con*, meaning 'thinking with,' and, perhaps more importantly, 'thinking with the heart,' from *corazon* (heart) and *razon* (mind). In Polish, in my opinion, this cognitive stance can be most adequately rendered as *współ-czucio-myślenie*(co-feeling-thinking). The co-feeling-thinking researcher does not situate him-/herself in the position of a detached erudite observer but of an auto-bio-geo-graphically engaged subject, whose knowledge is born out of an affective relationship with various subjects, times, and territories.

Diana Taylor, in her latest book, calls this process of cognition by the collective Spanish term *presente*, understood as the researcher's affective, political engagement with the object of study, and as a kind of peripatetic participation that engages not only the researcher's senses, but also allows him or her to become aware of several limitations and difficulties that accompany the process of cognition (2020, pp. 1-37). In her own words:

> Walking is a thinking/becoming in motion, a pedagogy and training (peripatetic). Walking is one of those acts that form, rather than

> result from, thought. The act of walking produces its own way of thinking, un-thinking, and thinking-feeling negotiating assuredness and vulnerability, motion along with uncertainty. It demands we pay attention to terrain, to time, to the conditions on and of the ground under our feet, to the limits of our own physical bodies, to our balance and fear of falling, to the politics of access and characteristics of a specific location, to the direction of our movement, to distance and reduced visibility (p. 40).

Most likely, Taylor knows what she is talking about, as she regularly engages in human rights actions, especially for migrants from Latin America. As a daughter of a Canadian settler raised in Mexico and working in the United States, she situates herself between the cultures of the Global North and South. Therefore, in her research projects, Taylor has repeatedly not only supported the activities of artists with Latin American origins (as part of the Hemispheric Institute she created) but has recreated, with her research team and students, the migrant experience by following human trafficking routes, among others (Taylor, 2020, pp. 38-44). She also explicitly sought to clarify her cognitive position of *in-between*, that is, of being between different forms of cultural, linguistic, and social belonging, precisely at the junction of the Global South and North, as in this way she legitimized, as it were, her moral right to speak on behalf of subordinate subjects.

Thus, looking at how many local conditionings accompany the processes of cognition, it is necessary to realize that to substantiate the benefits of studying the knowledge-creating practices of local cultures in this part of Europe, two things are needed. In addition to the methodology employed, it is also necessary to clarify what we consider as local cultures and how to explain their experience of epistemicide in Poland. This issue is closely

related to another, namely the concept of indigeneity or indigenousness and belonging to the land, which in the broad European – and especially in Polish – cultural context, needs yet to be discussed.

Folk histories versus local knowledge-creative practices

The issue of indigeneity and the relationship of local communities with the land in Poland and, more broadly speaking, Europe seems to me to be highly problematic. Especially so when juxtaposed with the basic tenets of indigenous studies developed in the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Latin American countries, that is, territories that have experienced historical colonialism. Indeed, researchers from this circle were the first to point out the need for a change in the methodology of conducting research whose subjects are local communities of all kinds, as well as to point out the ethical implications of how the researcher is situated in relation to the object of his or her study (Smith, 1999, Simpson, 2017). Therefore, they wanted to accurately describe and define the indigenous communities, or the so-called first nations, namely the original inhabitants of the colonized lands, to distinguish them from the settlers, usually associated with white colonizers from Europe. This distinction has been used to identify the researchers themselves. In English-language literature, they are referred to as indigenous researchers (as opposed to settler researchers). It is argued that the former are ethically closer to the interests of indigenous communities. That being the case, for indigenous studies, the question of research ethics is critical. They aim to create a counterbalance to the Western *episteme*, which has appropriated the local knowledge of colonized communities for its own, often rather objectionable purposes (such as the disciplinary effects of

disciplines like ethnography and anthropology). This, in turn, leads to the question of who has the right to deal with and study local communities.

In a now classic study *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), the Maori scholar Linda Tihuwai Smith encourages to include in the academic discourse those communities who have had little experience of the so-called mainstream education system and cultural circulation and whose knowledge has often been considered naïve, immature or primitive. This knowledge should be mainly transmitted by researchers from these communities. Such an assumption, however, inevitably leads to an extreme essentialization of the researcher's identity, which is particularly difficult to maintain in a contemporary world marked by global mobility and migration.

