WHAT KIND OF POLAND?
Exploring the Role of the National Education Reforms (1999-2015) in the Neo-colonialist Expunging of Polishness and the Production of a New European-Unionized Subject.

By

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of Poland’s post-communist national education reforms (1999-2015) in the reproduction of (neo)colonial relations within Polish society. By focusing on Polish literature education in public high schools in Poland, this study investigates how literary curriculum reform contributes to Poland’s neo-colonial subjugation through Western, European-Union-centered postmodern hegemonic constructions of nationality/citizenship, fracturing Polish society into an Enlightened colonial elite, and Poland’s backward internal Orient, demystifying the post-communist transformation as neo-colonial oppression versus independence, and the current III Republic as a neo-communist construct, rupturing continuity with the self-governing I and II Republics. In proposing a colonial view of Polish education and society, past and present, from the 19th century partitions, 20th century Nazism and communism, to present-day EU liberalism, this study inducts Poland/Central Eastern Europe into colonial discourse. In its call for decolonization, both educational and social, it propounds modernization based on indigenous Polish traditions versus imported Western models.
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In honor of all those who sacrificed their lives for a free Poland.

“Lest We Ever Forget About Them,
May God in the Heavens
Forget About Us”.

Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), Poland’s greatest national poet.
List of Acronyms:

CEE = Central and Eastern Europe
EU = European Union
OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UNESCO = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
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1. Introduction:

A Bird’s Eye View:

I gripped the edge of my seat in nervous anticipation as I looked out the small window of my airplane getting ready to descend through the crisp winter clouds onto my homeland Poland. It had been nearly a decade since I had been back to my birthplace, and while the Internet and having some of my relatives still there allowed me a line of connection to my people, I did not know exactly what to expect in a country that had been undergoing dramatic changes in the past time. And here I now was, putting my research travel plan into fruition and keen to discover what I would find.

Already stepping foot at the airport in Warsaw the capital told me just how much had transformed since I had left. The city dazzled my eyes with the most modern infrastructure - a newly constructed state of the art international airport, shiny glass skyscrapers that have spurted throughout, expensive cars that filled the streets, all crowned with the biggest pride: a freshly built world-class soccer stadium just recently completed for the World Cup. I looked with great interest at people roaming the streets of the bustling capital who sported the latest Western fashions, fully equipped with up-to-date technologies, cell phones and gadgets, busy spending at the new gaudy futuristic design shopping mall, travelling in glossy modernized trains or eating familiar Western brands from local fast foods. Indeed, much had changed even in the few years since I had last been here in the early 2000’s and certainly since the communist era, which I still had the opportunity to experience personally and remember through my early childhood memories. Gone were the days of empty store shelves, endless lines for gas I recall waiting in with my parents until 2 in the morning and that general greyness and drabness of being enclosed in a Soviet world without having access to any basic pleasures of life, including “luxury” foods like oranges, fancier music or clothing, all associated with the West. Today indeed much has changed with the official fall of communism and the country opening up to the West, especially with Poland formally joining the European Union in 2004 and the concomitant general liberalization of life, an increase in wealth and openness that I could myself observe.

Yet, as I ventured deeper into the culture of my newly re-discovered home, this lustrous veneer started to dissolve right in front of me and my eyes started opening up to the
reality of what truly lay at the country’s core. As I forged my way through the city interior, I began to realize that all those sparkling buildings from afar were mostly foreign-owned banks, hotels or supermarkets. The historical Old Square, usually bustling with local artists, performers and musicians, creating that unique feel that could only be the beating heart of Poland, were nowhere to be found. The Square lay bare and silent, instead filled with new official restaurants showcasing Polish cuisine, pierogies - the European Union’s way of encapsulating Polishness. It seemed like technically Polishness was there, but that something was just not right... as if its very soul had been ripped out and instead instilled with an artificial, pre-packaged version of it. My heart truly sank when I found the famous and much-loved historic store “Doll” from the epic Polish novelist Prus - a classic in Polish culture and a must-see for every Warsaw school trip, was now closed, the sign torn down and the building looking dilapidated. Such a startling contrast between what appeared at first sight and what I discovered beneath the surface of my society, prompted me to penetrate deeper and to begin to ponder the question of the immensely heavy price that was paid by my country for its westernization and “normalization” with the rest of the world.

The most profound introduction however into what was to come for me came from a haphazard passerby my Mother and I had approached on the street for directions to the famous Military Powazki Cemetery we were eager to visit to pay our respects to all those great Poles who had sacrificed themselves for our country, including the victims of the most recent Smolensk catastrophe of 2010. It was an elderly lady, skinny and withered by life, the look in her eye and the know-how in her demeanor revealing the massive life experience she bore. She engaged us with the type of solidarity, hospitality and care that only an old-time Warsawian can have. As we followed our new guide through the streets of this historic city where many reminders of the tumultuous past still remained in the form of statues, buildings and plaques, I was reminded that on this very ground, not that long ago, my own Grandmother’s generation had stood in brotherhood to fight the Nazi oppressor in the epic Warsaw Uprising in World War II and how in the aftermath of the war countless civilians like my Grandmother eagerly flocked to rebuild the razed city with their own hands, the only reward being the joy of seeing the beating heart of their beloved homeland restored.

Noticing our travel bags, she pointed us the way to the site where the newly constructed Smolensk memorial and graves were. Nodding her head in that serene wise
understanding that only Poles of her generation have - Yes you must go see it my children - she uttered - those were great Poles that died there. Smolensk, the recent plane crash that claimed the lives of Poland’s patriotic political elite, 100 of the highest military leaders, church dignitaries, Solidarity activists, all great Poles devoted to Polish freedom, tore at the very heart of the country and remains the most sensitive point of its present history. While the causes of the crash remain controversial, in Polish national imaginary, Smolensk is seen as a second Katyn - a haunting repeat of the historic loss of the leaders of our country reminiscent of the Soviet genocide of 1944. As we stood in the ice cold winter air, the wind whistling between the gravestones in this completely empty cemetery, looking at the honorable faces on the photographs of these Poles and the forest of crosses sprawling the adjacent hills, marking the place of rest of all the other heroic Poles that died for this country throughout history, I was quickly transported away from the fairy-tale exterior that had initially trapped my attention and confronted with the grave reality of the true situation of my country in a most visceral sense. As Prof. Nowaczyk - one of the few courageous Poles who continues to penetrate the truth of Smolensk despite a wall of silence and vicious attack from dominant forces said, Smolensk and its aftermath revealed Poland’s true status of literally being on its knees - its destitute, pillaged and subjugated state, of being completely robbed of its agency, power and dignity, despite maintaining an external guise of independence, liberty, normalcy and optimism. I will learn later that - thanks to the determination of many other resilient Polish patriots, the now famous Meadow just outside this Cemetery’s walls is also the site of the unearthing of Poland’s still uncovered history - how, to the disruption of the dominant discourse that seeks to silence, dehumanize and criminalize, dedicated volunteers are pushing forth for historical truth and diligently bringing to light the remains of our greatest national heroes, from both physical and discursive denigration and oblivion.

As we parted with our generous guide, I took the opportunity to introduce myself and the reason for my visit here - a student doing research on recent changes in Polish society and specifically the education system. As it turned out, the lady was a retired teacher and had only one comment on the topic - thank God she was now retired as it is truly heart wrenching to observe what is going on in the education system at present, she said. I later learnt that within the current socio-political situation in Poland, this phenomenally knowledgeable, experienced and wise woman was grouped into the Mohair Grandma category, a violently
dehumanizing and denigrating social category aimed at removal from the public scene as an impediment to Poland’s Western progress. She like many others of her generation, those elderly Polish women huddled around the Catholic Radio Maryja - the last bulwark against the present pro-European Union changes in the country - are deemed the dinosaur to die out, the parochial Catholic who should remain in the church and not impede progress. As she bade us farewell, I pained for that whole generation, who like my Grandmother, went through the hell of war - either slaving with their youthful hands in the labor camps for the German war machine like my Grandmother with only hunger, denigration and a kick from the SS man’s boot as a reward, or who sacrificed their youth in active battle in the proverbial adult helmets too big for their child heads or in the concentration camps, only to later have their lives further stolen from them by the insidiousness of communism. Paradoxically, even in old age in “free” Poland these people were robbed of a humane end to their lives by being treated as second class citizens with pensions not even sufficient to obtain their basic necessities and now with only prayer left, to be faced with such dehumanizing denigration.

I also later learned that on the very soil we stood on as we passed the Krakowskie Przedmiescie - the main city square symbolic for hosting breakthrough moments in Polish history - not long ago in the aftermath of the Smolensk crash, grandmothers like her who gathered in the Square around a make-shift cross to pay homage to those perished in a traditionally Polish Catholic ritual, were brutally removed by the violence of state forces, expunged from the Polish public space and thrust to boundaries of the “parochial Church” so as not to disrupt the landscape of progressive, happy, celebration-mode modern Poland. This spectacular manifestation of state violence rang thunderously loud echoes of reminiscence from Poland’s previous oppressive regimes as the brutalized crowd chanted slogans of resistance alluding to the Nazi and communist state militant police. Later criminalisation of civilians for laying down flowers and praying at the cross for the Smolensk victims evoked further allusions to Poland’s lived history of struggle with communism just two decades ago symbolized by the famous “illegal flowers and banned cross” motif of the time, reminding me yet again that in fact in many respects Poland had not changed that much after all.

It is with such a penetratingly real accent of introduction that I invite the reader with me on a journey of discovery into the Eastern side, a region, that although today officially has come out from behind the Iron Curtain, still most often remains hidden or skewed to the
Western gaze, especially in critical scholarship and rooted in a Polish indigenous perspective. In this work I set out to understand the underlying mechanisms behind Poland’s dire situation, the systemic factors that lie behind the destitute state my homeland is in today, despite its semblance of outward prosperity and success. In my analysis of Polish society, I particularly focus on the education system, and explore how, as a subset of Polish society, it works to produce and re-produce the oppressed status Poland is in now. By identifying these mechanisms, I hope to point to solutions that can help push my country, which is still a work in progress, onto the proper (its own versus imposed) development path as well as provide insight for other countries in the West that can learn from this hitherto poorly explored part of the world.

**Aims of the Study**

Over the past two decades, Poland along with the entire Central and Eastern European region have been undergoing tremendous changes. The breakdown of the Iron Curtain, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the official dismantlement of the Soviet bloc marked the official end to a nearly half-a-century long system of Soviet communism. Poland along with many other former Soviet satellites and Soviet republics formally gained its independence and was on its way to freedom under the model of a new Western-style democracy. Fundamental changes swept the country in the years of transition, encompassing all spheres of Polish life from the economy, society and politics, denoted by the uniquely Eastern European term coined for this process of “post-communist transformation”. After nearly five decades of communist repression behind the Iron Curtain, Poland was on its way to becoming free and normal like other independent, self-determining countries of the world. Furthermore, as Poland successively implemented these Western-oriented reforms into its society, including those in the education system (1999-2015) especially escalated in depth and speed with Poland’s official joining the European Union in 2004, Poland was notoriously praised for its advancement by the West, for finally shedding its Eastern backwardness and touted as a shining example of Western progress and “normalization” for the whole Central Eastern European region. Popular press in Western Europe abounded in pieces beaming at Poland’s model renovated infrastructure crowned with the newest soccer stadium in its capital (see for example Der Spiegel - most popular German journal), celebrating as Poland climbed the
charts in OECD in relation to other CEE countries in various Western social markers of development, while most recently England’s visiting education minister glorified Poland’s newly reformed education system as the pinnacle of success.

However, tuning into the marginalized Polish indigenous voices analyzing Poland’s present situation as they live the Polish realities on the ground, which I use as a reference point in my own analysis, reveals a completely different assessment of Poland’s present status quo. As many Polish patriotic analysts have noted devastatingly, Poland’s apparent wealth has come at the cost of great debt with Poland’s official debt rates for the country peaking at a soaring 1 billion Polish zlotys (official statistics from dlugpubliczny.org.pl)- a price Poland will have to pay at one point in its future, creating further dependency known to accompany analogous SAPs in the Third World. All Polish indigenous industries, once boasting top ranks in the whole world, are either driven completely into bankruptcy or sold out to non-Poles, the most stark example being the pride of Poland - the shipyards once the foundation of Poland’s economy that hired thousands and also the birthplace of the legendary anti-communist non-violent Solidarity movement, now completely sold out and laying barren. With a vast majority of Polish finance capital, media etc. owned by foreigners, public spending being geared towards an imitation wealth to suit the West versus enriching Polishness with the Warsaw stadium fiasco now standing empty as the starkest symbol of wasted indigenous resources, Poland’s status has be deemed by Poland’s number one patriotic economist, former Warsaw Uprising hero and development worker in Africa as de facto neo-colonial, equivalent to the many other neo-colonial states of Africa. With citizens taking to the streets in protest of Poland’s deteriorating economic condition and people undertaking extreme measures of hunger strikes in opposition to the degradation of the education system, the state of the country is indeed dire. As Solidarity activist Jadwiga Chmielowska has said, echoing the many other indigenous critiques of the educational and economic situation, Poland is producing a bunch of docile sheep, half-idiots and illiterates, deprived of strong Polish education, fit only for cleaning toilets in England, referring to the millions of young Poles currently fleeing the country in search of better prospects in Western Europe, rupturing Poland’s continuity economically, politically and culturally.

This thesis seeks to disrupt the optimistic standard account of Poland’s present and past and demystify the notion of Poland as an independent, self-determining, free country,
giving voice to the Polish indigenous perspective that argues that the present Republic of Poland (the III Republic) is, in the words of the Polish peoples’ simple wisdom, nothing short of neo-communism or Polish People’s Republic bis (communist Poland 2), that is a neo-colonial construct. This thesis ruptures the dominant narrative of the Round Table originator mythology of the present III Republic, the Solidarity myth of the peaceful handover of power by the communists and denudes Poland as a (neo)colonialist country with power structures remaining in place from communism under the guise of a new, liberal-style Western democracy.

Specifically focusing on the realm of education, I explore the westernizing reforms as a microcosm of the changes occurring in larger Polish society in its present re-orientation towards the West. While gradual reforms in Poland’s education system have been steadily proceeding since transition from communism in 1989, this thesis focuses on the education reforms of 1999-2012 which mark the most fundamental shift in Poland’s education system surrounding Poland’s entrance to the European Union. Following Polish patriotic philosopher and former Education Minister Ryszard Legutko, this thesis takes the changes in education out of the mystifying popular discourse of “reforms” and re-possits them as a fundamental “rupturing of continuity” between anything that has historically been seen as indigenous Polish culture and constitutes the injection of something completely foreign which violently severs any constancy with the heritage of the previous indigenous-rooted II Republic. Focusing specifically on the literary canon in the Polish high school curriculum, this thesis interrogates the role of the new, post-1999 reform Polish language literature curriculum in the production and reproduction of present-day Polish neo-colonial society. Through a critical examination of what is and is not included in the present literary canon, I explore the constructions of Polish nationhood in dominant knowledge production- the creation of a new, optimistic, modernized Poland based on the violent sanitation and expunging of traditional indigenous Polishness which is seen as an impediment on the road to Western style progress.

Further, this thesis aims to link the present colonisation of Poland to historic multiple colonialisms on the country by neighbouring hegemons through: the partitions (Prussian, Austrian and Russian), German Nazism and Russian communism, all hitherto not conceptualized as colonialism. Rather than seeing these as isolated historic periods of partitions/occupations/
totalitarianisms/attacks as encoded in dominant discourse, I theorize them all as modernizing projects rooted in the Enlightenment based on discursive orientalization of Poland as Europe’s Other which legitimizes the material violence of colonial subjugation. Here I offer a novel way of looking at Russia which is exposed to be acting as Western Europe’s superior Self implementing Europe’s colonialist Enlightenment ideologies of progress onto the Eastern European inferior Other like Poland, whether in the partition era or communism. This is innovative since in Western critical literature, Russia is taken up as a poor Eastern Other of the Enlightenment, innocently lumped together with all the other CEE countries, whereas from the Polish perspective and lived experience of oppression, Russia is the active perpetrator and not the victim of colonialism, as I argue specifically in a Western style ideologically. I further argue colonial subjugation of Poland at present leads to an internal colonizing project within Poland which merely replicates colonialism onto Poland as a whole, creating Poland’s internal orient in the form of the Mohair Grandma by the now modern Enlightened Polish elites in a project to sustain Western hegemony whereby now Poland on its own joins Western domination, replicating EU policies, education reforms and removing the unwanted backward others impeding the road to progress. Thus, altogether, I propose a holistic epistemological framework integrating Poland’s multiple colonial pasts and present to understand my country’s oppression in its entirety.

By identifying the historic and ongoing oppression of Poland (and Poland’s internal sub-populations) as a Western-style colonialism, no different than for example British colonisation of North America’s indigenous populations, I aim to bring Poland and the whole “Second World” into the global discourse of colonialism hitherto masked under mystifying, otherizing, isolating discourses of partitions, occupation, totalitarianisms, communism etc. thus expanding Western critical thought to a region hitherto unexplored in this context. However, rather than imposing a Western-centric stereotypical analysis onto this part of the world, I ground my interpretation of the Polish situation in the Polish indigenous perspective, as articulated by Poles on the ground from a wide spectrum of Polish society from teachers, activists to academic scholars from interdisciplinary backgrounds from history, sociology to philosophy for a most holistic analysis. As Ewa Thompson noted, ever since its oppression beginning with the partitions in the 18th century, Poland has stopped speaking for itself with its own voice. It is the goal of this thesis to bypass the layers of complicity to colonialism
speaking for Poland with a skewed voice and give a say to those indigenous voices that are silenced and marginalized.

Finally this work seeks to point to a step towards transformation of Poland’s education and society stemming from a Polish indigenous perspective. I sketch out some most prominent aspects of Polish indigenous culture which not only gave rise to the glorious traditions of Polish civilization, but more importantly, constituted Poland’s strongest anti-colonial bulwark, a stronghold of dignity and anti-colonial resistance the country was able to mobilize throughout the various periods of Poland’s multiple oppressions. From having to confront the adversity of completely disappearing from the map of Europe for over a century in the partition era, to then being squeezed by the two most bloody totalitarianisms in World War II, to then being subjected to the final stroke of the brutal perversity of Russian communism designed to break the very core of the Polish spirit, it is the power of Polish culture particularly strengthened in opposition to its assaulting forces, that allowed Polishness to survive throughout the centuries, even in the lack of official state structures. It is specifically Polish literature, which in the face of the skewing of official history written by the colonial victors and used for indoctrinating Polish society for colonial submission, served a strong political purpose of Polish continuity and resistance. It was under the cloak of the poetry and prose of Polish writers where true Polish history and culture could survive and be passed secretly down the generations, read in the privacy of the home amplified by the oral histories of the people, which Poles would die for in the face of official censorship. Today, in the face of new aggressive forces, yet another attack onto Polish indigenous culture, it is this very literature which has stood the test of time that is so desperately needed. This study is significant due to the severity of the consequences of the present changes in Poland’s education for Polish children and the nation as a whole, augmented by the silences around the topic. While literature on Poland’s transformation and even education reform exists, all is written from an uncritical stance, seeing the West as the unquestioned naturalized norm Poland should aspire to. It is this dramatic gap in knowledge, further exacerbated by Poland’s deadlock positioning between two (Western and Eastern) hegemons where any critique of the West is seen as a threat to return to the recently battled East, that this work hopes to begin to fill.
**Personal Location**

I am Polish - born and raised in Poland and thus I locate myself in solidarity with my people as a whole in their oppression. While I had the privilege of emigrating to Canada along with the few other lucky individuals and families who fled the country in the early 1990s during the country’s unsteady transition period from communism to democracy and now being in a Western institution, rather than deserting my post of duty to my country and taking advantage of my privileged status in the West for my private interest, I hold true to my roots and utilize the opportunities that I have available to strive to better my homeland. Rather than adopting a Western-centric ideology and engaging in work that perpetuates the subjugation of Poland to the West (which is easy and would come with personal benefits), I take the unpopular, non-politically correct, counter-current stance of the Mohair Grandma and the many other courageous Polish patriots who express the indigenous Polish point of view running counter to the dominant Western ideology, which is harder and for which I pay the material and personal price including hardships with this thesis and social ostracization in Poland. However, being strongly grounded in my family traditions and an heir to the great lineage of patriots and particularly the strong women in my genealogy who devoted their lives to fighting for our homeland, I consider it my moral duty to carry this great generational heritage of courage and resistance forward. From my Grandmother who faced the Nazi war machine in the labor camps of Germany, to my Mother who proudly wore the illegal Solidarity button on her school backpack during the communist era, to now my own time facing the impositions on my country by Western hegemony, I humbly carry this tremendous burden of suffering, oppression and sacrifice of my people as I simultaneously dutifully do my part in the project of finally liberating Poland.

Historically, my own life chronology is also situated at the nexus of monumental historical change. My childhood dating to the tumultuous times of Poland’s transition from communism to Western democracy, falling right in the suspension zone between being no longer in the grip of communism and yet not yet being shackled by the full stronghold of Western domination, I grew up and was educated in a country and system where I was just able to glean a moment of unrestrained Polishness. My education in the public school system, while gradually undergoing steady changes, was able to be completed under the old, pre-full blown Western reform system (1999-) - my high school graduation year of 2004 being the
last one writing the old-style Maturity exam, with the following year’s cohort already following the new, post-reform curriculum. It is this personal location that I embody, the unpressed transfer of indigenous knowledge of Polish history, culture, values and lived experiences from both my family together with the old school curriculum, in a society still then unhampered by the fully-fledged anti-Polonist dominant discourse of today, that gives me the unique vantage point from which I enter this topic. Being the repository of my Grandmother’s and my Mother’s lived experiences and stories amplified by the old school curriculum through the rich spectrum of literature of a full Polish literary canon and thorough history and Polish education that I experienced, I use my lived experience as a reference point that I draw on to compare the present changes in Polish schools and society.

For me personally, it was specifically Polish literature education in high school that has had a tremendously formative impact on my identity as a Pole. It was not the dry history classes with a chronology of past events but the lived experience of my people that came alive through the texts of literature where, on a deep emotional and spiritual level I was able to understand, feel and connect with all the past generations of my people and their struggles. Gleaning Polish history, experiences and values encapsulated by Polish poets and novelists is what fundamentally made me who I am as an upright and confident human being rooted in my indigenous culture. This home foundation became especially important in my years in the West, where as an Eastern European I so often had to confront the dehumanizing comments and racial slurs evoking the Eastern European stereotype of that stupid Polock assumed to be less intelligent just because I could not understand the English language or simply of that dirty Eastern European from the all too prevalent anti-Polish jokes about the drunks, the thieves, the criminals that just weren’t fit for normal Western society. (see eg. Todorova, 2006 for the construction of Poles and generally Central Eastern Europeans as half-Niggers in American ethnic discourses, or as in-between racial undesirables before Blacks and Browns, yet behind the Anglo white majority in Canada’s immigration policies - eg. Henry et al., 2000). Faced with such a wall of denigrating racist anti-Polonism in the West, it was my strong foundation from the old style Polish education that allowed me to stand tall and know myself to be the proud Pole with a noble history, culture and knowledge coming from an over millennium old civilization that I had received from my proud, Polish-centric indigenous education in the pre-reform system.
Having such a profound personal experience with Polish literature education and now learning from a distance of the removal of this crucial foundation through the recent education reform, I personally understood just how destructive an effect robbing Polish children of the organic nutrients of a thorough Polish education through a new pedagogy of shame and erasure would have for the children back home. Further hearing my people’s cry of resistance and despair, especially of the older generation firmly rooted in Polish tradition, taking to protests and even hunger strikes in defense of the old system and stark rejection of this foreign imposed reform, prompted me to stand with my people and embark on this project. While being an insider as a Pole grounded in Polish indigineity allows me to bypass the layers of Polish complicity to the Western reforms and penetrate to the core of Polish indigenous voices an outsider would not be privy to, I simultaneously use my privileged status as an outsider to Poland, utilizing the safety of a critically-oriented and open-minded institution in the West to ask questions and probe into a topic that in Poland is silenced, sanitized and viciously blocked from the public discourse. It is my true honor to be a conduit for these marginalized voices that in Poland, due to the strength of the hegemony, would not be allowed to see the official light of day. Being specifically trained in critical inquiry as applied to Western social and educational contexts such as Aboriginal populations, I am able to draw parallels and apply many of the tools of analysis onto what I see as a striking similarity in the oppression of Poles, as this thesis will show.

**Critical Sociology in Polish/CEE Context**

In this section I briefly outline the uniqueness of performing critical sociology in the CEE context, as it differs from that of the West.

While in a Western critical context, a blanket critique of Europe as a whole (Eurocentrism) is standard, an insider European perspective calls for a fine-tuning of this analysis to differentiate between Western Europe and Central Eastern Europe and as Claire Cavanagh said, recognize that “there were colonies within Europe”, recognize CEE as the Other of (Western) Europe. In addition to this geographical differentiation, it is necessary to make a temporal distinction between the egalitarian Christian roots of Europe prior to the Enlightenment, rooted in the common heritage of the great ancient European civilizations (Greece and Rome) and the Enlightenment in Western Europe in the 18th century with the
embodiment of these ideals into practice in the 1789 French Revolution, which violently severed what hitherto formed the foundations for the entire Europe (both East and West). It is the onset of Modernity with Enlightenment thought that created the disjunction between the Self and Other based on a superior/inferior binary opposition that introduced hegemony on the continent (and beyond through colonization of the New World), constructing new abstract utopian modernizing projects onto its inferior/backward Others like Poland. This is clearly visible in the case of Poland which prior to the Enlightenment enjoyed a respected voice within Europe, in fact boasting a proud culture, which while blending both Eastern and Western elements, particularly expounded its proud Eastern heritage, most starkly symbolized by its glorious Eastern Sarmatian culture of Poland’s Golden Age - a bustling civilizational centre both taking and contributing to European culture on equal terms, not yet Orientalized. Conversely, beginning with the Enlightenment - from the partitions, Nazism and Communism, to today’s EU liberalism - Poland has been subjected to repetitive utopian modernizing projects aimed at modernizing a Poland now constructed as inferior and backward. Thus, it is strictly post-Enlightenment Western Europe that this thesis specifically critiques.

Further complicating the picture in the CEE context in relation to the West is that Poland being inherently a part of the European continent, is embedded within Western socio-political structures, most notably the nation-state, and hierarchical social structures (the nobility, Church) which again, in a Western critical context receive a uniform critique. However, conversely to the Western context in which as abstract, top-down, imposed modern structures the nation-state serves to oppress, in the CEE context, arising from an organic, indigenous, bottom-up background, it is not only not oppressive, but in fact becomes the very locus of anti-oppression and liberation (this has caused Ewa Thompson to call Polish nationalism defensive versus the Western standard of offensive nationalism. Significantly, indigenous Polish discourse utilizes the terms “patriotism” or “nationhood” instead of the strictly negative Western “nationalism”). While Poland is inevitably located within the European cultural sphere and undergoes Western influence, it never blindly replicated these structures but rather appropriated them for its own means. Thus as Zarycki notes, traditional Western hierarchical institutions like the Church and nobility, stereotypically oppressive in the Western context, in the CEE context, in the lack of official indigenous state structures
usurped by the colonizers, actually take the role of their substitutes and form anti-colonial bastions - with the Catholic Church being the bulwark of Polishness from the partitions, communism to today’s EU liberalism and the intelligentsia - a unique Eastern European variant of the nobility-derived middle class that while a stronghold of economic privilege and oppression in the West becomes the crucial leader class that guides the country to freedom - by virtue of its rootedness in the indigenous Polish ethos of social service, solidarity, and a drive to freedom.

Yet another difference between the East and West is how each conceptualizes the notions of the political Right/Left, Conservative/Liberal. As Zarycki points out: the political Right/Left divide in CEE countries is drawn along cultural lines versus the economic divisions characteristic of the West. This specificity again stems from Poland’s indigenous traditions and its modern development in the conditions of colonization, where it was the stance towards the external colonizer that defined socio-political orientation. While in the West, with social stratification along class lines, the Right has been associated with the oppressive forces of class privilege which blocked social justice reforms, Polish conservatism was liberatory, seeking national independence alongside social justice reforms, liberating all social groups in accordance with Poland’s ethos of social solidarity, further precipitated by the need to mobilize the whole nation in anti-colonial struggle. In Poland thus, the Right refers to the historical lineage of Polish indigenous culture and its preservation through anti-colonial resistance (a marginalized position in Poland’s colonial context). Ewa Thompson speaks of the popularity and importance of conservative thought in the CEE context (versus the liberalized/ presently postmodern West) which in CEE countries becomes the very mainstay of the continuity of tradition, history and the nation itself, British conservative Edmund Burke (quoted in Szacki, 1962, p. 131) providing a conceptualization of indigenousness relevant to the Polish context: The society-nation is not only a partnership of people in space, as in Enlightenment conceptions, but also in time, "a partnership between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born". The Left/Liberal in the CEE context conversely means complicity with the external colonizer, anything not indigenous to Poland, hence encompassing either Eastern communism or now Western liberalism, which equates to material power and privilege. Hence it is right wing/conservative political parties that form an anti-systemic liberatory force in Poland today, and historically
(although economically having a socialist/leftist program of social justice eg. the Solidarity Union or today’s Law and Justice party) whereas in the West it is precisely opposite - anti-oppressive critique coming from leftist positions. Thus, scholars’ like Zarycki stance on the relativity of the structures of oppression in Poland depending on the point of view thus rendering the performance of critical sociology in the CEE context difficult represents an objectivist sociologist’s view, in stark contrast to my outright equity-perspective rooted in my solidarity with the materially oppressed indigenous Polish patriots.

Such a nuanced analysis centering the CEE context warns the West against indiscriminate critiques of some hierarchical structures in principle, which even though oppressive in one context - of external abstract imposition as in the case of Western utopias, if grounded in indigenous values, can actually serve social justice and liberation. Conversely, what is seen as liberating in the Western context (eg. Marxism or post-modernism) precisely constitutes an oppressive force in the CEE context. In Poland due to the lived experience of brutal oppression from Russian communism, Polish indigeneity strongly objects to postmodern forms of liberation which are seen as pink communism (a corollary of the recently battled red Soviet communism). This is not to discredit the genuine anti-oppressive postmodern equity groups, but based on the Polish/CEE lived experience of communism, sensitize the West to new political ideologies disguising as liberation and remind of the importance of indigenous routes to liberation. Poland, which modernized in accordance with its own traditions (Szacki, 1962 - the only revolution in Poland being the external liberation of the country as a whole, internal social progress being achieved with the initiative of the nobility not against it in a non-violent evolutionary process) in contrast to the violent Western revolutions, cautions the West against extreme thinking (eg. modernism-postmodernism, capitalism-communism) and revolution which merely perpetuates new hegemonies, and rather propounds rootedness in the timeless moral values of an indigenous centre, proposing a more holistic notion of progress that blends tradition and modernity rejected by Western exclusionary linear thinking.

In my work, in order to compare the two contexts: the West with the artificially imposed modern structures of the nation-state homogenizing its internal minorities with the East’s millennium-old organic indigenous nations oppressed from outside, I theorize Poland as an indigenous minority oppressed by the supra-national construct of the European Union
(its present hegemonic liberalism form, in opposition to its egalitarian Christian roots, which Poland harkens back to) - which is not to elide the real underlying national hegemons of Western Europe like Germany and France which, despite the new cloak of the EU, wield actual power on the European continent or to collapse the differences that nonetheless exist within this now largely mono-cultural nation but rather draw attention to the oppression of Poland as a whole by outside forces which unifies Poland’s internal groups as a solidified anti-colonial front. Importantly, Poland’s present virtual mono-culturalism, as opposed to the unifying discursive constructions of the West stemming from the country’s self-imposed utopian project, was forced from the outside by external colonizers as a material reality - from Hitler’s genocide of the world’s largest Jewish population Poland’s traditionally inclusive notion of citizenship proudly encompassed through the ages, to Stalin’s shrinking the country’s boundaries and ethnic cleansing of the remaining rich minorities that inhabited the once greatest multiethnic empire of the continent (the glorious I Republic marking Poland’s Golden Age)- a premeditated attempt at reducing the country to a small vestige of itself which stands in stark contrast to its centuries-old indigenous tradition. It was the rise of neighbouring aggressive heterodox nationalisms against which Poland had to self-define in order to survive that chiseled Polishness into the present dominant Pole-Catholic identity which although serves as a sharp anti-colonial tool concentrating all Poles in the face of external oppression, in the context of self-determination gives way to Poland’s ideal of diversity that Poland harkens back to up to today. Thus any critique of Polish nationalism/imperialism/nobility-intelligentsia/Church/Conservative Right as oppressive seen in the dominant Marxist/post-modern/post-colonial literature on Poland is unfounded and stems from a blind application of Western clichés onto the largely opposite CEE situation and perpetuates anti-Polonist discourse.

**Theoretical Framework**

This thesis employs a variety of theoretical frameworks, each useful in its own right, but which utilized together provide a potent holistic and interdisciplinary tool in allowing me to understand Poland’s oppression - external and internal, past and present, in its entirety. I utilize the anti-colonial discursive framework, as articulated by Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001),
in tandem with select elements of post-colonial and critical theory in order to conceptualize colonization in the context of Polish education and society at large.

**Anti-colonial Discursive Framework**

The reason why the anti-colonial discursive framework is so adequate in this study is because it is a powerful tool in conceptualizing colonial relations of power, specifically rooted in an indigenous perspective (p. 300), which is precisely the goal of this thesis. Importantly for the Polish/CEE context, the anti-colonial discursive framework works with a very broad notion of colonialism encompassing anything that is imposed and dominating (p. 300), as opposed to post-colonialism’s debilitatingly rigid conceptualization of the term as strictly reserved for classical 19th century European colonialism. This allows for the hitherto denied validation of Poland’s and the entire Second World’s lived experience of multiple oppressions as, like Ewa Thompson says, constituting the fundamental violence that is colonialism and releases Poland from the doubly-wounding discursive impasse the blind application of Western meta-theories onto the Polish/CEE context has lead to. The anti-colonial discursive framework also re-orient post-colonialism to neo-colonialism which allows me to acknowledge the continuing colonial power relations within Polish society to the present which Polish adepts of post-colonial theory have limited to post-communism at most (omitting the current reality of Western neo-colonialism).

Furthermore, also crucially to the Polish/CEE context, which has been the object of various “liberating” projects merely masking new oppressive ideologies - as in the case of the present post-modernism, rather than a Western-rooted critique of the West, the anti-colonial discursive framework espouses an indigenous philosophy of liberation that this thesis adopts. This is because the anti-colonial discursive approach is an epistemology of the colonized that recognizes marginalized groups as subjects of their own experiences and histories, anchored in the indigenous sense of collective and common colonial consciousness (p. 300). “Such a consciousness (in turn) emerges from an awareness of the intellectual agency of local subjects as well as from their capacity to articulate their condition in terms of their own geography, history, culture, language, and spirituality (...) and can be used to challenge, rupture, and resist colonial and imperial relations of domination” as well as offer self-healing (p. 302). Thus, the anti-colonial discursive approach allows me to see Poles as being able to
recognize their own oppressed status, critically evaluate their lived realities, and propose solutions for change rooted in their own traditions and world-views, thus embracing an organic, homegrown indigenous route to liberation, rather than the violence-perpetuating top-down, external imposition of analyses and solutions typical of Western (and Polish imitations of Western) academics. In its acknowledgement of the colonized’s agency and power to challenge and subvert colonialism, the anti-colonial theory also restores optimism to the helplessly victimized status of Poland standard applications of post-colonial theory to this region have entrenched.

This leads to the notion of indigenousness the anti-colonial approach is rooted in, which Dei articulates as: “knowledge consciousness arising locally and in association with long-term occupancy of a place” (p. 302), “the social norms and values, and the social and mental constructs which guide, organize, and regulate a people’s ways of living and making sense of their world” (p. 304). In the Polish context, I use the concept of indigenousness to denote the Polish cultural code, the timeless norms and values rooted in our historical experience as a people, which has allowed us to survive as a nation for a millennium, especially in the face of numerous brutal colonial impositions. While I do not take a political view (apart from a systemic politics of liberation), this Polish tradition is politically associated with the Polish conservative tradition (as outlined in the preceding section). Importantly, the anti-colonial discursive framework, anticipating a post-modern critique of the concept of indigenousness/indigeneity/tradition citing its alleged essentialialism and even fundamentalism - in the Polish context manifesting in the anti-polonist stereotypes of the Polish xenophobe, anti-Semite, even fascist - rejects such a paralyzing view that takes away any resistance power from the oppressed. Acknowledging the reality of the wholesale denigration, disparagement, and discarding of indigenous identity, tradition and culture in the name of modernity and globalization which has and continues to constitute the nucleus of colonization, it recognizes the strategic effectiveness of the use of tradition/indigeniety as a potent site of empowerment and anti-colonial resistance. While acknowledging the fluid nature of all cultures internally, as is especially prominent in the Polish case with its eclectic blending of eastern and western, modern and traditional elements (as outlined in the previous section), it invokes the concept of indigeneity as a emancipatory tool subverting the external dominant order.
Further, the anti-colonial discursive approach “acknowledges the role of societal institutional structures in producing and reproducing endemic inequalities” (p. 300). This becomes important in my analysis of the reformed Polish school system as a site of the replication of the Western (neo)colonialist social order. Dei says explicitly (p. 299) that the process of knowledge production in the academy can be a colonial exercise”. Such a critical view allows me to take the education curriculum and the contents of the present literary canon specifically out of the confines of the present normalizing and naturalizing discourse and expose it as a site for the reproduction of colonialist ideologies, which “rather than heralding a knowledge that allows learners to develop a counter culture - in the Polish context the purported development of a critically-oriented modern learner- actually rewards the knowledge that inserts learners within existing hegemonic structures and practices” (p. 299). It also helps to implicate the supra-national structures (EU, OECD) and the complicit Polish state/government/local education authorities that sanction these institutional structures in the process of the reproduction of colonial relations and the weakening of Poland’s status socially, politically, economically etc. By delineating the colonial process in the academy as twofold: instilling the authority of Western canons with the simultaneous negation, deprivileging and devaluation of local indigenous knowledges, the anti-colonial discursive approach espouses an academic project of decolonization based on the subversion of Western Eurocentric knowledge in the spirit of a Frierian critical pedagogy and the concomitant re-infusion of indigenous epistemologies - which I apply as a Polish-centric curriculum, in line with Poland’s centuries-old pedagogic traditions.