Besides, for multiple reasons, it is difficult to understand the indigeneity of local communities in Europe in the same manner as in the Americas, Australia or New Zealand. For the purpose of this argument, I will focus only on the two premises that I believe are the most prominent. One concerns the peasant attitude towards the land, formed yet in the feudal era, recently described in many publications devoted to the so-called folk history of Poland. The other premise pertains to the mass ethnic cleansing, massive displacement, and the consequences of the creation of nation-states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Of course, this paper does not allow an in-depth review of all the books that have lately been much-debated, such as Adam Leszczyński's *Ludowa historia Polski* [A People's History of Poland] (2020), Kamil Janicki's *Pańszczyzna. Prawdziwa historia polskiego niewolnictwa* [Serfdom. A True History of Polish Slavery] (2021), Kacper Pobłocki's *Chamstwo* [Peasantry] (2021), whose authors make an effort to describe Polish history as people's history.

All of them present the history of European modernism from the point of view of those classes that were not its direct beneficiaries. Therefore, instead of the totalizing view from 'above' typical of the Western *episteme*, they offer a local view from 'below.' Among these arguments, there is a quote from Pobłocki's book that perhaps well illustrates my thinking about the precarious status of indigeneity in Poland and sheds some light on the ambivalent attitude of the peasantry to the land during feudalism:

> This is another paradox of Poland: on the one hand, subjects are formally assigned to a land and cannot move away from it. And if they escape, it is under the harsh penalty of cutting off their ears or nose, or even death punishment. On the other hand, they are not infrequently moved from house to house, from village to village. In this way, it was ensured that a person would not get too attached to a place, would not put down roots in it, and would remain in a state of social death [i.e., epistemicide – author's note] (Pobłocki, 2021, p. 77; own translation).

Pobłocki says that attachment to the land was regulated by the tools of feudal coercion and not by the peasants' will. The lord was free to transfer and sell his men and to manage them as he saw fit or according to his economic needs. Consequently, the lives of the serfs in Poland resembled more that of slaves in America than that of the so-called first nations, which now make claims to the lands seized from them.

Suppose today, as Pobłocki and Leszczyński argue, we are mostly a society that consists of the descendants of these peasants and serfs without land. In that case, it is much more difficult for us to build local knowledges in

connection with a territory that we would recognize as our own and significant. Our possible sense of community and local identification may be determined more by a commonality of language (regional dialects) than by attachment to the land. However, if I understand Pobłocki correctly, language commonality has also been thwarted to some extent by the discipline imposed by Polish as a national language (Pobłocki, 2021, pp. 294-295). In my opinion, only in recent years has there been a conscious attempt to emancipate regional languages, such as Silesian or Kashubian, which I will discuss in a moment.

The above, basically accurate, observation by Pobłocki regarding the ambivalent attitude of the peasantry towards the land has perhaps only one drawback. Speaking of 'peasantry in Poland,' Pobłocki makes another totalizing generalization, suggesting that the peasantry all over the territory of the Polish Commonwealth of nobility, as well as during the Partitions, was the same everywhere, that is, equally shared the fate of social inferiority under serfdom. Meanwhile, Dariusz Zalega, among others, argued in his latest two books (2019, 2021) that the life of Silesians was not shaped by serfdom but rather by nineteenth- and twentieth-century workers' revolutionary uprisings that broke out in various parts of Europe, including Prussia and Spain, and whose 'travelling' participants were the unruly residents of Upper Silesia who fought for a better life. It is also difficult to agree with the statement that the opportunity for linguistic identification of local communities has been missed in Silesia. For at least the last fifteen years, I have observed a notable shift towards linguistic emancipation in this region, which I once called 'performing localness' (Bal, 2015, pp. 137-147). It manifests itself, for example, in theatrical productions played in Silesian, translations of world literature into Silesian, and novels written in two or more languages (including Silesian), as well as the efforts of local cultural

activists to refer to Silesian as a language rather than a dialect[3]. I have written about these phenomena many times before, so I will not repeat the arguments here. However, I want to emphasize that in studying the knowledge-creative practices of local cultures it is imperative to avoid overly hasty generalizations and to follow all sorts of nuances rather than overly easy-to-see regularities.

The second reason to be cautious about essentializing indigeneity relates to the mass displacement, eviction, and ethnic cleansing that lasted through the entire twentieth century in Europe. Their illustrative testimony is, for example, the exhibition at the Berlin Documentation Centre for Displacement, Expulsion and Reconciliation, which opened in June of 2021 and was widely discussed in Poland and Europe[4]. It incontrovertibly shows the scale of migrations in the twentieth century. It also allows one to understand the far-reaching consequences of nationalist ideologies and Nazi policies, which are still felt today, and, importantly, to see the disciplinary effects of the post-war new deal in Europe. The exhibition also shows the fate of the victims of the most recent wars in the countries of the former Yugoslavia or Syria, whose residents also had to face the experience of ethnic cleansing and seek salvation in migration.

Gundula Bavendamm, director of the Documentation Centre, was supposed to guarantee that the exhibition told a different and more reconciliating narrative than that once pushed forward by Erika Steinbach, which painted a demanding picture of expelled Germans. Bavendamm's primary strategy was to zoom in and capture the individual experiences of losing one's home, fleeing or migrating, that is, experiences of participants or witnesses of past and contemporary events still alive, and the traumas of the children and grandchildren of displaced persons. Therefore, the experiences depicted in

the exhibition take the form of specific individuals, the voices of flesh-and-blood people. Hence, their testimonies are transpassive and easy to relate to one's own analogous, although not identical, situation of uprooting. I must admit that the exhibition proved particularly valuable to me. For the first time, I could situate my own hitherto undefined consequences of displacement in a broader collective experience. And these were consequences I personally faced as a granddaughter of repatriates from the East who settled in Upper Silesia after the war. This is because the exhibition triggers presumed deep affects in viewers and translates the experience of losing land and home into the body, voices and sounds, i.e., non-discursive ways of knowing. In this way, on the ruins of the old, probably no longer existing world, the exhibition builds up those relationships with the land that either have not yet been conceptualized or whose importance has not been appreciated (or perhaps explained somewhat differently).

Ethno-nostalgias and ethno-futurisms or Isles of Atlantis and micro-utopias

Therefore, I dare say that this performative way of producing and distributing knowledge about the world is one way of situated knowing or an example of local knowledge-creative practices. It evokes the experience of losing one's home and involves the transmission of affects more than the essential attachment to the land. In order not to stop at this one example, I will refer to a production staged four years earlier by Teatr Korez in Katowice, directed by Mirosław Neinert, under the title *Mianujom mie Hanka*[5] [my name is Hanka in Silesian). In fact, in a typical way, it actualizes in the audience a sense of belonging to the land and is some form of recovery of Silesians' epistemic subjectivity, or the cognitive sovereignty

mentioned in the title of my article.

The performance is based on the reportage *Jak Niobe. Opowieść górnośląska* [Like Niobe. An Upper Silesian Story] by documentalist and chronicler writing in Silesian, Alojzy Lysko (2016). Most of his works were printed in just a few copies, often self-published, which also testifies to the exclusionary policies imposed by a particular understanding of literature. The events he depicts cover a time similar to where Twardoch's *Pokora* is set. However, the only protagonist of the play based on Lyska's reportage is Hanka, played by Grażyna Bułka, a Silesian woman who reports on a decades-long course of universal history from the perspective of her town, family, household or even kitchen. And it is with this particular location that the character of Hanka differs from Alojzy Pokora, who, in his attempts at social advancement, was thrown from place to place according to the logic of history based on conquest and domination. Without moving, Hanka reports how almost the entire world, national borders, dominant languages and discourses are changing around her while she stands guard over the local Atlantis (as an invisible land on the political map). She watches as members of her family fall prey to the seductive ideologies of nationalism or communism, as they are forcibly enlisted in the army, serve in various armies, often fighting each other, and as fate throws them again and again to the farthest corners of the world. From her point of view, these discourses are not worth competing with. However, one can legitimately resent the fact that regimes, changing now and then, blame her family members for life choices (if they can even be called choices), which, after all, do not stem from their real political commitment but from the need to survive in a world whose geopolitical framework seems impermanent and fleeting. For this reason, Hanka finally rejects her son's proposal to move to Germany after the war and lead a prosperous life as a pensioner there. This is because she

believes that her home is where she was born, even if this piece of land does not bear the marks of political sovereignty (it is located '*kajś*', in Silesian somewhere, as Zbigniew Rokita said (2020), but it is not necessarily known where exactly).