Finally, the anti-colonial discursive framework works with a very broad notion of race, stretching beyond the standard notions of skin colour to encompass a spectrum of other socially constructed categorizations based on: place of birth, language, religion, nationality, ethnicity, culture (p. 309). Such a broad conceptualization allows me recognize the racialization of Poles based on their national identity, as well as that of the patriotic Pole within Poland based on values/religion/culture - their discursive and material denigration in a facilitation of the Polish colonialist project, and thus dislodge yet another barrier blocking Poland’s access to the global discourse of colonialism (Poles are seen to have the same white race as their colonizers and thus denied the recognition of colonialism). Dei further states: “Race, racism and xenophobia lie at the heart of all colonialist and imperialist enterprises (p.
While centering race however, the anti-colonial framework heeds all other interlocking systems of oppression including class, gender, ability, age etc, taking a holistic view of oppression. This becomes important in my analysis of the Polish society which while centres culture (national, religious identity, values) includes other sites of oppression; class, gender, age, place of birth (urban/rural), level of education, and crucially in the Polish/CEE context, post-communist ties, as seen in the present “young, educated male from larger cities” dominant identity versus the old, poorly educated, rural/smaller town female subordinate identity dichotomy, thus allowing to identify and challenge oppression in Poland in its entirety.

**Critical Theory**

In addition to the anti-colonial discursive framework, I draw on elements of Foucault’s work, which despite its drawbacks (outlined in the following Methodology section), helps me elaborate the detailed dynamics between knowledge and power, as explored in the case of the Polish hegemonic educational curriculum in this thesis. For Foucault, the two notions are so inextricably intertwined, he comes to encompass their constant dialogic relationship in one conception of power-knowledge. He is able to do so through his notion of discourse, which diverges from traditional conceptualizations of the term strictly reserved for acts of speaking, and rather refers more broadly to a strongly bounded area of social knowledge, a system of statements within which the world can be known (Ashcroft and Griffiths, p. 70). The key aspect of discourse that allows me to draw the connections between school knowledge and Polish colonial society is that, conversely to a positivistic notion of knowledge that statically represents the world, discourse has an active/productive property to it, being “a complex of signs and practices which organises social existence and social reproduction” (p. 71). Thus, by theorizing the reformed Polish education curriculum and the literary canon specifically, as discourse, I am able to conceptualize its operation as both reflecting and reproducing the Polish colonialist social order.

Foucault further elaborates the mechanism of action of discursive hegemony with his conceptualization of Western knowledge as an “archive” - a library, a “system of discursivity”, “a storehouse of histories, artefacts, ideas, texts and/or images, which are
classified, preserved, arranged and represented back to the West” (Smith 1999, p. 44). He further says that the archive contains a “complex volume in which heterogenous regions are differentiated or deployed in accordance with specific rules and practices, allowing them to be retrieved, enunciated and represented in new contexts” (Foucault, 1972). The archive thus is “the first law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events”, legitimizing what can be said, who has the authority to speak, and what is sanctioned as true (Kreisberg, 1992, p. 11) and as such it establishes a discursive Regime of Truth, in Foucault’s terms, legitimating certain knowledges/ways of knowing/narratives and delegitimizing others. Such a critical conception of discourse allows me to excavate the present Polish education curriculum out of the present space of neutrality and universality and expose it as a site of ideological and political investment of a certain (Western Eurocentric and colonialist) unilateral ideology characteristic of larger Polish colonial society. In fact, Foucault traces the very roots of discourse to the onset of Modernity itself, revealing such a hegemonic notion of discourse to be the very precondition for the construction of modern utopian projects, as in the case of the construction of new (post)modern Europeanized/westernized Poland. This allows me to understand the present situation of Poland, where what can be said/read/taught in schools and in the larger Polish society is strictly controlled and regulated according to a silent yet pervasive rule of “political correctness”, validating voices and knowledges in line with “Europeanness” and marginalizing or completely eliminating voices representing Polish indigeneity, all under the cloak of the polyphonic diversity of liberal democracy really masking an univocal Eurocentric monologue with its underlying presuppositions of anti-polonism, racism, orientalism.

Finally, I draw on Foucault’s theorization of the impact of power-knowledge on bodies through his conceptualization of the production of subjects in and through discourse. In “Discipline and Punish” (1977) Foucault argues that beginning Modernity, the human body has been subjected to a “machinery of power”, a political anatomy that “defines how one may have a hold over others’ bodies not only so that they may do what one wishes but so that they may operate as one wishes with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines”. By examining the body, breaking it down and rearranging it according to its own needs, the modern technology of discipline produces the modern individual: “subjected
and practised bodies, ‘docile bodies’” (Foucault, 1977). Thus Foucault expounds how power in modern societies is aimed at managing populations - rather than working negatively by forcefully dominating, it incorporates them, is ‘productive’ in the sense of retooling them to fit its needs. For Foucault, power operates in everyday social practices of every social domain, which have a largely discursive nature, including teaching practices, or specifically the examination. This becomes relevant in my exploration of the disciplining power of educational practices of the reformed Polish school system - the constant rehearsing of students in a certain knowledge in which they learn their subjectivity, social relations, values etc. further entrenched through standardized testing, validating and rewarding such knowledge - en route to the production of the colonial subject - submissive, unquestioning, glorifying Europeanness and expunging the shameful Polishness. Here, in addition, the theorizing of Theweleit (1989) proves useful, who while focusing on the production of fascist soldier-male and a fascist nation, shows how deeply psychic the process of production of a certain artificial subject, and by extension - nation, is: the building of a dominant Europeanized Polish self and nation must be based on a constant, compulsive expunging of the indigenous other, through the various disciplinary techniques of the military drill, speeches or, analogously, the various practices of the education curriculum including the reading of the specifically devised literary canon in the Polish context.

**Post-colonial Theory**

Finally, in addition to the anti-colonial framework and critical theory, this study utilizes elements of post-colonial theory in its overall theoretical approach through the works of Edward Said (1978, 1993), Homi Bhabha (1994), Frantz Fanon (1952, 1961) and David Goldberg (1993). The work of Said helps to bring Foucault’s focus on power in the realm of education specifically into the plane of writing and literary texts. In his book “Culture and Imperialism” (1993), Said expounds on the pivotal role of literature in promoting colonialist discourse, stressing the dialogic relationship between literature and imperialism, arguing the 19th century novel both comes into being with the formation of empire and simultaneously acts to reinstate imperial domination by confirming imperialist European ideologies as the prevailing norm. This allows me to specifically recognize the reformed Polish literary canon, in this case a body of literary texts, marked both by the presence and absence of its
constituent pieces, as a vehicle for colonialist ideology that both reflects and reproduces colonialist forces within the larger Polish society. Importantly, in line with the differences between the Western and Polish/CEE contexts (outlined in the “Critical Sociology in Polish/CEE Context section), the pre-reform indigenous Polish literary canon, contrary to the Western context of critique by various feminist, anti-racist etc. equity groups as hegemonic, constitutes not only a precious indigenous heritage, but a historically proven nucleus of anti-colonial resistance, as outlined in the “Aims of Study” section.

Despite the shortcomings of postcolonial theory, as pointed out in the “Anti-colonial Theory” section, I employ the works of Bhabha (1994), Fanon (1952, 1961), Thobani (2007), Wa Thiong’o (1989), and especially Goldberg’s (1993) flexible conceptualization of racialization to theorize processes of colonization both in the realm of education and larger Polish society, both historically and in the present as parallel to Western forms of colonialism - most importantly for the Polish context, allowing me to break the silence of the Polish experience of colonization and thus expand the scope of Western post-colonial theory to a whole, hitherto excluded, (Second World) region of the globe.

Methodology

The objective of my study being two-fold: the interrogation of colonialism as manifested in children’s knowledge production and the larger Polish society as well as pointing to strategies of anti-colonial resistance by centering the indigenous voice, I adopt a dual methodology to address the issue of colonization in Poland in its entirety. A critique of colonialist discourse is achieved through a Critical Discourse Analysis methodology of the reformed education curriculum document (including the new literary canon), while indigenous voices of resistance are captured via an Indigenous methodology by my personal interviews with teachers, complemented by public access media recordings of Polish scholars, activists and other Poles representing the marginalized Polish indigenous worldview.

The reformed Polish education curriculum document

This study utilizes the official reformed education curriculum legislative document - the “Podstawa Programowa” (the Core Curriculum) - issued by the Ministry of Education in
2008, but effective in high schools beginning 2012/2013 - as a site of analysis as it constitutes the official basis defining the new Polish education content for the post-reform, pan-national, centralized public schooling system. The document was obtained from the official website of the Ministry of Education of Poland. The focus of analysis has been specifically narrowed to the Polish language education curriculum (particularly the literary canon) at the level of high school, as it is in this subject and this particular grade level that topics of nationality, history, culture and thus processes of identity formation, central to this thesis, are most pronounced.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is so suitable for this study because it “studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk (discourse) in the social and political context” (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 352), which is precisely the goal of this study. Theorizing the educational curriculum as discourse, this thesis’ aim is exactly the uncovering and critique of the power relations embedded in the education curriculum, as it both reflects and reproduces the oppressive colonial structure of Polish society. Like Foucault’s social model of discourse, the central precept of CDA is treating “discourse as a social practice” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 63), thus firmly situating discourse in a broader context of social relations. However, the reason why a simple Foucaultian discourse analysis is not sufficient in this study is because of Foucault’s constricted notion of power (included in, but not restricted by CDA’s view of power). For Foucault, power is not imposed from above by particular collective agents (eg. classes) but developed ‘from below’ in certain ‘microtechniques’ (such as the examination, described in the preceding section) that are pervasively distributed and constantly engaged in at every level in all domains of social life. Foucault is not interested in the authors of discourse, but rather in the “system of discursivity, the enunciative possibilities and impossibilities it lays down (Foucault 1972, p. 129), the anonymous rules that underlie and regulate discourse formation, thus espousing a (post)structuralist notion of infinite power dispersal, of power ‘circulating’ everywhere, “never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands”. Thus his analysis remains at the abstract level of not particular instances of discursive practice, but rather the underlying authorless structures that give rise to them. As a result, his view of
power is very one-sided, yielding a pessimistic image of overbearing power structures confining the subjects embedded in them and leaving no room for social agency and resistance. In such a view, discourse appears as a mere instantiation of the underlying oppressive social structures and social subjects as mere propagators of such oppressive discourse.

The founders of CDA, Fairclough and van Dijk, whom I utilize in this study, solve this problem by, while maintaining Foucault’s socially constitutive principle of discourse, strike a balance between such structuralist determinism and individual agency by proposing a dialogic view of power in the form of Gramsci’s hegemony model of an unstable equilibrium, a dynamic model of constant contestation, negotiation and struggle over power between competing groups/social classes. They do so by proposing a focus on specific instances of discursive practice - actual acts of speaking and text which bring a third intermediary dimension to the social study of discourse that Foucault misses - that of social agents, the producers and recipients of discourse. This allows them to understand how in practice the relationship between discourse and society works - by the necessary bridge of the social agents, the constructors and interpreters of discourse. Thus CDA expands Foucault’s notion of discourse to include not only Foucault’s more abstract understanding of the term as ideas, knowledge disciplines, theories, discursive practices, but also a more textually oriented, strictly linguistic understanding based on actual texts. This is ideal in my analysis because it allows me to uncover power relations manifested in the specific instance of discourse practice of the education curriculum document.

Hence Fairclough proposes a tripatriate level of analysis including not only linguistic analysis of the text and the macrosociological analysis of social structures, but the indispensable link mediating between the two via the microsociological interpretivist individual dimension, thus providing a robust interdisciplinary tool for the social analysis of discourse necessary in this study (Fairclough’s “text-discursive practice-social practice” three-dimensional model - see Figure 1 below - corresponding to Van Dijk’s “discourse-cognition-society triangle” framework). They are thus able to understand how exactly power is propagated through discourse - by showing who and how is responsible for the control over and access to discourse, and how such discursive power is further replicated or contested via the social subjects’ cognition (depending on, as Van Dijk says, whether such
discourse accords or disaccords with their preconstituted personal beliefs and experiences). In the Polish context, this allows me to both critique the hegemonic structure of the education curriculum as a product of the ruling Polish colonial elites (specifically two succeeding pro-Western liberal governments) and their colonized mentality, which both reflects and serves to further reinscribe their power and the groups they install as legitimate over the Polish masses by launching particular views of Polish nationality and citizenship contained therein, as well as to simultaneously recognize the recipients of such colonialist discourse - specifically the teachers (as mediators between the final addressees of the education curriculum - the students), as active agents of change. The latter is specifically crucial in my study, as being a decolonizing project, it sees the indigenous Poles not as helpless victims and passive recipients of colonial discourse, but rather as critical thinkers, drawing on their indigenous knowledge and experience to resist such domination, thus giving strategies and hope for transformation.

CDA’s general commitment to stand in solidarity with the oppressed, centering the voices and experiences of dominated groups and supporting their struggle against inequality and injustice falls harmoniously in line with the emancipatory goals of the anti-colonial theoretical framework. Furthermore, just as CDA’s notion of power invites a dynamic fluidity, my portrayal of the social hierarchies of Polish society do not imply absolute fixity, but rather mirror a more nuanced image of Polish society, variegated by the different social categories of oppression, also in accord with the interlocking theory of social oppression espoused by the anti-colonial framework. In other words, social divisions of domination in Polish society do not run along a simplistic clear line of Polish colonial elites versus the Polish colonized masses, but rather are complicated by further categories of social discrimination including class, age, gender, level of education, urban/rural socio-economic background etc, as outlined above in the Anti-colonial framework section.
A CDA analysis of the education curriculum discourse

According to the precepts of CDA, as outlined in Fairclough’s Three-dimensional Analytical Framework utilized in this study, analysis was conducted on the micro scale of social interaction (ie. text production and interpretation) and the macro scale of larger social structures/relations, as well as a textual analysis of the discourse structure itself. It must be remembered that such a clear division is strictly an analytical one however, as Fairclough and Van Dijk themselves stress, in practice there being overlap between the three dimensions: features of text themselves always being shaped by the micro processes of text production and interpretation and the microprocesses of discursive practice always being circumscribed by the macrosocial structures they arise out of in the first place. The details of the analysis
procedure of the educational discourse at the level of context (micro in relation to macrosocial) and the discourse structure itself (textual analysis) is presented below.

**Analysis of Context:**

Following the framework of CDA as formulated by Fairclough and Van Dijk, the exercise of discursive power was interrogated not only via analysis of the text itself, but also of the microsociological context (as determined by the larger macrosocial structure) in which the text is embedded which dictates who is allowed to produce discourse in the first place and what kind of discourse is authorized. Van Dijk (2001, p. 356) defines context as “the mentally represented structure of those properties of the social situation that are relevant for the production or comprehension of discourse”, further elaborating it to include: “the overall definition of the situation, setting (time, place), ongoing actions (including discourses and discourse genres), participants in various communicative, social, or institutional roles, as well as their mental representations: goals, knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and ideologies”. Van Dijk (2001, p. 357) further lists four instances of contextual means of discursive control: 1) the authoritative status of the producers of discourse (eg. scholars, experts, professionals etc.), 2) social situations obliging participants to be unquestioning recipients of discourse (eg. lesson plans, learning materials in education), 3) the lack of public discourses or media from which alternative perspectives may be gleaned and 4) the resulting lack of knowledge base from which participants could draw on to challenge the discourses of domination they are exposed to. In the Polish case, all four instances of contextually-based discursive control are observable.

The Polish educational curriculum is defined as an official top-down imposed legislative act produced by the Minister of Education, acting on behalf of the present Polish (pro-Western liberal) government and Polish state that the teacher recipients are expected to unequivocally implement in their practice under the letter of law (and be held responsible for by their superiors in their professional review and through their students’ successful internalization and performance of this educational content on the standardized tests of the Maturity exam finalizing the high school education). This is further compounded by the macro social context of the prevalently constructed in Polish society deference to the authority of European Union directives and recommendations by Western experts underlying
these curricular reforms, deemed necessary in Poland’s need to return to “European normalcy” following its recent emergence and ongoing transformation from Soviet backwardness, and the government’s blocking of alternative media and discourses (the widely cited political banning of the national-Catholic Radio Maryja television channel featuring Polish indigenous patriotic content being the most stark example) alongside its concomitant disregard for Polishness, best encapsulated by the Prime Minister’s telling quote of “Polishness is abnormalcy” - all contextual conditions which aggravate the effects of the curriculum discursive control over the teachers, parents, and Polish society at large.

Analysis of Discourse Structure:

Following the precepts of Fairclough and Van Dijk’s textually-oriented CDA, alongside context, the exercise of discursive power was investigated via an analysis of the structure and strategies of the text or talk (discourse) itself. Van Dijk (2001, p. 356-358) defines these to be multifarious ranging from global to local levels of discourse, but lists as some of the most vital: topic choice (semantic macrostructures), to the more local levels of meaning, form, and style, choice of lexical items, focusing especially in both levels on the silent presuppositions, the implicit social opinions/beliefs/ideologies that underlie the explicit text that reveal its hidden meaning. In my study of colonialism and racism (anti-polonism) in the case of the Polish curriculum document, it being a mostly a non-narrated, bulleted format - an enumeration of concepts, topics, literature pieces students are to assimilate - my analysis relies mostly on the identification of relevant words, topics, literary works, both in terms of their presence and absence, the extent of their presence (ie. how often do they appear in the document, whether they are foregrounded or backgrounded - the order they appear in, if they are taken up in detail or generally, in terms of the literature pieces - in their entirety or in fragments), the lexical choices/wording pervasive throughout the text or the complete absence or replacement of certain words - all reflective of the underlying ideology of the authors. In preparation for the analysis, the text was first scoured to filter out the social context independent linguistic/stylistic/grammatical/technical aspects of the Polish language curriculum, to strictly focus on its conceptual/topical/literary/substantive elements where ideology can be found. By the local quantitative and qualitative analysis of the words/phrases/literature pieces reflecting indigenous patriotic Polish versus “European”
worldviews, I am able to analyze the more global meaning and coherent strategy this curriculum document text performs via these discourse structures. This allows me to interrogate how the curriculum document enacts a certain ideology of its authors, as found in the structures of the discourse by marginalizing certain elements and forefronting others and thus achieving its project of identity formation of its recipient students internalizing such educational content.

Finally, relating text to context (both micro and macro) via CDA’s trilevel analytical model, I am able to see a full picture of the discursive enactment of social power. Thus CDA has allowed me to connect textual relations of power as found in the text of the education curriculum document to the material forces of domination characteristic of larger Polish social structures (power relations between social groups/classes) and certain institutional power structures (the education system) from which the text emerges in the first place. Via the intermediary realm of individual cognition linking the textual and social domains, I am able to explore the educational discourse as a reflection of the authors’ (the Polish colonial elite) (colonized - in relation to Poland as a whole and colonizing - in relation to Poland’s internal minorities) mentality, as manifested throughout the curriculum text in certain dominant conceptualizations of the ideal (and undesired) Polish identity, nationhood, history and culture and understand how it both reflects and further reproduces the hegemonic Polish social order. By interrogating the dominant ideologies embodied and articulated by the dominant authors in this text and, if internalized as intended, by the teacher and ultimately student recipients, I am able to link the work this textual document performs in the micro scale of educational interaction to the macro scale of Polish society in terms of reinstalling the material power and privilege of dominant groups validated by such discourse (Polish colonial elites/government/state) while simultaneously legitimizing the discrimination and violence performed on the marginalized groups embodying the undesired identity and beliefs (Polish patriots), thus reifying the oppressive structure of Polish society. Most significantly for this thesis, I am able to make the connection between school and the larger Polish society by understanding the strategy performed by this discourse (both on the level of context and text) of the production of a certain ideal individual and national identity (with the simultaneous delegitimization of another undesired one), the molding of the ideal social subject by working on the teachers’, and ultimately students’ social cognition, thus providing
a constant supply of desired colonial subjects, including future Polish colonial socio-political elites and scholars, who will uncritically accept and propagate such dominant conceptions, values and knowledge as an unquestioned truth, thus perpetuating the loop of Polish colonization (internal and external). Equally importantly for this thesis, the same CDA framework, precisely because of the cognition dimension, allows me to recognize and investigate the agency of individual teacher (and student) recipients of this colonial discourse, especially older Polish teachers, who may not conform to such hegemonic discourse and draw on their own preformed indigenous mentality/knowledge to question and resist this discourse and knowledge, as explored via my personal interviews with many centred in this thesis, as elaborated in the following section.

**The Interviews**

The second part of the study utilizes my interviews with Polish teachers as a source of the Polish indigenous voice, complemented by public-access media recordings of various Polish scholars, activists and Poles from marginalized indigenous circles (as well as unrecorded talks with current students). The interviews were conducted over a two week period in March 2012 during my research travel to Poland. A total of 9 interviews with 9 Polish language high school teachers were done - the specific identity of the teachers, schools and cities have been disguised due to the sensitive nature of this study. Suffice to say the interviews represent the voice of a courageous minority, of mainly older and retired teachers from mainstream schools (which were specifically targeted as those having a reference point pre-reform and less at stake in freely expressing their views) that had the courage to not only speak out truthfully, but do so on record. Initial access to participants was gained via an official Letter of Administrative Consent directed to the principal of a given school, following which a snowball sample of trusted colleagues was collected following teacher referral. Each teacher was interviewed (in Polish) once from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours in an in-person, individual semi-structured interview setting, as well as one 3-person focus group, all using a loose Interview Guide to direct the discussion. The purpose of the interviews was iteratively double in my study: to confirm and elaborate my initial lead of indigenous Polish critique of the education reform, as gleaned at a distance from initial (alternative) media reports, and explore strategies of potential resistance these teachers adopt in their actual
practice. The interviews were recorded via an audio recorder (upon consent) and later transcribed for analysis. The details of the methodological approach adopted for the interview study are elaborated below.

**Indigenous Methodology**

The reason why the Indigenous Methodology is appropriate and necessary in the interview part of this study dealing with indigenous human subjects, is because it sees the need for research to be done “‘by and for indigenous peoples, using techniques and methods drawn from the traditions and knowledges of those peoples (Denzin, 2008, p. x)”’. It is a methodology that privileges indigenous knowledges, voices and experiences, recognizing the transformative power of these indigenous, subjugated cultures and epistemologies as sites of resistance and empowerment (Denzin 2008, p. 2-15), which is precisely the premise of this study. Contrary to traditional Western research which has formed an inextricable part of the colonial project, serving to entrench Western domination and disempower the indigenous voice, Indigenous Methodology sees indigenous people as agents and as having an authoritative voice (Denzin, 2008, p. 14), using that voice to form the basis of indigenous liberation and self-determination. Translating to the Polish context, where mainstream scholarship, since the loss of the country’s independence from the Enlightenment, through the country’s various colonial histories, rather than a resource in the hands of indigenous Poles to serve their benefit, has been a hegemonic process owned by (externally originated and internally perpetuated) colonizers, which, rooted in a discourse pathologizing Polishness and instilling the West as an unquestioned norm, has worked to produce and reproduce Poland’s colonial subjugation. Utilizing an Indigenous Methodology in my interview study of/with/for Polish people conversely, allows me to recognize and center the power and legitimacy of the Polish indigenous perspective, thus supplanting a pedagogy of oppression and colonization with a pedagogy of hope and freedom. By replacing an epistemological model based on hierarchy, control and domination with one anchored in principles of equality, respect, collaboration, and participation espoused by the Indigenous Methodology (Denzin, 2008, p.11-12), a politics of emancipation and self-determination can be achieved - a goal in line with the anti-colonial framework underpinning this entire thesis.
According to Indigenous Methodology, such politics of self-determination extends to all levels of the research process: initiation (whose initiative), benefits (who benefits), representation (honest or skewed), legitimacy (what counts as legitimate knowledge) and accountability (to the indigenous people or to Western academia) (Denzin, 2008, p. 2) - all of which have been upheld in this interview study. My indigenous research, from my initial choice of topic and lens adopted, to the actual interview process, to my dealing with the final results, shows adherence to these tenets. First, my study, rather than imposed from above by a pre-formed set of (dominant Eurocentric) assumptions, arises organically from the concerns and need of my people and puts their voices, perspectives and goals first throughout the entire research process (ie. versus monitoring the teachers’ “progress” in westernization, it interrogates the legitimacy of this tacit norm to begin with). Further, in my actual engagement with the research participants, rather than my presentation as a detached Western academic (which despite my indigenous Polish roots, my present capacity of a researcher from the West superficially implies), I purposefully reveal my subject positioning and show my critical stance on the Polish educational and social situation, thus inviting an open, equal dialogue. Contrarily to the Western paradigm that maintains a guise of neutrality while enacting a politics of domination by eliciting a replication of the dominant view, here the goal of establishing such personal rapport is to gain trust and safety, so that in a hegemonic society, any counter-hegemonic narratives that may exist (and wish to be captured on record), can safely come to light. Hence, a completely open and transparent process of informed consent was utilized - participants were informed in details of the methods and objectives of the study, complemented by my personal narrative of my location and politics in the project, their participation stressed to be based on complete voluntary consent. Furthermore, an open and flexible semi-structured interview format was utilized, allowing for uninhibited freedom of expression of the participants in their own terms, a loose interview guide merely serving as a probe to gesture to the topics of interest (Denzin, 1994). The focus group setting, which in a dominant enforced context would have served to perpetuate dominant views and further silence the marginalized, in this case came as an indigenous initiative of the trusted teacher colleagues themselves, the group dynamic serving to further synergize and inspire anti-systemic views. The recording of the interviews
verbatim fulfilled Indigenous Methodology’s commitment to preserving the integrity of indigenous people’s voices in their own words.

The trustful egalitarian (and thus liberatory) context of the interview was further augmented by the informal setting the interviews were conducted in - on the people’s turf, either in the teacher’s homes or their classrooms/staffrooms in an atmosphere of casual conversation. In my interaction with the teacher participants, I observed all codes of Polish cultural conduct - rather than an authoritative Western academic, I maintained the (truthful) indigenous air of a former student of teachers like them, engaging in customary revisiting of their former mentors in gratitude, maintaining relevant traditional Polish customs of (formal) dress, (humble and courteous) behaviour, (polite, respectful and patriotic) language so as to (honestly) present myself as one of them, embodying a shared ethos of traditional Polish schooling and culture. In return, I was reciprocated with the teacher’s generous time, honest reflection, equal investment and willingness to genuinely and passionately engage with my research, accompanied by traditional Polish ritual of being treated by the host to tea or to the gift of an apple as symbol of trust. In return, the teachers received a chance to reflect and vent about their careers, to increase their critical consciousness and political mobilization by validating and expanding their views in conversation with me or their colleagues in the focus group, further augmented with the mass amplification of the research results by a translation of the thesis into the Polish language - all of which I was thanked for. My devotion to the principle of accountability to the people first is further stressed by my delivering a guest lecture on my studies in Canada in return, providing each participant with a copy of the completed thesis and maintaining contact even after the research process has been completed. Thus Indigenous Research’s tenet of reciprocity and relationality was fulfilled. While an institutional Research Ethics Review was completed, this study embraced a much more holistic view of morality of the entire research process - a dialogic ethic of love and compassion (Denzin, 2008, p.14), espoused by the Indigenous Research Model.

In keeping with Indigenous Research’s privileging of interpretive methodologies suited to the needs and traditions of the respective indigenous community (Denzin, 2008, p. 11), the interviews were analyzed for emergent themes of Polish indigenous critique of the reform and strategies for resistance and change. Any hegemonic views encountered in my interview study, have been purposefully filtered out in the interpretation, recognized by the
vigilant counter-hegemonic interpretive gaze of the indigenous anti-colonial researcher, as not representing the autonomous individual opinions of their utterers, but rather the mere reproduction of dominant discourses pathologizing Polishness and idolizing Westernness participants feel obliged to replicate. Rather than serving to entrench a negative view of Poles as deficient in critical thought or agency however, the presence of such voices has been understood to merely confirm the strength of the hegemony in a society where, as many have noted, the cost of expression of one’s true beliefs is as high as one’s and even one’s children’s employment, and highlights the tremendous courage of those few who decided to take the risk nonetheless, whose anonymity is protected here in kind. Conversely, many powerful indigenous counter-hegemonic voices interviewed off-record have also been omitted here due to lack of verbatim recording consent - they nonetheless serve to validate my overall approach of critique to the topic. These gaps were filled with complementary indigenous voices retrieved from public alternative media records.

Thus, in summary, via an interrogation of the top-down colonizing role of the reformed education curriculum utilizing a Critical Discourse Analysis methodology, together with an exploration of any potential bottom-up anti-colonial resistance responses to such colonizing discourse on the part of the teacher recipients of this discourse achieved via an Indigenous interview methodology, a complete picture of colonialism in Poland has been attained.
References


2. Theorizing Postcolonial Poland

Postcolonial Theory in Poland - the Debate

In this section I briefly overview the nascent use of postcolonial theory in the Polish/CEE context and locate my study in relation to it.

As Tomasz Zarycki, Polish sociologist, superb synthesizer of the Polish (post)colonial debate has noted, post-colonial theory in the Polish, or more broadly the entire CEE context has been slow to take root. The first to notice the striking absence of Poland or the whole “Second World” (Cold War Sovietism has been the latest colonial experience of CEE) from global postcolonial discourse was American Slavist, translator of Polish poetry into English, Clare Cavanagh in her now seminal article “Postcolonial Poland” of 2004 (subtitled: “Blank spot on the map of modern theory” in Polish translation) who pondered the root of such omission of a country with such profound postcolonial credentials: “is not the interesting issue for postcolonial theory that there have been colonies in Europe - the continent of the intercontinental empires - and that most of these colonies did not attain their independence until forty-one years after India and twenty-seven after Algeria?” (p. 85). As Western postcolonial critic, David Ch. Moore in his article “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet” (2001) remarked in regards to the giant post-Soviet sphere encompassing 26 nations in addition to Poland, two aspects are striking: “first how extraordinarily postcolonial the societies of the former Soviet regions are, and second, how extraordinarily little attention is paid to this fact” (p. 114), arguing for a global postcolonial critique. Such an absence is particularly more intriguing given that Edward Said, one of the founders of post-colonial theory was an avid scholar of Joseph Conrad (nee Jozef Korzeniowski, a 19th century Polish emigree to Britain from the Russian partition of Poland). Cavanagh has pointed out the curiosity of how a Western scholar of imperial literatures, the nominal advocate of all oppressed people of the globe has not wondered at the source of the aptness of Conrad’s critique of empires both the East and West, Conrad’s Polish background of oppression going completely unnoticed in Western scholarship. Such a silence is doubly wounding: for Poland who cannot express its colonized status up to today in global postcolonial discourse and to postcolonial theory which remains confined to the narrow space of merely half of the globe.
The reasons for such exclusion have been cited by mainstream postcolonial discourse as mainly methodological. Postcolonial studies, it is said, arose in a Cold War context, as a critique of Western European imperialism, and as such it should remain devoted to the geographical sphere of the First and Third Worlds. Here, the argument of the necessity of overseas conquest is put forth. As Ewa Thompson (2000), pioneer of postcolonial theory onto Poland argues however, in contrast to the geographically water-bound Western empires, Russia was surrounded by adjacent vast lands which it considered available for its colonial taking. Moore notes Said’s explanation of his exclusion of Russia in his work “Culture and Imperialism” centering Western empires: “Russia, however, acquired its imperial territories almost exclusively by adjacence. Unlike Britain or France, which jumped thousands of miles beyond their own borders to other countries, Russia moved to swallow whatever land or peoples stood next to its borders, which in the process kept moving father and father east and south” (and west we may add) (Said quoted in Moore, p. 119). Moore notes here Said’s dismissal of colonialism by adjacence and allotment of primacy to water. Unlike Western overseas colonialism, the specificity of CEE colonialism has been contiguous colonialism, but colonialism nonetheless. A second, related reason for the exclusion of CEE from postcolonial discourse is lack of the race factor in CEE colonialism present in Western colonialism. As Thompson (2000, 2010) argues however, Western postcolonialists’ fixation on racism has left it blind to other technologies of subjugation, namely nationalism, characteristic of internal European colonization (here internal European “multi-national” empires are seen to deviate from, in fact provide remedy for, the single-nation imperial model of the West). However, I argue racialization of colonized nations like Poland by European empires based on Goldberg’s inclusive notion of racialization as rooted in Enlightenment notions of progress and its construction of otherness based on historically changing markers of modernity (and non-modernity). Here, proponents of postcolonial theory in the CEE put forth the pioneering case of Ireland with Hechter’s (1975) landmark work on the now recognized in postcolonial theory white-on-white colonialism internal to Britain as a foundation to build on for CEE postcolonialists. Another factor prohibiting the inclusion of CEE in postcolonial theorizing is the perceived need of capitalism as an economic system underpinning colonialism, as observed in the Western model and not socialism (in fact seen as an antidote to capitalism). Here Thompson (2000) argues Soviet
socialism was a mask for an at root brutally exploitative economy, Poland’s regearing to an arms-industrial complex of the Soviet empire and the Soviet phenomenon of the “red bourgeoisie” being a case in point. Finally, Russo-Soviet colonialism is questioned based on a perceived lack of a civilizing mission characteristic of Western colonialism, stemming from a perception of Russia as culturally inferior to the colonized. This has caused Skorczewski (2008a), a Polish postcolonialist scholar, to dub Russian colonialism regressive, versus progressive Western colonialism. I argue such thinking stems from an unquestioned reception of Eurocentric ideologies of progress and elides the reality of Russia, like the West, constructing itself as superior, under “scientific socialism”, rooted in Enlightenment thinking in order to legitimize conquest.

The largest blockage in the application of postcolonial theory to the CEE region is recognizing Russia’s, in both its tsarist and Soviet incarnations, colonial character (Poland/the CEE is a space of two overlapping colonialisms: Western - mainly German and Eastern - mainly Russian. For an elaboration on the seemingly unconnected relationship between Russian and Western colonialism, see the “Russia as the West” section below). Herein lies the less often mentioned, especially in the dominant postcolonial discourse, ideological reason behind Poland’s/CEE’s exclusion from postcolonial theory, noted by conservative-oriented Polish scholars like Thompson, Skorczewski and Cavanagh. As Skorczewski (2006) explains, Western postcolonial thought is rooted in Marxism which found its peculiar manifestation in Soviet communism and thus a critique of Soviet Russia - praised as an anti-colonial counter-balance to Western imperialism, an ideological and material supporter of the Third Word decolonization movements - as a Western-style colonial empire would constitute an act of methodological suicide (p. 102). Such a view of Russia as innocent of any imperial inclinations or in fact its anti-imperial character, best epitomized by the homogenizing Cold War designator “Second World” obscuring the colonizer-colonized dynamic contained therein, constitutes age-old Russian imperial discourse (similarly with the terms “Slavism”, Eastern Bloc, “CEE” etc. which collapses the distinction between Russia and its colonized subalterns), replicated unquestioningly by the West, now under postcolonial theory. It is precisely Western postcolonialists’ pro-Russian Marxism with its anti-nationalism stance, that disallows them from recognizing Russia’s aggressive nationalism, uncritically accepting Russia’s imperial myth of pan-nationalism obliterating an internal relation of
colonialism, and conversely, to delegitimize CEE’s defensive nationalism as a Western-style imposed oppressive contract versus a material reality-based, indigenous form of self-assertion, as has been noted by Thompson. Thus, as it has been noted, “the largest country in the world, still very much in possession of its imperial holdings, Russia remains a challenge to scholars of the First and Third Worlds”. (Condee, 2006, p. 831).

Similarly on Polish soil, the application of postcolonial theory has met with analogous controversy (see Domanska for a complete bibliography of postcolonial studies in Poland). As has been noted by Kaps and Surman (2012), the employment of postcolonial theory in the CEE region has taken on a bifurcated form: its conservative and Marxist (post-communist) versions (p. 27). Prevailing post-Marxist (not recognized outright as such - in fact openly denying any ideological affiliations - see Kolodziejczyk 2010) interpretations have objected to the use of postcolonial theory to this part of the world altogether, citing similar methodological difficulties as Western postcolonialists, proposing instead a “post-dependency” paradigm for the CEE context (eg. Kolodziejczyk 2010, Gosk 2010). Thompson however has staunchly rejected such a perspective, pointing out the sanitization of the fundamental element of violence underlying the relationship between the smaller CEE nations and their colonizing empires implied by the term “dependency”, thus defending the (post)colonial paradigm for the CEE (see Thompson’s article “It’s Colonialism, after all!”, 2011). If at all, these Marxist interpreters of postcolonial theory have advocated the complete inversion of postcolonial theory in the Polish context and rather than seeing Poland as a victim of colonial oppression, situate Poland as the perpetrator of colonialism. As Fiut (2003) has stated outright, utilizing postcolonial theory in a traditional Polish interpretation risks re-entrenchment of the tired old stereotype of Poland-as-victim, eternally suffering at the hands of its oppressors. In this version of postcolonial theory, Poland is seen as a Western-style empire, orientalising and colonizing its eastern others, Ukrainian, Belarussian and Lithuanian national minorities in the former Borderlands (Fiut 2003, Bakula 2006, Borkowska-Arciuch 2010) and Russia (Zarycki 2004, Waldstein 2002, Janion 2006). Notably, the argument of Polish imperialism, accepted even by conservaties Thompson and Skorczewski, has been demystified by stellar Polish conservative historian of Russia Nowak (2004) and stems from a lack of understanding of politics of a region in -between and a blind decontextualized, ahistorical application of Western theories onto the Eastern context which merely reproduce
a Russo-Western hegemonic perspective. Even Zarycki (2008), otherwise a proponent of Poland’s imperialism thesis, has validated Poland’s traditional borderland mythology, which, if not transmuted into material colonization, serves emancipatory goals as psychological compensation for the brutal amputation of Poland’s ancestral territories, suppressed under communism.

Noteworthily, Janion, notorious in Polish patriotic circles as an “old Marxist” with a successful academic career during communism available only to faithful ideologues, in her book “Incredible Slavs” (2006) offers an interesting attempt at the application of postcolonial theory onto Poland. In her critique of Western imperialism however, she locates pre-(alleged) conquest Polish indigeneity in some romanticized, essentialized pre-Christian Slavichood, which while interesting as an intellectual construct, completely disregards the lived experience of the self-identification of Poles with Western Christianity since their inception as a people (marked by the voluntary, not forced baptism of the first Polish king Mieszko I in 966 AD). While denying it, Janion ends up falling into the trap of panslavism thus replicating Russian imperial discourse began in the 19th century (see Polish Catholic University of Lublin’s Skorczewski 2008b for a detailed critique of Janion). The pitfalls of Janion’s work highlight the delicatness of performing postcolonial critique on a region in between two empires, where in the Polish case, in a critique of Western imperialism, care must be taken not to undermine indigeneous Polish self-identification with the (pre-hegemonic ie. pre-modern) West and to avoid the threat of a throw-back to the lived reality of (what is seen as much more) brutal colonization by Russia, which my indigenous-centered analysis respects.

Janion also replicates a common error committed by the post-Marxist, postmodern literature-oriented adepts of postcolonial theory onto Poland, namely a privileging of discursivity over materiality. This leads to the paradox of the translation of allegedly orientalist (in a Western sense) Polish literature to the (untrue) material reality of colonization of Poland’s eastern neighbours and conversely, equating the perceived lack (disproved by Thompson’s groundbreaking book “Imperial Knowledge”) of orientalising Russian literature onto Poland with a lack (glaringly counter-factual) of material colonization of Poles by Russia.

Conversely, the Polish conservative interpretation of postcolonial theory, pioneered by Polish Slavist Thompson in the USA, in the Polish context equated with the Polish indigeneus perspective (as explained in the Introduction chapter), has been viciously
criticized by the dominant Marxist (both Russo-Western - critique of her book “Imperial Knowledge” in Western Slavic Studies - and dominant Polish circles - see Golinczak 2008, Koczanowicz 2010) spheres as practicing “thompsonism” and making a nationalistic conservative usurpation of a discourse that is rightfully Marxist. Thus it can be seen that a neo-colonial battle rages over Poland/CEE today in the realm of academic discourse, between the dominant Russo-Western proponents, and their internal Polish replicators, of traditional postcolonial theory (which ousts Poland from the discourse altogether or utilizes it to propagate anti-Polonism) and Polish indigenous-rooted budding attempts at colonial discourse spearheaded by Thompson which remain viciously marginalized. This thesis validates the marginalized conservative interpretation of postcolonial theory initiated by Thompson as indigenous and liberatory and extends it further while denouncing the dominant interpretations as Marxist and hegemonic (post-Marxist Russian and internal Polish in collusion with the now postmodern/ Marxist West), which serve to further subjugate Poland’s status discursively.

While converging with Thompson’s holistic analysis of Poland’s (post)coloniality, integrating the historical colonialisms of the partitions and the communist era (due to her inclusive definition of colonialism as a relation of fundamental violence), this thesis diverges from Thompson’s (2010) assessment of the present day condition of Poland marked by an internalized postcolonial syndrome (post-communist apathy remedied by the voluntary choice of a “substitute hegemon” of the West). While likely accepting such an analysis onto a segment of Polish society, namely the elites, this thesis avoids such an internal psychologising analysis that serves to shift the focus away from an ongoing external neocolonization onto Poland (by the West) and further pathologize and blame the victims and rather centers the many existing indigenous voices of anti-colonial resistance and agency that her analysis omits. Thompson’s shortcomings are identified as stemming from her reliance on dominant Western postcolonial theory (as evidenced by her citing of postcolonial theorists like Bhabha, Said) and corrected by a reorientation towards Anticolonial Theory espoused by this thesis, which relieves all the blockages mounted against any (post)colonial theorizing of Poland outlined above (shifting the pessimistic victimizing discourse of postcolonialism to an optimistic focus on anti-colonial resistance and agency, from ended postcolonialism to ongoing neocolonialism, looking beyond classic European overseas racist colonialism to
everything that is “imposed and dominating” and reverting Western/postmodern/ Marxist critique to an indigenous perspective - see Theory section in the Introduction chapter ). This thesis finally adjusts Thompson’s (2006) locating of Polish indigeneity in the pre-colonial culture of Sarmatism and a concomittant pathologization of Polish literature/culture under colonialism symbolized by Polish Romanticism, which I argue not only did not skew, but refined Polish culture to its best, as epitomized by the greatest national Polish Romantic poet Mickiewicz, just as the failed uprisings of the time in the Polish indigenous ethos are viewed to have merely strengthened the core of the Polish spirit rather than break it.
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In order to recognize and understand the present day situation of Poland as fundamentally colonial, specifically in the sphere of the education system, as explored in this thesis, it is crucial to situate such oppression in the context of the systematic subjugation of Poland as a country throughout its history. By drawing the connection between the multiple periods of colonial subjugation throughout Poland’s past - from the partitions (19th century), to German Nazism and Russian communism (20th century) and present day European Union liberalism, I unearth these systems of domination out of the standard fragmenting conceptualizations as partitions, totalitarianisms, annexations etc. and theorize them all as constituting a Western-style colonialism specifically, all rooted in a common ideology of Western European Enlightenment progress. As such, I argue all these systems as underpinned by discourses of racism, bringing notions of race into a context hitherto devoid of such conceptualizations, thus inducting Poland and the entire Second World into the global discourse of colonialism, thus far restricted to discussions of the First and Third Worlds exclusively. In my theorization of the past and present colonization of Poland however, rather than focusing on the abstract realm of discourse, characteristic of standard post-colonial theorizing, I ground my conceptualization of the issue in the material reality of violence and oppression experienced by the Polish people, as espoused by the Anti-colonial theoretical framework of this thesis. As such, I draw on the notion of discourse as conceptualized by the critical theorists like Foucault utilized in this study, as being constitutive of social reality. By relating (past and present) oppressive social structures to their underlying colonial discourses, to understanding how such discourses, albeit in new forms, perpetuate themselves in present-day Polish society, including its educational institutions, to further reify such hegemonic systems of power, through a constant, mutually-constitutive dialogic relationship between discursivity and materiality, the complete mechanism of violence, power and domination that is colonialism can be understood.

As a foundation to begin theorizing colonialism in the Polish/CEE context, I utilize the work of a classic of post-colonial theory - Edward Said. In his seminal “Orientalism” (1978), Said, a Western literary scholar of Palestinian Arab descent, lays bare the discursive underpinnings of Western colonial and imperial power, in an Asian and specifically Middle
Eastern context. Said speaks of generations of Western writers, scholars, travellers, politicians and other commentators - the Orientalists on the East, who have lead to the construction of an “Orient” that constitutes a fundamental Other to the West. Such a (mis)representation of the lands and peoples of the global East is based on an Enlightenment-rooted binary opposition by which a weak, irrational, feminized and inferior East comes into being as an antithesis to a strong, rational, masculinised and superior Western self. Such a discursive construction of the Orient served as a means of its material subjugation and control and a validation of Western domination. As Said sums up: Orientalism is a corporate institution for “dealing with [the Orient], by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, and settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism [is] a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” (Said, 1978: 3). Said works with a Foucauldian notion of discourse, as productive of social reality, however, unlike Foucault’s abstract poststructuralist notion of discourse, for Said discourse always had an author and thus he was interested in the material rooting of discourse, emancipatory changes for the Palestinian and other oppressed peoples being his political priority - thus converging with the fine-tuned conceptualization of discourse by the sociolinguists utilized in the methodological framework of this study (Fairclough, Van Dijk) highlighting the intermediary role of social agents in the link between discourse and society.

Following other advocates of the application of Western post-colonial theory onto the Polish/CEE context (eg. Thompson, Zarycki, Korek, Surynt), I argue for the fruitfulness of the utilization of such theorizing onto these lands as constituting Europe’s internal orient. A pioneer in this regard is Western historian specializing in Eastern European affairs, Larry Wolff, who in his book “Inventing Eastern Europe: the Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment” (1994), for the first time in a systematic fashion undertook to transpose Said’s theory of orientalism in relation to Asia and the Middle East onto Central and Eastern Europe. Like Said, in his historic tracing of Western European discourse in regards to the Eastern parts of the continent, Wolff locates the roots of the discursive “invention” of the Europe’s Eastern European other to 18th century French Enlightenment. Wolff (1994) explains:

“It was Western Europe that invented Eastern Europe as its complementary other half in the eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment. It was also the Enlightenment, with its
intellectual centers in Western Europe, that cultivated and appropriated to itself the new notion of ‘civilization’, an eighteenth-century neologism, and civilization discovered its complement within the same continent, in shadowed lands of backwardness, even barbarism. Such was the invention of Eastern Europe.” (p. 4).

Thus, just like in the case of Said’s Asiatic orient, Central and Eastern Europe becomes constructed as the West’s contrasting mirror image, defined by a negation of the qualities attributed to the West and marked as superior. Like the Saidian orient, the difference between Western and Eastern Europe is defined based on a modern (Western) European ideology of progress marked by civilization, rationality and order, which can only manifest via a contrast with a barbaric, irrational and chaotic other. However, Wolff argues for a nuanced construction of Europe’s internal orient, as a demi-Orient, as a paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, negotiating a balance between attributed difference and acknowledged resemblance, as opposed to Said’s Orient proper defined by total difference. Unlike Third World colonies which did not organically self-identify with their Western European colonizers and were thus otherized based on external markers of difference, most notably skin colour and lack of Western culture, nations of the Second World like Poland, being white, (Western) Christian and located within the European geographical and cultural sphere, still become otherized and orientalised as not fully European, despite their self-ascribed identification with the West. The arbitrariness of such division is further underscored by the historically shifting nature of the category of Europe’s barbaric other, from the Renaissance-rooted North-South axis (Italy’s Northern barbarians) to an Enlightenment-based modern reorientation of the continent to an East-West positioning, as demonstrated by Wolff.

Wolff argues it was the opposition between Western Europe and the full Asiatic orient that brought the semi-Orient of Central and Eastern Europe into existence as an in-between zone, an intermediary cultural space between Europe and Asia, a link between civilization and barbarism. He says: “it was Eastern Europe’s ambiguous location, within Europe but not fully European, that called for such notions as backwardness and development to mediate between the poles of civilization and barbarism” (p. 9). According to Enlightenment notions of human progress, classifying human communities according to degrees of civilization defined as cultural refinement, unlike Asiatic peoples, situated on the
antipodes of civilization, CEE nations were located on a scale of human development, as a people in transition from their earlier stage of development, in the process of becoming fully cultivated. As part of its inherent instability, Wolff further characterizes the Euro-orient as a space of shifting boundaries, the original Western European frontier between barbarism and civilisation set in the 18th century on the border between Germany and Poland, being moved further east with the partition of Poland in the 19th century to include the Polish lands under German partition, further amplified by the constant fluidity of the boundary between Europe and the “true” Orient. As Neuger (2009) clarifies in relation specifically to the German eastern border, the difference between the Euro-Orient versus the full Orient like Russia, including Polish lands under Russian partition (for a problematic positioning of Russia in this regard, see the following “Russia as the West” section. For a comprehensive critique of Wolff, who replicates the mistake of homogenizing Russia with its CEE subalterns, see Skorczewski 2009), was that the complete wildness of the Orient rendered it available for conquest only, whereas the in-between lands while also wild, were still tamable, reformable, susceptible to projects of colonization perceived as cultivation/civilization. It is the construction of such a fluid borderland region formally within the West yet in need of a constant civilizing mission in order to fully belong that defined the specificity of the semi-Orient.

It is here that the theorization of Homi Bhabha (1994) on mimicry becomes useful in the conceptualization of the construction of Poland by the West as a colonial mimic, as “almost the same but not quite” (p.86). While Bhabha’s focus lies in the subversive potential of mimicry located in the inherent ambivalence of colonial power, I highlight the self-serving colonial perfidy of producing and reproducing a region as perpetually in a state of in-betweeness, half backwardness, regardless of the “cultivating” efforts of the colonizer. The colonizing project involves a process of partial assimilation, always leaving a remainder of difference for the Western self to construct itself in relation to (Smith, 2005, p. 26). It is precisely the construction of Poland/the CEE as inherently ambiguous, in between the West and East, as “the same but not white” - similar enough to be adaptable, yet different enough to warrant constant colonization/assimilation/civilization, that allowed the maintenance of colonial power over it and the entrenchment and re-entrenchment of Western superiority. Translating to the present context of westernizing reforms under the EU (the new face of
Western European domination), according to such a logic of colonial power, the assimilation of Poland to the dominant European order is allowed to go only half-way, with Poland being given merely a semblance of Europeanization - all the more insidious given Poland’s self-identification with the West - while simultaneously being asked to expunge its Polishness, leaving it in an in-between state of expelled tradition and yet unfulfilled (post)modernity, rendering it susceptible to further (neo)colonial control, while the dominant nationalist status of the Western European powers remains unabated. Wolff himself says it was precisely the similarity, proximity and accessibility of the European orient that lent it to particularly intensive operations of constant reform, civilization, modernization by the West, Eastern Europe in fact serving as a prototype for Third World colonialism. Thus, despite Wolff’s claim of a nuanced distinction between the discursive construction of the full Orient versus the semi-Orient, which my analysis does not exclude, I stress instead both constructions as based on the same fundamental premise of Enlightenment difference set up for the purpose of colonial control under the guise of a civilizing mission, most importantly with equally destructive material implications as for overseas colonies, not excluding spectacular moments of violence, most starkly epitomized by the split genocidal project onto this in-between land of the 20th century German Nazism and Russian communism.

The Western European discourse of Modernity in relation to Central and Eastern Europe had its most outspoken mouthpieces in the form of Voltaire and Rousseau. These two leading philosophes of the French Enlightenment, engaged in contradictory yet, in effect, complementary discourses of the Enlightenment, revealing the inherent tensions characteristic of Western Modernity. Western colonial power was bisected between the discourse of the Father - driven by its urge to dominate and exploit and marked by debasing stereotypes and the discourse of the Mother with its desire to nurture and cultivate and protect, embodied in the romanticized figure of the noble savage (Ashcroft and Griffiths, 2000). Accordingly, “writing about Poland in the XVIII century was divided along the lines of fascination and disdain (Davies, 1982, quoted in Szkudlarek, 2005, p. 20), the dominant tone being one of contempt. Voltaire’s “discursive crusades” against Poland condemned Poland’s republican political system as anarchic, marked by a “proud and lazy Polish nobility”, that is at root corrupt “sell(ing) its votes and rarely its affections”, and oppressive, rendering the rest of the nation “slaves” (Voltaire quoted in Szkudlarek, 2005, p.21). Voltaire
derided Poland as “the home of ‘chaos’, ‘barbarity’, and ‘fanaticism’ (Davies, 1982, p. 368 quoted in Szkudlarek, 2005, p. 21) - the reverse of those values: ‘order’, ‘civilisation’, and ‘tolerance’ delimiting the core of Volterian politics of Reason, defined in opposition to the irrationality and insanity of Polish (non)politics. Voltaire, as a strong proponent of Enlightened absolutism, maintained sympathetic relations with the despotic rulers of Poland - Russia, Prussia and Austria (Davies, 2001, p. 269 quoted in Szkudlarek, 2005, p. 20), thus legitimizing the colonial projects of the partitions by Poland’s neighbours of the 19th century as a civilizing mission to help the Poles govern their country in an orderly fashion - an ability they were perceived to inherently lack.

Conversely, Rousseau in his discourse on Poland, “recognised prevailing conditions [of Poland] as a perversion from worthy ideas” (Davies, 1982, p. 369, quoted in Szkudlarek, 2005) ie. as deviating from an otherwise acceptable norm and thus correctable versus as completely irrational oddities, irreconcilable at root with Enlightenment ideas, as perceived by Voltaire. Rather than locating the reason for Poland’s downfall via the partitions in the rapacious aspirations of its despotic neighbours however, Rousseau attributed the weakness of Poland to its internal pathologies, thus he proposed a program of internal reform for the country, based on his idea of its problems and adequate solutions. Unlike Voltaire, who took a completely contemptuous attitude to the political structures of the country, Rousseau spoke from a perspective of an idealized noble savage that he wanted at all costs to save, thus locating himself in opposition, as a supporter of Poland, to his contemporary Voltaire aligned with Russia against Poland. In his reform program, Rousseau wanted to preserve what was originally good about the Polish political system, most notably its founding ethos of freedom - what he saw as its innocent, pure, and uniquely Polish nature. It was precisely Poland’s strangeness/difference - the very object of Voltaire’s disdain for the country, rendering it removable and rule-able over by more Enlightened outside forces - that made it desirable from the point of view of this philosopher of the Enlightenment. However, Rousseau’s project, despite such seemingly loving intentions and attempts at converging with what he perceived to be Poland’s indigenous pathway of modernization, remained equally othering in the end, Poland being constructed as an essential strange other to the West. Indeed, analysts have cited Rousseau as the precursor to Said’s discourse of orientalism in the Eastern European context, reading Rousseau, via Said, as a discourse in the “reconstruction of
European identity by the way of constructing Poland as ‘Europe’s nature’ or ‘Europe’s child’” (Szkudlarek, 2005). Both Rousseau’s and Voltaire’s projects were produced from afar based on their perception of Polish realities and its proper development path, typical of all Enlightenment abstract projects constructed from the detached position of the Western intellectual observer operating on its object of study from a distance.

It is in the theorizing of Rousseau in relation to Poland that the construction of Poland’s otherness in the discourse of Modernity is specifically articulated as a lack of political maturity. Rousseau’s discourse on Poland produces the country as children or animals, signifying a state of immaturity, a transition phase, a stage preceding rational full adulthood/humanhood. The trope of animals refers to Rousseau’s theorization of the evolution of human communities, as proceeding from atomized, pre-political aggregates of animalish individuals in the state of nature, to fully mature civil society, based on the Western model of the social contract. As opposed to his contemporary Voltaire who advocated the transition of nations to a fully political state via a force-based top-down Hobbesian model of Enlightened despotism, Rousseau supported a more organic evolutionary process of such progression via civic education of the nation’s citizens. This is why his project of re-form for the Polish nation was founded on a state-based program of modern national education. Rousseau’s projects of constructing a modern Polish nation, albeit rooted in what he perceived to be Polish indigenous tradition, implied a complete disregard and invalidation of Poland’s existing ancient republican model of nationhood, and of the Polish people’s capability to correct their own problems. While Rousseau’s modernization project for Poland never received the chance to be implemented into reality, with the materialization of Voltaire’s alternative of “cultivation” by force under the tutelage of Poland’s mature and better knowing rulers, it was the construction of Poles/the CEE as inherently immature, child-ish and in need of help and “education”, inaugurated by influential thinkers like Rousseau in the 18th century, that entrenched such a view of the country in dominant discourse, legitimizing further projects of “enlightenment” and “civilization” onto it in subsequent epochs.

Murawska-Mathesius (2006) speaks of the persistence of the discourse of the CEE nations as children and generally a submissive object of operation on by the better-knowing Western subject, in the West since the Enlightenment, beginning with the dominant
perception of the newly born Polish state following the partitions with the 1919 Treaty of Versailles as the “bastard child of Versailles” - harkening back to the century-long hegemonic order of the continent of the “Concert of Europe” - which warranted further “civilizing” projects onto these unruly minors by patrons either West or East, most notably under the subsequent German Nazism and Russian Communism, to the passive acceptance of the West looking on from afar to these disposable small nations in the remote periphery of the continent. The abandonment of Poland by the West - in the initial aggression of Hitler and the USSR onto the country in 1939 despite official treaty obligations, and then further in Poland’s solitary fight with the world’s two bloodiest totalitarianisms of Nazism and Sovietism, culminating in the heroic Warsaw Uprising of 1944, followed by the subsequent secret “selling” of Poland to Stalin at Yalta in 1945 with the West’s criminal tacit complicity with all its attendant genocidal policies, despite Poland’s immense contribution to fighting against Hilterism on all fronts of Europe in World War II, for “our and your freedom” - known in Polish indigenous independence thought as “Western betrayal”, was only possible due to the prior construction of this region in the Western psyche as inherently recalcitrant, undeveloped and thus expendable. The region’s ascribed innate immaturity, newness/youngness and instability, is further augmented by the constancy of imposition of such new modernizing operations onto it, including dramatic arbitrary re-shifting of the country’s borders at each stage, relative to the vast indigenous realm of the First Republic, from the “New Europe” that (re)emerged in 1919, to Eastern Europe under Sovietism, to a “young Europe”, reconstituted as Central and Eastern Europe, returning to Europe to “catch up” following half a century of suspension in development under Eastern communism as fresh members of the EU and NATO who must learn their proper place in the Western community. A more recent manifestation of such discourses came from French president Jacques Chirac in 2005, who on behalf of the “Old Europe”, explicitly derided his juvenile Eastern siblings in Poland for representing “not well-brought up behaviour” in disobeying the expectation of their proper conduct of silence and submission to their senior Western superiors by their voicing an independent stance on the Iraq war of the time (Szkudlarek, 2005).

The Western European discourse of Modernity in relation to Poland/CEE, found a specific articulation in the case of Germany, which being the easternmost frontier of Western
civilization, considered itself in the unique position of the vanguard nation of the Western modernizing project whose special mission was the spread of Western Enlightenment culture to the dark spaces of its immediate Eastern barbaric neighbours. The French Enlightenment’s Voltaire and Rousseau, thus found their German equivalents in the form of thinkers of the German Enlightenment like Fichte and Heine with their corresponding discourses of the Master (Voltaire’s Father) and Patient (Rousseau’s Mother) (Neuger, 2009). Like Voltaire, Fichte’s discourse on Poland was underpinned by a pathologizing repulsion to its imagined wildness, lawlessness and lack of culture - epitomized by the “polnische Wirtschaft” stereotype equating to extreme disorder, lack of management, manners and dirt - legitimizing the naked exploitation performed on the constructed ineffective, thriftless, lazy and ignorant Polish slave (most notably under the Western legal doctrine of terra nullus, rooted in Western modes of development). Heine, conversely, like Rousseau, looked to the same object of his discourse with romanticized fetishism, with the goal of appropriating its ascribed purity, vitality and spirituality made available for its cultivation, for the self-serving purpose of healing of the decaying Western self - both ultimately otherizing Poland and providing justification for its colonization by Germany.

In accord with Eurocentric ideologies of progress, German colonial thought fused together the notion of culture - culture in this case equated with the German Volksgeist or ‘spirit of the nation’ - with scientific theories of social Darwinism, which justified the subordination of “weaker” civilizations by the stronger by the evolutionary model of human development (Surynt, 2008). As analysts have pointed out, “with this law [historical law] on its side, the Anglo-Saxon race conquered America, France - Algeria, England - India, and the Germanic peoples took over the lands of Slavic speaking peoples” (Lasalle, 1919: 33, quoted in Surynt, 2008, p. 73), stressing once again the analogy between Second World and Third World colonialism. Thus the German colonial project onto its adjacent Eastern European territories was intertwined with the concomitant German nation-building project from the 18th to the 20th century, specifically under the leadership of the Prussian state, German settlement in the Prussian partition of the Polish territories and its attendant policies of Germanisation epitomized by the politics of Kulturkampf, onto the otherized and inferiorized Polish people being indispensable in the consolidation of a modern, unified and dominant German national state, en par with other European colonial powers. While Thompson
stresses the category of nationalism underlying internal European colonialism, while not negating it, I expand this conceptualization of Euro-colonialism to include the broader ideology of Enlightenment progress underpinning these projects. Following the partitions, such discourses gave rise to further material projects of German colonisation of Poles, most notably in the late 19th century concept of Mitteleuropa (Neuger, 2009) - a program of German cultural and economic hegemony in CEE, curtailed with Germany’s defeat in World War I, to be revived in new form under Nazism later in the 20th century with its genocidal plan of extermination of Poles and other Slavs and an exploitation of the lands and remaining Polish population for the German imperial project. German neo-colonisation of Poland continues apace today in new, softer forms, via economic attempts of re-gaining of lands lost following World War II and takeover of Polish industries, banks, media, to anti-Polonist cultural and linguistic policies in Germany and anti-Polish historical policy of the German state, most notably with the insidious shifting of blame for the Holocaust from the Germans to the Poles, epitomized by the “Polish concentration camps” discourse.

It is in the discursive and material colonization of Poles by Germany that the concept of race becomes most apparent. It was 19th century German philosopher Herder who designated the modern explicitly racial categorization of CEE peoples as Slavs. Such classification was preceded by changing racial groupings arbitrarily ascribed to Eastern Europeans by the West in the 18th century, from ancient Scynthians to Sarmatians, as documented by Wolff (1994) (where Sarmatism was also a self-ascribed identity of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). The most vivid racial marking of Slavs, including Poles occurred in the starkly racist project of Nazism, which, as Wolff illustrates, was underpinned by scientific discourses of race generated by German academia, which constructed Eastern Europe as a an explicit racial domain, including phenotypic characteristics of the Asiatic Slavs with features such as “the common tendency to shorter and broader shaped heads, of lower and broader facial formation, of prominent cheekbones, primitive nasal formation and of thick, taut hair” (Reche, an expert on the “anthropological conditions of Poland”, quoted in Wolff, 1994). It was based on such racial categorizations, that Poles as being of inferior Slavic, and not the superior Aryan race were marked down, along with other inferior “races”, for extermination in concentration camps - a fact often overlooked in dominant discourse regarding Hitlerism - the remainder, mainly youth deemed “reformable”, sent to labor camps
or, based on the notion of racial improvement, germanised as slaves for the “supreme” civilization. Racism is known to lie at the root of colonialism, the founder of anti-colonial theory Fanon (1961) locating the fundamental division of the colonial world on a color line based on race, an essential rift between the two different species, two separate levels of humanity, two disparate races - the native and the (white) man. Skin colour constituting the most prominent marker of differentiation and subordination in Third World colonialism, the apparent lack of such difference has served to exclude race from analyses of Second World colonialism. However, I argue racialization of Poles based on culture (including nationality, religion, creed) based on Goldberg’s (1993) inclusive notion of race.

Goldberg’s (1993) historical analyses show race to be a “constitutive feature of modernity, ordering conceptions of self and other, of socio-political membership and exclusion. It has identified exploitable individuals and populations for subjugation, and it has been used to rationalize and legitimate domination, subjugation, even extermination” (p. 149). Race is thus an insidiously fluid and dynamically shifting social construct, stretching far beyond the limits of epidermal identity, adapting to the socio-political conditions of any given historical time, a historically-specific technology of subjugation of groups constructed as other, marked out for removal like debris in the modernization process, the criteria of such marking and exclusion transforming with changing historical socio-political contexts. Here, the Irish serve as a case in point - who, while physically white, were still racialized based on their culture perceived as wild, uncivil and alien, as a race separate from the British and more Africanoid on the Western racial scale, an essentially inferior race marked for discursive and material destruction - providing a prototype for internal European colonialism. It is in this sense that I theorize Poland as racialized in all its colonial projects, its national culture essentially constructed as an inferior human race. Under the partitions, Poland’s socio-political system’s perceived backwardness, anarchicness, oppressiveness, and anti-democraticness was ascribed to bio-genetic traits of Poles’ innate narrow-mindedness, intolerance, conflictualness, laziness, megalomania and drunkenness, concepts of race becoming particularly apparent in discourses of the German Enlightenment epitomized by German emperor Frederick II’s ( known in Germany as “the Great”) stereotype of Poles as the Indians of Europe or conversely, of Asiatic Orientals- analysts further noting the similarities between the German “‘Drang nach Osten” (drive towards the East) to the
Western overseas colonial frontier in either the New World or Asia (Surynt, 2008). Further, analogously to its Nazi counterpart rooted in national socialism based on race, Soviet communism with its seemingly opposite, yet in actuality co-related underlying ideology of inter-national socialism, racialized economic classes of people for destruction and transformation, where entire nations like Poland became raced as a backward bourgeois class which needed to be re-set to the new rational modern path of communism, Poland’s former, capitalist structures perceived once again to be the result of Poles’ inborn irrationality and regressive mindset. Finally, today’s project of EU liberalism - constructed as its preceding communism’s ideological opposite (due to focus on economic presence or absence of private property), yet in Polish indigenous thought de-mystified as fundamentally a new, pink version of its red antecedent - is legitimized under similar discourses of Poland’s perceived moral conservatism, religious traditionalism and parochialism - these mental habits, already inherent to the inferior “Polish race” to begin with, further entrenched under the preceding system of Sovietism, epitomized by the biologizing classification of post-communist societies as “homo sovieticus”, which must now, all the more, be re-engineered on the road to cultivating the superior (post)modern liberal “homo westernicus” species (Zarycki, 2010).

The similarity of such culturalist otherizing discourses underpinning all these projects of Euro-colonialism explored here on the example of Poland, further proves their rootedness in a common ideology of Western modernity, which as in the case of Western overseas colonialism, prove to be fundamentally racialized.

Thus, in summary, it can be seen that just like in the case of Third World colonialism, Second World colonialism was underpinned by orientalising discourses rooted in 18th century Western European modernity - with equally destructive material consequences. From such discourses onto the whole CEE region, as well as Poland specifically, a general image of Poland/CEE emerges epitomized by “sensualism, irrationality, traditionalism or conservatism, despotism, primitivism, compliance and femininity” that comes into being as a binary opposition to a “rational, progressive, democratic, modern, dynamic and masculine” West (Korek, 2009), the inner European orient closely resembling Said’s Asiatic orient. Such discourse was generated by Western politicians, journalists, literati, as well as academics. As Korek (2009) says, “just as Orientalism had its Orientalists, so ‘Central-and-Eastern-Europeanism’ had its Slavists and Sovietologists” for whom the nations of CEE to this day
constitute a marginal addition to Russian and German (i.e. Poland’s immediate colonizers’) culture. Despite their differences and even animosity, the two historiographies share the common view of CEE as a disposable region of substandard nature fit only for “kulturträger protection” by its superior neighbours, a hegemonic conception uncritically replicated by Western (and dominant internal Polish) scholars until today (Riabchuk, 2000, quoted in Korek, 2009). Thompson (2009, 2010) elaborates on the anti-polonist deformations of Western historical discourse, with its routine condemnation of the Treaty of Versailles and the resulting (re)creation of the Polish state - stemming from either Leftist accusations of its responsibility for the rise of Nazism (due to a perceived unjust “humiliation” of Germany) or a Rightist nostalgia for an allegedly “multiethnic” and benign Habsburg empire - and standard concomitant critique of its underlying Wilsonian doctrine of self-determination, revered from the Polish indigenous perspective as a symbol of international recognition of the wrongs committed on smaller nations by their imperialistic neighbours. The effects of such discursive colonization since the loss of Poland’s independence in the 18th century, has been either the complete erasure of Poland’s pre-colonial history - epitomized by a complete sanitization of the glorious heritage of the Noble Republic or the history-turning defeat of an aggressive Islamic invasion of Christian Europe in Vienna in 1683 under Polish king Sobieski from global consciousness - or an appropriation by the West of Polish indigenous culture and contributions to world history, rendering Chopin a French musician, Copernicus a German scholar, the World War 2-determining breaking of the Enigma code, a British achievement and attributing the fall of communism to the abolishment of the Berlin Wall versus the Polish Solidarity movement. Corrections to such omissions and skewing of Polish history and culture and thus a challenge to the Western episteme’s keystone rule of “Slavica non leguntur” (Slavic languages are not read worldwide) only began by a single pro-Polish Western historian Norman Davies, with his first historical work on Europe of 1996 to systematically include CEE nations (Korek, 2009).

Such orientalising historical Western discourses onto CEE/Poland are further amplified by sociological discourses onto the region in the West. Western social sciences, as expounded by Chakrabarty in his book “Provincializing Europe” (2000), traditionally depict the social history of non-Western societies as full of deficiencies, failures, delays and shortcomings. Specifically, non-European societies are marked as inferior due to a lack of the
cornerstones of Western European modernity, epitomized by European revolutions (industrial and religious). As Zarycki (2009) argues, such Euro-centric categorizations, treating Western models of development as an normative standard, completely elide the ancient legacy of pre-modern multi-national models of nationhood unique to the CEE region, and the “intelligentsia revolution” equivalent to its Western counterpart, specific to the Polish indigenous ethos of republican democracy and egalitarianism and conditions of captivity of Poland’s modernity. There is growing research on Western orientalist discourses on the CEE rooted in the Enlightenment, based on its constructed inferiority, weakness and civilizational backwardness (Neumann, 1999; Melegh, 2006; Burgess, 1997 - for a grossly problematic positioning of Russia in all such Western studies, see the “Russia as the West” section below). Schopflin (2000) has highlighted an imagined incompleteness of institutional social structures in the CEE and periods of discontinuity in its social history. Borocz has underlined the unilateral ascription of the lack of “civilizational competences” to Europe’s East (2006) and an essentializing predominance of corrupt informal social systems (2000) versus the largely formalistic and meritocratic social structures of the West. Finally, the CEE is represented in the Western social studies as a region of constant ethnic conflicts, tribal clashes and warring nationalisms, epitomized by the key pathologizing stereotype of Poland as nationalistic, chauvinistic, xenophobic, racist, anti-Semitic, non-tolerant and ultra-Catholic religious fundamentalist, constructed in opposition to a West based on democracy, tolerance, secularism, multiculturalism and human rights. Such orientalist discourse was perpetuated recently in the process of the Eastern enlargement of the European Union - the narrative of the necessary re-adjustment of the inherently backward Eastern candidate nations prior to their EU accession underpinning neo-imperial forms of Western domination of CEE (Borocz, 2001; Kuus, 2004). Fairclough’s (2006) critical discourse analysis of EU discourse onto CEE nations unmasks it as constituting Western-centric symbolic violence perpetrated by EU and global agents onto CEE (review of all relevant literature based on Zarycki).

Such academic discursive constructions are further compounded by orientalist literary discourse, most notably with the Russian best-selling novel “War and Peace” by Tolstoy which entrenches a view of CEE nations as lacking a national identity and thus expendable (Thompson, 2000) or the German classic writer Freytag’s literary portrayal of Poles as ignorant, wild and uncivilized in his world-renowned novel “Debit and Credit” (Surynt,
2008), both constituting imperialist literature in the Saidian Western orientalist sense. CEE orientalism is finally reinscribed in contemporary Western popular culture (particularly film) and art as a foreign land of strange customs and unpronouncable names (Korek 2009, Skorczewski 2009), as well as dominant Western anti-Polish jokes of the Polish criminal, drunk, half-wit. Simultaneously, in accord with the paradox of Modernity, the Western psyche projects a romanticized image of the Eastern European as the possibly good, devout Catholic, yet nonetheless naïve and primitive Easterner (Korek, 2009), Poland as a land of pious spirituality, historic castles, and curious Soviet architecture, all for the consumption of the Western tourist. As a result, as Lindelof (2001, quoted in Korek, 2009) sums up, CEE nations are still perceived globally as:

marginalised and patronised in a similar way, although maybe not to the same degree, as India and ‘third world’. In the ‘West’ - both in the street and in the university - Eastern Europeans are commonly treated as somewhat old-fashioned, backward and not modern, as ‘not yet’ people, to borrow an accurate term from John Stuart Mill. After the fall of Communism, Eastern European countries should ‘catch up’ with the West, both economically and politically, and socially and culturally; ‘they’ should join the European Union and NATO and become normal people - in other worlds, like ‘us’. Much is said about economic development or about how far the democratic processes in these countries have progressed. Into this way of thinking is written the automatic premise that the ‘West’ represents the apogee of the longed-for development, which is at the same time the longed-for aim of all other countries and nations. The (Western) European (late/post) modernity and (late) capitalism are presented as global values. What is also characteristic is that in the discussions about ‘Eastern Europe’, historical time is used as a measure of cultural distance. ‘They are fifty (or twenty or ten) years behind us (...). How did these countries and these people find themselves in the ‘imagined waiting-room of history’? It is after all clear that ‘Europeanism’ does not embrace (has ceased embracing?) the Eastern borderlands of the continent, namely those which for a large part of the twentieth century found themselves under Communist rule as satellites of the Soviet Union and Moscow.

Most importantly, such colonialist discourse translates itself to material colonization of CEE until today, most notably with the economic cooperation of Russia and Germany over the heads of Poles with the recent gas pipeline - in Polish indigenous thought dubbed as a second Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact - to the wholesale unilateral destruction of the Polish economy and culture now with Poland’s official membership within European structures under the EU, closely reminiscent of present neo-colonial forms of economic exploitation
and social re-adjustment of the Third World under the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.
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From Backward Peasant to Mohair Grandma - Poland’s Internal Orient

Following an investigation and illustration of the mechanism of the colonial subjugation of Poland as a whole, both past and present, a complete understanding of Poland’s present colonial situation, as reproduced in its education system, demands an exploration of the internal power dynamics within the country itself. In this section I argue that as in the case of Third World colonial and postcolonial states, external colonialism onto Poland as a whole leads to an internal colonizing project where Polish society becomes stratified into groups of power and privilege directly mirroring the hierarchical relation between the outside colonial metropolis - historically changing with Poland’s multiple colonizers - and the subjugated nation, such a social order working to the benefit of the external (neo)colonizer. Specifically, drawing on the work of Western post-colonial scholars like Fanon (1952), Said (1978) and Bhabha (1994), I apply and demonstrate the existence of a colonial elite comprador class characteristic of Third World colonies and neo-colonies in the Polish/Second World context, which maintains colonial power over Poland’s constructed internal orient on behalf of the colonial centre, despite its changing historic location - in the case of Poland: Berlin-Moscow-Vienna, to Moscow to now again Berlin/Brussels - and allows such colonial changes to be implemented within Poland, as today in the case of the westernizing education reforms operating at the service of the new Western EU center. Furthermore, continuing Goldberg’s theorization of race, contrary to traditional conceptualizations, I theorize the relation of power and domination of Poland’s present colonial elites towards its inside colony, epitomized by the Mohair Grandma as one fundamentally based on racism, replicating the essentially racist relationship of Poland’s external colonizer onto the country as a whole. Analogously to my analysis of the process of colonization of entire Poland in the preceding section, this section seeks to historicize present relations of domination within Polish society, tracing its internal fracturing to previous colonial eras of the partitions, communism and present day EU hegemony. Finally, in keeping with the methodological precepts of this study, I maintain the constant dialogic dynamics between the discursive and material aspects of past and present colonial power by demonstrating the discursive underpinning of social structures of domination, which are further reified in different historical times by representatives of dominant social powers,
including in educational institutions, albeit in slightly modified forms, further sustaining the country’s hegemonic, colonial status quo.

As a basis for theorizing the internal colonial dynamics within Polish society, I once again draw on the work of the classic “Third World” post-colonialist scholars like Bhabha (1994), Fanon (1952) and Said (1978), the two contexts bearing striking similarities. Following my theorization of the construction of Poland as a whole as a colonial mimic - as being “the same but not quite” - as a purposeful strategy of colonial policy of the (Western) external colonizer, in the preceding section, I now extend this conceptualization to interior groups within Polish society, namely what has in postcolonial discourse been termed an “elite comprador”. In his book “The Location of Culture” (1994), Bhabha, writing from an Indian context, elaborates on this “class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern - a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (Macaulay, 1835, from Bhabha, 1994, p. 87), a group of “mimic men” acting as intermediaries between the West and the local indigenous population and responsible for imparting the superior English civilization, including education, to India. Fanon (1952), speaking from an African location, further elucidated the genealogy of the local colonial elite, which, recruited from an existing native elite, contrary to the remainder of the local population, is more susceptible to external colonizing influences, due to their privileged position in society being directly dependent on such submission (in Thompson, 2010). Finally, Said (1978), in his theorization of the colonization of the Middle East by the West, highlighted the role specifically of the local Oriental intellectual elite, which facilitated the colonial subjugation of the region by the West by a re-entrenchment of Western orientalist stereotypes. Thus, based on these post-colonial thinkers, it can be seen that “Third World” colonialism was conducted via an internal “elite comprador” class of the colonized country onto its constructed internal orient of the lower classes of the local population, a phenomenon that finds direct parallel in the Polish/Second World context.