Hanka's self-determination and cognitive sovereignty are thus determined by her very bodily presence on stage, her actions, her Silesian speech, and what she manages to create as a result of her encounter with the audience. Such sovereignty, involving the transmission of affects, can still be described by the English term transmotion, proposed in the collective work by Carter, Davis-Fisch and Knowles (2017, pp. 95-116). Watching Hanka perform small daily tasks, listening to her story, and singing local songs with her, the viewers get emotional, laugh and cry. At the same time, her testimony triggers a strategy of local cognitive resistance that consists of persistence and concern for those closest to her, thus contradicting the philosophy of conquest, civilizational progress and individual success, typical of modernity.

The show opens our cognitive horizons to the analogous individual and communal experience of duration (or survival). At the same time, it makes us aware of our own sense of non-rootedness (resulting, for example, from the migratory past of earlier generations), which can produce nostalgia for territory and belonging to a local community. However, I do not understand this nostalgia as idle sentimentality or romantic longing for a lost homeland or, even worse, as a rationale for pipe dreams of territorial claims. Here, nostalgia or, as I have called this experience elsewhere, 'ethno-nostalgia'[6] is more of a purely empirical sense of the lack of solid ground and the associated sense of needing to find one's own Atlantis, even if it were a utopian ground. However, this is the kind of utopia that, as Ewa Domańska said, falls within the framework of affirmative or prefigurative humanities

(2017, pp. 41-59). This means that, firstly, it has an apotropaic (amuletic) function – it wards off the possibility of various catastrophes by creating a protective layer in the form of a specific social imaginarium, i.e., visions showing various possible forms of social coexistence (ibid.). And secondly, these realistic micro-utopias, as Domańska calls them, can be materialized on a local scale, limited in time and space, as valid in specific times, for the needs of a specific community, to aid the well-being of its members[7].

There is perhaps only one risk associated with creating such micro-utopias, which requires extreme vigilance, especially in times of post-truth and the dominance of fake news. I mean the kind of reality greatly influenced by the new media and the filter bubbles, or so-called 'cyber tribes' that arise within them (Pariser, 2012; Matuszewski, 2018; Bal, Wojnowski, 2020). The latter may or may not organize around ideas that treat the defence of local identities as a pretext for establishing a new ethnocentric world. Its virtual or real inhabitants (a trait characteristic of cyber tribes) so reformulate the immediate reality around them, as well as the entire world around them, including its future and past, that they see themselves at its centre as if in a fortress threatened by an enemy attack. This is the risk that the latest production of Teatr Zagłębie in Sosnowiec, directed by Robert Talarczyk, based on a script by Zbigniew Rokita, under the telling title *Nikaj* [nowhere], warns against[8]. For while in the biographical novel-reportage *Kajś* Rokita showed the complex process of recognizing the twisted paths of his own history and cultural identity, in *Nikaj*, he warns everyone not to misunderstand his attachment to the Silesian land as a form of fierce local patriotism.

Nikaj is a kind of anti-utopia, but one that is possible to fulfil soon if one looks at the scale of movements openly challenging the achievements of

modern science, such as the anti-vaccinationists, flat-earthers or others. The play is set in Poland, in Silesia, after a major catastrophe involving the passage of a mysterious, extremely violent Tempest. The family home of a typical Silesian (Rokita himself, perhaps, as I infer from the names of the Hajok family members taken from his reportage) looks like some *pars pro toto* of the post-disaster world. In a small room, someone has put somewhat splintered signposts pointing the way toward the landmarks of former Europe, though they all sound the same: '*Kajś*' [somewhere]. This is probably because the Polish state is in disarray, ruled by rival tribes: Zagłębians, Silesians People's Party, All-Polish Youth and Thunderians, each of which is ready to fight their enemies by any means.