An analogous situation can be observed in Poland today with the Polish liberal pro-EU elites, which, in Bhabha’s terms, despite their Polish origins, due to their cosmopolitan mindset, have located the centre of their culture outside of Poland, in this case in the new Western EU center. As a result, it acts as a mediator between the Enlightened West and the Polish masses constructed as inferior and backward, implementing an imitative model of
development, including in the sphere of education, as described by Polish conservative philosopher and former Education Minister Legutko, modernization by photocopying of a West glorified as a superior norm to be aspired to, best epitomized by the words of the most prominent mainstream journalist in Poland: “my views are normal - European”, for which they receive material and prestige privileges from the centre. Conversely, this colonial elite stifles any indigenous Polish routes of development, pathologizing the Polish culture and its representatives as a burden, obstacle onto the road to modernity that must be removed, best encapsulated by the words of the liberal Prime Minister: “Polishness is abnormalcy”. Such a distinctive dual feature of the elite comprador, of simultaneous contempt for the indigenous masses and deference to the external colonizer has been already summarized by the great Polish romantic poet Slowacki in the partition era, attributing the fall of Poland in the 19th century to its characteristic of a “peacock and parrot of nations” - proud peacock towards its own people and imitative parrot towards the external centre.

The historical roots of the Polish colonial elite can be traced to the beginning of the colonization of Poland - to the partition era of the 19th century’s, best illustrated by the greatest national poet Mickiewicz in his national drama “Forefather’s Eve” of the time, in a scene iconic in Polish national culture of the Warsaw Salon which represents the fundamental divide within Polish society under foreign rule, featuring the prominent elite collaborating with the Russian partitioner, including the aristocrats, literati, generals who speak of poetry and balls glorifying the imperial order and occupy the centre of the stage and the Polish patriots marginalized to the sidelines, discussing the tsar’s repressions and strategies for liberating Poland. Such a basic polarization of Polish society under colonization, valid until the present time, was further summarized by Polish patriotic conservative of the time, Czartoryski, who said: “Poland has always had two parties: a Polish and anti-Polish one”, or patriotic and comprador class. However, the most decisive period for the formation of the Polish elite comprador occurred in the era of totalitarianisms of the 20th century, which, analogously to overseas colonialism, as in the case of North American Aboriginals, for example, consisted of a genocidal annihilation of the indigenous Polish elite by Russian communists, in collaboration with German Nazis, under the secret Ribbentrop-Molotow Pact of 1939 at the outset of World War Two, symbolized by the Katyn crimes of 1940, followed by half a century of Soviet social engineering - of persecution and
marginalization of Polish patriotic circles, epitomized by the “Cursed Soldiers”, followed by an artificial promotion of a ruling communist class in Polish society, known as “nomenklatura”. Following the fall of communism, in Poland’s transformation to the West, a key characteristic of the present Polish colonial elite, in differentiation to “Third World” post/neo-colonies, is its re-gearing to an ideology of Western liberal democracy, while maintaining its post-communist roots. This elite is thus demystified in Polish indigenous thought as a post/neo-communist establishment/system/salon, its conversion facilitated by an ideological transition of the West to Leftism/neo-Marxism, denounced by Polish patriots as a pink version of its red Soviet predecessor, progressing since the Frankfurt School of the 1920s and materializing with the cultural revolution in the West of the 1970s. In addition to the post-communist elite, which exchanged its political power during communism for economic privileges in a process known as “propertisation of the nomenklatura” accompanying Poland’s predatory neo-liberal transformation, the present Polish elite comprador consists of a new liberal elite which derives its power and privilege from the present capitalistic socio-economic order, the two working in tandem to serve foreign interests and undermine Polishness.

As in the case of overseas post/neo-colonies, in addition to political and economic elites, intellectual elites - in Poland/CEE, due to the specific subaltern socio-historical context, named the “intelligentsia” - form an important constituent of the colonial comprador class in Poland, replicating external orientalist, anti-polonist discourse onto social groups constructed as Poland’s internal orient, and thus facilitating the colonial subjugation of the country as a whole. Thus beginning in the partition era, a fraction of the Polish intelligentsia colluded with the colonial project of Poland’s external partitioners, reproducing otherizing discourses originated in Western Europe onto Poland/CEE (discussed in the preceding section) of an anarchic Poland unable to govern itself, transferring them onto social classes perceived to be in opposition to Enlightenment ideas of progress - the backward Catholic peasantry and the selfish aristocracy (Thompson, 2010). Such discursive denigration legitimized the material persecution, including physical annihilation, deportation (most infamously to Siberia), expropriation of members of these groups, most notably the largely nobility-based insurgents of the November 1830 and January 1863 anti-tsarist national uprisings. Notably, the essentializing homogenization of these groups constructed as anti-
modern and backward proceeded even if fractions of these groups did in fact embrace Western models of modernization (as adapted to the Polish context), as epitomized by the Constitution of May 3, 1791 - an achievement of the patriotic part of the Polish nobility, constituting the first modern constitution in Europe, up to today Poland’s greatest pride. Furthermore, such colonialist discourse continued in the communist era, where anti-Polish discourse of the Soviet external colonizer of a backward, bourgeois, oppressive, racist, capitalistic Poland were replicated by a local communist elite, similarly targeting Polish patriotic peasants (who refused to give up their land for collectivisation) and notably the patriotic usually nobility-derived military class of the Home Army soldiers, labelling them as bandits, fascists, collaborators of Hitler (even though they actively fought against Nazi fascism), dark forces of reaction etc. Such discourses both reflect and further reify the material violence from the socio-economic degradation to the viciously brutal torture (most notably in Soviet prisons and the Gulag death camps) and genocidal extermination of representatives of these groups, including an intended posthumous defamation of their legacy and desecration of bodies, epitomized by their mass nameless, sewage-strewn pit-graves up to today covered with the luxurious granite monuments of their communist executioners (epitomized by the symbolic Warsaw “Meadow”).

Today, under Western EU domination, a similar discursive orientalization of groups epitomizing Polish patriotism can be observed, most notably with the constructed “Mohair Grandma” category, reproducing orientalist rhetoric by the West onto Poland as a whole. Thus Western discourses of a culturally backward, morally traditionalist and religiously conservative Poland become extended to a stereotypical group of Polish patriots, uniformly labelled as “old, un-educated, rural” and symbolically degraded to a sub-human, objectified category of a “Mohair beret” symbolizing the head covering of the cliched old female patriot, which clustered around the Catholic Radio Maryja fortress, clings to her parochial views and anti-modern traditions and thus impedes the road to progress, thus replicating a key colonial strategy of the dehumanization and objectification of the colonized subject “(colonization = thingification)” (Cesaire, 1972). Continuing Goldberg’s theorization of culture as race, where culture includes “language group, religion, group habits, norms or customs; a typical style of behaviour, dress, cuisine, music, literature and art” (Goldberg, 1997), I argue the discrimination of “Mohairs” in Poland today is essentially racist, based on the construction of
the Mohair as an immutably, biologically backward race - externally marked by their dress, speech and actions stemming from their religious/cultural values - a pre-modern dinosaur species that must naturally die out, or be expunged to make way for the new superior “young, educated, urban” European(ized) stock. That this is an artificial racial category designed to disempower those labeled with such marking in an ideology of progressivism is further proven by the fact that anybody manifesting Polish patriotic views is automatically thrust into the old, uneducated, rural, Catholic, anti-modern Mohair classification, despite their actual or self-ascribed identities, including young, educated, urban, not necessarily religious and/or actually embracing the West/EU/modernization (but on equitable/indigenous terms). Such discursive denigration of the “Mohairs” translates itself to material violation of these people, from a marginalization to active persecution of patriotic circles through constant lawsuits, blocking of the Polish indigenous voice epitomized by the Catholic TV Trwam, sabotaging of any patriotic initiatives - most notably, the brutal pacification of the national mourning on the main city square Krakowskie Przedmiescie with state violence directly following the Smolensk plane crash.

Polish critical sociologist, Fedyszak-Radziejowska (2010, 2012) traces the historical evolution of the Mohair Grandma category in modern Polish post-transition society, locating its roots to the pre-EU accession ignorant, backward, pre-modern peasant/agricultural worker which had to be re-gearued onto the road to (Western) (post)modernity prior to joining the EU. Interestingly, Zarycki (2011) here notes the pathologisation of this social group in the early stages of Poland’s transformation by the Western liberal discourse as homo sovieticus, “losers of transformation”, heirs to the postcommunist mental legacy of “civilizational incompetence”, moral depravity and provincial mindset (see for example Buchowski, 2006), the homo sovieticus label partially persisting as a marker of backwardness to the current Mohair conservatives (despite their stark anti-communist stance). Notably, the overlap of the various modernizing projects Poland has been subjected to historically reveals their hierarchization in their relative level of moderness - from the present supreme post-modern Western liberal democracy, to the preceding modern Russian communism (previously constructed as superior), to the completely pre-modern Polish idigeniety (derided by the first two as in fact anti-modern). In the latter stage of Poland’s transformation, with the shifting of Poland’s political scene from a Soviet- to a Western-centered orientation, Poland’s internal
orient shifted to the stereotypical “Mohair Grandma” of today, the anti-Semitic, religious-fundamentalist, ultra-Catholic, xenophobic, nationalist, chauvinist, anti-EU conservative, her backwardness stemming this time not from a post-communist mental legacy, but from the parochial indigenous Polish culture. The discursive stigmatization of this social group intensified with its politicization proceeding from 2005 with the consolidation of the conservative camp under the Law and Justice party and their (short-lived) victory in the presidential and parliamentary elections, epitomized by the massive liberal “hide your Grandma’s ID” anti-Mohair election propaganda (so as to prevent her from voting for the conservatives), sustaining the original rural-inflected language like cattle, slaughter, Law and Justice as the party of the villagers. The persecution of the Polish conservative camp at this time is best illustrated by the vicious media campaign directed at the leader of the Law and Justice party, later Polish president Lech Kaczynski, with degrading discourses of the backward midget, uncouth potato, stupid duck etc., which, contrary to indigenous Polish Catholic custom of never speaking negatively of the dead, continued unabated despite his brutal death in the Smolensk plane crash of 2010. Finally, the most recent transmutation of the Polish internal other took the form of the symbolic Catholic “defenders of the cross”, commemorating those perished in the Smolensk catastrophe on the main square in Poland’s capital, directly in the aftermath of the crash and every month thereafter, villainized in dominant discourse as a Smolensk mob, Smolensk sect, Smolensk nation. The dominant discourse in Poland surrounding the Smolensk plane crash itself further sustained such anti-patriotic discourse, criminalizing the Polish plane crew as alcoholics and irrational suicide-seekers and their widows and other patriots pleading for the basic truth regarding the death of their loved ones/country leaders as unrightfully demanding and fanatic conspiracy theorists disrupting official (Russo-centric) explanations.

Importantly, such orientalising, anti-Polish discourse, replicated by inner Polish liberal circles centered around the largest daily newspaper in Poland - “Electoral Gazette” headed by the post-communist turned liberal Michnik, one of the main architects of Poland’s post-communist transformation, is clearly demystified in Polish indigenous thought as a pseudo-elite, lumpenelite, or from the Russian “obrazovanshchina” - who may have an educational diploma but lack the indigenous Polish ethos of solidarity and service to the Polish people, and have unrightfully usurped such a title, the real Polish “intelligentsia”
deemed to have been physically exterminated and marginalized following World War Two (Gella, 2001). Such discourses against the Polish people were further sustained in the process of Poland’s transformation, best epitomized by Michnik’s telling line of the dangerous wild “Polish mob from Jasna Gora” (the spiritual capital of Poland), which both reflected and reproduced the material removal of the true, democratic representatives of the 10 million-strong people’s Solidarity movement with an agenda of national liberation, discredited as anarchic, fascist, radical, utilizing the violence and bloody terror of martial law. This group, known to Polish patriots as the “First Solidarity” was usurped by the “Second Solidarity”, the Enlightened self-nominated elites with superior liberal slogans of individual human rights, which sat at the Round Table and manipulated Poland’s transformation above the heads of Poles, in collaboration with the communists, thus sustaining the fundamental marginalization of the Polish indigenous faction into the new, “post-independence” Poland, maintaining the continuity of the Polish colonial order (Nowak, 2012). The similarity of the discourse in communism and today under Western liberal democracy have been noted by many Polish conservative scholars, including Legutko (2010), who notes the starkly parallel strategies of the vilification of Polish patriots as either dangerous or insane, as a means of their political removal, thus proving the common underpinning ideological roots of Enlightenment modernizing projects of both systems. Whereas under communism, epitomized by the Soviet tanks, Poles were to be, in the words of main Polish Marxist philosopher Kronski, to be expunged from their primitive Polish ways by the force of arms, today it is via softer cultural forms that the backward Pole must be re-educated to a new, now (post)modern “reality”. Finally, in my discussion of the hierarchization of interior groups of Polish society, it is important to emphasize that while my analysis centers culture and political views, according to the tenets of anti-colonial theory, it includes all interlocking levels of social exclusion, including gender, class, ability etc., producing a holistic analysis of oppression in Polish society.
References


**Russia as the West - Poland as Space of Two Interlocking Colonialisms**

Finally, in order to complete a full picture of Poland’s colonial status quo, as manifested in its education microsite specifically, it is crucial to include Russia in the analysis. While the focus of this thesis lies in Western colonialism/imperialism/hegemony, the purpose of this section is to demonstrate the intricate relationship between Eastern and Western hegemony, how the two synergize, work with and through each other, mutually reinforcing and playing off of each other. In this section I uncloak Russia from its dominant conceptualizations as an innocent victim of and/or anti-imperial liberator from Western imperialism - seen as the only existent global hegemon and implicite it as a colonial oppressor, operating specifically in a Western-style ideologically, to equal, or even supersede Western hegemony. Rather than situate Russia as the poor inferiorized Other of the West, innocently homogenized with all other small/medium-sized CEE nations, as represented in common discourse (Russian, Western and Polish), I argue Russia has, since the Enlightenment acted as a hegemonic Western Self, utilizing Western utopian ideologies of progress to further its own imperialistic agenda onto its own constructed Enlightenment continental others, such as the CEE. It has done so either in accord with the West, as in the case of the 19th century partitions, or in opposition to it, as in the case of 20th century communism and increasingly today with Putin’s neo-Soviet “New Russia”, in both cases operating within a global hegemonic consensus dividing world power and civilising duties between the two hegemons over countries deemed disposable, backward and inferior, requiring tutelage from patrons either East and/or West. The first to notice the CEE region’s doubly colonized status was Hungarian scholar Totosy de Zepetnek, dubbing it the specific term of “in-between peripherality” (Deltcheva, 1998). In comparison to the “Third World”, which receives colonialism only from one hegemon, the West, the CEE region is unique in that it constitutes an in-between zone of two overlapping colonialisms - East and West, which rather than acting in isolation, operate in tandem to the double detriment of CEE nations located in the middle. Importantly, it is via the study of these in-between lands like Poland that the relationship between the two intersecting global imperialisms can be discerned.

As mentioned in the “Postcolonial Debate” section above, Russia constitutes the main obstacle in recognizing these lands as (post)colonial, for allegedly methodological, but as has
been revealed, for deeply ideological reasons (Marxism, Russo-Western-internal Polish). The attempts to demystify Russia as a Western-style imperial hegemon via post-colonial theory have thus far been unsuccessful, the discourse being appropriated by a Russo-centric perspective to either exonerate Russia as a victim of Western imperialism or of Russian internal colonization (Etkind) and/or even as a global anti-colonial liberator (Nowak, 2003). The purpose of this thesis is to clearly denounce Russia as a perpetrator versus victim of colonialism, by reorienting abstract Western Marxist postcolonial theorizing to an Anti-colonial Polish-centric lens rooted in the Polish lived experience of oppression from both sides, East and West, which in fact recognizes Russian colonialism as comparatively much more brutal than Western imperialism, especially given its perfidious ability to mask itself so successfully up to now. This thesis builds on Thompson, who with her groundbreaking book “Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism” (2000) broke this Russo-Western-Polish Marxist hegemonic silence and pioneered a critique of Russian colonialism (in both its tsarist and Soviet incarnations) using a Saidian literature/discourse-based methodology, grounded in a Polish indigenous (conservative) perspective. By including Russia in global colonial theorizing, this thesis expands (post)colonial studies to the entire Second World- a giant sphere of the globe thus far excluded from modern theory (Cavanagh, 2004). As in my preceding analysis of Western colonialism, and in keeping with the theoretical precepts of this study, my discussion of Eastern colonialism encompasses a constant dynamics between the past and present (from partitions, to communism to present day Russia), and between the discursive and material aspects of colonial power (the details of which have been discussed in the preceding “CEE as Europe’s Other” section).

The close interconnection between the two hegemons East and West has been noted by Cheaure (2010) who describes the relationship between the two parties on a deep psychological level as one of her article’s titular “infinite mirrorings”, Russian identity being constructed never in isolation, but always in intimate relation to the West, whether in accord or opposition to it (even though she replicates the common misconception of Russia as the West’s subordinate other). This intricate relationship between the two hegemons, as noted by Thompson (2000), has been underscored from the Enlightenment era by the dynastic ties between the two spheres, the Russian tsarist dynasty bearing direct familial relation to the British royal rulers and Catherine the Great of Russia bearing German ancestry, for example.
However, as Thompson, indigenous Polish specialist on Russia notes, while initially Russia’s identity may have been established through the Western imperial gaze as that of an orientalised inferior other, the unwanted bastard child of the West exiled to the inferior eastern regions of the globe, for the vast majority of its history, Russia has in reality asserted itself as not only as a victim, but an expansive colonial aggressor, en par or in fact rivalling Western supremacy on the globe. In other words, rather than passively accepting its imposed objectified status of a poor Eastern other of the West, as the dominant discourse would have it, for most of its existence Russia has fought back firmly to play the role of either an equal Western self, imposing, in tandem with the West, Western-rooted imperialist utopian projects onto its own constructed others in the Eastern part of the globe, or in fact a superior Western super-Self, embracing its Asiatic otherness (including non-Western-derived, eg. Mongolian practices) to build in reality an alternate rival civilization and eventually level it back against a now inferiorized West, in aspiration for complete global hegemony.

Thus, during the partition era, Russia adopted a Western identity (symbolized by Peter the Great’s radical westernizing reforms) and then used Western Enlightenment ideology of progress - epitomized by Catherine the Great’s personal befriending and utilization of leading Western Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire to subjugate its constructed Enlightenment backward others in the CEE like Poland via the partitions, acting in partnership with the West as the purveyor of the luminosity of the Enlightenment ie. Western civilization on the West’s behalf in the eastern-more parts of the globe. Conversely, during communism (and increasingly today in Putin’s neo-Soviet Russia - following a brief period of westernization directly after the fall of the Soviet Union), Russia internalized a Western counter-ideology - epitomized by Lenin’s personal journey to Western Europe and the appropriation of inner Western oppositional philosophy of Marxism - in order to level it now against the West itself, to construct and administer to its CEE subalterns a civilization superior to the West itself, a supreme Eastern anti-oppressive spiritual force that can serve as an anti-dote to an oppressive, demoralized, rotten West (countering capitalism with communism, materialism-spirituality, nationalism-supranationalism etc.). At present, due to the West becoming increasingly Marxist - beginning with the Frankfurt School of the 1920s in the USA to the materialization of Marxist philosophy into material reality in the West with the cultural revolution of the 1970s, the two hegemons finally join hands on an ideological
commonality of post-Marxism/post-communism, fulfilling a Cold War scenario using peaceful means, in a Eurasian project of a union between the East and the West, on Russia’s terms, as has been noted by Polish indigenous voices (eg. Nowak 2003, Szonert-Binienda, 2014). Notably, for Poland ironically this means a second wave of communism today, the new Western postmodern soft pink version superseding the preceding outmoded hard red Soviet one, now coming from both the East and West in collusion, hence all the greater facility on the part of Polish people in recognizing the new Western influence as (communist-style) oppression (not yet visible to some naive Westeners).

Noteworthily, in comparison, other subaltern CEE nations like Poland have fallen victim to the West’s imperial orientalization as poor others of the West, constructed as colonial mimics, “the same but not quite”, in-between countries (as discussed in detail in the “CEE as Europe’s’ Other section above), neither fully Western nor Eastern as a deliberate strategy of Western colonial power to subjugate and perpetually continue to subjugate these nations, using Western ideologies for anti-imperial self-defense purposes, as in the case of the Enlightenment epitomized in the patriotic 3rd May Constitution of 1791 or Romantic Messianistic ideology of “Poland as the Christ of Europe” embodied in events like the anti-Russian November Uprising of 1830. Russia conversely has appropriated Western discourse, its ascribed in-between status to its own advantage, embracing either a Western identity (as in the time of partitions), to in tandem with the West participate in imparting Westernization to the world, or asserting its Eastern otherness (under communism and today’s increasing neocommunism) to build an alternate civilization and to now in fact otherize - Occidentalize the West as inferior, constantly morphing and re-morphing between the two identities over historical time, sometimes merging the two at the same time, in either case realizing its imperial status, in the common spirit of Western Enlightenment-rooted utopias. Groundbreakingly, such a view of Russia directly challenges the widespread conception of Russia as a passive victim of the West, homogenized with all the other CEE nations (eg. Neumann), revealing it to be an active agent of its fate, able to self-define on its own terms, strategically utilizing the West and maneuvering its identity in relation to it, always for its own imperial purposes and even daring to boldly reverse the hegemonic dynamic imposed on it by the West and attempt to subjugate the West itself, all the while maintaining a cloak of its own innocence. Such a perfidious positioning of Russia has caused Thompson (2000) to
call Russia a Western-style colonial criminal par excellence, perpetrating colonial violence at times more destructive than the West and yet simultaneously elusively slipping out of the purview of the Western gaze and fudging it to the point of a sanitization of its crimes, successfully remaining an untouched blind spot on the Western psyche up to today.

Such Russian imperial strategy and discourse is summarized by indigenous Polish historian of Russia Nowak in his article “Poor Empire or a Second Rome” (2003) which encapsulates these two oscillating incarnations of the Russian empire. As Nowak reminds, Russia as a westernized “poor empire” acting on the West’s terms is for Russian imperialism always a secondary option. Ideally, Russia’s goal is always a fully-fledged empire, a proud “Second Rome” tapped in directly to the alternate source of supreme civilization (albeit still Western derived, as Cheaure stresses), ideologically superior to the decaying West, the falling First Rome, as has been the case with the ideologies of Byzantinism, Romantic pan-Slavism and communism Russia has drawn on historically to build a rival competitive empire alongside the West (or even “Third Rome”, mobilizing the entire Third World against the First in an attempt to monopolise world hegemony). Nowak (2003) notes these strategies are usually utilized by Russia simultaneously, as was the case in the era of the partitions when Catherine the Great under the superficial cloak of implementing westernization to its subjugated subalterns, underneath pursued a deep plan of building an Eastern empire directly drawing on ancient Greek Byzantine traditions, a project systematically blocked by a wary West of the time.

Russia’s dual hegemonic identity is best epitomized by figures like Catherine the Great herself who ostensibly deferred to Western civilization via correspondence with its representative Voltaire but internally took pride in her Eastern heritage, epitomized by her personal conversion to Russian Orthodoxy or Putin today, who while superficially complying with Western values, conducts an anti-Western neo-Soviet, Eastern project, ultimately looking to overtake the West in global hegemony on his own terms.

Crucially, the ideological collusion between the Eastern and Western hegemons, rooted in Western Enlightenment utopias, translates itself to a physical collaboration between the two, from the 19th century three acts of partition conducted in agreement between Russia and the West (via Prussia - today’s Germany and Austro-Hungary), to the alliance between the ideologically closely related (even though nominally opposite) 20th century totalitarian
utopias of German Nazism and Russian communism sealed via the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (1939) - known to Poles as the fourth partition of Poland, to the establishment of the post-World War 2 order at Yalta (1945) with the Big Three, representatives of the West (USA and UK) and Russia cooperating together to divide the world between the two spheres of influence cemented by the Iron Curtain, to today’s postmodern Eurasian union of a post-communist Russia with a hegemonic post-Marxist EU (mostly Germany), especially underpinned economically with a gas energy partnership, seen as a second Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact in Polish indigenous thought, or “Russo-German condominium” ie. yet another partition of Poland between the East and West.

The best evidence of Western-Russian hegemonic collusion today is the structure of Slavic studies departments in the West, which as the name already implies, homogenizes Russia with its colonized CEE subalterns like Poland under the same “Slavic” category and relegates them to the role of a marginal addition to Russia. As noted by Polish indigenous Slavic studies scholars like Thompson and Skorczewski, as relics of Cold War centres of Sovietology, they systematically reflect a Russo-centric perspective centering, glorifying and vindicating Russia’s view and culture - from the classical Russian 19th century literary canon, to Soviet totalitarian and post-Soviet hegemonic discourse- and excluding, skewing and silencing the voice of Russia’s CEE subalterns like Poland. Thompson (2000) recounts the numerous manifestations of Russian imperial discourse in the academy (and popular discourse) which on the one hand heighten Russian victories and sanitize its crimes, while downplaying/pathologizing Polish/CEE successes and fabricating/exaggerating its wrongdoings. Most prominent examples include the complete erasure of Soviet crimes of genocidal proportions symbolized by the Katyn massacre of 1940 or a silencing of Soviet-Nazi cooperation under the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 1939, while up-playing Russia’s role as “liberator” from Western hegemons like Napoleon in the 19th century and Hitler in the 20th. On the other hand, achievements in Polish history are distorted as either unnecessary or criminal as in the case of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 (which although geared against Nazi Germany, was a symbolic act of salvaging Poland from the approaching Soviet “occupation” ie. colonization from the East), the Battle of Warsaw of 1920 - known in Polish indigenous thought as the “Miracle at the Vistula” - a miraculous and world-changing battle in self-defense of Poland and, by extension, Western civilization from the inundation of the “red
plague” of communism advancing from the East - criminalized as a deliberate genocidal act directed against Russian military officers - a perfidious reversal of the reality of Katyn, to a villanization of the Polish diplomatic excursion to the Kremlin of 1613 as an aggressive war-like endeavor, underscored today with a celebratory elevation of its abolishment to the status of a Russian national holiday. Most importantly, such age-old Russian imperial discourse is blindly regurgitated by Western academia and reflected in the physical political (in)action of the West towards Russia’s wrongdoings (eg. up to today blocking a full legal investigation of Katyn as a crime against humanity - e.g Shonet-Binienda initiative in American Congress), revealing the West’s support, collusion and complicity with Russian hegemony (and thus its crimes) and cementing Poland’s/CEE’s colonized subjugated status around the world. Such Russo-Western academic collaboration is also reflected in today’s post-colonial studies departments in the West which notoriously exonerate and glorify Russia at the expense of Poland/CEE, epitomizing the East-West intersection today based on a common ideology of Marxism, as has been noted.

Such Russo-Western global hegemony is finally completed by the dominant discourse within Poland today which merely replicates Russian-originated, and Western-echoed Russian imperial rhetoric, delegitimizing Polishness and validating the perspective of the two hegemons. Polish hegemonic discourse today most prominently relates to the country’s most recent communist past, fundamentally relying on a criminalization and vilification of Polish Home Army heroes from the anti-communist Polish Underground, known in Polish dominant discourse as the “Cursed Soldiers” but to Polish patriots rather as the “Unbreakable Soldiers” symbolised by Witold Pilecki, (patriotic) Poland’s greatest anti-communist (and anti-Nazi) national hero with a concomitant justification and glorification of Polish communist oppressors, epitomized by the last leader of communist Poland, responsible for the massacres of Martial Law he personally imposed in 1981, Wojciech Jaruzelski, extolled to the moment of his recent honorable state funeral in 2014. This hegemonic dynamic within Polish post/neo-communist society today is epitomized by the blocked and denigrated in Polish dominant discourse Polish indigenous endeavors on the Laczka cemetery in Poland’s capital Warsaw aiming to excavate, physically and morally out of the depths of oblivion and defamation, Polish patriotic soldiers hurled in anonymous mass death pits lying buried under the pristine marble tombstones of their communist executioners,
towering in glory above them up to today, together with the thousands of other untouchable post-communist statues dotting the landscape of Polish cities up to today, celebrating the glory of Poland’s communist “liberator”. In the material sphere, the most tangible and eviscerating occurrences in Poland today testifying to Poland’s subservient status to Russian neo-hegemony is the subjection of the case of the Polish presidential plane catastrophe in Smolensk of 2010 completely to Russian control with its blatant violations and lies/mystifications, in complete violation of Polish sovereign interests.

Importantly, Russian communism - constituting Poland’s most recent experience of colonization, prior to the present Western one discussed in this thesis - forms an intricate link to Poland’s postcommunist transformation to the present Western post-modern hegemonic system, the legacy of Soviet communism, the red homo sovieticus residue (notably transferred from the absolved Russian hegemon to the CEE subalterns) forming the necessary prerequisite to impose the present order of a Western form of Marxism in a new, improved pink version under the EU. This once again underscores the constant dynamic inter-relationship between the two hegemons East and West, which although in constant competition over the superiority of their modernizing projects, overall converge in their orientalising and then “civilizing” efforts onto these cross-border regions. Indeed, as Thompson (2000) has noted, there are now even official records of Russia’s and the entire Eastern Bloc’s re-gearing to westernization following the end of the Cold War known as “perestroika”, being engineered from within with the knowledge and support of the West. With the increasing transformation of the West itself to Marxism since the Cold War, as has been mentioned, in a post-Cold War world the two hegemons, East and West can now work hand in hand, now rooted in the common ideology of post/neo-Marxism/post-modernism with a main agenda to decentralize using pro-minority, anti-nationalist discourse which unilaterally targets traditional national formations in CEE like Poland (while notably, omitting hegemonic Western European nation-states like Germany or Russia itself, deemed post-nationalist), fuelling local regionalisms (eg. Slask) and thus aiming to dismantle countries like Poland from within. Thus the discourse we hear today from the West about Poland’s alleged oppressiveness of its minorities, nationalism/chauvinism/fascism/anti-Semitism etc. is a direct recycling of recent half-a-century-old Russian communist anti-Polish discourse used to discredit and subjugate Poland. Thus we can see how critique of
Western hegemony on Poland, performed from standard inner Western postcolonial Marxist standpoints, falls directly into the hands of Russian imperial discourse, working with Russia synergistically today to (neo)colonize Poland.

This reminds yet again of the sensitivity of conducting critique of hegemony in a region in-between two hegemons where critique of one cannot lead to exoneration of the other purporting to offer liberation from the first. It also reminds of the tragedy of regions located in-between two hegemons like Poland thrust into a deadlock positioning between two oppressors, where, as Cavanagh (2004) has noted, the question is not between freedom and captivity but the subject existence at the side of the lesser of the two evils. For Poland, due to its long-standing affinity to the West since its inception and great wariness of Russia due to the lived experience of extreme Russian brutality encapsulated in the indigenous Polish term of “cursed, inhuman land”, as Conrad, 19th century indigenous Polish writer and “knower of the Polish soul”, personal witness to imperialism of both East and West said, Poland chooses to claim sovereignty under the wing of the West, which this thesis respects by denouncing hitherto masked Russian imperialism and directing critique at Western hegemony and not Western tradition. It also reminds of the complexity of the situation of regions in between like Poland where what is taken by abstract decontextualized postcolonialist theorists to be orientalization of its Eastern neighbours (eg. Zarycki, Janion, Fiut) is merely an indigenously-resourceful self-defensive survival strategy, an anti-oppressive negotiation of the identity of countries trying to navigate their very existence between two overlapping hegemons, rather than a purported aggressive imperialism in a Western sense on their part. In other words, Polish indigenous discourse calls Russia “wild”, “Asiatic”, “barbaric” not as a discursive means of subjugation of Russia, but completely oppositely, uses the leverage of Western discourse - a patron it has always self-identified with, to defend itself against what is experienced in reality as a much greater brutality of Russian imperialism. (Note the difference with Russia again who uses Western discourse for aggressive empire-building versus Poland/CEE for its defensive self-preservation). Thus, rather than Poland/CEE acting as a Western Self as the vanguard of the imperial West to colonise Russia, as Russian imperial discourse (now in postcolonial garb) would have it, it is Russia together with the West that synergize their hegemonic Selves to doubly colonize Poland/CEE.
In conclusion, as has been shown, Russia and West work with and through each other to realize their imperial projects - Russia using the West, whether via the West’s current or oppositional ideologies and the West sanctifying such an order either out of naive ideological fascination/support of Eastern “liberatory” projects or fear of them in the pragmatic spirit of appeasement/not provoking the “Russian bear”, a global hegemon the West must reckon with - the two working in tandem to co-conduct global hegemony, both to the double detriment of CEE nations located in between. As Vladimir Bukovsky (2011), former Soviet dissident concluded: “In the 73 years of the existence of the communist system (the most recent imperial incarnation of Russia - my insert), the interconnections between the West and the East were much bigger and deeper than any one of us suspected”. Hence in analyzing Western hegemony that is the focus of this thesis, it is important to include the Russian one and encompass their closely interlocking complex nature, as this section of the thesis has attempted to briefly outline.
References


Cheaure, E. (2010). Infinite mirrorings: Russia and Eastern Europe as the West’s “Other”. In B. Korte, E. Ulrike Pirker, & S. Helff (Eds.), Facing the East in the West: Images of Eastern Europe in British Literature, Film and Culture (pp. 25-41). Amsterdam: Rodopi.


3. Re-formation or De-formation of Education?

Having illustrated the colonial dynamics operating within Polish neo-colonial society historically and today in the previous chapter, the aim of this chapter is to argue and demonstrate the specific role of the present reformed education system of Poland, as a subset of Polish society, in producing and sustaining these relations. I historicize these colonial acts in Polish education throughout the multiple phases of Poland’s colonization over the past 200 years, from the partitions, to Nazism, communism, highlighting their continuity with today’s processes of colonial education under EU liberalism. Most importantly, in accord with this thesis’ overall aim of inducting Poland/CEE into the global discourse of colonialism, I draw parallels between Poland and colonization under classical Western empires, most notably the British (eg. India) and Canadian colonial education policy towards its native populations. As outlined in the Introduction chapter, the reformed Polish literature curriculum is investigated via a CDA methodology, articulated by Fairclough and Van Dijk, which conceptualizes the literary canon as discourse and places it against the backdrop of society via CDA’s social model of discourse, specifically utilizing Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model of CDA.

The British understood very well that education is a key technology of colonial subjugation. The overt goal of British colonial education policy was, as encapsulated in Lord Macaulay’s infamous 1835 “Minute to Parliament on Indian Education” to produce the ideal colonial subjects in the form of “mimic men” - “a class of person Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, in morals, and in intellect”, as outlined in Bhabha (1994) (cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2000, p. 140). British imperial education was fundamentally based on contempt for indigenous learning, orientalised as inferior and an uncritical Euro-centric reproduction of English art, learning, culture and values, instilled as the universal norm to be aspired to. As Macaulay also noted, colonization of the mind was most strategically achieved through the teaching of English literature. As Gauri Viswanathan (quoted in Ashcroft et al., 2000, p. 117), specialist on English literary study in colonial India underscores: “the humanistic functions traditionally associated with the study of literature - for example, the shaping of character or the development of the aesthetic sense or the disciplines of ethical thinking - can be vital in the process of sociopolitical control”. Thus, the English literary canon functioned as the ideal hegemonic vehicle for imperial power,
sanitizing the material violence underpinning colonialism, while extolling the literary heroes and idolized values of the West, and implicitly derogating and marginalizing those of the natives. As Viswanathan concludes: “The strategy of locating authority in these texts all but effaced the sordid history of colonialist expropriation, material exploitation, and class and race oppression behind European world dominance ... the English literary text functioned as a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state” (p. 117). Such an insight is further reiterated in Norrel London’s (quoted in Kanu, 2006) concluding remark on the crucial role of humanism in British colonial education applicable across the whole British empire:

The heroes exalted in the history books, the norms and mores presented for inculcation (...), and the standards of excellence and gallantry paraded for emulation (as depicted in the story of Odysseus and the Cyclops, for example) were contrivances for the colonial purpose. Emphasis on these, to the exclusion of all others, was an attempt to obliterate the existential past of the colonized and to present an alternative and preferred view of reality... The official pronouncement meant that students did not have a voice, nor were they encouraged to develop one. They were the ‘voiceless’ objects in a socio-political sense, a position which gestures in the direction of Gayatri Spivak’s (1988) concern: ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ (p. 10).

Such negation of indigenous voice and literature, and a blind, uncritical reproduction of the Euro-centric discourse of English literature was key in establishing colonial “mimic men”. For example, Said in one of his books notes his observation from one of his visits to an Arab country, where an inspection of the university curriculum reveals a children’s reading list to comprise literature of their former English colonizers, Jane Austen and George Eliot versus their indigenous writers (Thompson, personal correspondence). Such (neo)colonial education finds direct reflection in the reformed Polish literature curriculum and practice, expunged from indigenous Polish content and injected with the canon of the Western European (neo)colonizer, as will be demonstrated below.

Importantly, as Bhabha (1994) also notes, the purposeful aim of colonial discourse was never to (re)produce exact replicas of the colonizer, perfect mimics, but rather a subject that is “almost the same, but not quite” (p. 86). This becomes important in the Polish context, as - as mentioned in the previous chapter - Poland, through the post-Enlightenment Western gaze has been produced from the outset as the semi-Orient, as within Europe (spatially and
temporally) but not (yet) fully European, on the scale of development, in contrast with the full Orient, defined by complete difference, located in the Western colonial imagination at the antipodes of civilization. As also argued in the previous chapter, such an in-between status of Poland/other CEE nations, which are similar enough to be reformable, yet different enough to warrant constant reform, paradoxically renders it, more than “Third World” colonies, susceptible to continual projects of civilization/modernization/transformation, the goal in this transition zone thus becoming an endless reinscription of in-betweeness. While Bhabha’s focus lies in the subversive potential of such “partial reform”, I expound the self-serving colonial strategy behind such a move of colonial power to establish and maintain the colonized in a perpetual state of in-betweeness, always leaving a remainder of difference to self-define off as superior (Smith, 2005). Such ambivalence of colonial education is illustrated in Charles Grant’s religious education (cited in Ashcroft et al., 2000), hybridizing (a blind regurgitation of) Christian doctrine with Indian divisive caste practices, as a pure version of the Western religion would make the subjects too equal and thus threatening to the colonizer. This concept finds direct application in the case of the Polish education reform which, rather than instilling a full version of Europeanness, establish a superficial imitation, an empty semblance of the European (while in reality strong Western nationalisms persist unabated - the English continuing to read their Shakespeare, the Germans - Faust etc.), while reducing the only allowed remainder of Polishness to its tokenized/ folklorized/commodified version, established through the Western EU (liberal/multicultural/capitalist) gaze. Notably, Poland’s indigenous self-identity also encompasses a hybridity of indigienousness and Europeanness, however, conversely to the double dilution of the hegemonic hybrid, both aspects are appropriated towards indigenous ends, best epitomized historically by the Constitution of 3rd May of 1791, blending a strong Polishness with elements of the Western Enlightenment, re-geared to further strengthen this Polishness, or today’s Polish patriots’- Euro-realists’ endeavors looking to fuse traditional Polishness with pre-hegemonic EU roots (versus hegemonic liberal Euro-(over)enthusiasts seeking to, by embracing the “post-nationalist” EU construct, become “more English than the English”, in Bhabha’s terms).

One of the starkest examples that bears striking parallel to the Polish education reform is found in the colonial policy of Britain’s neo-colonial heir - the Canadian state towards “its” Aboriginal people, best epitomized by the government-funded but Church-
operated Aboriginal residential schools. These colonial educational institutions were aimed at the assimilation/reformation/transformation of Aboriginal children (still deemed reformable, conversely to the adult Aboriginal population slated for genocidal annihilation and cultural/legal extermination) to make them suitable for white Euro-Canadian society. The complete nature of the retooling process of these schools, from the physical segregation of the Aboriginal students from their indigenous environment deemed corruptable, to the physical transformation of the “dirty Indian savages” to hair-trimmed, Western-clothed “civilized” Europeans, to an inculcation of European languages, cultural and religious values and Western capitalist modes of thought and activity, with an attendant brutal expunging of Indigenous languages, culture, knowledges and ways of knowing via the Euro-centric school knowledge and practices, has caused analysts to call them “total institutions” (eg. Chrisjohn, 2006). The overt goal of Canadian governmental policy towards Aboriginals achieved strategically through these schools was, in the words of D.C. Scott, the head of the Indian Department, one of the overseers of this program, to “take the Indian out of the child”. This whole “reformation” process proceeded under the benevolent discourse of the civilizing mission, assisting the inferior Indian to the superior life-ways of white society, encapsulated by Rudyard Kipling’s “white man’s burden”, leading to the modern infamous paradox of the “Indian dying of improvement”. Such Maternal discourse of nurture of the “noble savage”, masking the brutal domination in the discourse of the Father, marking the characteristic duality of colonial discourse outlined in the previous chapter, is evident also in the case of the Polish reformed westernized schooling system which is presented to the childish Poles as a “gift” from the elder Western patrons “helping” these “young/new Europeans” progress to full Europeanness, today under the ultimate (post)modern utopia of EU liberalism. As Kanu (2006) summarizes, the Aboriginal residential schools, like the British colonial schools they were modeled on, were geared to their overall instrumental aim of the propagation of cultural hegemony and the production of efficient workers to supply Western capitalism. As such, they were based on rote memorization, foreign subject matter devoid of students’ existential realities, direct transmission of information by teachers and its blind reproduction through standardized testing, suppression of indigenous voice, critical thinking, questioning and creativity. While not as overt, the education reform in Poland bears uncanny similarities in its formation of obedient colonial subjects, mindlessly replicating the values of the colonizer by
regurgitating a Euro-centric curriculum and demanding the Polish children’s amputation from their cultural heritage, as will be illustrated below.

Prior to an analysis of the present-day education curriculum under EU liberalism, it is imperative to situate today’s colonial education in Poland’s colonial history beginning with the partitions of the 19th century, to the 20th century totalitarianisms Nazism (albeit short-lived) and communism (most recent and well entrenched for over half a century), centering the fate of the Polish literary canon over these different eras of Poland’s colonization and expounding the indigenous role of the Polish literature canon in Poland’s history. While in the Western context the concept of a unitary cultural canon has been the object of critique and deconstruction by various postmodern equity groups (feminists, anti-racists etc.) in the West today (see, for example, Kolbas 2001), as outlined in the Introduction chapter, in this thesis I mount a case of defense for the Polish (and other CEE nations) canon as a potent locus of anti-colonialism, in accord with the defensive and anti-oppressive nature of Polish nationalism against hegemons both from West and East (where Poland’s main Eastern colonizer Russia is here conceptualized as the West). As also stated in the Introduction chapter, in order to compare the two contexts of the West and CEE, I theorize Poland as a minority culture within the supranational structure of the EU, highlighting the need to maintain Polish nationalism as a pivotal bulwark against the imperially homogenizing forces of the EU/globalization. Simultaneously, while not delegitimizing the actual anti-oppressive efforts of postmodernists in the West, in the Eastern context, I demystify the alleged postmodern deconstruction ideology, in reality working unilaterally to dismantle CEE national cultures while preserving Western hegemonic nationalisms and canons intact, as nothing but another Western hegemony. Such false Western liberations from the West are countered with indigenous routes to emancipation, specifically through the traditional literature canon centered in this thesis, on the example of Poland, as will be elaborated below.

Part 1: The Education Reform Document - a CDA Analysis:

The focus of this thesis being the literature curriculum (and its relationship to perpetuating Poland’s larger relations of colonialism), this section begins with a CDA analysis of the literature canon, as represented in the official Ministry of Education’s
reformed curriculum document of 2012 ("Cultural Texts" section), as compared with the pre-
Westernizing reforms government curriculum document of 1990, its two proposed versions
synthesized based on my personal lived experience of my high school Polish language
education prior to the reform. Table 1 represents a comparison of the two literary canons,
from the pre-reform 1990 and post-2012 reform curricula, respectively, organized
chronologically according to historical epoch and juxtaposing literature items in a way so as
to easily illustrate their correspondence or lack thereof between the two documents (some
items, to facilitate translation between the old 4-year high school program and the new 3-year
system, have been included from the preceding Gymnasium).
Table 1. High school literature canon (1990 versus 2012).

( ) = excerpts possible.  * = obligatory

Removed in new 2012 canon  (GYM) = Gymnasium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LITERATURE CANON (High School)</th>
<th>Curriculum 1990</th>
<th>Core Curriculum 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Antiquity---10th century</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- J. Parandowski <em>Mitologia</em> (selection);</td>
<td>- (selection of myths)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sofokles <em>Antygona</em>;</td>
<td>- Sofokles <em>Antygona</em> or <em>Król Edyp</em> (literary or theatrical version);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Homer <em>Iliada</em> (excerpts);</td>
<td>- (GYM) (Ksiega Rodzaju, gospel parable, <em>hymn św. Pawła o miłości</em>);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Homer Iliada</em> and <em>Odyssey</em> or J. Parandowski <em>Przygody Odyseusza</em>).</td>
<td>- (GYM) (Ksiega Rodzaju, gospel parable, <em>hymn św. Pawła o miłości</em>);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle Ages (10-15th cent.)</strong></td>
<td>- Gall Anonim <em>Kronika Polska</em> (excerpt);</td>
<td>- <em>J. Kochanowski</em> – selected pieśni, treny (other than in gymnasium) and a psalm; (GYM) selected fraszki, Treny V, VII, VIII;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Bogurodzica</em>;</td>
<td>- (Dzieje Tristana i Izoldy);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Lament Świętokrzyski</em>;</td>
<td>- (GYM) <em>Pieśń o Rolandzie</em>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Legenda o św. Aleksym</em>;</td>
<td>- (J. Kochanowski – selected pieśni, treny (other than in gymnasium) and a psalm);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Kwiatki św. Franciszka</em> (selection);</td>
<td>- (GYM) <em>Pieśń o Rolandzie</em>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Piesn o Rolandzie</em> (excerpts);</td>
<td>- <em>(J. Ch. Pasek Pamiętniki)</em>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Renaissance (1500-1620)</strong></td>
<td>- M. Rej <em>Zygot człowieka pocztewego</em> (excerpts);</td>
<td>- <em>J. Kochanowski</em> – selected pieśni, treny (other than in gymnasium) and a psalm; (GYM) selected fraszki, Treny V, VII, VIII;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- J. Kochanowski: selection of: <em>Fraszki, Piesni, Treny, Psalmy</em>;</td>
<td>- (Dzieje Tristana i Izoldy);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- M. Sep Szarzyński <em>Sonety</em> (selection);</td>
<td>- (GYM) <em>Pieśń o Rolandzie</em>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- P. Skarga <em>Kazania sejmowe</em> (selection);</td>
<td>- (J. Ch. Pasek Pamiętniki);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- W. Szekspir <em>Makbet or Romeo i Julia</em>;</td>
<td>- (M. Sęp Szarzyński – selected sonety);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- A. Frycz-Modrzewski <em>O poprawie Rzeczypospolitej</em> (excerpts)</td>
<td>- W. Szekspir <em>Makbet</em> or <em>Hamlet</em> (GYM) <em>Romeo i Julia</em>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baroque (1620-1764)</strong></td>
<td>- D. Naborowski; J. A. Morsztyn; W. Potocki - selected poems;</td>
<td>- (J. Ch. Pasek Pamiętniki);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- J. Ch. Pasek <em>Pamiętniki</em> (excerpts);</td>
<td>- (GYM) <em>Molier Świetoszek or Skapiec</em>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Molier <em>Świetoszek</em> or <em>Skapiec</em>.</td>
<td>- (I. Krasicki – selected satyra or <em>Monachomachia</em>);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enlightenment (1764-1822)</strong></td>
<td>- I. Krasicki <em>Bajki</em> (selection), <em>Satyry</em> (selection), <em>Monachomachia</em> (excerpts);</td>
<td>- (I. Krasicki – selected satyra or <em>Monachomachia</em>);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Political literature of the Sejm Wielki and Kosciuszko Uprising, eg. H. Kollataj, S. Staszic;</td>
<td>(GYM) selected bajki;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- J. U. Niemcewicz <em>Powrot posła</em>;</td>
<td>- (I. Krasicki – selected satyra or <em>Monachomachia</em>);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- J. Wybicki <em>Pieśń legionów polskich we Włoszech</em>;</td>
<td>(GYM) selected bajki;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Wolter <em>Kandy, czyli optymiżm</em> (excerpt).</td>
<td>- (I. Krasicki – selected satyra or <em>Monachomachia</em>);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- J. Słowacki <em>Kordian</em>, poems ( including <em>Grob Agamemnona</em>);</td>
<td>- J. Słowacki – selected poems;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Z. Krasinski <em>Nie-Boska komedia</em>;</td>
<td>- (Kordian) (excerpts possible);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- C. Norwid - selected poems;</td>
<td>- C. Norwid – selected poems;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Fredro <em>Słaby Panienskie</em>;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>Work</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positivism</td>
<td>selected short stories - M. Konopnicka - eg. Milosierdzie gminy, Mendel Gdański; E. Orzeszkowa - Gloria victis, ABC.; B Prus Kamizelka; H. Sienkiewicz <em>Z pamiątki poznanskiego nauczyciela</em>; B. Prus <em>Lalka</em>; H. Sienkiewicz <em>Potop</em>; A. Asnyk - selected poems; (GYM) Prus or Orzeszkowa - selected short story; - F. Dostojewski - selected work eg. <em>Zbrodnia i kara. Łagodna</em>; B. Prus <em>Lalka</em>; (GYM) <em>Sienkiewicz</em> - selected historic novel <em>(Quo vadis, Krzyczy oder Potop)</em>;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Poland</td>
<td>K. Przerwa-Tetmajer, J. Kasprowicz, L. Staff - selected poems; S. Wyspianski <em>Wesele</em>; S. Żeromski <em>Rozdziebia nas kruki, wrony... Ludzie bezdomni</em>; W. Reymont <em>Chłopi</em> t. 1 <em>Jesienni</em> i t. 2 <em>Zima</em>; J. Conrad <em>Lord Jim</em>;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interbellum</td>
<td>S. Żeromski <em>Przedwiosnie</em>; Z. Nalkowska <em>Granica</em> or M. Kuncewiczowa <em>Cudzoziemka</em>; W. Gombrowicz <em>Ferdydurke</em> (excerpts possible); S. I. Witkiewicz <em>Szewcy</em> (excerpts possible); B. Schulz <em>Sklepy cynamonowe</em> (excerpts); selection of poetry - B. Lesmian, J. Tuwim, W. Broniewski, J. Przybos, K. I. Galczynski, J. Czechowicz; selection of Legionnaire poetry; F. Kafka <em>Proces</em>; J. Iwaszkiewicz - selected prose; (W. Gombrowicz <em>Ferdydurke</em>); B. Schulz - selected prose; B. Lesmian, J. Tuwim, J. Lechoń, J. Przyboś, J. Czechowicz, K. I. Gałężyński – selected poems;</td>
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Already a first glance at the surface structure of discourse in terms of the text titles reveals the profound difference between the two documents and hence, educational approaches. The lexical choice of “Curriculum Core” found in the title of the 2012 document, signifying minimal educational requirements, is a direct import from Western education models, in contrast to the traditionally Polish concept of a comprehensive education program, as encapsulated by the titular designation “Curriculum” of the 1990 document. Furthermore, a comparative quantitative analysis of the two literature lists is very telling of the dramatic discrepancy the two literary canons represent. While the 1990 document features an abundant listing of literature items across all the historical epochs (which, based on my personal high school experience, was covered in full notwithstanding my science stream, in addition to a broad array of extracurricular items from the “Supplementary Reading” list, not even included in Table 1), the 2012 literary canon is reduced to a staggeringly low 13 literary works (marked with an * in Table 1) over the span of the entire 3-year high school education program (works completely eliminated from the 2012 canon, relative to that of 1990 are highlighted in Table 1). It is in the official “Commentary to the Curriculum Core” accompanying the 2012 curriculum document, which reveals the intentions of the authors, where the creator of the reformed literary canon, Prof. Zurek, deems this meager literature collection to constitute the “heart of Polish literature”. It is via such a rhetorical figure of a euphemism masking the true violence of the expunging of the traditional rich Polish literary canon to its disgraceful vestige, that this brutal amputation can occur unnoticed, or, as in fact, preserving the very essence of Polishness. Although Zurek stresses this canon core is a bare minimum which teachers are encouraged to expand via the additional literature choices provided on the list and beyond, it is clear such an argument is fallacious, given the reality of the drastic cutback of teaching hours for the Polish (and all other) subject accompanying the curricular reform, reducing a traditionally Polish 4-year high school education program to a 3-year system, leaving barely enough time to cover even this minimum - an urgent complaint voiced by many Polish teacher practitioners, including ones I personally interviewed (see next section). The further reduction of Polish literature content in the reformed literary canon of 2012 is seen not only through the absence of a large number of standard pieces, but through the extent of the presence of those few that remain on the list - canonical works that were traditionally read in full, are now acceptable in excerpts - as evidenced, for example, by
the Romantic classic Slowacki’s “Kordian” or the Young Polish Reymont’s Noble-Prize winning epic novel “The Peasants” (volume 1 only versus volume 1 and 2 in the 1990 canon).

In the same “Commentary” section of the 2012 Curriculum Core publication, Zurek goes on to delineate the rationale behind such a drastic downsizing of the traditional Polish literary canon, which is the aim to combat the “myth of student readership” whereby in today’s world children are deemed not be reading literature anyway, especially the thematically and linguistically “archaic”, voluminous and difficult masterpieces constituting the traditional school canon, thus making a much simplified reading list more accessible and realistic for a “student of the 21st century”. Zurek argues that: “in today’s world, reading books is no longer the only and primary form of obtaining information, neither is it - very importantly - a source of aesthetic value”, “The responsibility of the Polish teacher becomes the provision of various tools which will enable the student’s smooth navigation through this complicated reality”, “the Polish school should keep pace with this new reality of the 21st century”. It is through such statements, compounded by a series of lexical items, such as: “student of the 21st century”, “the modern student”; “fast-changing reality - civilisational, cultural”, “digitalisation and informatisation”, “new media situation”, “era of screens”, “complicated reality” throughout Zurek’s commentary text that the underlying ontology and methodology of the author becomes apparent. Positivism with its objectivist assumption of a pre-determined world “out there”, to which the only solution is to passively adjust, is in stark contrast to the social constructionist ideology underpinning the 1990 education document, which recognizes the social creation of reality and the power of social actors to change that reality. This approach is evidenced in the multiple expressions of the 1990 curriculum, such as: “In order to balance the negative [relative to students’ expectations and interests] effects of an orientation towards the past in literature choice, measures should be taken to link tradition with modernity and highlight connections between historic and universal meanings”, further reiterated in the statement: “The Polish teacher should do everything to ensure positive results and promote readership value, transforming the pressure of the obligation of school reading into valuable reading motivation and discovery of cultural phenomena”, implying the overall macroproposition that despite, or in fact all the more due to, the changing realities of the modern world which erode traditional Polish culture, extra
measures should be taken by the teachers to counter-act such changes and strive to preserve the traditional elements in balance with modern trends. The self-proclaimed criteria for literature choices in Zurek’s canon found in the Commentary of easy and pleasurable reading to suit the modern student is further sharply contrasted with the explicit drivers behind the classical canon selections of “humanistic formation” in the 1990 curriculum. It is at this deep level of the text, through the hidden meanings, enforced through explicit premises that the fundamental ideological differences between the two documents, and hence, education models, become most apparent.

In addition to such pragmatic motivations underlying the formation of the reformed 2012 canon, Zurek, in the “Commentary” text further reveals the cultural drivers behind the newly conceptualized literature list. Here, the positivistic argumentation identified in the previous paragraphs, can be seen to come to light once again, an implied proposition to simply accustomize to the, admittedly regrettable changes of a pre-existing reality. This is seen in statements such as: “in the present era, there are many different sources of information, and the school, although sadly, is no longer an authority amongst them” encapsulating a typically positivist, defeatist proposition, or “the school must thus assume its position - albeit in many respects irreplaceable - as one of many other institutions, unable to fully inculcate the values it transmits”, signalling a typical postmodern lack of agency and helplessness to change the surrounding conditions. Based on such objectivist presuppositions, the overall strategy that is effected by this section of Zurek’s text is, via an explicit argument against a single normative canon of values, the dismissal and delegitimization of the traditional indigenous Polish conception of the term, and the overt establishment of the concept of multiple canons based on individual choice of teachers in conjunction with students, revealing the underlying dominant ideology of the West of postmodernism, marked by decentralization, pluralism, relativism, subjectivity, fluidity etc. Not only is this concept of the postmodern canon/canons installed as an ideal norm through positively qualifying statements such as: “the modern school ought to cultivate active choice-making within culture, the cognizance of alternatives and elasticity of interpretation”, “it ought to encourage readings of literature open to various interpretations”, the normativity of the Western postmodern standard is further confirmed by the detailed expounding of the negative aspects of the “transmission of a single unitary model of culture”, including indirect allusions to the
prevailing pathologizing discourse of an allegedly oppressive, homogenizing and nationalistic traditional Polish culture. In stark contrast to the reformed curriculum, the need for such a central, pan-national school literature listing is explicitly emphasized in the old curriculum document through statements such as: “I (author of 1990 curriculum- Prof. B. Chrzastowska) believe, a common literary canon is necessary: a common set of mandatory readings, signs and symbols, ideas and attitudes experienced by all high school students, so they may communicate in the language of national tradition”, “A common set of compulsory readings for all students of high school, enables the young generation’s identification with the cultural tradition of the nation”.

A more detailed analysis of the reformed literary canon of 2012 relative to its pre-reform 1990 predecessor exposes the more specific strategies of expunging traditionally Polish content and its substitution with Western substance. Firstly, an interrogation of Polish versus world (ie. Western) literature elements between the two curricula reveals a marked predominance of Polish works and authors in the old 1990 reading list. This is confirmed by the official commentary attached to the 1990 curriculum document stating that “the high school literature canon consists mainly of Polish literature with one chosen representative world literature piece per epoch”. In contrast, in the new 2012 curriculum a comparatively significant increase of “world” literature items at the expense of Polish items is observed. This trend is evidenced by the removal from the 2012 curriculum of the following Polish items in the respective historical periods:

Middle Ages: Gall Anonim *Kronika Polska; Legenda o sw. Aleksym; Kwiatki sw. Franciszka*;
Renaissance: M. Rej *Zywot człowieka poczciwego*, P. Skarga *Kazania sejmowe*, A. Frycz-Modrzewski *O poprawie Rzeczypospolitej*;
Modern-day: Polish fiction prose: foreign 4/5: 2 (ratio).

Instead of these items, the 2012 curriculum features the following Western (this section continues this thesis’ theorization of Russia as the West, as outlined in the previous chapter) literature pieces:

Middle Ages: *Dzieje Tristana i Izoldy*;
Renaissance: M. Cervantes *Don Kichote*;

Thus, through the replacement of Polish items in the 2012 curriculum by Western literature pieces in the respective historical epochs, combined with the changed ratio of Polish to Western literature in the Modern-day period (1:1 versus 2:1) in favour of Western literature, it is clear that the new reading list shows a preference for Western items at the cost of Polish works.

Secondly, when considering the proportion of contemporary versus old-Polish literature in the two canons, it is immediately evident that the 1990 reading list features an abundance of items in the epochs preceding Modernity with a more or less proportional selection of works in the Modern-day period. This trend is reflected in the explicit commentary to the 1990 curriculum, stating an intended orientation towards the past, the overall main aim of Polish education being the immersion of the young Polish generation in the history of the Polish nation. The secondary importance of contemporary readings in the old curriculum is further underscored by the optional nature of the Modern-day canon in the 1990 document based completely on teacher choice, providing merely preferred selections under general genre categories. In direct opposition, the 2012 canon demonstrates the wholesale removal of a large section of pre-Modern literature, leaving a glaringly scant list of items in the Old Polish time period, while the contemporary canon remains relatively undiminished, in fact adding more literature choices.

The following old-Polish items in the respective epochs have been completely eliminated from the 2012 literature canon:

Middle Ages: Gall Anonim *Kronika Polska, Legenda o sw. Aleksym, Kwiatki sw. Franciszka*;
Renaissance: M. Rej *Zywot czlowieka poczciwego*, P. Skarga *Kazania sejmowe*, A. Frycz Modrzewski *O poprawie Rzeczypospolitej*;
Baroque: D. Naborowski; J. A. Morsztyn; W. Potocki;
Enlightenment: - Political literature of the Sejm Wielki and Kosciuszko Uprising, eg. H. Kollataj i S. Staszic; J. U. Niemcwiecz *Powrot posla*; J. Wybicki *Piesn legionow polskich we Wloszech*; Wolter *Kandyd, czyli optymizm*;
Romantism: *Konrad Wallenrod*, Z. Krasinski *Nie-Boska komedia*; Fredro *Sluby Panienskie*;
J. W. Goethe *Cierpienia mldego Wertera*, selected poems eg. Faust;
Also Young Poland’s canonical writer Zeromski has been downscaled from 3 pieces to 1:

(1990): S. Zeromski *Rozdziobia nas kruki, wrony..., Ludzie bezdomni; Przedwiosnie* (3).
(2012): S. Żeromski – (1) selected work (*Ludzie bezdomni, Wierna rzeka, Echa leśne* or *Przedwiośnie*).

The key here is that Contemporary literature, while it may be Polish-authored, is expunged from traditionally Polish national content, focusing more on typically postmodern linguistic innovation (as expounded, for example by Thompson 2010, 2012), as evidenced by the obligatory readings of Gombrowicz and Szulc, at the expense of the most lamented in Polish indigenous discourse loss of the epitome of the old-Polish patriotic ethos - Sienkiewicz in the new high school, read only in Gymnasium and reduced to only 1 selected work (Quo Vadis, Krzyzacy or Potop) despite a Polish educational tradition of including all three - once again revealing the Western postmodern ideological underpinning of the reformed literary canon.

In addition, amongst the old-Polish literature, it is clear the 2012 canon shows a preference for secular and rationalist content (expounded in the Renaissance, Enlightenment, Posivitism) at the expense of religious and irrationalist matter (Middle Ages, Baroque, Romanticism), exemplified by the removal from the new canon of the Middle Ages’ “Kwiatki sw. Franciszka”, devout Catholic Romantic writer Z. Krasinski’s “Nie-Boska komedia” or the contemporary Biblically-contextualized poetry of priest J. Twardowski, a curricular trend reminiscent of the preceding communism, a reminder of the common Western utopian modernizing roots of both systems.

Thirdly, a comparison of the two documents on the level of elite culture versus mass culture reveals a virtual absence of mass culture in the 1990 curriculum, with a vast predominance of high culture masterpieces. Conversely, the new 2012 curriculum features a broad array of popular culture pieces, once again, as explicitly stated in the curriculum commentary, in the spirit of positivistic adjustment to the prevailing mass culture of the 21st century. This is most pronounced at the lower educational level of gymnasium which includes a wide spectrum of mass media and popular literature pieces, but is also observed in the new high school curriculum which includes such contemporary genres as science fiction (eg.S. Lem *Solaris*) or romance (eg. T. Konwicki *Kronika wypadków miłosnych*). Of importance here is that elite culture is a concept encoding traditionally Polish meanings due to Poland’s historic elite/nobility culture preferring high forms (poetry, epic novels etc.)
whereas mass culture is nothing but a marker once again of the prevailing postmodern, (neo)liberal and consumerist culture of the West. Thus, by installing popular literature and expunging high culture, the new canon is clearly promoting Western versus indigenous Polish content.

Fourthly, a scrutiny of the two curricula with regards to the prevalence of multimedia culture versus literary culture uncovers a further divergence between the two documents. While audio-visual culture is present in the 1990 curriculum, it is listed as a supplementary material under the “Interpretation Contexts” category, thus only functioning as an additional context to the main literary curricular core, not centered as key choices on the mandatory canon list, as is the case for the 2012 document. The following examples of audiovisual elements from the 2012 curriculum core illustrate this:


In addition, the Antique classical drama Antygona, traditionally read in literary format is now acceptable in a theatrical version:

Antiquity: Sofokles Antygona or Król Edyp (literary or theatrical performance).

As in the case of mass culture and other non-traditionally Polish aspects above, the 2012 commentary actively encourages audiovisual culture in the new Polish high school as an inevitable part of the surrounding reality - this is evidenced by statements such as: “The contemporary student lives in a world of broadly defined cultural texts”, “literary works are not the only reality, with which the student is to be in contact in school” “Constructors of educational programs should bear in mind the cultural context of our epoch marked by audiovisual media”. The 1990 curriculum on the other hand stresses that despite the predominance of such culture in the contemporary world, traditional literary curriculum cannot be eliminated and, given the time restrictions of the Polish education program, audiovisual culture must be relegated to an extracurricular level. Thus the familiar fundamental ideological rift between the two curricula is once again seen to give rise to completely different educational solutions and hence, literary canons of the two curricula.
The above analysis of the 2012 curriculum text at the local level of literature items of the literary canon confirms the overall macroproposition of the predominance of Western-centric elements - where the qualifiers: international, contemporary, mass, audiovisual culture are markers of Western ideology, while - national, historic, elite and literary culture encode indigenous Polish tradition which is marginalized. It must be crucially stressed that a juxtaposition of the two binaristic categories for the purpose of this analysis does not mean to imply they are mutually exclusive, as best evidenced by the actual old pre-reform 1990 canon itself, harmoniously blending both elements, while centering traditional Polish content.

The infiltration of the 2012 curriculum text with Western concepts and ideas becomes more explicitly visible at the more global level of discourse in the “Teaching Objectives and Contents” and “Introduction” sections immediately preceding and providing context for the literary canon list, pertaining to the Polish subject specifically and all subjects in general, respectively. This is evident both with respect to the lexicon and structure of these segments of the curriculum text. As stated outright in the Introductory section, the “knowledge and skills taught at the level of high school, are formulated in the language of learning outcomes, in accord with the European Qualifications Framework”, a footnote here revealing the underlying legal/political reference point to this approach, namely the recommendation of the European Parliament and Council of the European Union from April 23, 2008 regarding the establishment of a European qualifications framework for lifelong learning. This EU initiative, as is known outside the text, by creating a common European frame of reference for member countries’ different national qualifications systems, aims to facilitate mobility of learners and workers across the EU. While in theory this Western framework is not intended to supplant country-specific National Qualification Frameworks (itself a Western construct), it is clear that in reality, the end result-orientation of such an approach results in the necessary subordination of the entire traditional Polish education process to this Western-centric standard. Such an effect-driven curriculum results in the centering of practical, easily quantifiable skills in the educational goals for all subjects, which despite their nominal equal division between knowledge, skills and attitudes in the Introduction section, heavily favour skills. This is reflected in the ensuing detailed listing of the most important skills to be acquired by the student of the new high school system, which is a direct replication of the “key competencies” for life-long learning established by the same EU bodies in a
recommendation from December 18, 2006, as foundations for personal and professional success for EU citizens. Here, it is clear that preference is given to technical skills, as evidenced by the majority of the eight points referring to the spheres of mathematics, science, modern technologies, independent research, empirical observation, and reducing humanistic competencies to the pragmatic skill of effective communication in the Polish language, critical analysis of information and instrumental processing of texts, completely obliterating the cultural, moral and aesthetic value of traditional Polish education, as pronounced in the old curriculum. The depreciation of the status of humanities education is further evidenced in the Introduction section with an explicit argument for a focus on the technical and science subjects, in accord with the priorities of the Lisbon Strategy, yet another explicit influence of the EU that finds its way into the Polish education document. The document further emphasizes the benefits of such an approach, citing civilizational development of Poland and Europe - the Lisbon Strategy known beyond the text to set out a plan of creating the most competitive knowledge-based economy globally of the EU.

These explicit practical results-based, Western-centric premises relevant for all subjects taught within the new reformed schooling system are reflected and further elaborated in the section devoted strictly to the Polish subject, where the traditionally conceptualized (as reflected in the pre-reform 1990 document) “Teaching Objectives” and “Teaching Contents” are articulated as “General Requirements” and “Specific Requirements”, respectively, as evidenced by the relevant subsection headings. Here, a glaring lexical and semantic omission of the word “formation” (of character), traditionally not only present, but constituting a fundamental goal of traditional Polish education, as evidenced by the 1990 curriculum titles “Objectives/Contents of Teaching and Formation” and amplified through the explicitly stated formative goals of the curriculum in the Commentary, further underscores this crucial schism between the old humanistic and new technical education models. Like in the all-subject Introduction, a detailed inspection of the content of the “General Requirements” section for the Polish subject, which is merely further elaborated in the “Specific Requirements” section, reveals a vast predominance of skill elements, as reflected in the wording of the three main Polish education goals of: Reception and Construction of statements, and Analysis of cultural texts - all articulated as active verbs. In stark contrast, the curricular goals in the 1990 document are equally balanced between the
three aspects of traditional Polish learning - of building knowledge, skills and attitudes, as observed in the corresponding section headings and tripartite structure of the Teaching Objectives section of the 1990 document. Further, the old 1990 document displays a traditional equilibrium between the literature and language sections of the Polish curriculum, with a heavy lean towards the literature aspect, elements of language for the most part being taught as an accompaniment to literature education. This is reflected in the distribution of material in the old curriculum heavily weighted by a rich literary canon and the accompanying abundant “Interpretation Contexts” featuring facts from the history and theory of literature, and confirmed by the explicit Commentary to the 1990 curriculum, validating its literature-centricity, confirming the key necessity of the knowledge of literary contexts and expounding the negative effects of the removal of these aspects for the education process. The completely inverse trend is observed in the 2012 curriculum, where in the General and Specific Requirements section, amongst the three main goals of Polish education, the one Literature point (Analysis of texts) is overshadowed by the two points pertaining to Linguistic study (Reception and Production of discourse), revealing a domination of linguistic education over the literature component, further stressed explicitly in the 2012 commentary emphasizing the educational goal of the skill of reading versus a course in the history of literature. The marginalization of literature education in the new curriculum is further emphasized by the drastically reduced Interpretation contexts list within this one Literature point and the radically truncated literary canon based on which such knowledge would be normally taught. Thus, from this analysis, an ideological differentiation emerges between the new curriculum marked by: practical, effects-focused, quantitative features and the more theoretical, process-oriented, qualitative aspects of character development and holistic knowledge attainment, characteristic of indigenous Polish education.

Most importantly, the 2012 document in the same Introductory part, in one of the first sentences explicitly reveals the ultimate goal of such education not only in the Polish subject, but all subjects, namely the “development of professional qualifications, opening the door to their further improvement or modification, and thus facilitating the process of lifelong learning”, further reiterated in the last paragraphs of this section in the statement: “The lifelong learning strategy requires the skill of important decision-making, including the
choice of a specific professional specialization, workplace, ways of increasing qualifications and potential change of profession”. Thus, through the explicit and implicit assertions in the Introduction section, it is clear that the macro-strategy effected by this education text is to produce a qualified labour force, equipped with the specialized skills for professional success, yet able to elastically adjust to the ever-changing labor market - all tenets of Western capitalist ideology. This is further amplified through expressions like “human capital”, “educational services” found throughout the 2012 curriculum Commentary. This utilitarian goal of the 2012 education is in stark opposition to the 1990 curriculum stressing the moral, cultural, aesthetic, spiritual value of education, as seen in the explicitly stated primary goals of Polish education found in the first sentences of the Introduction: the “intellectual, moral, social, aesthetic and emotional development of students”, introduction to culture, promotion of understanding of self and the other, teaching the history of the nation, active participation in the life of the nation, cultivation of universal values and humanistic ideals. This is further underscored by the prevailing lexical items throughout the Commentary, such as: “cultural heritage”, “moral values”, “humanistic formation”, “formation for culture”, “humanistic attitudes”, “higher spiritual needs”, “humanity”, “aesthetic and moral sensitivity”, “philosophy, existentialism, morality, religion”, “aesthetic attitudes”. Thus, the self-proclaimed ideal subject of the 1990 curriculum is an “erudite”, an “educated, well-formed Pole”, a well-rounded humanist who has read the required rich literary readings of the curriculum in full, and grasped an accompanying basic knowledge set - an individual corresponding to the indigenous Polish intelligentsia ethos. This is in stark opposition to the proposed product of the new education model - a specialized technocrat, a typically modern homo faber whose knowledge of Polish literature and culture is decontextualized and fragmentary and whose main purported strength of linguistic competency cannot even be realized, given the lack of knowledge base from which it can be obtained, resulting in the much bemoaned crisis of the Polish word in the new school. While the 2012 curriculum document, towards the end of the all-subject Introduction, does state the desired attitudes of a successful graduate of the new education system, it is clear these are Western-centric, forefronting utilitarian and individual-oriented traits, as seen most markedly by the Western capitalist quality of enterpreneurship, and relegating community attributes to a secondary position on the list, supplanting traditionally Polish patriotic with civil attitudes characteristic
of Western modernity. The word nation, so abundant and centered in the old curriculum, although mentioned at the end of this list, appears alongside other cultures in a typical Western postmodern multicultural fashion, accompanied by a disclaimer against discrimination, insinuating the familiar argument of alleged Polish oppressiveness.

In addition, in investigating the overt references to Western influence in the new Polish curriculum document, it is instructive to examine the general Preface to the Curriculum Core, exposing the rationale behind the whole reform in the first place, further reiterated in the enclosed official Opinions to the reformed curriculum. This section, utilizing Fairclough’s CDA terminology, displays an utter colonization of discourse with Western concepts, ideologies and arguments. Semantic microstructures such as: “European Union Contest for Young Scientists”, “PISA worldwide education performance studies by OECD”, the Bologna Process, Western democratic countries, and local propositions such as: “The 21st century has brought...”, “a similar education model has been utilized in many countries in the world”, “Polish students, similarly to their counterparts in the majority of European countries”, “Polish school has matured to the level...” (of its Western equivalents), “this program (...) is convergent with most education models of the West” reveal the Western normative standard against which Poland’s educational progress is measured and evaluated. Poland’s massive increase in education demographics is attributed to the allegedly organically arising cause of “increased educational aspirations of young Poles”, rather than the socially constructed ideological project of decreasing educational standards under the cloak of the “democratization” of education. While the problem of a decline of educational outcomes is acknowledged, the proposed solution is, in accord with the already familiar positivist ideology underpinning the entire curriculum document, to simply adjust to the “inevitable” reality, and as is typical for Western utopian modernizing projects, to in fact introduce more reform (as seen in Poland similarly under the preceding communism, where any failures were remedied with increased communism), further lowering the standards, despite official denials. Also, as has been noted before, the marginalization of the formative aspect of schooling is further illustrated here by relegating any existing formative program to the level of the school or local community, revealing once again a typically postmodern decentralizing tendency in opposition to a traditionally pan-national formation ethos.
While the focus of this thesis is the Polish subject, the complete enactment of Western discursive power performed by the new education document cannot be seen without its contextualization within other subjects in the new high school curriculum. Already a first look at the subject listing of the new high school, still contained in the all-subject Introduction, reveals the further infusion of Western content, most markedly through an increased focus on foreign (ie. Western, especially English) languages, as elaborated further in the Introduction, the typically Western capitalist Introduction to Enterpreneurship, the secularized Ethics versus the traditional Religion and a new addition: Ethnic/national minority/regional languages signalling a Western postmodern focus on regionalism/minority cultures and sexual education, a hallmark of Western postmodern (neo)Marxist ideology, in the Polish curriculum under the cloak of “Formation for Family Life”, a secularized and scientificized version of the traditional domain of Religion. A more detailed analysis of the humanistic subjects more directly related to Polish reveals a similar installation of Western content at the expense of Polish matter, already observed at the local level of the Polish subject. The subject “Knowledge of Culture” most closely connected to Polish reveals a parallel focus on contemporary, mass/popular, multimedia culture. National culture appears only in the very last points of the document, in between the equally valid local/regional and European/global cultures, thus revealing the titular word “Culture” to signify Western (postmodern) culture. Even more pronounced than in the Polish subject curriculum is the focus on local/regional culture, which is further elaborated here through words such as: “family, peers, local community”, or “class, school, home, neighbourhood, city, church, football stadium”, subcultures, revealing the decentralized postmodern ideology debunking traditional Polish national culture. The ideal subject of the new curriculum emergent from Polish education is further concretized in the Entrepreneurship subject which takes a normative view of Western market capitalism: as an “enterprising individual”, an assertive “member of a team, a worker, consumer”. The most explicit indoctrination of Polish education with Western content is evident in the education stream entitled “European Education” present via the first installment of the education reform cycle in the 2002 high school curriculum document. Here, a most characteristic rhetorical move, aimed at the covert diffusion of EU content, can be found, already observed by Borocz (2001) in his study of EU discursive imperialism, of a synecdoche, where the term European comes to represent the
EU. While the concept of education streams was withdrawn from the 2012 curriculum, the meanings pertaining to the EU have infiltrated subjects such as Knowledge of Society, where a section devoted to the EU normalizes EU integration and EU citizenship, presenting the EU in a unilaterally positive light as a space of education and work opportunity for young Poles, for earning wages and starting a business, naturalizing the EU as a golden standard to be aspired to versus but one alternative that must be critically questioned. It is the mutilated Polish education, in synergy with the Westernization of the entire subject canon of the new high school through which the exercise of discursive power can be realized.