It is a world based on the dogma of the 'only right' idea, every time a different one, which organizes the philosophy of action of all these tribes. Every now and then, another patriotic group of fanatics in identifying colours appears on the stage and demands declarations of obedience from the household, the members of the Hajok family. Even the members of the Silesians People's Party are a threat to the Hajok family because, after all, one never knows whether a typical Silesian family will pass the test of fidelity to the local culture, language, and sense of belonging to the land. Therefore, at one point, Rokita, through his characters, creates a perverse version of the genesis of the world, the beginning of which is the planetary struggle between the Zagłębians and Earth. It is not difficult to guess that Earth loses this battle at the outset and must surrender to the will of Zagłębie.

Further down the road, it only gets worse. Zagłębians master the globe, lay the foundations of the first civilizations, are the first to invent the wheel, and finally set foot on the moon, from where, unfortunately, only Nikisz can be

seen (Nikisz, that is, Nikiszowiec, is a district of Katowice, the capital of the Silesian province, which has always depreciated the cultural distinctiveness of the Zagłębie people). Needless to say, it is impossible to live on such a planet ruled by local fanatics, so the Hajoks see their only salvation in a hasty escape by rocket to the moon.

The show's grotesque, hilarious and, at times, bloodcurdling style is very different from Hanka's nostalgic tale. However, the differences are essentially apparent. The reason is that both *Kajś* and *Mianujom mie Hanka* paint the possible projects of local worlds. This leads me to conclude that there is little difference between ethno-nostalgias, understood as micro-utopian isles of Atlantis (better worlds), and a kind of ethno-futuristic dystopias in which the logic of modern times takes on the form of extreme consequences, including collective annihilation. This is because both visions serve a similar amuletic function, either protecting or warning us of the dangerous implications of events for which we are not ready or satisfying deficits. They are not, however, the same as social movements that embrace ethnocentric visions uncritically and are prepared to reach for the wartime instruments in their rhetoric and actions. And to present not exclusively Polish examples, let me recall the bloody clashes the escalation of discourses around the independence referendum in Catalonia led to in 2017. The two hostile camps, supporters and opponents of independence, represented by Carles Puigdemont on the one side and Mariano Rajoy on the other, have become hostage to the rhetoric of war. The only way out of it turned out to be a physical clash, with the use of weapons in the streets of cities, and this in a country that, after all, remembers the civil war (Bal, 2019, pp. 19-29).

That is why I see the need to study the knowledge-creative practices of local cultures, to look at them and participate in them. This is, perhaps, where the

decolonizing projects of the so-called ‘pluriversum’, or a fairer world made up of many worlds, lie. The examples I analyzed are mainly from Upper Silesia and Zagłębie Dąbrowskie, but there are, after all, many more such places. I am thinking here, for example, of artists who refer in their work to the specific position of the *in-between*, that is, being between different cultural codes related to a particular location. These include, for example, Katarzyna Szyngiera, who, together with Mirosław Wlekły, examines the dynamics of Polish-Ukrainian relations in the theatre. Also coming to mind are Ukrainian directors of the younger generation working in both Poland and Ukraine, such as Olena Apczel and Roza Sarkisian, as well as the Polish playwright Joanna Wichowska, who take an insightful look at the tensions between East and West Ukraine, taking into account the perspective of women. There are, of course, many more such artists, not only in theatre, but also in the field of performance or literature. All this allows us to presume that we face the opportunity to create a network of collaborating researchers and artists who can exchange experiences and support each other. The aim would mainly be to show that the experiences typical of this part of the world, from both the most recent and the distant past, make it possible to create a successful alternative to the fixed patterns of thinking. One of these patterns is the division into the West and East of Europe, which has probably become illusionary. That, at least, is my scientific credo today.

The paper is an expanded and supplemented version of a lecture delivered on 29th September 2021 before the Committee on Cultural Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. I want to thank the members of the Committee for all their valuable comments, which helped me to develop its final version. The paper is the result of research conducted under the POB Heritage mini-research grant of the Jagiellonian University Excellence Initiative, 1st edition 2021.

Translated by Kaja Szymańska

A Polish-language version of the article was originally published in *Didaskalia. Gazeta Teatralna* 2021 nr 166, DOI: 10.34762/v9fa-xn30.