Finally, in accord with the CDA model by Fairclough and Van Dijk, the reproduction of social dominance is effected not only by the discursive practice reflected at the level of the curriculum text, but also by other discursive and non-discursive practices constituting the whole Polish education reform process. Here, a staggering list of items presents itself, all a cause of loud outcry among Polish teachers and other indigenous circles, beginning with the fundamental rupturing of the continuity of the traditional Polish education model of an 8-year elementary school, complemented with a 4-year high school, now fragmented into the more numerous and shorter education levels of a 6-year elementary school, 3-year gymnasium and 3-year high school, including a 1 year earlier start of the whole process with compulsory schooling of 6-year olds beginning 2014. The disruption of the long-established flow of Polish schooling is further aggravated by the introduction of standardized testing following each of these education levels, reducing the rich education process to a results-driven notorious phenomenon of testomania, at the high school level epitomized by the new “matura” exam finalizing this level of education, introduced with the first installment of the reforms in 2005, and now further reinforced with the second stage of reform beginning 2015. This new test, already nominally oppositional to the traditional internal “Examination of Maturity” administrated by a new, Western-inspired external body of the Central Examination Commission, expunges the traditional format of a rich student essay based on the students’ holistic interiorized knowledge of the high-culture literary canon and critical analysis/moral evaluation/originality capabilities. In its place it instills a Western-centric drastically simplified model of multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank style questions, based on provided excerpts of partly non-literary, popular culture texts, further entrenching the skill-focused, fragmentary, decontextualized and uncritical new model of Polish education. The
erosion of Polish teaching tradition is further compounded by a gradual replacement of the grading system from the traditional 1-6 scale to a percentage scheme, epitomized by a downscaling of the “matura” passing mark to a despicable 30%. Further, the traditional teaching methods based predominantly on a teacher-centric lecture, facilitating the primary goal of Polish education of the transmission of knowledge, has now been supplanted with student-centric “activating methods”, a Western neologism that appears as an explicit recommendation in the 2012 curriculum commentary. Traditional Polish teaching is further undermined by an overall undercutting of the authority of the teacher and of tradition in general, overtly and covertly encouraging a critical versus a traditionally normative (although crucially: not oppressive and open to individual opinion) attitude towards traditional topics, subjects and school in general, resulting in the much lamented disciplinary failure of the new Polish school. Finally, corrosion of Polish tradition is further achieved by a breakdown of the traditional structure of subjects, with the introduction of education streams, thematic segments, or inverted chronologies, disrupting a traditionally linear progression of study, as seen for example in the traditionally parallel and complementary subjects of Polish and History. The latter is now replaced by the new History and Society supplementary subject, Polish Catholic philosophy professor Jaroszynski further underscoring the Marxist ideology underlying such trends (sociologization of the study of history, blurring of subjects), paradoxically already experienced by Poland under communism, and now replicated in Western neo-Marxism. All these aspects accompanying the Polish education reform serve to further reinforce the anti-polonism effected by the changed literary curriculum that constitutes the main focus of this thesis.

A final and most important step in Fairclough/Van Dijk’s CDA’s framework is the connection of textual relations of power, as detailed above in the case of the curriculum document, to the larger group relations of Polish society. Thus, relating text to context reveals the discourse genre of this curriculum text to be a legislative act, imposed top-down, without wide public consultation and against the loud protest, including hunger strikes of Polish indigenous circles, by the Minister of Education on behalf of the (pro-Western, liberal) government of Poland, whose successful implementation is officially monitored under the sanction of the law through teacher appraisals and student evaluations. The very access of these powerful groups to this type of influential discourse reflects the present (and
historic) socio-political system in Poland, where the colonial elite comprador class, in this case Western-centered (previously Eastern-centered under communism), wield political power, and by propagating such hegemonic discourse, further perpetuate their power over the indigenous Polish masses, in this case the intermediary Polish teacher addressees and the students, the ultimate destinataries of this educational discourse. At this micro-context level of analysis, the verbal public discourse of the author of this reform, Minister of Education Katarzyna Hall (and her successor Szumilas), further reveals and exacerbates the pro-West and anti-Polish strategy of the written text, most notably by her outright stated goal of “modernizing” Polish school towards the ideal value of an “open civic patriotism”, yet another Western neologistic deformation of the traditional Polish ideal of patriotism. The macro-sociological context of past and present Polish society out of which such discourse practice emerges (and which is further solidified by such discourse), as expounded in the previous chapter, is marked by a pervasive system of discursive and material colonialism which symbolically and physically aims to marginalize and exclude Polishness, while privileging and centering Europeanness (including Russia, conceptualized as the West in this thesis, as elaborated in Chapter 2). Today, this is achieved symbolically by a dominant discourse of Western-centricity and anti-polonism, as epitomized by the fundamental rhetoric of “return to Europe” underlying Poland’s/CEE’s whole post-communist transformation process, now materializing under the EU liberal democracy, insidiously utilizing Poland’s recent emergence from the material brutality of the (purportedly opposite) Eastern communism and Poland’s natural self-identification with the West.

Such hegemonic discourse (and practice) is present in many other sectors of present Polish society, including higher education, media, politics and culture. Academia is marked by a corresponding hegemony of political correctness, research topics, grant funding etc. being decided based on Russo-Western postmodern/neo-Marxist ideology, epitomized by Minister of Higher Education Kudrycka’s notorious anti-polonist censorship initiatives, paradoxically reminiscent of the restrictions on academic freedom recently experienced by Poles under communism, or the politicized attacks against the patriotic endeavours of the Institute of National Memory. The media (including TV, radio, press, Internet) similarly, features pro-Western content, encapsulated in the most (in)famous postcommunist-turned-Western mainstream journalist Monika Olejnik’s ill-famed on-air statement “I am a
proponent of normal ideas, that is, European ideas”, while marginalizing and delegitimizing indigenous Polish matter, including patriotic Polish school literature, epitomized by the anti-A. Kaminski’s “Kamienie na szaniec” media campaign. This is most starkly exemplified by the outright political banning of the Catholic Trwam TV and other alternative media centering Polish content, the persecution of pro-Polish journalists through notorious terminations and lawsuits for “politically incorrect” statements, lack of public funding for patriotic films and an active promotion of anti-Polish content, evoking well-rehearsed colonial discourses of Polish alleged anti-Semitism, xenophobia, fascism etc. The political involvement of these pro-government media was most evident during the short-lived successful politicization of the patriotic grouping under the Law and Justice (PIS) party during the years 2005-2007, represented by the massive anti-PIS voter media operation “take away your grandma’s ID card” and the accompanying brutal discrediting campaign against this party’s leader, Lech Kaczyński, further continued today in the anti-Smolensk media offensive stifling any attempts to solve the still controversial Smolensk crash. Politics is defined by a parallel anti-Polish pathologizing discourse symbolized by the Polish liberal Prime Minister Tusk’s infamous statement of “Polishness is abnormalcy” accompanied by an overt discourse of optimism regarding the EU, epitomized by the Poland as a “green island”, “second Ireland” narrative, emphasizing Poland’s alleged economic and social success under the EU. The abuses of power in politics, including the recently notorious elections rigging in conjunction with the media dubbed “the fourth power” in Poland, has had Polish indigenous analysts deem Poland’s political system a “facade democracy”. Culture is characterized by a wholesale expulsion of traditional Polish content, including cinema, theatre, opera, museums and an installation of typically Western postmodern, expressly anti-polonist substance, defacing the traditional Polish cultural canon under the guise of postmodern formal innovation. Such hegemonic relations of power, both symbolic and material observed at all these micro-sites comprising Polish society, both reflect and synergistically work, in tandem with the educational governmentality, to further re-entrench the systemic colonial relations of domination within the larger Polish society.

The relationship between the text and (micro- and macro-) sociological context of this educational text is most significant for this thesis with respect to the discursive and material project of the construction of a particular individual subject (Polish citizen) and, by
extension, of a certain desired nation (EU Poland). With regards to the individual subject formation enterprise effected by this curriculum text, the thought of Foucault pertaining to the disciplinary power of social institutions to produce “subjected and practised bodies’, “docile bodies” in general, further elaborated by Theweleit (1989) becomes extremely useful. While the focus of this German sociologist’s work lies in a historical study of the formation of fascist soldiers in pre-World War Two Germany, I apply Theweleit’s psycho-analytical insights to the equally deep cognitive process of the construction of a particular hegemonic (externally hegemonized and internally hegemonizing) Polish subject through the reformed education system. As in the case of Theweleit’s “soldier male”, which comes into being through participation in the various repetitive practices of the military drill, speeches, literature (reading and writing) and propaganda, so the desired postmodern homo westernicus subject (superseding the preceding modern homo sovieticus) of the new Polish schooling curriculum emerges as a result of the discursive and accompanying non-discursive practices of reading a particularly designed literary canon, discussed in a certain context, further reiterated by the graded examination, and a more subtle system of school rewards and punishments such as prestige or social exclusion based on a successful internalization or rejection of these “politically correct” (Eurocentric and anti-Polonist) values, knowledge and attitudes. Theweleit writes: “The most urgent task of the man of steel is to pursue, to dam in, and to subdue any force that threatens to transform him back into the horribly disorganized jumble of flesh, hair, skin, bones, intestines, and feelings that calls itself human” (p. 160). Thus, just as Theweleit’s ideal masculinised subject is forced to expulse those unwanted “feminine” elements within himself which he has learnt to see as a threat to his own integrity on his progression to becoming a desired “man of steel”, Poland’s idealized newly constructed postmodern citizen subject - the, young, male, rational European is asked to expunge those undesired characteristics from himself associated with the old, female “Mohair”, spiritual, emotional indigenous identity. This is achieved by a truncated literary canon, as discussed above, which in combination with the minimized knowledge contexts of Polish tradition leaves a student of this new curriculum believing Polish history and culture is either non-existent, pathological or unimportant, a view further entrenched by the anti-polonist pedagogy the student is exposed to outside of school via dominant public (pseudo)authorities in the media and politics and anti-Polish content in the cultural sphere, as
discussed above. In turn, the new Polish high school graduate, emptied from Polish substance, through the overt and hidden curriculum is instilled with European values, knowledges and attitudes which he comes to see as progressive, modern and superior. Most importantly, such a curriculum and pedagogy contributes to the production of a new supply of Polish colonial subjects, including a colonial elite comprador which, conversely to the pro-independence indigenous intelligentsia class, will, by propagating such internalized anti-polonist discourse and practice and thus re-entrenching hegemonic socio-political structures, perpetuate Poland’s cycle of colonization (both external over Poland as a whole and internal over Poland’s indigenous population).

An extension of the project of the production of an individual student subject enacted by this curriculum text, is the formation of a particular nation out of Poland, as part of the greater supra-national project of the EU superstate, the “homeland Europe” federal hegemonic assimilationist conception of the EU superseding the original national sovereignty and egalitarianism-rooted “confederation of homelands” notion. Here once again Theweleit proves handy with his conception of a fascist nation based on a community of such individually constructed soldier males. As in the case of the Polish Western modernizing project, Theweleit’s German nation-building project is underpinned by European Enlightenment normative notions of culture based on racism, clasissm and patriarchy, where the German “man of steel” becomes a “man of culture” and anybody not subscribing to such a model of culture is deemed a barbarian. The unwanted “feminine” aspects within Theweleit’s soldier subject are used to encode various undesired social groups, including women, lower classes, Jews, “racial aliens”, the primitive, bestial and barbaric “others” - in the Polish context symbolizing the undesirable stereotypical old, “backward”, religiously traditional and morally conservative, patriotic Mohair grandma or anybody embodying the indigenous Polish ethos. As Theweleit writes, in order to survive, to remain “whole” on the inside (where wholeness denotes not equality but domination), the soldier male must perform violence on the embodiment of this unwanted element on the outside - during wartime, by killing the “other”, as in the case of Theweleit’s fascist soldiers and during peacetime, as is more relevant in the present Polish scenario, by maintaining such groups in subordination (p. 92). Thus indigenous members of the traditional Polish national community are discursively and materially evicted from citizenship in the newly conceptualized EU Polish state as
disposable populations, like ancient debris swept away on the way to the now not only modern, but post-modern Western utopian project under the EU, to use Goldberg’s terminology.

Such a material and imaginary expulsion of the indigenous members of the national community from the modern body politic, is epitomized by the most spectacular use of state violence against members of this collective, most evident in the case of the Smolensk-mourning “defenders of the cross” at the Krakowskie Przedmiescie main capital square, symbolically and physically thrust beyond the boundaries of the public realm to the peripheral sphere of the church, prison or mental hospital, accompanied by the rehearsal of old colonial pathologising discourses of the alleged insanity and fascism of Polish patriots or a similar routine brutal police treatment of young patriotic Polish soccer fans vilified as ‘hooligans”, “bandits” in dominant discourse. A further suppression of indigenous Poles’ public initiatives is further evident in supplanting the traditional annual independence march of November 11, criminalized in mainstream rhetoric as riot-ridden, by an official, presidential, “respectable” procession or the introduction of new holidays replacing the traditionally serious, quiet, reflective patriotic national days of observance, such as Flag Day marked by loud Western-style music, entertainment and consumerism. Such a modern material and discursive nation-building project is further described by Thobani (2007) with respect to Canada and its relationship to its Aboriginal population, based on a fundamental Western Enlightenment binary opposition of self-other. She writes: in the dominant Canadian national mythology “the figure of the national subject is a much venerated one, exalted above all others as the embodiment of the quintessential characteristics of the nation and the personification of its values, ethics, and civilizational mores (p. 3), while “the stranger has historically been suspected of embodying the potential for the very negation of nationality within modernity” and as such, is the subject of concern, if not outright hostility” (p. 4). Such an imagined hierarchical dichotomy was further re-enforced as the idealized nationals could validate their superior status via their materially privileged position in Canadian society and a concomitant deprivileging and utter violation of the unwanted Indian aliens. Analogously in the Polish case, a new superior EU Poland - secular, post-modern, future-directed, optimistic, cosmopolitan, “post-national”: either “small homelands” or supranational-based, comes into being, in opposition to and on the brutalized remains of the old “Mohair” Poland - religious,
“pre-modern” or even anti-modern, ancestors-oriented, sombre, traditional, nation-grounded. Most significantly for this thesis, it is the educational curriculum text via its anti-Polish and pro-West content and pedagogy of who is a desired citizen and who is not, that becomes a crucial vehicle for realizing this greater macro-sociological project.
References


Part 2: Indigenous Voices of Resistance - the Interviews:

Just as the Critical Discourse Analysis Methodology utilized in the previous section to interrogate the discursive reproduction of social power, this same CDA methodology allows for an examination of the contestation of such power, based on the recipient subjects’ autonomous cognition, thus opening the door to social change and liberation. As Van Dijk (2001) says, if an imposed top-down discourse does not accord with the recipient subjects’ pre-formed identities, beliefs and experiences, rather than blindly interiorizing and uncritically replicating such discourse (and thus propagating social power), the addressees of this discourse may challenge and undermine such hegemonic discourse. Thus, while the purpose of the previous section was a critique of colonial educational discourse embodied by the education reform legislation, the aim of this section is to explore indigenous voices of anti-colonial resistance of local Polish teachers on the ground (as the intermediaries before the ultimate student destinataries of this discourse), complemented by other marginalized voices from the larger Polish society. As was elaborated in the Introductory chapter, the Indigenous Methodology applied to this part of the study, privileges such indigenous voices, knowledges, and experiences, recognizing the transformative power of these indigenous, subjugated cultures and epistemologies as sites of resistance and empowerment (Denzin 2008, p. 2-15). Returning to the precepts of the Anti-colonial Discursive Framework underpinning this entire thesis:

The anti-colonial discursive framework acknowledges the power of local social practice and action in surviving the colonial and colonized encounters. It argues that power and discourse are not possessed entirely by the colonizer. Quite the contrary, the colonized has also the power to question, challenge and subsequently subvert the oppressive structures of power and privilege. Discursive agency and power of resistance also reside in and among colonized groups (Bhabha, 1995). They always have had a (theoretical and practical) conception of the colonizer and based on such a conception they have engaged in social and political relations with the colonizer (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 300).

As will be demonstrated below, these teachers, rather than helpless victims, passive recipients of such hegemonic discourse, appear as active agents of change, who despite the hegemonic dictates of these reforms under the letter of law, consciously navigate their colonial situation and in the privacy of their classrooms engage in discourses and acts of resistance to the imposed order. As Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) explain: “Contact between
the imperial centre and the colonial periphery continues to involve complex and creative encounters and resistances. The myriad resistances help sustain the local human conditionalities of the colonized other” (p. 301). Thus, the colonial dynamic, rather than a unilateral transfer of power, entails an inverse orientation of bottom-up opposition, a constant navigation, maneuvering and resisting colonial pressures and encroachments, even in small ways, behind the closed door of the classroom.“The anti-colonial approach recognizes the importance of locally produced knowledge emanating from cultural history and daily human experiences and social interactions” (p. 300). “It is by according a discursive integrity to subjects’ accounts of their stories and cultures, indigenous languages and knowledge forms that colonial imperialist projects can be destabilized” (p. 301). Thus, by centering indigenous narratives of critique and resistance, as will be illustrated below, strategies for decolonization are explored, thus completing a holistic view of Poland’s colonial scenario. While the focus remains the literature curriculum, the analysis encompasses the wider Polish society of which the educational discourse constitutes an intricate part.

Practically all teachers interviewed lamented the drastic cutback of the high school literature curriculum. Referring to the downscalement of the 2012 reformed literary canon to a staggering 13 books to be read in full over the entire 3 year new high school education period, one teacher encapsulated the bleak educational scenario with utter despair:

With 13 books over the duration of the whole high school, what can you show them (the students). Your hands shake over what to show them. We’re behind on contemporary (literature) because there is no time. Because there are so few hours. Once there were 4 years (of high school). And here of the 3, 1 year is practically cut off, so in 2 years what can you do?

Other teachers echoed this desperate sentiment of being cornered by the new truncated literature program (curricular and temporal), complaining the 4/5 hours of Polish class per week in the new high school was barely enough to realize even the prescribed minimum, making inspiring knowledge outside of it, despite official recommendations, virtually impossible. Paradoxically, despite the program’s formal declaration of a focus on postmodern linguistic innovation and a professed preference for modern items versus the old-Polish ones considered out-moded today, teachers pointed to the practical reality of a lack of time even for modern literature. One teacher elaborated at length her concern about the
reduction of the contemporary canon, revealing the hypocrisy of the education reform which cannot even fulfill its own claims.

We have very little time. I can only bring the Polish literature program up to Mrozek’s ‘Tango’. These are the 60-ties, what kind of contemporary literature is that!? And this young individual leaves high school.. Because as far as poetry is concerned, I try to sneak in Milosz, Herbert, Szymborska in younger grades as part of the dialogue with tradition. So they know Milosz, Rozewicz, Szymborska, Herbert, maybe Zagajewski, Baranczak, Lipska. But that is pretty much it for modern literature. Whereas school should also show what is happening now, what is coming out today. It’s a pain that I don’t have time to talk about this. Textbooks technically do lead up to Modernity, but in March/April (of their last year), the children are so “gone” and preoccupied with their upcoming exam (“matura”), who will be reading modern literature?”. (...)

Thus, I am very concerned about the reading competency of contemporary/avant-garde literature based on what was done to the literary canon - the exclusion of the basis of its understanding. Because in reality, students - which I deeply regret - learn avant-garde literature - which enables the understanding of the newest trends, penned by today’s greats - (to a poor extent) ... even Gombrowicz’s ‘Ferdydurke’ is in fragments! So on the one hand we want to encourage young people to read, but when they reach for modern Polish prose, they do not have a knowledge base to draw on. Because if I do one short story of Bruno Szulc from the whole cycle (!) - which once you had to read ‘Sklepy Cynamonowe’ in full. For Szulc I have one lesson, 1.5 or 2 if I get lucky (at the expense of something else). So on the one hand we are to catch up to Europe and the newest trends, yet on the other hand there is a removal of the difficult avant-garde literature whose understanding is a prerequisite for a competent reading of the newest and greatest releases on the publishing market.

Another teacher shared this concern about the time pressure of the new program and the concommittant dire fate of the latest literature in it:

I think the program in school should be elastic enough to allow time for the basic canon, but also leaving time to introduce something new. Meanwhile it turns out that there is not much time for these novelties. If you do do it, you have to “steal” those hours.

Apart from the noted Ministry’s of Education prescription of the complete removal of most thick school readings from the list, all teachers unanimously strongly critiqued the accompanying ministerial decision to leave the remaining ones in excerpts. One teacher reflected on how this process of fragmentarization of texts begins already in the preceding level of education (gymnasium), but which has consequences for the learning process in high school:
For some time now, maybe 6 years, we are observing a lower quality of students coming to (high) school from gymnasium. This weakness stems not from the fact that they are not prepared intellectually - children did not change their capabilities - but they are not prepared for the analysis of literary works because they did not read many works in full, and some none at all, and secondly they have no knowledge of history ie. background/contexts which would help them understand a given work of art/culture/literature. They did everything in excerpts...

One teacher shared his personal experience of shocking first-hand contact with the Eurocentric postmodern model of fragmentarism as contrasted with the traditional Polish educational ethos of reading texts in their entirety:

I experienced the first shock in the 70-ties when I was studying in France. And what I saw made my hair stand on end in fear already then. Because: Gustav Flaubert ‘Madame Bovary’ - extrait (ie. excerpts), Stendhal‘The Charterhouse of Parma’ - excerpts. I think to myself, Jesus Christ, I start imagining: ‘Pan Tadeusz’ - excerpts, ‘Ogniem i Mieczem’ - excerpts, ‘Krzyzacy’ Sienkiewicz - excerpts... Good Lord, what does this lead to? It was such a horrendous experience and I was happy that back home at least for now, at the time, everything is read in full.

This same teacher later proceeded to explain the reason behind his skepticism towards the whole fragmentary approach:” This fragmentarism is a problem because how can you talk about the value of a book, the style of the language, when you read fragments?”

Another teacher highlighted the negative consequences of fragmentary reading for readership in general, crucially debunking the most often officially cited reason for the downsizement and simplification of the school literature canon of the naturalized lack of readership in today’s world, to which the new school program must simply positivistically adjust and revealing its socially constructed nature, precisely through such a truncated school curriculum:

It’s not good that there are fragments because the whole point of reading the work is lost.” (...). Literary works should be read in whole because they are a whole. Nothing bad, mediocre is proposed, only highly artistic works or those representative of a certain (literary) trend, movement or epoch, so they should be learned in full. And not - if (the students) don’t read, then let them read at least only a piece. They are not reading because they are not forced to read. If they are not forced, then they will not read.

This teacher also noted once again the duplicity of the new Polish subject curriculum which despite its pronouncement of priming the skill of reading over theoretical knowledge
contexts, fails to achieve even this aim as the skill of reading is not obtained through reading fragments. When asked about the reading of patriotic literature in the new school, this teacher responded: “If you don’t learn how to read literature properly - and you won’t on fragments - then things like Baczynski will also be hard to understand”. Paradoxically, without such basic knowledge and skills, students are not able to even engage in critique of tradition which the new program would seem to encourage, as was possible in the pre-reform canon, for example while discussing more contemporary and innovative works like Gombrowicz.

Another teacher penetrated the true effect of the reform in a similar vein:

Even though the Core Curriculum prescribes ‘Kordian’ and ‘Dziady’ in fragments, I cover both in full. Because understanding Kordian in fragments, when they cannot understand when reading the whole thing and it takes a lot of work to get them to understand. So now, to get them to understand a fragment, without reference to history, ie. the November Uprising for example, is impossible to get through. And hence I think their unwillingness to read - they don’t understand, so they don’t read”. (...). I completely do not understand how someone concocted for example - Reymont’s ‘Chlopi’ 4 volumes - what’s the point of having them read 1 volume, as is suggested by the Core Curriculum now. This new teaching is very abstract.

Another teacher resounded the same observation regarding the “Chlopi” reading: “What’s the point of even starting, if you do not finish?”.

Apart from the already mentioned fragmentarization of the literary canon, teachers ascribed the decline in student readership to the lack of historical contexts in literature education in the reformed system already adumbrated earlier. One teacher emphasized that the students’ lack of understanding and ultimately, aversion to reading stemmed from a poor introduction deprived of a proper historical contextualization of the work, especially in the case of the older Polish literature which is considered most problematic for today’s students. Instead of a traditionally systematic and chronological course in the history of literature accompanying the works discussed, the new system offers none or again, a fractional or thematic approach. This teacher concluded:

Withdrawal of the historic-literary teaching style is catastrophic for both the teacher and the student. I’ll give you the example of my own daughter who comes back after the Matura exam and asks if Rej was the Baroque or Enlightenment. (Writers) are put in completely random arrangement, there is no order. It is done thematically - eg. (the theme of) “love” etc. That makes absolutely no sense.
Another teacher stressed the intricate links of literature and history education and their synergistic importance in the transmission of values, more so in the case of literature than history, in the instance of a colonized country like Poland where history was appropriated by the colonizers whereas literature preserved the integrity of Polish history - an observation that also resonated with my own personal experience of traditional Polish education where the reading of Polish literature was instrumental to my internalization of past events and values:

Values are passed on through the literature, mainly on Polish and history classes. Of course history is a difficult subject, for one, and two, history can be falsified. But these are the two subjects where you can transmit to the student values, different values, not only patriotism, but honesty, dignity, a general human decency. And this new reform lacks this. In actuality, in my opinion as a practitioner, the most important thing in this new reform is relativism. This is evident when discussing some school readings, which when your generation covered eg. ‘Konrad Wallenrod’ or ‘Kordian’ in full, as it should be - you knew this was treason, that was heroism. Of course within this framework you could still have your own opinion, but with (today’s students) everything is relative. It depends on the point of view is the most common response, there is no such thing as objective truth for them.

Other teachers, in the context of a 3 person focus group, elaborated further on the general universal and time-less value of, especially old Polish literature, despite prevalent present discourses of its alleged anachronicity and irrelevancy to the present day, where freedom and independence are naturalized and liberation struggle rooted in Poland’s national history and literature are devalued as obsolete, providing justification for removal of such matter. While opening up the option of wider choice in relation to the modern canon (as was traditionally the case also in the pre-reform curriculum I personally experienced), teachers highlighted the importance of a unitary classical canon with respect to its cultural, linguistic and general humanistic value:

(While we can debate the contents of the contemporary canon), on the other hand there are many classical items without which you cannot even imagine education. Because this is a base. This is how a generally educated person - who has precisely that, a basic knowledge set - functions in our culture, in our language. Because literature gives rise to certain linguistic conventions - for example, idioms, their origin (the Bible, mythology), exchange of one word for another, construction of sentences, the context in which we humans talk, refer to something - it’s difficult to imagine normal life in general, also private, interpersonal relations without this. Or treating literature as a kind of simulation of life - ie. I am not
talking about a direct copying (of the literary situation) but of a certain (reflective) value of reading literature.

Another teacher added the patriotic value of especially the Romantic literature expounding the moral ethos of duty to the national collective and national emancipation struggle, so delegitimized in the dominant discourse and thus marginalized and depreciated in the new school curriculum, summarizing succinctly: “It builds a moral and spiritual foundation in youth”.

Another teacher noted the crucial anti-colonial role of Polish literature, as a potent tool of anti-colonial resistance and national survival over the ages of Poland’s multiple colonial encroachments, beginning with the 19th century partitions:

The Polish language survived thanks to the literature. Despite the efforts of the Russians and Prussians, the destruction of the language did not succeed. The greatest flourishing of periodicals was in Positivism. And this was the stupidity of the partitioners because they allowed for the printing of periodicals, even trivial ones, but which provoked to read in Polish. It was thanks to literature, the written word (that Polishness survived). The first editions of ‘Pan Tadeusz’ were this (small) - you could smuggle them over the border in your boot. So the nation lives so long as its language lives - that was said a long time ago. Note that Mexico does not have its own language, the (native) Mexicans yielded to the Spanish. Brazil, all of South America yielded to the conquistadors, the Portuguese - there the language is Portuguese. And here 123 years of captivity, but because of the language... the Poles did not give in to de-nationalization because the whole time they read in Polish.

Music Professor Marek Dyzewski (2013), an active indigenous Polish voice particularly in the cultural sphere, in one of his public lectures of a whole cycle devoted to saving a Poland in crisis elaborated on the fundamental importance of literature as art in shaping the soul of the young reader and in sustaining the Polish cultural identity and the destructive effects of its diminishment in the new education reform:

A work of art, removed from its entirety, its integrality, loses its strength of appeal to the mind and emotions of the young person. And Polish literature education is incredibly complementary to building a common historic memory which constitutes our identity. Because historical truth, the truth about our past, cloaked in the sphere of literature or poetry into the form of beauty, has an immense appealing force to the young person, who can then say: I know, I understand, but also, I experience, I have an emotional connection to it, I (am beginning to) love it. And that is the whole point of education, because it is not only informational education, but also historic. We have in the Polish language a oneness of two words: education (ksztalcenie) and formation (ksztaltowanie), they have a common root. So education should be a formation of character, also with reference to the homeland, to its
tradition, its history, to the national community. So education should be a formation of, let’s say it outright, a patriotic attitude.

Bronislaw Wildstein (2013), former anti-communist dissident, contemporary patriotic Polish journalist and writer, in the alternative TV channel ‘Republika’ expounds the crucial role of a common literary canon in the construction of a shared national imaginary, a reference point to the Polish cultural code which ensures the sustenance of the cohesion and historical continuity of the nation and the disastrous consequences of its destruction in the breaking of this continuity and cohesion and its implication in causing the fragmentation of the present Polish post/neocolonial Republic into the internal Orient of the Polish patriots embodying the indigenous Polish ethos and the “Enlightened” colonial elite comprador aiming to expunge this traditional ethos in the process of the formation of a new post-modern European-Unionized Poland. Referring to the removal of two key works for the Polish national imaginary ‘Pan Tadeusz’ (removed from gymnasium relative to the previous stage of the reform of 2002, now only left in high school) and ‘Trylogia’ (reduced to one volume) in the latest education reform, he states:

This destruction of the school - because elimination of readings such as ‘Pan Tadeusz’ or ‘Trylogia’ is the destruction of the school, because it is the destruction of a certain canon. Because school takes part in the creation of the modern community. It gives the same literature to everyone - literature that founds, which allows us to recognize each other as a community. In that sense for example ‘Pan Tadeusz’ or ‘Trylogia’ are invaluable. ‘Pan Tadeusz’ - not only because it is an epic poem, but it is poem about a mythical order of Poland before its fall and the incredible value that is this community, which can quarrel amongst itself, present various negative aspects, but ultimately constitutes a certain fundamental value which overcomes all these problems which are bound to happen everywhere. (...) ‘Trylogia’ is the same in that regard because it is about the republican ethos. Its characters are very different, but they posses a sense of the common good which allows them to overcome their weaknesses. So again this great literature that forms a common myth. And this was extremely important, this was evident during the Second World War in the pseudonyms that these young soldiers took. Very often they were derived from Sienkiewicz and that shows the value of this literature. (...) (This school literature canon) forms a world of a common imagination. Obviously, later these people will differ. Some will do this, others that. Some will never read another book in their life, others will read very refined texts, but the point is that they have that common set of concepts to which they can refer. It’s a referral to a world of a common imagination, of common values which extend far beyond conflict towards the defense of something common. Different people, different social groups, but they do share something in common. If we don’t have that, then there is no such thing as community. Of course the word ‘community’ is now cursed, but at the same time those who (discredit) community, complain about social fractures, social discord, anomie ie. the social
split. Well, that’s where it comes from, because we don’t have a sense of community, we
don’t have that reservoir to which we can all refer.

While the focus of this thesis is the literary canon, all teachers pointed to the critical
role of the Maturity exam finalizing the high school education program, which given the new
system’s results-orientation and test-centricity, dictates the entire shape of the Polish subject
education, including literature instruction. As one teacher explains, locating the origin of the
prevalent fragmentarism of education in the format of of the new Matura from 2005:

But all this came from the fact that the new matura encompasses a fragment, you have to
discuss a fragment of a given work and few questions relate to the whole from which this
fragment is derived. There are no more topics like: ‘The romantic hero - choose works which
illustrate this’. Because now the point is to test reading comprehension of a journalistic and
literary work. Hence essays are reading a literary text with comprehension, and the first part
of the matura is reading a journalistic piece with comprehension.

Another teacher, when asked about the decline in student readership in the new school also
drew attention to the maturity exam, once again emphasizing its socially constructed nature:

Let us begin with the fact that the written matura now looks completely different. Because if
up to now you had to write a fairly long composition, in which you had to demonstrate
knowledge of the readings and now the examination paper contains some fragments based on
which you write an essay. So really you don’t need to be familiar with this reading, it’s
enough that you read carefully (the text), possibly know something on the topic, and I think
you’ll write something no problem.

A second teacher within this 3-person focus group amplified this opinion regarding the
matura:

Once students had 3 concrete questions from literature. You had to read, learn this -
fragmentarization of texts absolutely did not do the job. Someone who did not know, did not
read the works, either did not pass the matura or passed with a poor grade. And now the
system sort of promotes not reading, promotes the slackers because if someone wants to
develop on their own, widen their horizons, be a generally educated individual - they will
read anyway to have a general awareness. But now the system sort of supports this kind of
behaviour - don’t read because it’s not worth it anyway. It is not in vogue to read and be an
educated person”. (...)You practically do not have to prepare for the written matura - I will
say in all honesty that a person of average intelligence will write it, pass it - maybe will not
get a high number of points, but will pass. Because first you have source texts, to which there
are questions - most pertain to general knowledge so you can circle blindly - because they are
mostly multiple choice questions, so (you count on luck). (And if you’re not lucky), then the
text implies certain answers, so you can rely on that to get a certain number of points. Plus
two texts to compare from which you can - a person of average intelligence will manage
without greater general literary preparation.
The third teacher further resounding this view: “because exactly, you are not asked about the interpretation, the context, but merely what directly emerges from the text”.

Another teacher confirmed this unanimous belief of teachers about the new matura exam:

There is a text based on which you have to write a composition. There is a fragment, the said fragment and there is a topic to this fragment. It is enough to analyze this fragment, sometimes mechanically list... I am still lucky to be grading at the advanced level where the essays are a bit better, but at the basic level they are not good essays. So the matura sort of cultivates in them... it stopped demanding (of them), the students preparing for the matura sort of don’t... when it comes to the Polish subject, these requirements are significantly reduced... It is true that you can pass the matura without having done the readings and only having written a fairly good analysis of the mere fragment. So this is sort of teaching mediocrity.

As another teacher concisely put it: “The new matura gives them a mandate not to read”.

A further crucial factor related to the matura exam which constrains the whole literature education process in the new high school is a standardization of learning, known as the infamous amongst Polish educational circles phenomenon of “teaching according to the (answer) key”. As one teacher articulated emphatically:

We were muzzled, as I not very nicely call it, by the new matura, which urges us to prepare the child for skills - very necessary skills, but of precise reading, interpreting, analyzing of a certain fragment. Obviously this fragment should be related to the whole, but we later mark the matura according to a so called answer model, answer key. And the point is that the centre of gravity in the Polish subject moves towards a cultivation of skills of precise reading, interpreting and squeezing out from the literary text and from its fragment, what is in it. (...) (So) when we teach reading, the students do not like it because they claim there is a need to ‘match the answer key’. The baby was sort of thrown out with the bathwater because these children do not have the chance to express their opinions, beliefs, reflections because nobody cares about that. On the (old) matura that you wrote there would routinely be (a topic) that would ask you to elaborate on it in relation to the literature and your own opinion on it. So the student was required to think which readings, either one’s own or from the canon, he/she will choose to elaborate (the topic). Then, marks and points were given for the student’s own opinion on the subject. And now these children are given a fragment (...) But children have the need to express what literature is for them. And they write it. And I have to give them a zero for that conclusion because it is not stated in the topic what you think about (it). For me, this new format (of the matura) sort of kills individualism, a difference, originality of perspective. Because everybody must be prepared for the skillful reading of the topic and, I will use the children’s wording of ‘matching the answer key’.
Another teacher reverberated this critical position on the homogenization and normalization of the present standardized testing system and the submissive versus critical student subject it creates, once again, despite its official proclamations:

Matura from Polish, when we mark it, if somebody is really a humanist who likes to rebel, who likes to write a polemic, different essay (my son was like that), right now would have trouble with the matura exam because there is an answer key and you have to match this answer key. If it is written in the answer key and you do not have it in your work, then you don’t get the point. And now what about that student who does not agree with the topic. In the old matura you could write a polemic work. Here no, here you must think like the others. And this is disturbing, that we have to think like everybody else, whereas the young person should be able to rebel.

Another teacher validated this diagnosis of the new system in stark opposition to the old one: “(The old matura) required from people an independence of thinking because the child had to choose his/her own books or demonstrate his/her own observations”.

One teacher exposed the root cause behind the new system’s movement away from the more qualitative, process-oriented humanistic model based on individual reflection characteristic of the old curriculum and a tendency towards skills-based analysis of texts in the in the effect-driven and quantifiable precepts of the reformed curriculum:

On the old matura, which you took, reflection was important. You read the text and based on your experience and knowledge of the literature, you could engage in a certain reflection on this text. Whereas now analysis of the text is important. This was dictated by one important element - to the old matura, to reflection, it would not be possible to build an answer model. Whereas to analysis of the text it is possible. So if this standardized assessment model is used, it can only be analysis/interpretation of texts. (This) gives rise to a certain analysis scheme and (the students) must fit their reading of this text fragment on the matura into this scheme. Of course this is a lowering of a certain level - they must only read this text within a certain scheme. (...) Because if it were to be reflection, then this topic becomes unquantifiable, it’s hard to work with. So here at the expense of developing a certain model, reflection was abandoned for analysis/interpretation. Whereas I think that students don’t need this analysis/interpretation at all and it would be better if they had a reflection on the topic. The way it was before, that you had to think and choose works and see how this topic functioned in the literature and in your own reflection. Whereas today such questions are no longer asked. So this orientation towards testing this one skill causes a lowering of the level. The same is the case on the first part (of the matura) which tests reading comprehension. It tests one skill - if the student knows how to read the text - in the first part these are journalistic or popular science texts - with comprehension. And that is practically the only one skill that is tested on the matura.
This teacher proceeded to demystify the end goal of this social technology that the instrument of standardized testing de facto performs of lowering the whole level of Polish education and dispelling accusations of the official reasons for its implementation of the alleged lack of objectivism in the previous system:

(In this new reform) the school completely loses its autonomy. You were still lucky enough under the old system, in (schools) that had the matura, each school had its own autonomy. It was teachers from a given school who devised the questions for the oral matura, they graded the (written matura), setting a certain level (for the school). Now, the new matura gives them the right not to study. Because virtually anybody can pass it. On the basic level you get a fragment of a text, a topic and you have to write 250 words on this topic. So there is no student who could not pass it, unless he/she really tried. The passing rate is 98%. Whereas with the old matura, the student knew that if he/she went to a certain school and the school had a certain autonomy, he/she knew that this obliged to something (that he had to write it well). I mean every school set a certain tone and students had to adjust to it. Now when we mark the exams, we have a certain answer key and we have to mark according to this key... Whereas before teachers were accused of a lack of objectivism which was not true because if you read thousands of these large essays, you were able to judge - and it was not a matter of my whim - why this text and not another one is good or important.

Another teacher elaborated the fundamental difference between the skill of reading a literary versus a journalistic/popular-science text, dispelling the common myth of Polish students’ alleged improved performance in reading comprehension as seen in Western-centric standardized tests for example under PISA (by OECD) which merely capitalized on the already well trained student minority who simply regear their literary reading skills to the much simpler task of popular text interpretation:

As regards the matura, we were once lauded for our success that we were at the tail end in reading comprehension and then suddenly we moved up to a fairly good position. What’s that all about? Reading a literary text is completely different than other texts eg. a journalistic text. Information from a literary text you collect from every part of a work, from the beginning, middle, end and only then do you have a whole, whereas for example in a journalistic text you follow the line of reasoning of the author. So we had this didactic schizophrenia. We taught reading of (literary) texts, but evaluation of knowledge was based on journalistic or popular-science texts. So this narrative of this big success, that suddenly we leaped over the span of a few years is nonsense because the teacher simply prepared for reading those who already read very well previously, whereas the rest remained where it was.. Because it was actually not hard to show how to work with this text to students who already know how to read.

Finally, with respect to the matura exam, all teachers loudly protested the new marking scheme which downscaled the passing mark from a previous minimum 2 grade (the
equivalent of 51% on a 1-6 scale) to an astounding 30% (21 points out of 70), all serving to further deprecate the Polish education. Here are a few of different teachers’ synchronous opinions on the subject:

The format of the new matura from Polish is unacceptable for me, however I do mark them and I am not going to hide the fact that I, like most of us Polish teachers, mark them for financial reasons. Our salaries thus far are such that that extra boost of say 1500 zloty around the month of June means you can send your child on vacation for that. And that’s a fact however each year when I mark them I rebel against myself that I mark them. Because they are really on a very low linguistic level, terrible, and the scoring system is such that the vast majority of students will pass because it is only 21 points out of 70, which is 30%. And 30% passes the exam.

I would also raise the subject of the scoring system. If 100% is the whole, then 30% passes the matura. To me that is disgraceful. (It is not even 50%) God! It should be 50+1, what do you mean 30%?! Only a half-wit will not do the analysis, because you just repeat what is already written, quote somewhere, sometimes add something and somehow it is pushed through. In my opinion this is depreciation. When I read the exams of these kids, for half of them, I don’t know what I would do because their writing and imagination skills, it’s a tragedy...

And now even if I don’t pass the student - because many students I don’t pass because I can no longer, for example, tolerate laziness, this horrible laziness - it won’t change anything because he/she sooner or later will pass and he/she will be accepted into university because he/she will merely show his/her maturity diploma and with a mark of 30% from the matura, you can get into university. A 30% threshold - what is 30%?! This is the passing threshold for the matura - you pass if you solve questions from all subjects for 30%! Before, if you had 51%, that was at most ‘poor’ (2) because that’s barely half. 75% (3) was ‘satisfactory’. And here it is ‘poor’ so a 30% pass so he/she doesn’t know anything. Because the answer keys are such that a 10 year old child would likely also be able to answer them. 2 years ago the matura was: a fragment of Molier’s ‘Swietoszek’, describe the characters! I am not joking - don’t even refer to the text, but describe the characters. Unfortunately I have to say it because that’s how it is...

All teachers also noted the abominable linguistic level of the matura, once again underscoring its socially engineered nature through, apart from broader cultural factors (which are discussed later on), precisely through educational instruments like new matura with its the fragmentation of the literary canon and a short essay relative to a lengthy dissertation in the old matura which, as one teacher pointed out, was instrumental also in cultivating linguistic competency:

Their linguistic style on the matura is absolutely horrible, horrible. They use language that is reduced, infantilized, simple sentences, shorthand - like those in text messages. Not to
mention anglicisms... This sometimes makes the markers laugh - there are now even booklets
being published with all these humorous language things on the matura. They are not
sporadic, they are pervasive. Sometimes when you mark them, your hand does not want to
sign the matura which is so poor but which you have to pass because it has 30%, 21
points.(...) Reading literature exposed you to different styles, you could choose. Whereas
now there is only one style, mainly shorthand style. Because the essay on the matura is 250
words. And the test which they have to solve (in the first part of the matura) and later there
are given responses (in the answer key).

Another teacher adding in relation to the starkly opposite old matura: “Long essays (in the
old matura) also developed language skills”.

In addition to the written matura, the oral matura exam was also indicated by nearly
all teachers to contribute to the destruction of the learning process, including student
readership of literature. While one the one hand the long-essay format of the old matura was
transferred to the new oral matura, given its drastically diminished length (15 minute oral
presentation) versus a minimum 4 large page written essay in the old system, combined with
reduced requirements of the knowledge of the complete literature on the exam, the
diminishment of its importance due to its removal from university admission requirements
and the possibility of various abuses eg. its purchasing on the internet given its take-home
nature versus the previous on-the-spot delivery, the oral matura was identified as yet another
component of the ruin brought about by this reform. This is illustrated by the following
voices of different teachers:

The topics for the oral matura resemble the topics on the old written matura - choose at least
3 works to discuss a certain issue, literary motif or particular hero. But in actuality, you don’t
have to read those works in full, even if you list them in the references. That is, as a Polish
teacher, I always assumed that you had to read them because you can get a question from the
(exam) committee about a given work, but then I realized that questions are asked in such a
way so that the student responds the least, ie. quickly, so that he passes. Regarding the scope
of it - it’s a huge material, this type of work previously took up at least 4 large pages, but
they are to convey the same content in 15 minutes.

The choice of works (previously present in the old written matura) was moved to the oral
matura. Because there the student (is asked to present on a topic he gets in September and
works on the whole year). He can incorporate different elements, literary works also outside
of the required readings. But the problem is that all the topics - which cannot be infinite
because the program is finite, it contains a finite number of works and themes - already
function, students post these works on the internet now and for 29 zlotys, which is a
laughable amount, you can buy such a work and present it. Others take the even easier route -
if I get really vexed, I do an experiment for myself, I look on wikipedia the day before the
exam looking which topics I will have. I can then expect, out of 12 students presenting their topic, if I have 3 on that particular topic (eg. horror), then at least I will repeat exactly the sequence of adjectives from Wikipedia. Really! And I have to listen to that and quietly, with an appropriate expression because this is a state exam etc., I am expected to be an official, to fill out a protocol - the student said it and I am to evaluate it! Because he said it, I am not allowed to interrupt him, I cannot tell him that’s from Wikipedia, I can only ask him questions to the topic that he presented.

There is no motivation now to prepare well for the oral matura because it doesn’t count anywhere. The points you get from this presentation do not count anywhere towards (recruitment) into university. Because if there is no whip, then it doesn’t make sense because there is not benefit for it anywhere. Obviously then you won’t be properly motivated. (...) (Plus) in September you draw a topic, you have till May to prepare. You can collect material from various books, from the internet - what’s so hard about that? Everyone can help you at home and you just have to memorize it. I don’t know why they didn’t remove the oral matura altogether then, since the points, not mark are just written somewhere to show that it was passed, plus (it can be) bought or downloaded from the internet - it will be simply checked off (as passed).

Now the authorities are to step away from (this format of the oral matura) because everyone buys these presentations on the internet. It’s a parody. You really have to see it - he writes on the (internet) forum I need (or), I passed the matura, I got a (good result) on this particular topic and for 50/100 zlotys you can sell it. And this idiot memorizes it. How many times was I approached - I will pay you, please write it...

Despite the government’s resolve to return to some of the tenets of the old system for the matura beginning 2015, with a (partial) departure from the anwer key model in the written matura (essay part only) and an on-the-spot draw of topic on the oral exam, given the reform’s fundamental orientation completely opposite to Polish educational tradition, notwithstanding these cosmetic changes, the prospects for the future of Polish schooling seem bleak.

Many teachers also situated the deterioration of the Polish subject education in the broader decline of humanities education in the present post-transformation Polish society, reminding once again of the Western modernizing project that underpins this new education model instilled over the gradual stages in the “post”colonial III Republic, based in the “progressive” rational scientism and expunging the “backward” more spiritual aspects typically pathologized as insanity, as gestured to by two teachers in the focus group:

Let us begin with the fact that nobody in today’s time values humanistic education. This ended a few years ago, nobody considers it to be an intellectual value in and of itself - maybe due to the greater accentuation now of technical knowledge, modern technologies, which
most of society has no knowledge of anyway, but nonetheless that is the political option. People publicly boast that they don’t read and no one condemns them for it, on the contrary, it is considered completely normal. And humanistic education is some kind of (extra decoration), not useful for anything.

I have the impression that we (humanists) are treated as if we were mentally insane - what do you get out of (being a humanist)? If you finish any university, and especially the humanities department, you are considered to border on mental illness - because what’s the point, what do you get out of having studied that? The polytechnic - yes, technical education - go right ahead...

Other teachers cited how this erosion of humanities education, particularly the humanistic formation ethos runs completely contrary to the traditional Polish education model rooted in the pedagogic practices of the previous independent II Republic. One teacher explained in detail the difference between the previous humanistic/cultural/formative versus the new pragmatic/utilitarian philosophy of the school:

What is the philosophy of the school today, how did it change? The philosophy of the school changed in the sense that there are significant changes in... Once school had a different goal/character - the goal of the school was formation, also finding cultural identity. Whereas today the goals of the school are more pragmatic, students practically want to get educated in a certain field and they don’t expect any formative or cultural activities and this improverished somewhat the school of the formative element. Because frankly speaking once school was seen also as a kind of formation. Perhaps it was related to the times in which it functioned. Despite the whole communist exterior, our school was nevertheless built on prewar models - because there were still teachers. The prewar school was an element of formation. And the prewar school and generally school up to now was geared towards humanities studies. In spite of all, for example Polish was the principal subject which later enabled studies in different fields, irrespectively of... So once this humanities education was the foundation and now there is a departure from this. (...) Because we had this system of formation - which is interesting, some people asked how it was possible in a school formed under different conditions, of the system after 1945 (communism) - where humanities studies gave students a certain refinement/salon cultivation. You could discuss about philosophy because students knew a certain cultural code which was transmitted through Polish lessons, for example. Apart from the cultural code, they knew how to speak because they read, they had no problems with it. And the situations presented in the school readings, certain model situations became a model of a certain literary reality to which you could refer and based on which you could build your own system of values and attitudes. Whereas now, if I ask about a salon - a funny thing, while discussing Dziady part III - then students immediately list: car salon, hair salon - a terrible depreciation of this concept. So now they constantly say they don’t need any salon (cultivation), they don’t need to talk about that. (...) The curriculum (document) was once constructed in such a way that it began with a preamble which contained the Objectives and Obligations of the school. In the new Core Curriculum
this is nearly completely missing, there is only - ‘understands’, ‘reads’, ‘writes’. So these objectives were reduced to merely certain actions - these are not objectives. This was reduced, and with detriment. Because if you don’t set out the objectives and obligations, and these were defined in the axiological sphere... This lack of objectives and obligations demonstrates a complete renunciation of an axiological system. I know that these objectives were often formulated enigmatically like respect for freedom of others and civil liberties. But even such enigmatically formulated objectives required a certain reflection and at least an attempt to translate them into school practice. It’s like (before when students would visit the grave of the patron of this school) and it was said... And now it’s a big problem to get a group of students to go because they don’t see the point of it - because that objective is not there. It doesn’t fit within the presently formulated operational objectives: reading/writing and listening/understanding of texts. So it’s a shame - this comes at the cost of the axiological sphere. Because I think there are certain values which are universal in every system like respect for the other person, respect for dignity, the language and I think these should be (present).

Another teacher painted a similar picture of the degeneration of the indigenous Polish humanistic education ethos, ending with a desperate cry for decolonization:

Essentially, the whole teaching practice until this most recent reform - pseudoreform - was based on the experience of the schooling system of the interwar period. In this course - in which you also participated because it was also based on the interwar period schooling model - I am sure you sensed that Polish is a very important subject in school. Regardless of the stream of study, it was the most important subject (which my experience of a strong Polish despite my technical stream confirms). This in turn stemmed from a kind of culture-oriented schooling or education model. It was decided that school should teach Polishness and the Polish subject officially became the most important subject. Also in accord with the interwar period was an emphasis on formative goals. And up until the most recent reform, everything was based on this (model). (…)

(With the newest reform) the Polish subject was decidedly deprived of its leading role in school. It is no longer a leading subject. The curricular stipulations speak to this, eg. “Reading, speaking and writing is the responsibility of every teacher in the school”. So teachers are not prepared for this. There is a major difference between reading a mathematics question and a literary text. So this leading role was taken away and really everybody is teaching and nobody. The number of hours devoted to the Polish subject was reduced. When I went to high school I had 8 hours of Polish in the fourth grade, you had 7, now there is 6 or 5. That’s very little. Why do I so deplore the removal of this leading role? It’s a break with our tradition, a very rich didactic tradition of the Polish school. We are treated like Third World countries who don’t have any experience with (European modes) of learning. This (model) completely doesn’t apply here. (…)

With regards to this leading role of the Polish subject, there is one more important thing. The Polish subject contributes not only to the learning of the language and literature, but the general development of the student, and very importantly, intellectual development. Reading a text is like reading a document, obtaining information, concluding, generalizing, drawing connections with other concepts - all this is very important and its destruction really means
the destruction of everything else. Like I said (the Polish subject) contributes not only to the learning of literature and the theory of language, but also to the development of language skills. So all these skills - describing, narrating, speaking, expressing oneself, writing in various forms of expression, different genres - the student slowly assimilates this but if there is no time for it, then unfortunately it all leads to nowhere. And really, in my opinion, over the last 10 years, the Polish schooling tradition was destroyed. And how long it will take us to rebuild it - this is the last chance to do anything about it because later it will be too late.

All teachers unanimously decried the latest reform’s (2012) most drastic cutback of humanities education, of not just the Polish subject but also other humanities subjects, most notably history. In the new model of the high school, a general course of history for all students will end following the first year of study (supplanted thereon by a supplementary subject “History and Society” deemed completely useless). This stems from an imposed need for earlier specialization where, following their first year, students will have to choose between either a science/technical stream or a humanities stream. The reduction of history education in the science/technical streams which the vast majority of students will opt for given the anti-humanist social pressures in the dominant society will further aggravate the students’ already diminished knowledge base in the humanities, the history subject traditionally serving to parallel and amplify historic and literary content taught in the Polish subject, as these teachers elucidate. A current teacher in gymnasium with experience teaching in high school began to explain:

Now let’s say there is a science/technical stream. The moment they choose physics, chemistry, mathematics, in the 2nd and 3rd grade they will have 1 hour of history with elements of sociology! So their knowledge of history will be none, since already in gymnasium history is drastically downscaled. So I cannot imagine how these teachers in high school will be able to discuss such serious readings as: ‘Kordian’, ‘Ogniem i Mieczem’, ‘Quo Vadis’, ‘Odprawa Poslow Greckich’, Hemingway’s ‘Komu Bije Dzwon’ or Herling-Grudzinski’s ‘Inny Swiat’, if they have no reference point. If for our students (in gymnasium) historic knowledge is completely poor - they cannot relate historic periods or certain historical concepts. Eg. They don’t distinguish between the partitions, (Nazi) occupation, the First and Second World Wars, it is all the same. It makes it harder for us (Polish teachers) to then tie that in with the literature.

A present high school teacher concurred with this observation citing the example of a student who confused the basic historic context of a the novel “Noce i Dnie” (removed from the present obligatory literature canon) of the 19th century January Uprising with the World War
Two Warsaw Uprising, due to, in her estimation, the reduction of history education in the new school:

(I know an example a student preparing for the oral matura) who locates the time of action of ‘Noce i Dnie’ in the Warsaw Uprising. So he doesn’t know anything about the history of World War Two, it’s all a distant past to him. And there is so little history in the school that the teacher will not get the chance to exact all the knowledge. If someone does not want to study, they won’t study. Because today’s school promotes not the hardworking but the cunning.

Another teacher added in the same spirit regarding the effects of the downscalement of history:

If we finish history education in the first grade of high school, then what will we know about the newest history of our country? Nothing - because we will end on World War Two. But what about the whole period after 1945 - which is very important for the awareness of the contemporary person, the contemporary Pole - the whole communist era or the Martial Law... You know, I still try in my Polish classes to sneak in (certain things) on different occasions, but at the end of the day I have to come back to the literature, I cannot teach history on Polish class. So I’ll do some poems from the Martial Law or I’ll discuss Jacek Kaczmarski’s poetry as work connected with this latest history. Only then does that get covered but these are lessons completely outside of the canon. But (I doubt) there will be time for that in this new reform (from 2012).

As two teachers synchronously pointed out, there is a lack of a general compatibility of subjects which once again are in opposition to the nominal precepts of the new program of a postmodern fusion, and to Polish tradition of the synergy of humanistic subject (Polish and history).

There is no such thing as the compatibility of subjects. It was supposed to be there, but it isn’t. Every time the authorities would ask us any questions, we would point that out. (Even in the beginning of the reform there was something called ‘inter-disciplinary streams’) whose purpose, very importantly, was to encourage correspondance between subjects. But now, how is there to be any correspondance if history is cut down?

Another teacher pointed out the exact same inconsistency regarding another new complementary subject “Knowledge of Culture” introduced by the reform, its matter previously subsumed under the traditionally wholistic study of the Polish subject:

A subject called ‘Knowledge of Culture’ was introduced, which was once the traditional territory of the Polish teacher. Now this is taught not only by Polish teachers, but also art or music teachers, depending on the school. And this subject is completely random. Whereas if
taught like in our case, within the Polish language bloc, it made sense because additionally you just showed different trends in art. And that hour would be useful here. Because it’s not like language is taught separately... Language is taught in connection with literature education. So it’s all very connected, and not something detached, separate. It was the same with the ‘inter-disciplinary streams’ before... So this ‘Knowledge of Culture’ shows how on the one hand we supposedly merge contents - integration of disciplines is promoted as the source of greatest innovation, yet on the other hand we are separating everything here which leads to nowhere.

The downgrading or break up of traditional humanities subjects has dire consequences, as articulated by these two teachers:

If the historian supports me - the historian speaks of facts, but in such a way that he not only teaches dates, but so that students are able to predict the logical sequents of events, that is how history should be taught and also (the transmission of) attitudes, and I also (teach) attitudes, and then we release a human being and not a matura graduate for 30%! That is nonsense! The school lost its formative aspect”. (...) And the changes related to the latest reform (of 2012) with the curtailment of teaching hours of certain subjects, including drastically the humanities eg. history - these are irreversible negative changes for the whole society because we are dooming a few generations really. These children behave as if they are from Mars...

People can be great biotechnologists, but these people vote, go for elections, have children, which they raise, they influence others in various other ways and if these people have no knowledge of the contemporary world, no understanding of (basic values like) integrity, then what can they pass on? There are certain subjects (Polish, history) which we simply cannot (neglect).

On the other hand, while teachers lamented the erosion of humanities education in the new school, rather than replicating the stereotype of the tradition/modernity, humanities/sciences dichotomy imposed by the new system, many Polish teachers stressed the crucial importance of science subjects, also harkening back to the Polish schooling tradition rooted in the II Republic, which despite its humanities-centricity, prized a wholistic education, including the sciences. Thus, conversely, teachers condemned the reduction of science education in the technical stream of the new high school, in general rejecting the imposition of early specialization:

In this new reform, for those that choose the humanities specialization, all the other science/technical subjects will be under 1 bloc called ‘Science’. I believe this will be the downfall of our education. Because as a Polish teacher I did not mind (learning the details of,
for example, the biology subject) which did not prevent me from studying Polish in university.

I am very worried because on the one hand ‘Science’, but on the other those who choose science will have this construct - something between sociology and the history of fashion, the military etc. from history. So they will have no history at all. I am very worried not only about this history but equally as much about this ‘Science’ bloc. Because I believe it is very good if our students have a systematic knowledge (from all subjects, a general education). And this disrupts this whole system which was in place up to now...

I say this as a Polish teacher - if I wasn’t taught physics or mathematics, then I wouldn’t be able to be a teacher, or go to university... Because if I graduate from a general-education school, then I have to have a certain base which will allow me to develop further. After all, I learn throughout my whole life, and if I didn’t have that base from high school, I don’t know if I would have achieved what I achieved with regards to my intellectual and spiritual state. The fact that I read books - every member of the intelligentsia in principle reads books - that’s nothing. I have to have a basic knowledge of physics, biology - after all I live in the 21st century! And if now children will have in high school ‘Science’, some kind of physics-science-chemistry bloc, that is simply intellectual castration. Whereas these children are capable and willing to learn, but if they don’t have to, then why should they? (...) (So) I am very terrified by the fact that the student after the 1st grade will have to choose what he will study in university because having 2 more years of school before him he has every right not to know what he wants to do.

Due to the streaming of students into these multi-subject blocs and the concomitant laying off of teachers, one teacher raised a further negative effect of this reform for the formation of students:

I am afraid about the formative aspect because a teacher who works in one school gets attached to it, feels responsible for it, has his homeroom class, that’s his home. And now if I knew that for example in 10 minutes I have to leave to another school, then please tell me, which school do I really identify with - with neither. This cannot not have a negative effect on the students. Because if now I have 4 classes, so I am overlooking the formation of 110/120 children and I would get twice as many - that is a factory, I am no longer a pedagogue.

All teachers located the root cause of the reduction of the humanities (and all other subject) curriculum of the new school in the reduced time of study, the new high school being shortened from the previous 4 year period to now 3 years. While the one year was transferred to the earlier education level of gymnasium, teachers all unanimously considered it completely useless, resulting in a waste of the first year catching up the losses from gymnasium, which together with the loss of the last year preparing for the matura exam, as
was mentioned, results in a drastic amputation of actual teaching time, which the following (different) teachers convey:

(There is much less material now compared to before) because there were 4 years (of high school) and now there are 3. There is a constant lack of time, the 4 or 5 hours is very little and (the students) constantly report that they didn’t do the reading, and then who can you rely on?

Unfortunately the program of study is so cut down and there are so few full teaching days in the week - there are constant holidays, now there are (the religious) ‘Recollections - it’s not like any of the students went to church or meditated all day, they do their own thing and 3 days for a graduating class, for example, is a lot. They came here to school and wanted to study and they did. There are constant school holidays - sports day, ‘Recollections’, etc. So that, plus the downscalement of the curriculum, plus the fact that children completely don’t remember anything from gymnasium - they study for the moment, for the mark...

So you still went to a 4-year high school. And I have to say you were lucky because with regards to the changing of the school system, I miss and look back nostalgically on the 4-year school because there was time for discussion. After each reading you could devote a few minutes, or even a full lesson to some contemporary contexts. Technically this is recommended now too, but the program is generally overloaded, we have less and less time to teach. This one year is really missing here... (...) So the old 4-year school system (is missing). Especially since that year came at a time in the life of the young person, when he/she knew how to utilize this time well. Meanwhile, this time is now wasted in gymnasium, when the children are out of sorts. And as you yourself saw - they themselves claim that gymnasium was a bad idea...

The latest (2012) installment of reform, instead of adding this year back into high school and replenishing the curriculum, went in the direction of a further cut back of content ie. treating the reform with more reform, as is characteristic of all utopian modernizing projects (as was the case also with the preceding communism). The idea now being not repeating material that was already covered in the preceding gymnasium, the program counters both its own official declaration of non-linear postmodernity as well as the Polish tradition of spiral learning, the new system resulting in a return to a typically modern linear learning system. The following voices illustrate this:

Now, the point of the newest Curriculum Core (2012) is to arrange readings in such a way so that authors do not repeat (in gymnasium and high school). As a result, students forget everything (from previous levels).

This newest (2012) reform will cut off many more very important texts. The idea behind this reform is to not repeat what the students already learned. So this new reform follows a linear
model, and not a (spiral) style of teaching, which we once had where we made connections with material already taught. So the child learned about ‘Faraon’ a bit in elementary school, a bit more in gymnasium and the most in high school. You made connections with earlier epochs and you deepened/expanded/reiterated. And now if the child will learn in gymnasium about eg. ‘Faraon, king Jagiello or the Battle of Grunwald, then it won’t be discussed again in high school.

In general, all teachers derided the present fragmentation of the new school structure from a traditional two-tier system of 8+4 (elementary and high school) to the present 6+3+3 (elementary school, gymnasium and high school), once again denouncing its rupturing of the customary continuity of the traditional Polish school. As these two teachers summarize:

(Gymnasium) is really a waste of time. I see the difference (in high school students) because the 8-year school monitored the child from the age of 7 to 15. And the child knew that he/she was known, his mom, dad, grandma, grandpa, the child’s whole background was known. Whereas after 6 years (of elementary school), if this child is relocated to another school (gymnasium), then he/she gets not only a sense of maturity which is completely false (at that age), but also a sense of impunity because he/she enters a new environment. The gymnasium is often located away from the student’s home and teachers do not have a way to help them overcome the troubles of adolescence etc. This simply works to the disadvantage of both the teacher and the students, as well as the cooperation between the school and parents, who are not as willing to make contact with a new teacher body and reveal their problems or concerns.

The system we had was 8+4, so it was 8 years of elementary school plus 4 (of high school). But then the 6+3+3 system was introduced. So 2 grades (7 and 8) of elementary school and 1 grade (1st) of high school were taken out to form gymnasium, in this way separating young people at the most difficult age from the rest, thus rupturing the continuity of teaching. In the 8-year elementary school that you are familiar with, in the 8th grade the same homeroom teacher as from the 1st grade would say: Johnny, how can you, your grades are so poor and you were such a good boy... It was completely different, there was that continuity. Or, for example, 8th graders were asked to look after the 1st graders and they would do it. So this also built a certain system of formation. Now this was abandoned (...) (So) this division with the gymnasium destroyed the continuity (of education) and now really it’s not worth studying because there is only 3 years. The students that come (from gymnasium) - you can tell by their whole attitude - this also has implications for the whole axiology. Because it’s not worth it, it’s only 3 years, we’ll get through it somehow... The students that come from gymnasium are much weaker now. I went through the whole cycle because for a while I also taught in gymnasium, so I know exactly how it is.

In summary, all teachers strongly condemned the education reform at large, as in effect leading to a complete depreciation of the value of Polish education, and the production of, versus the well-educated traditional member of the Polish intelligentsia class (humanities-
centered, yet well-rounded in all fields), a mass society of, using Polish indigenous discourse, “functional illiterates” (nominally technically-oriented, yet in actuality not educated at all). One teacher captured this sentiment with the following desperate words, signalling the intent to go and scream them out loud in the middle of the main city square, in protest of the whole reform:

I am terrified because talented youth is going to waste. Because not all parents are able to help these talented students, one, because they don’t have money for extra courses and two, because they are not well-read enough themselves to be able to help their children. They should hire some teachers, but all that involves costs. And the children of wealthy parents will manage because their parents will provide them with very expensive extra courses, or they will send them to private schools where everything will be paid for. Whereas public school will educate the masses - not individuality or the individual person, but the masses! I don’t know, maybe that’s the point. The mass is uneducated, ignorant and deaf, simply put. I don’t know what’s this all about. And I am very concerned. (...) I don’t mean to sound bitter, but if every year I had a few (school) olympians and this year, for the third year in a row I have no one because firstly, no one wants to and secondly, is good enough! Because during the first year in the first grade, despite my great intentions, I am not able to prepare anybody for the Polish Olympiad. Even if my colleague had (a few), they all didn’t make it... Before I had Olympians from physics, mathematics streams because reading books is not the domain of humanities. Because it was now decided (obviously by someone who has no idea about literature) that the humanist is the one who reads and the mathematician the one who counts - that is nonsense. So now we get engineers who cannot speak Polish, doctors who do not know history and it will get to the point where the doctor will look for my kidneys in my ears because everybody is starting to be uneducated. And it will be just like abroad - only private schools will be good, and the rest is the mob, plebs who is taught nothing, a paper only. That is how it will be. And I deeply regret this because Poles - that’s the way I was taught - are a very talented nation. So why restrict them? And all these young people will leave (the country).

In this last section this teacher is articulating the contemporary phenomenon of the massive brain drain of young Poles to Western Europe and the general construction of Poles as cheap labor force for the benefit of Western capitalism, encapsulated by the stereotype of the Pole as the “new Black” or the “Neanderthal”, the new Second World backward proletariat class of Europe replacing the “post”/neocolonial Third World immigration wave. This teacher further explicated:

There is a general decline in interest in knowledge, the level of knowledge, especially in the humanities, so in effect, young people lose interest. (I know of an example of a student who did not know who was Tadeusz Kosciuszko). That is the level of most of Polish society! But this was done by the reform. And wealthy people will send their children somewhere and
they will do very well, except those children will be over there and not here, they will not come (back) here! After all, there is only so many percent of management staff needed, right?

Another teacher echoed the observation about a general deterioration of Polish education and its catastrophic effect on Polish society where the graduate of the Polish public high school is proverbially able to only read the instruction manual of a modern electronic:

Generally now it is getting worse and worse with knowledge, information and the general level of education. Like I said, the Polish subject was to teach not only language ability and inspire interest in literature (which it did not do unfortunately), but also provide general education. And here unfortunately since the reform the situation is that we have less and less generally educated people, ones who know how to utilize the language in a way that satisfies public life. (I know an example of a young mom who had trouble understanding a simple instruction from the doctor). My grandmother, an illiterate peasant woman had no trouble with (understanding such basic things). And here this young girl had a problem with understanding. And the doctor said that it’s getting worse and worse with the young moms, more and more often I have to explain basic things. But this is the effect of the new education system, which nobody realizes (...).

Moreover there is a departure from knowledge because knowledge is (considered) not useful. This is complete nonsense because intellectual development consists not in inventing - for example, I recall (a school exercise) to invent as many uses as possible of a paperclip - but in acquiring knowledge, organizing it. First you have to choose certain elements from that which you learn, then there is description, generalization, synthesizing, including them into a larger whole, establishing connections between elements - that is intellectual development. Whereas thinking up the number of uses of a paperclip leads to nothing. In fact, I would say (based on my knowledge) I was more creative in my ideas than the students, I thought of more ways!

Another teacher similarly denounced the move away from knowledge, revealing the hypocrisy of the reform’s focus on skills which paradoxically cannot be obtained without prior knowledge:

In this new reform there is a move away from systematic (knowledge), even to the point that one professor said, who needs knowledge about the Renaissance if you can look it up in the encyclopedia. Right, but the point is that when you go into a renaissance temple, it’s nice to know what kind of style it is and locate it in the historical epoch. I think teachers from my generation say: of course skills are important, but in order to develop skills, you need to have a at least a basic level of knowledge. And only develop skills based on that knowledge. And now everything is all about skills and knowledge is to be found, for example, on the internet. Certainly it is, but for me, and even my students laugh that this new school produces these ‘half-wits. (…) I am not saying reform was not necessary. It was, but not in this direction. It
went in the direction of lowering standards, definitely, and that’s it, that’s the only logical conclusion from all these reflections.

Professor Ryszard Legutko, political philosopher and former Minister of Education of Poland during the short-lived political rule of the conservative Law and Justice Party between 2005-2007 directly mirrored the feelings of these teachers in an appeal to the liberal Ministry of Education regarding the reduction of the literary canon in the new Polish high school beginning 2012:

The Ministry’s of Education present proposition entrenches the stereotype of the graduate of the Polish school as a half-wit. I don’t know how you can graduate from high school not having read Sienkiewicz and having read Gombrowicz only in excerpts” (quoted in Gorski, 2008).

Andrzej Wasko (2008), Polish literature studies professor and vice-minister of education in this government eloquently recapitulates the broader colonial scenario this education reform realizes:

In the international division of labour Poles are relegated to the role of a nation of nurses and plumbers from the famous commercial. The pinnacle of ambition and success for the best is serving foreigners as local representatives of a Polish branch of a foreign firm or leaving to work in London. The alleged adjustment of knowledge and skills of graduates to the needs of the modern labour market amounts to nothing more than the training of a cheap labour force for the needs of multinational corporations. The education system of the III Republic thus serves to prepare personnel for labour migration or to act as intermediaries in the economic penetration of the Polish market. Since the age of the Commission of National Education, Poles have had a national schooling system geared towards our own needs and the overriding national interest. Since the time of the present reform, we have a postcolonial schooling system in Poland subordinated to the strategic interests of affluent countries of the West.

Moreover, these teachers understand the socially constructed nature of this education reform and its devastating social effects, dispelling the myth of its alleged positivistic nature, including illicit means, which they nevertheless had the courage to reveal on record. This first teacher noted the prevalent practice of keeping matura (and other exam) results secret or manipulated, to hide the abominably low passing rate (despite its markedly lowered standards):

So for me, in the last 3 years, it is not even a downward spiral, but a downward plummet. It’s just horrible what is going on, please believe me. I know because for the past 2 years, I am
not grading the maturas, because I simply wasn’t able to do it anymore. Because every error that is noticed is reduced so as not to count as an error. Including one that ‘Oda do Młodosci’ is a poem about the war and uprising! Really! It must come from top-down, that everyone must pass. I don’t know, that the reform is so great, that there can’t be... Things are kept secret... for example, now, the passing percentage rate for the gymnasium exam is not revealed. This is confidential! Why is this confidential? I suspect that simply, well, it’s obvious what it is...

Another teacher provided more insight into the unofficial practices that take place specifically surrounding the matura exam:

In addition to the answer key, which we have to follow while marking the matura, there are also different trends, for example there is this pressure to mark so that it’s not lower than last year. There are curves drawn constantly, it is constantly compared, there is constant contact, meetings of leaders of these groups: how is the marking going, are the tests worse, if they are, let’s see if there is anything we can augment in them so there is no downward trend in this curve... And that is already sort of...

The following teacher revealed that for speaking out critically against the reform another teacher in her city was penalized with loss of some employment rights, thus reinforcing the predominance of political correctness in this hegemonic society, the cost of its breaching notoriously running as high as losing one’s employment altogether:

I will say one more thing. I am not going to hide the fact that for what I said just now, one teacher from (this city) was penalized by being removed from the maturas. He does not mark them anymore, he is not allowed to. For telling the journalists what I just told you now. Another Polish teacher from (another city) was also banned from marking the maturas because he spoke out negatively against the matura.

Similarly within the focus group, following one of the teacher’s critical comments regarding the reform, another teacher observed: “Well, if our previous Minister (of Education) heard you, you would have a hard time.

Another teacher disclosed the whole covert nature of the education reform, epitomized by the virtual absence of the entire topic from public discourse and media:

The worst thing is that there is practically no information. There is nothing, no discussion on the TV, in various media. Nobody knows anything like in a (Kafkaesque situation). Only (alternative) internet media publicize the issue, for example of the hunger strike. Otherwise it’s completely quiet, nobody says anything about it.
Moreover, a university teacher noted how even the education circles were not consulted about the reform, unmasking the unilateral, top-down imposed context of the reform despite official assurances of an open dialogue and democratic collaboration. This teacher cited her own experience of brutal silencing by Professor Zurek, one of the leading authors of the Polish reform following her attempt to voice her opinion on the reform:

This present pseudo-reform, (was) not consulted with anybody, nobody really knew what was going on. As I said, we basically find out about everything post-factum. (I wrote) an article about how I was treated by Professor Zurek from the University of Silesia - he simply did not want to have my voice heard because my article was critical. The funny thing was I was not critiquing him but the whole reform since the beginning of 1990, because he got involved with it a bit later on. (...) (So) there are no consultations, Prof. Zurek yelled at me denying it. Of course there are consultations conducted with many professors of various disciplines, only most of them have nothing to do with school. But let’s say that such a consultation still makes sense because at least these are people connected with education, they say what kind of (high school) graduates they need. But interviews are done for example with representatives of Business Center Club who have (nothing to do with school). And they are to speak out on schooling. While, parents, teachers, even myself as a university teacher educator are not asked for their opinion on teaching. There is simply no such thing. So really, in my opinion, the whole idea of democracy is lost.

A high-school teacher corroborated this view based on her own long-time teaching experience:

So here really there are no consultations - at least not that I am aware of, and I’ve been teaching in school for 23 or 24 years and most of my friends are teachers, and none of us know, who was actually consulted about this education reform. (We) would like to find out from the Ministry, who is responsible for the education reform in terms of specific names, who was consulted, who (came up with) such a Core Curriculum because, after all, particular people with particular names determined the reading list from Polish, for example.

One teacher summarized the socially engineered nature of the present reform in these words: “We do not have a dumb society, but we are dumbing it down at our own request through this reform”.

Another teacher elaborated the specific means of this social control, revealing the convenient transmutation of the irrationalist postmodernism into neo-modernist rationalism, both working to the detriment of Polishness:
Students, even from humanities streams, engage in debate only if they can express their own emotions. Now there are no more substantive discussions, based on arguments about a character, but it’s always an emotional discussion that you really have to keep in check because it’s on the basis of: I like it/I don’t like it. It’s very hard to explain to our students that the emotional sphere, which is under so much attack today... That is, obviously emotions are easier to control, (the students) become more controllable - this is also the result of a certain system that we adopt to render the society more controllable. That which philosophizes too much, does not conform well to various procedures and other elements of this new system. So it becomes hard for the students to understand that they have to intellectualize what they feel.

Another aspect of the new system pointed out by some teachers that contributes to the erosion of the traditionally Polish focus on values is the prevalent bureaucratization of schooling. The first teacher expounds this issue with regards to organizing extra help sessions for students:

And all this paperwork - you have to create a front to help the child who has trouble. You have to fill out all these papers now - the child gets lost in it all. All my life, if a child needed help, the teacher would help him. He didn’t have to document it - we just sat down and talked. And now first I have to fill out a paper where I assume in advance that I have to devote 30 hours to this child. That is complete nonsense. We should operate on the basis of intuition, spontaneity - it’s a human being after all, not a cog in a machine. So that’s why it’s kind of hard to teach now...