Author

Ewa Bal

Ewa Bal (ewa.bal@uj.edu.pl) – professor at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, the Department of Performatics, head of the research laboratory of knowledge-creative practices of local cultures at the University. A former lecturer at the University 'L'Orientale' in Naples and a visiting professor at universities in Italy and Spain. She is a member of the European Association for Studies of Theatre and Performance (EASTaP), the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR), and the Polish Society for Theatre Research (PTBT). She has studied Italian drama and theatre and wrote two monographs about it: *Lokalność i mobilność kulturowa teatru. Śladami Arlekina i Pulcinelli*, 2017 (in English: *In the Footsteps of Harlequin and Pulcinella. Cultural Mobility and Localness of Theatre*, 2020), *Cielesność w dramacie. Teatr Piera Paola Pasoliniego i jego możliwe kontynuacje*, 2006. Her current research interests include cultural mobility, nationalism, localism, dramaturgies of linguistic minorities, critical methodologies in (de/post)colonialism, gender and queer studies, and performance studies. She has co-edited several collective monographs, including with Mateusz Chaberski: *Situated Knowing. Epistemic Perspectives on Performance* (2021), with Konrad Wojnowski: *Bądźmy w kontakcie! Strefy kontaktu jako narzędzie rozpoznawania współczesności* (2020), with Dariusz Kosiński: *Performatyka. Terytoria* (2017). She is the editor of the Jagiellonian University Publishing House's series New Perspectives – Performatics, in which eight volumes have been published since 2013. For the past eight years, she has been studying the production of Silesianness in theatre and performance. She has recently been conducting a research project with the working title 'Ethno-nostalgia and Ethno-Futurism in twenty-first Century Theatre and Performance' on local cognitive performance practices from the Polish, Ukrainian and Spanish language areas. ORCID: 0000-0002-2434-6108.

Footnotes

1. *Pokora*, according to a script by Szczepan Twardoch, based on the novel *Pokora* by the same author, directed by Robert Talarczyk, premiered on 11th June 2021 at Teatr Śląski in Katowice.

2. In this case, Mignolo is talking about the westernization of the world within a monolithic system of cognition and its cognitive appropriation, the timeframe of which is set between the ‘discovery’ of America in 1492 and the end of World War II in 1945. The latter caesura, in his view, brought a clear shift in the distribution of knowledge geopolitics with the establishment of the Cold War order (2018, p. 90-113).
3. In this context, the activity of, for example, Grzegorz Kulik, a translator and editor of the Silesian portal: www.wachtyrz.eu, is worthy of note.
4. I give the most illustrative examples:
https://www.dw.com/pl/ucieczka-wypędzenie-pojednanie-muzeum-w-berlinie-gotowe/a-57958599 [accessed: 24.10.2021]
https://wyborcza.pl/alehistoria/7,121681,27328422,muzeum-o-wypedzonych-niemcach-otwarte-powstalo-w-kraju-ktory.html [accessed: 24.10.2021]
https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C909032%2Cniemieckie-zbrodnie-ucieczka-wysiedlanie-jak-wyglada-berlinska-wystawa [accessed: 24.10.2021].
5. *Mianujom mie Hanka*, a monodrama by Grażyna Bułka based on Alojzy Lysko's reportage, *Jak Niobe. Opowieść górnośląska*, directed by Mirosław Neinert, premiered on 21st October 2016 at Teatr Korez in Katowice.
6. The title of the research project I submitted in 2021 in the competition for a Consolidator Grant to the European Research Council: *Situated Knowing in the Ruins of Eastern and Western Europe. Ethno-nostalgias and Ethno-futurism in the 21st-century performances*.
7. Ibidem.
8. *Nikaj*, script by Zbigniew Rokita, directed by Robert Talarczyk, premiered on 11th September 2021 at Teatr Zagłębia in Sosnowiec.

Bibliography

Bądźmy w kontakcie! Strefy kontaktu jako narzędzie rozpoznawania współczesności, eds. E. Bal, M. Chaberski, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2020.

Bal, Ewa, ‘Performowanie lokalności,’ [in:] *Teatr historii lokalnych w Europie Środkowej*, eds. E. Wąchocka, D. Fox, A. Głowacka, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2015.

Bal, Ewa, ‘Strefy kontaktu jako przestrzeń nacjonalistycznego antagonizmu. Przypadek Katalonii,’ *Didaskalia. Gazeta Teatralna* 2019 no. 149, pp. 19-29.

Betasamosake Simpson, Leanne, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2017.

Bhabha, Homi K., ‘Mimikra i ludzie: O dwuznaczności dyskursu kolonialnego (Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse),’ [in:] *Miejsca kultury*, trans. T. Dobrogoszcz, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2010.

Carter, Jill; Davis-Fisch, Heather; Knowles, Ric, ‘Circulations: Visual Sovereignty, Transmotion, and Tribalography,’ [in:] *A Cultural History of Theatre in the Modern Age*, vol.

6, ed. K. Solga, Bloomsbury Academic, London 2017, p. 95-116.

Domańska, Ewa, 'Epistemologie pograniczy,' [in:] *Na pograniczach literatury*, ed. J. Fazan, K. Zajas, Universitas, Kraków 2012.

Domańska, Ewa, 'O nowej humanistyce z Ewą Domańską rozmawia Katarzyna Więckowska,' *Litteraria Copernicana*, 2011 no. 2, pp. 220-226.

Domańska, Ewa, 'Sprawiedliwość epistemiczna w humanistyce zaangażowanej,' *Teksty Drugie*, 2017 no. 2, pp. 41-59.

Escobar, Arturo, *Designs for the Pluriverse. Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*, Duke University Press, Durham 2017.

Escobar, Arturo, 'Transition Discourses and the Politics of Rationality: Towards Designs for the Pluliverse,' [in:] *Constructing the Pluriverse. The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, ed. B. Reiter, Duke University Press, Durham 2018.

Fannon, Frantz, *Czarna skóra białe maski*, trans. U. Kropiwiec, Karakter, Kraków 2020.

Grosfoguel, Ramon, 'The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities,' *Human Architecture*, 2013 no. 11(I), pp. 73-90.

Haraway, Donna, 'Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,' *Feminist Studies* 1988 no. 3, pp. 575-599.

Harding, Sandra, 'One Planet, Many Sciences,' [in:] *Constructing the Pluriverse. The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, ed. B. Reiter, Duke University Press, Durham 2018.

Janicki, Kamil, *Pańszczyzna. Prawdziwa historia polskiego niewolnictwa*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 2021.

Leszczyński, Adam, *Ludowa historia Polski. Historia wyzysku i oporu. Mitologia panowania*, Wydawnictwo W.A.B, Warszawa 2020.

Lysko, Alojzy, *Jak Niobe. Opowieść górnośląska*, Miejski Dom Kultury „Południe", Katowice 2016.

Matuszewski, Paweł, *Cyberplemiona. Analiza zachowań użytkowników Facebooka w trakcie kampanii parlamentarnej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2018.

Mignolo, Walter D., 'On Pluriversality and Multipolar World Order. Decoloniality after Decolonization. Dewesternization after the Cold War,' [in:] *Constructing the Pluriverse. The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, ed. B. Reiter, Duke University Press, Durham 2018.

Mignolo, Walter D., *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, Duke University Press, Durham 2011.

Nycz, Ryszard, *Kultura jako czasownik. Sondowanie nowej humanistyki*, The Institute of

Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warszawa 2017.

Pariser, Eli, *Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*, Penguin Press, New York 2012.

Pobłocki, Kacper, *Chamstwo*, Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2021.

Rokita, Zbigniew, *Kajś. Opowieść o Górnym Śląsku*, Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2020.

Situated Knowing. Epistemic Perspectives on Performance, ed. E. Bal, M. Chaberski, Routledge, London – New York 2021.

Santos, Boaventura de Sousa, *The End of the Cognitive Empire. The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of The South*, Duke University Press, Durham 2018.

Taylor, Diana, *Performans* (*Performance*), trans. M. Borowski, M. Sugiera, Universitas, Kraków 2018.

Taylor, Diana, *Presente! The Politics of Presence*, Duke University Press, Durham 2020.

Taylor, Diana, *The Archive and The Repertoire. Performing Cultural Memories in the Americas*, Duke University Press, Durham 2003.

Smith, Linda Tihuwai, *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, London 1999.

Twardoch, Szczepan, *Pokora*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2020.

Zalega, Dariusz, *Bez pana i plebana. 11 gawęd z ludowej historii Śląska*, Wydawnictwo RM, Warszawa 2021.

Zalega, Dariusz, *Śląsk zbuntowany*, Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2019.

Source URL: *https://didaskalia.pl/article/servitude-cognitive-sovereignty*