We are constantly signing some papers for additional teaching hours, this, that - we sit down with the student not because they tell us to - I don’t care about that. I will sit with a student 10 times as long as they tell me to, should need be. Because if the student needs me, I am there for him. It’s as simple as that. Friday, Sunday, whichever day, it doesn’t matter - I am there for him. I correspond with them over email too - because sometimes that is also necessary. But for the most part nowadays they just come to me for a hug.

A second teacher made a similar observation with regards to the matura exam:

I think that another type of formation now is procedure. Everything is explained with procedure. For example, this is how the matura exam changed. Once the matura exam was the affair of the student and teacher. For example, (I would be present when) my students would write the Polish subject, of course I knew I wasn’t allowed to help them. Nonetheless you could feel that it was a common affair of these teachers, hence the Polish teacher could be present on the Polish exam, obviously not because he was helping or writing cheat sheets. Whereas now everything was replaced by procedure on the new matura. It is according to procedure that we are to check the number of students present, whether they have their ID
If they read the instructions - everything is done according to the procedure. And all the good gestures like (giving a good luck sign) before the exam are impossible now because there is a set procedure. It’s the same way many things right now operate here - for example, if it’s slippery someplace, nothing is done to make it less slippery but a sign is put up saying it’s slippery. Everything is according to procedure - if somebody falls down, they have no right to sue because there was a sign saying it was slippery. The matura exam is organized the same way. So sometimes I rebel against such a putting up of signs instead of actually doing something about it. It’s an emphasis on that which is individual, egoistic, and values do not hold up well in such a world. (...) So this proceduralization of the teaching process leads to a decline in that which is human, that which was the essence of the humanities - to show the persistence of the spiritual, the human, the spiritual aspect of man’s existence, not just the physical.

Another crucial problem, while seemingly unrelated to Polish education, yet bearing significant implications for Polish literature instruction, is the disciplinary failure of the present school and home, bemoaned by nearly all teachers. As one teacher from the focus group explained:

It’s getting harder to exact the reading and diligent work from the students due to the present education policy, at least in Poland. As teachers we are under tremendous pressure of an increasing status of the student and parents and a decreasing position of the teacher. If the student is not doing well, our authorities’ reaction is that it’s solely the teacher’s fault. They thus ask what the teacher did to make sure that the student attended school regularly, that he was motivated to study, that he passed to the next grade, did he provide any necessary assistance or was he available for additional help. And nobody asks for example the student, what he/she did to pass to the next grade, if he/she studied. Neither do they ask the parents if they are responsible for their child, if they are aware of his actions, if they are able to monitor his work if need be. And hence, due to such a policy, it’s obvious that for us teachers it also becomes harder to be demanding, that our standards will be lowered. So, for example, we won’t be as adamant about covering a particular work since we can get in trouble. So that later somebody from the school board won’t ask us what did you do to encourage (the class), was (this difficult reading) really necessary, couldn’t they just have read (something more simple and pleasant), after all you have the ability to select the readings and the class should also have input on what it wants to read.

Another teacher expounded the deterioration of the school, state and family structures under the present system which served as a traditional reinforcement for school learning:
It’s the system that created such (undisciplined) behaviours. Groups of drunken teenagers prowl around the city and nobody reprimands them because they are afraid. Where is the (state and municipal) police which once patrolled the movie theatres, the stores (now shopping malls) who would catch truant students. Now?! The parents can press charges. The parents also have a demanding attitude towards the school, they lie, defend (the student). I am supposed to teach so that the child is satisfied - and that’s it! After all, they are paying me from their taxes. I am no authority figure for them because I make 3 times less than they do - and now money is supreme. If I tell a mother that the child did not read this or that - (she says) I didn’t either and I have a higher education, so what that I didn’t read, I didn’t die!

This is the way mothers and fathers talk to the teacher nowadays. Nobody refers to the teacher like before - no, we are causing a nuisance because we are demanding! The school - the last place left that still demands - is an obstacle to the good life. In life you have to line’s your pockets, that’s what it’s all about, you live only once after all! There is a general trend of vulgarization of society. Our society has become vulgarized and it has regressed intellectually, unfortunately. And our roots will be lost any second now...

The following teacher elaborated at great length the destruction of the traditionally tight-knit student-teacher-parent triangle underpinning Poland’s indigenous education model, specifically blaming Western liberalism, completely inverting the age-old hierarchy of parents and teachers over the student and now pitting the students and parents against the teachers, citing one of the most extreme examples of student misbehaviour of an infamous incident of harassment of a teacher by putting a trash can on his head, captured on video and propagated on the internet to the amusement of these unruly youngsters, which while occurred in gymnasium, epitomizes the undisciplined atmosphere of the entire reformed school system:

I think the number one thing is disciplinary issues. My opinion for a while now is that there is a common disregard for the school and teachers, but also that the home is neglected. For example, (there was a video once) of a teacher where students put a garbage can on his head. I would be disciplined with a ruler back in the day in elementary school, whereas today it would immediately be criminalized, the TV (would take interest), everything. (Also), parents are not able to control their kids at home. The system fosters (these types of behaviours) because you cannot touch (the child) or say anything wrong because right away he will be offended. In Sweden or Norway or wherever the parents can be sued for spanking a child. That is the direction we are going in. (I know an example of a student who was speaking to his crouching mother at the school sitting down. I would have gotten disciplined right away).

(...) There is resistance from the parents because once the teacher’s word was holy and the student would be disciplined accordingly, and now the teacher is accused of being too strict. So it is completely inverted, the student and parents go against the school. (...) Since parents are not able to control their children at home, they do everything so as not to hurt the child with discipline, heavy-handedness. If I tell (the parents) that (the students) did not read
'Lalka’ for example, (the parents) say, can’t you spare them such a thick book...”. (And once they miss a few classes on ‘Lalka’, for example, they are missing something for the matura). (The problem of truancy is prevalent) because students beginning the age of 18 can write their own leave (of absence) because they are (considered) adult. So they write a leave on the fly and the school can do nothing about it. So these student regulations etc. that came out from the Ministry, allow these (types of behaviours). (...) So there is a number of factors that loosen the discipline. The school cannot discipline because the home does not do it... So changes in the whole society (are a factor). This (Western) liberalism makes it hard to enforce (discipline). These are communicating vessels because the home either provides control or it doesn’t. (...) So indeed this liberalism, a lack of discipline at home and a simultaneous weakening of the position of the teacher through the regulations whereby the teacher has more don’ts than do’s. (...) (And) if these 3 factors (the teacher, student and parents) do not cooperate, it will not be well.

Another teacher similarly attributed the disciplinary problems of the new school to the move to a partnership-based student-teacher and student-parent relationship, versus the traditional authority-based model:

I don’t like the word ‘partnership’. There are times when you have to follow the path of the student. But I believe that does not mean that the teacher is not responsible for his actions and towards his students. I don’t like this pat-on-the-shoulder attitude. Of course making declarations ex cathedra is not a good method either, there needs to be time to adapt. So (in order to build authority) we need time and not assume that we’ll walk into the classroom and immediately become partners. It is necessary to work together, but it also necessary to point out faults where they exist. So partnership is not the right concept. It invites the student to imagine a pat-on-the-shoulder type of relationship. That is not to say I am for a patronizing attitude towards students, I always respect dignity. (...) Today they need responsible role-models. They speak of engagement beyond the prevalent procedure. (...)
I also think this is a model from home. Today’s parent-child relations are to be ones based on partnership. It cannot be a partnership because parents are responsible for their children up to a certain point, so this partnership is not equal where one has rights and responsibilities and the other only rights.

This next teacher concurred with the diagnosis of the decline of the authority of the teacher:

Parents - just like in the West - accuse the teachers, with regards to the matura, that their child was not prepared for the matura. This is aside from the anomalies of the Polish school where students have only rights and the teacher only responsibilities - this is done purposefully so that students won’t want to study. But I mean something else. Teachers are afraid that they will be charged by the parents, be held legally responsible. Hence, for example, the lesson plan includes records of exact lesson titles to prove their accordance with the matura requirements. So in effect parents themselves are beginning to demand teaching towards the matura, which is absurd.
Another teacher described the present changes as civilisational in scope, focusing specifically on the pervasive attitude of assertiveness, once again with roots in the new familial upbringing:

(This assertive attitude) today is something I completely cannot get used to even though I do not consider myself an old person at all. I believe I am witnessing a civilizational change. (This assertive attitude) is unacceptable for me. In class, a student stands up, convinced of his knowledge, of how good he is, and speaks mere slogans and when I ask him to get to the point, to show it in the text, then he doesn’t know it. But this attitude is also brought from the home because today parents bringing first graders to high school are about 40 years old. And I am observing the same thing in these parents - say something even though you don’t know it. I completely disagree with this attitude. They are taught that way. There are even classes in schools - seemingly positive, eg. ‘matura exam stress’. Except often in these classes students are told to be self-confident - right, but within reason, and not just confidence if I don’t actually know much. This change is very noticeable but this change is already apparent in the parents.

Generally all teachers noted the liberalization and disintegration of the traditional family model marked by divorce, absenteeism due to increasing employment demands, materialism and a breakdown of discipline and values - all of which compounds the problem of literature instruction. This is epitomized by the following two teachers’ remarks:

I think the main responsibility (for formation of children) should rest on the shoulders of the parents, the home should educate (and right now it is not doing so). (Because) before the home environment was different. Yes, money always mattered, but it wasn’t such a priority before. There was a mother, father, Sunday dinner, table, chairs... And now, even that is missing. Now it’s all about making money, and not some ideals from books...

Another thing is that parents have very little contact with the school because they are either working or they simply don’t feel like going (I probably wouldn’t want to either) on the website with the electronic report card. Because before, if a child was having problems, I would call the parent in and the parent would come see me and we could decide what to do to help the child. Right now nobody has time for anything, including their children, that’s why the electronic report card was created (so that parents could access students’ grades from home). Only 40/50% of parents come for parent-teacher interviews because (anybody can pass the mass matura now) and get accepted into university because there are no entrance exams, so the circle is closed. (...) It’s not that children are any less capable than before, they simply do not have knowledge gained from home - because parents for the most part do not take care of them. Children are neglected at home, because the parents are already neglected. Because they are already a generation that read less, who didn’t have to try as hard, who had fewer exams - because these test exams right now are really poor quality exams...
Finally, teachers blamed the decline in Polish (literature and language) education not only on the immediately surrounding environment of the school and home, but also of the more extended context of Polish society and culture at large, lamenting specifically the mass culture marked by mass media (TV and internet), popular music and modern technologies (computers, cell phones) which has a particularly corrosive effect on the high culture model of traditional Polish schooling, as observed by all of the following teachers:

These children are not reading anything because the internet and TV are taking their time. It’s a lot quicker to watch a movie version (of a reading), even though technically the program does not allow it, but they do it anyway. Plus the fact that bookstores sell a large variety of study aids written by people having absolutely nothing to do with literature who make a business out of it. It is widely available because there is freedom in Poland and anybody can publish any brochure they want. There are many summaries, ready essays. The same is the case on the internet. That’s why some teachers have resorted to not assigning written homework assignments, not because it burdens them as teachers to mark them but because they have to play policeman and find where the student downloaded it from. (...
I often ask the children - did you come from Mars? These children have no idea about anything, never mind history, Polish, about nothing at all! Because from the very beginning they listened to - and so did their parents - rap music (about smoking weed etc.). The same goes for idols on TV. And the school cannot change this because the teacher is nobody. The authority of the teacher is simply none. (...
Standards are getting increasingly low now. But standards are also getting increasingly low in radio and TV. Journalists cannot speak and write properly. There are no more discussion-type programs where eg. following a broadcasted play there are 5 specialists: a theatre expert, a distinguished director, actors, the audience and a theatre critic discussing the play - there is no such thing, now there are only talking heads. Instead there are stupid programs like: battle of the blades, battle of (whatever else). Because money rules the culture now - today there is no more culture, there is only pop culture that has to sell well. And most people - and here the circle closes - are uneducated, have unrefined tastes because they don’t read, don’t have contact with high culture - all they need are reality shows and are interested in who sleeps with whom. There are no eminent actors right now, and if there are any they are not that popular because they are not shown on TV. Because TV shows celebrities ie. those who take off their underwear on stage or wear their high-heels backwards. And these children watch this and are fascinated with it.

Right now, Polish education’s biggest nightmare is the fact that students do not read the literature. This is a result of the internet where a variety of study aids, summaries, ready essays are available. There are forums where students ask for, and are instantly sent, for example an essay on Konrad Wallenrod or Jacek Soplica. I call this a great deception; but a double deception - of your teacher and of yourself. (...
So just like after 1989 the publishing of various types of study aids became widespread, (now it’s the internet). (....)
In an age of instant messaging, text messaging, email, music videos made on the fly, nobody feels like reading today. Hence all these canonical/patriotic elements fall by the wayside. And this last reform went in the direction of fragmentarism.

Young people in general do not read nowadays, if at all then only fragments or they watch movies. Besides, these changes in the school are a result of changes in our lifestyle. Computers, cell phones - I didn’t have these gadgets around me growing up and they didn’t have such an influence on me. Or all this media hype or the multiplicity of pleasures that youth is exposed to now. So this world goes forward and demands learning something else and leaving something behind.

Today, it’s enough to do a simple exercise: walk into any classroom of an average high school and ask one question: who was Witold Pilecki? At that point there is either silence or one or two hands will go up. This is important with respect to the formation of attitudes because these people were not literary heroes, but real life heroes (because these Cursed Soldiers continued the model of behaviour of the Second World War heroes) who from beginning to end represented those noble qualities that are a model to emulate. And today it is difficult to speak of these people as role models. (...) Today we hear on TV that Adam Malysz (famous Polish ski jumper) is a national hero. He is a good guy no doubt, and he may be an idol but he is not a national hero. (Whereas for students he is). So a certain trend is transmitted through the education system and media and the students simply pick it up.

Three teachers from the focus group confirmed these opinions in these statements:

There are very few students who can express themselves properly. The vulgarization of language is prevalent. I think a certain mode of public life is to be blamed. Because public people speak worse and worse, they don’t try, their language is poor, vulgar, oftentimes colloquial, not formal or literary and they provide a bad example. Also, there is an economy of language due to text messaging and media. And generally when I listen to our journalists, their speech is so quick and convoluted, not to mention that it doesn’t make sense, that I feel like turning on a stopwatch because it’s timed. There is a general sloppiness everywhere.(...) Before (Prof.) Miodek had his show where he explained the nuances of the Polish language. Now maybe Bralczyk will say something occasionally. Now there is: ‘You can dance’ or ‘Dancing with the stars’. So media (are a factor). Media which do not demand any intellectual effort from the viewer, which are purposely dumbed down so that everyone can have a good time watching. And hence people get out of the habit of making any effort. And that’s why the first thing children will ask is whether they can watch a film because watching a film is much easier and quicker than reading a book, so naturally they will choose what’s easier.

I think problems with readership also come from a true plague which is the internet where a variety of online summaries and ready essays is available, which makes it easy to excuse oneself (from doing the homework yourself). (For example, a student has a biology test, so he will simply download his essay on ‘Kordian’ from the internet).
I can tell the way everything has changed over the last couple of years based on the fraszka by Kochanowski ‘Na dom w Czarnolesie’ (which I cover with students) which features the most important values in life according to Kochanowski: health, friends, a peaceful home, love etc. And when I ask students whether that is also the case today, whether these are also principal values for the contemporary person, (they say) no. Today financial security is most important. And ideals of heroism, courage, honor are to be found in literature only...

For the most part, students don’t read, they don’t understand what is most important in life. Only rare individuals do, whereas for everybody else it’s mass culture, with an emphasis on the word mass and not culture. It’s really terrifying, but what can we do...

Another teacher corroborated these impressions, highlighting particularly the prevalent process of the commercialization of education through a displacement of traditional literary culture by consumer culture:

Today nobody talks about school literature anymore. I remember in my generation we would debate if Antygona was right or not - that would be a good discussion for a meeting over tea at home. And today young people are completely not interested in such topics. These topics are absent from home, the internet, television. Literature is dying and that’s why (the students) are not reading it, because there is no reality outside of the school in which (it would appear). So reading these books we become somewhat of a museum. It’s astonishing that in various quizzes, in questions about literature, wrong answers are most often tolerated. It is no longer shocking for anybody that someone does not know the main characters of ‘Chlopi’, for example. (...)

If literary elements do appear, it is only in denaturalized form, for example in alcohol names such as Soplica or Pan Tadeusz vodka, or in the culinary sphere like Wokulski’s pate. But they are completely absent from the cultural or literary sphere. Even 10 years ago a laundry detergent commercial, where a phrase from ‘Potop’ was repeated ‘ociec prac’ was understandable to young people. Right now I believe it would not be because they don’t relate it to the text. Words that were once common to describe the emotional sphere eg. ‘Have a heart and look into the heart’ completely fell out of use. Maybe it’s because the language, especially of the media, internet, has become a PG-like language. It is so poor, limited and vulgarized that it effectively ceases to express anything, it is reduced to a few stereotypes. Herein lies the challenge for Polish teachers who have to convince the students that reading the school books will not only not limit them, but will also improve their language skills because they don’t connect these two things. (...)

Nowhere in the everyday context of the press or TV are there any references to any texts, even contemporary ones. Once a year when a new book comes out there will be some discussion about the book, but then the author signs a contract with the publisher and even though he writes new works the following years, there is no more interest... So they don’t understand the language of Sienkiewicz or Mickiewicz because it is too difficult. Whereas the contemporary one, as read for example through Gombrowicz, turns out to be even harder because there is no tangible plot. So everything is suspended in a vacuum - nobody reads at home, there is no cultural continuity...

I also think it’s the times that are different now. With regards to cultural trends, a lot has changed with respect to a mode of relating to others. For example, words once considered
offensive today nobody considers such because they are utilized on an everyday basis on the news, hence they are also used at school. Or the Polish gentlemanly custom of kissing a woman’s hand now considered increasingly foreign. The culture has indeed changed a lot. (...) Today reading literature is constantly portrayed in all media as the synonym of the greatest evil. For example, the greatest achievement of our times is when a media celebrity boasts of not having read anything. Others boast of not having passed the matura. Still others boast that despite not having read anything, they still passed the matura. So it becomes difficult to exact the readings from the students.

This teacher elaborated at length the related problem of the widespread production of commercially available reading aids which work particularly destructively on student readership of literature, supplanting the original text with misguided and sensationalized information, based on her first-hand experience at a publisher of one of these study aids:

Now it is customary to extract elements from the biographies of each writer - which, in the opinion of I don’t know whom because certainly not in mine... - verging on the scandalous, pertaining to the author’s sexual orientation or mental impairments. This is a distortion of the very idea of Polish education because Polish should begin with the language, and biographical elements are secondary. Once it would be unthinkable to raise such issues, because it’s a kind of infantilization. There are certain bodies, publishers, who want to capitalize on this and they know that if they begin a discussion of a given text, by saying Mickiewicz was a lunatic and Shakespeare a bi-sexual (it will sell better). But once I did a discussion with my class and they themselves realized that it is simply playing to the crowd, a cheap way to entice young people. Nevertheless this is the prevalent opinion amongst publishers nowadays. I myself participated in a discussion at a publishing company where (it was said) that a juicy tidbit is needed so that students buy this brochure. The sentences cannot be neutral but must contain something ’spicy’, as the publisher would say it, because he knew it would sell better.

The following two teachers expounded on the harmful effects of these study materials:

For me the publisher who did the most harm in our country is Greg because these are all the reading aids for students. Right now they’re a bit better, but initially they had serious factual and stylistic errors. It turns (the students’) brains into mush because if in my humanities class, for example, I deliberately want to surprise them with a completely different approach which is not in Greg, they are completely lost. If you do something outside the box, it’s impossible because if it’s not in Greg or in Sciaga or on the internet, it doesn’t exist. Now even books are published with notes on the margins pointing out certain verses - that’s also Greg.

For me, downloading from the internet an analysis of a poem or an essay on Reymont’s ‘Chlopi’, for example, reminds me of the Western expression ‘window shopping’ ie. looking at and licking that (candy) through the window which yields nothing but frustration, because
how can you understand Reymont’s language in a literary or semi-literary summary - it’s impossible. So young people no longer appreciate literature. There are individual exceptions of good students truly interested in literature, philosophy or art. But the vast majority, the general mediocrity does just that.

Importantly, these teachers not only critique the effects of the education reform, but also recognize that rather than existing in a political vacuum, they directly pinpoint the agents responsible for this new education policy and understand the (financial and ideological) stakes behind the whole enterprise. Many teachers implicated Western Europe, specifically the European Union in the Polish education reform gesturing to the Western trend of the commercialization and a general liberalization of education underpinning the reform, as the following different teachers’ voices demonstrate:

I believe it’s about cutbacks (in education spending), to educate the student at the least possible cost and I don’t like it at all. (...) So we are all - because I speak not only on my own behalf but all the people I speak with - so devastated. So many times we communicated that this reform is simply good-for-nothing. But someone invested so much money, that’s why I think... Plus the (European) Union, that is why unfortunately standards are pulled down rather than up.

You know there is an old Polish proverb that says: ‘If you don’t know what the deal is, then the deal is money’. (...) So for me it’s simply the production of half-wits. I mean it’s imposed by the European Union, I don’t know if intentionally or not. I don’t mean to present a fatalistic view of history or introduce conspiracy theories. But why should the average Pole be smarter than the average Frenchman or German. Well now for sure he will not be...

“The (new) maturity exam was imposed because of our entrance into the European Union”.

And I am afraid that maybe we are drawing on the bad Western model of today. Because there is also a trend in the present education - which I think is completely absurd - that school should be attractive to the student, that there should be an element of entertainment. Education cannot be through play. Education is the intellectual endeavor of the person at the level appropriate to his developmental stage. And hence a piece of ‘Chlopi’, a piece of ‘Krzyzacy’, a piece of ‘Pan Tadeusz’ so they don’t get overworked. It’s kind of like eating 3 spoonfuls of soup and disposing of the rest and then still complaining that you’re hungry. There is no other conclusion...

These reforms are a transplantation of the European model onto Polish soil. A transplantation that sometimes omits certain cultural patterns, a certain otherness, that which is different, that which becomes a certain model, quintessence (of Polishness). On the one hand it might be good to have a European system. On the other hand this system entails, first and foremost, a lowering of standards with respect to the humanities.
Furthermore, these mostly older teachers are able to draw on their long-time teaching experience under the previous regime and situate the present education reform historically, recognizing its continuities with the old education system under communism, thus identifying the pathologies of Poland’s post-communist transformation, its usurpation by a liberal-leftist orthodoxy and unmasking the present system, rather than independence as it is touted to be in the dominant discourse, as a new form of oppression, as the following 3 teachers illustrate:

I got the impression, thinking over the span of many years now - because all of us gathered here have been working in the school for a good 30 years - before in the 60-ties, 70-ties, 80-ties, there is no doubt that the school reading list was always connected with the current political situation. At first (following the fall of communism) I think everything started changing in the right direction. Many valuable items from Western, anti-systemic Russian, Polish émigré literature were added, expanding the view of literature. While non-valuable authors thus far present in the literature canon due to their connection with the (communist) ideology were removed. So initially those were positive changes, but later... Because no matter which way you look at it, the school literature canon in Poland will always be a reflection of the present political system.

The year 1989, the transformation - as I said, the school needed reform. I was the first one then to think so. But I did not think that it would go in this direction because it didn’t improve. And besides, many teachers under communism, if they were smart, spoke about true history, true interpretations of literary texts in terms of the humanities. Sure, there were also indoctrinators, I knew some personally. But right now we are getting equal amounts of indoctrination, only in different forms. Because this (assertive attitude) to speak even though you have no knowledge and also this uniformization of schooling which I thought with the transformation - I was then a young teacher - there would be a greater emphasis on individualism, that we could finally take a breath (of freedom)... And here it turned out that there is an answer key and I must mark the matura according to this answer key. So if the student writes well but it is not in the answer key, (I can give) no points. What’s the point of that?” (...) Like I said, reform was necessary, but it could have been better thought through in terms of how in the modern world with its technological progress, not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. So that we don’t merely produce... I remember in 1980 and 1981, right before Martial Law when my colleague and I went on strike in our Polish studies department at the university, we had this banner: ‘we do not want the mass production of graduates’. And we thought in 1989 that after the changes, we would no longer have this mass production of graduates, but have a more conscious school instead... Well right now you can practically repeat the exact same slogan: we don’t want the (mass) production of graduates. (...) We’ll see what comes out of these social protests taking place now. But you know, I don’t see it very rosy because all these new textbooks were printed, programs created - that is so much money. This might be an idealistic point of view but I think there was the chance to take from the West was is good and transfer onto what was bad with our system, but what
was good (with our system) should have been kept, modified no doubt so that it is congruent with the times, but not so drastically, not in this way...

And then we regained, so called, sovereignty, as we had then thought. Now there are certain doubts because sometimes I get the impression that unfortunately in my life there are more top-down indisputable dos and don’ts than when I was young (under communism). Which I completely cannot understand because supposedly I am allowed, but in actuality I am no allowed anything.

Another teacher in response to the prevalent argument in the dominant post-transformation discourse of the need to “return to (European) normalcy” and adjust to the European standard, pointed out the inequities that accompanied Poland’s accession into the European Union, highlighting the role of the education system, which traditionally ensured Poland a strong position in the global hierarchy but now relegates it to subservient status:

Our only power right now are (our) people. Everything has already been so squandered, practically everything is gone, it’s obvious who it belongs to - because if power and telephone companies are on some islands... but thus far it was our Polish education that gave us this power. Our doctors had status - they had to pass local exams (in the West) but once they learnt the language, it was no problem for them. And generally our basic education was very good. Also Western countries attained a certain status when we couldn’t do it. So they are wealthy and we are already squandered. So we are entering Europe with nothing.

Catholic philosophy professor Piotr Jaroszynski (2009) amplifies this polyphony of teachers’ incisive perceptions of the post-transformation education reform, noting its incongruence with the indigenous Polish need of de-communization following Poland’s recent emergence from half a century of communist indoctrination and its continuity with the previous communist regime, now using more covert forms of economic control (via various education grants, funds etc.) and the ideological tool of political correctness and the stigmatization of opposition. As he explains, the present Western liberalism in effect results in a neo-communism in a softer pink versus a hard red Soviet version, following the West’s inner transformation to neo-Marxism/post-modernism of the New Left since the Frankfurt School of the 1920s with the present Euro-communism of the European Union, paradoxically dealing Poland a second blow of communism despite its promise of liberation, the two systems rather than being opposite, sharing the same fundamental root of a Western utopian modernizing project pitted against Polish tradition:
The education reform is not responsive to the needs of our nation whether it be the repair of damage caused under communism or the positive role of education in forming a person as a person first, and only then as a worker, but it is the result of international pressures from the European Union, OECD and others. According to them, the individual should be subordinated to the needs of the global market and one’s education should be reduced to a strictly specialist role, ie. it is to be professional training. This individual is to be deprived of a deeper rooting in his family, nation and religion which is normally achieved via humanities culture. This culture is eliminated from school programs in order to produce a simple laborer. In word, the present education reform is a continuation of reforms from the Stalinist era, only now it is ‘socialism with a human face’, but really it is even worse than communism because the intrusion into children’s development is even more premeditated and far-reaching than before.

Former Solidarity activist and leading participant of the hunger strike in defense of Polish education of 2012 Jadwiga Chmielowska (2013) succinctly encapsulates the present educational situation in Poland in relation to the broader social context of post-transformation Poland, underlining the continuity between the previous communist system and the present post-Round Table neo-communist III Republic, which she piercingly deems a Polish People’s Republic two to the loud applause of a large group of Poles in the audience, while unmasking the liberalization of the economy as economic neo-colonialism:

Stories about the invisible hand of the market are mantras for journalists to write about and stupid people to clap to. The invisible hand of the market has destroyed our whole industry (both heavy and light). Without the industry, people have nowhere to work. (So we are pushing our young people abroad where they pay social security contributions to support ageing societies of Western Europe). There is no future for them here. Because the reform was began with the removal of mathematics (from the matura) - since there is no matura from math, it’s not worth it to learn it. And that’s why we have lawyers, psychologists, historians - idiots because all of these humanities subjects require logical thinking, at least at the high school level. I taught some classes and I was convinced that older people learn slower and younger people faster. It was opposite - young people are not able to think logically. Also, at the beginning of the 90-ties it was said: young people are not reading so let’s give them fragments to read. In (the school reading) ‘Syzyfowe Prace’ students learned from secretly obtained books because the school taught based on fragments (Russian: ‘po kusoczkiami’) (under the 19th century partitions). So more and more I was getting the impression that the country called the Third Republic, which I call People’s Republic of Poland two is de facto an occupying state. Because each successive government, if we trace back each Minister of Education (first mathematics, then Minister Handke, then Hall, then Szumilas), none constructed the reform in a (remedial sense to fix the mistakes of the predecessors). Right now they introduced (standardized) tests and the problem with standardized tests is that the child has to learn towards the test which is particularly harmful because the child has to respond not how he/she thinks but how the examiner thinks and (match the answer key). (...)
Secondly, what shocked me and prompted me to undertake the hunger strike was when I understood that Polish youth is to scrub pots in pubs all over the world, is supposed to be highly educated but really is supposed to know nothing. Because the removal of Polish literature and history education beginning the second grade of high school - that is tantamount to rupturing our cultural code. For example, when we spoke of ‘po kusoczками’ in relation to ‘Syzyfowe Prace’, you all understand me, right? I talk to many young people and I had to explain to them from the beginning (basic things). People do not understand, they don’t know history, they don’t know many things. And the moment we found out that not only history is cut off, but also physics, chemistry, biology, computer science, then I understood. We won’t have engineers, technicians, so what does that mean? The Second World War ends and Hitler’s dream (comes true): cheap labor force. I mean before the war, the Polish school of mathematics... Thanks to (Alfred) Tarski’s (mathematical) logic we have computers. The school of (Stefan) Banach... We had something to be proud of. Poles had mathematical minds for the most part and we could have developed in that direction. And here we have a stupid school. Why? (Due to the prevalent liberalization of schooling). Do whatever you want, nobody is responsible for anything - we are bombarded at every step. Once they conquered with tanks, weapons of mass destruction. Today I laugh that tanks are the economy and mass media are weapons of mass destruction. Because they provide a new model of a completely relaxed, fun-filled life, without any responsibility.

Most importantly, not only do these teachers critique the education reform and those responsible for it, they enunciate discourses and practices of anti-colonial resistance they engage in, in response to such top-down encroachments, paving the way for decolonization and change, as the following various teachers’ passionate and resilient statements convey.

One teacher articulated the most common observed practice amongst these older teachers interviewed of continuing to teach according to the traditional Polish ways behind the closed doors of the classroom despite the official imposition of the reform. Validating the traditional humanistic ethos of character formation and patriotic education and the indigenous Polish practice of reading literary works in full (rather than in fragments), she explained:

Because I have to cultivate the child in the conviction that it is good to: be curious about the world, to love others and most importantly remember that you are a Pole and for a Pole certain behaviours are disgraceful. So first I have to teach the children - which they don’t know - what is dignity, what is dishonor (nobody uses such words today), nobility (nobody knows this!). I teach children Polish as you would English - vocabulary! Because these children do not know basic concepts, because they don’t read and nobody tells them what they mean. For example, what patriotism is. Nobody tells them what love for your homeland means. Children for example know what assertiveness is, because somebody taught them, a great word... But they don’t know what compassion means, they don’t understand the word mercifulness - that is a foreign word to them. Nobody talks to them about death, solitude for example. And when you talk to them about it, they are interested, please believe me. It’s not that they don’t listen, they listen very attentively! Yesterday with my first graders I had a
lesson about ‘Treny’ and I approached it completely differently. I threw them in at the deep end and right away I did (the topic): ‘Treny as a philosophical treatise written by a humanist’. And it worked out beautifully because everybody read the whole thing, of course! Not one tren but the whole (cycle). And with appropriate questions - after all that is the whole point of heuristics, to use appropriate questions. And they told me everything, including how it pained them when they read it. And I even made sure to read some fragments - and they bawled in the class. And that’s the point, right?!

This same teacher, in her overall reflection, despite the fervent efforts of alternative practice, expressed a worry about the future prospects of the Polish school, given the dire state of Polish education due to the destruction of the reform. Such depictions, rather than serving to pathologise the Polish people as lacking agency, speak to the strength of the hegemony of the present system and merely signal a deeper need for systemic change:

In general, looking at our school, you know, when I look at these faces, I do not think of them as noble anymore but they are vulgar (faces), and that’s the worst. And the same at parent-teacher conferences, you see vulgar, often drunk faces. Which is not to say that I do not see the talented ones, I do, but I feel sorry for them because of course I spend extra hours with them, but that is too little. They should be in superb classes - we have one excellent bi-lingual class, but they want to close it down. That is a tremendous loss for these children and for our whole country. But I don’t know who decides such things...

Within the context of the focus group, all 3 teachers synergized their strategies of resistance to the new system, each elaborating their own specific counter-hegemonic views and practices. The first teacher gave the example of conducting quizzes testing readership of the books the old-fashioned way:

Teachers undoubtedly still try (to make sure students do the readings). I think the vast majority of teachers do not give way that easily (to this reform). They realize the importance of the subject. And this is the cause of teacher-student conflict. For example, if I do a quiz from a given reading - (students ask) why, what gives you the right, what are these detailed questions. Well, what’s the name of the protagonist - that is a detailed question!?

The second teacher gave a detailed account of her teaching of war literature, her favourite section, in attempt to recover Polish suffering and heroism presently overshadowed by the Holocaust theme which she pointed out earlier, passionately presenting the whole historical context, according to traditional practice, so as to make this distant past and difficult reading more accessible to the young students:
When I enter the war theme, before I even begin (discussing the literature), I try to engage the children positively in the whole topic of the war. So I discuss the Nazi and Soviet labor camps, who Stalin, Hitler was, Siberia, I also make connections with (the persecution) of Poles earlier during Romantism. And I tell them how Poles were tortured. In order to have a positive introduction, because that is how we were raised, right? And suddenly, my jaw drops because I start to discuss the reading and I ask (a basic question)... And - nothing. And I think to myself, Jesus Christ. And the air escapes me as I look at this throng sitting before me and I ask myself - what is the point? But I am a teacher and this is my duty. And besides, we do not imagine it any other way. But interest is getting worse and worse...

This teacher, in response to a question regarding the present deprivileging of certain knowledges, particularly old Polish literature, specifically patriotic and religious matter, concentrated especially in epochs like the Middle Ages and Romantism, so debased under the present system, legitimized all Polish literary trends equally and especially those currently devalued:

Even though I may personally not like a certain author (for example I don’t like Gombrowicz, he wrote beautiful works, but as a person, I do not like him), it would never occur to me to say something negative in front of the students, we are not allowed to... For us Polish teachers all... there are no ugly, less beautiful things. Whether it’s Romantism, Positivism, or previously Antiquity or the Middle Ages so presently discredited as the Inquisition and all... Well, it’s not true that it was only the Inquisition because there was a flourishing of schooling, not only Jesuit but also secular. So there is no such thing that the teacher will say to the students, oh we can neglect this topic. That would just be wrong, I know not of such a teacher. And besides, each epoch has its own aims and values and we must tell the students about it all. (...) So in that regard nothing has changed. I simply cannot imagine it any differently.

The third teacher summarized this group discussion in the following words, once again vindicating the timeless humanist values of aesthetics, spirituality, morality, and patriotism rooted in the Polish teaching tradition.

For us the only thing that changed over all these years is: context, propaganda, politics and this (reading) set. However, from our point of view, in our teacher consciousness nothing changed - we still accentuate artistic, timeless universal values, ethical, moral and patriotic values. That has not changed.

A different teacher proudly admitted to conducting her lessons within the old model of schooling despite official impositions, to which I was generously invited to observe first hand, holding steadfast to the time-tested traditional ways of extracting the full readership of the literature in her classes rather than relying on excerpts, to great effects, while
simultaneously navigating the formal requirements of the new format of the matura exam based on fragments. She shared:

You know these lessons that you are observing, these are lessons following the old school model. But you know I would like these children to have a wholistic context. I would like my student to know - for example, what a Soviet or German camp is, and not just give them a fragment, one chapter and they will know about Kostylew (from ‘Inny Swiat’), but will not know the whole context. I miss that very much. And as a teacher of 20 years - 15 years in high school, you know, I try to approach this reform with a bit of common sense. That is, I am not so slavishly tied and submissive to (what is being imposed with this reform). (...)

I prepare these children for the matura exam and I can proudly say that my students - I apologise for saying this - get the best results, my classes are usually the best on the maturas. And I think that basing it not on fragments, but I absolutely demand reading books. And (the students) know that I demand reading books, not summaries. I tell them that it will backfire on them. And it later pays off. Of course, if I do a class test, then I only do it within the framework of the new matura - there are no longer topics of the sort you or I had as students. I only do it according to the formula of the new matura so they get a fragment and a topic. But once I cover the entire work, these children have a completely different view of this fragment. And generally I believe I am not making a mistake here because that is how this youth should be taught.

The following teacher shared the exact same practice while negotiating the official regulations:

I require the reading of the full text from the students, they only get a fragment on a class test because I have to prepare them for the question format of the matura. And as an old-school teacher I like to do a quiz from the reading. However, there is also a feedback loop because we (teachers) are also evaluated based on the students’ results. So there is a kind of interdependence. It does not translate to anything other than informational content, nevertheless each of us gets this information and we have to, for example - the matura we have to accurately calculate, different sorts of bar graphs, how much, how much more, what’s the difference between the mark that we gave... everything is later given in numbers, percentages, so it’s all kind of weird..

This teacher listed a number of other ways she resists the encroachments of the present system distinguishing between negative freedom characteristic of Western liberalism and the traditionally Polish notion of positive freedom and validating the age-old teacher role of a master, role model, authority figure versus a service provider in the Western commercialized conception, with great results and positive feedback from the students:

So I believe there is still a possibility to say something, although we should also be deeply aware that this realm of values is in some way depreciated. Or that the boundary of freedom is constantly lowered - because freedom is understood primarily as freedom from everything,
rather than freedom directed at something, the fact that I can do something. So I think that if we keep that in mind, then we can still count on discussants. I myself notice that sometimes I passionately speak about something based on my own experience in class and later (the students) remind me of it. (They say): the only reason I remember it is because you told us about it once, how you experienced it. So we can still..., we still have the right to express our own emotions. But honestly, the philosophy of the school has completely changed. I will say that I do not agree with being treated like the executor of certain actions - because that is how the teacher is treated today. Such terminology is used very often, also in professional journals, that the teacher is to be an organizer of the learning process, not a teacher. (The term) teacher carries a certain semantic weight - someone who teaches somebody something. (Such a conception) immediately raises questions of the type of model, of attitudes etc. Whereas here the nomenclature itself implies a complete departure from all these principles...

This teacher also, alluding to the earlier mentioned process of the marketization of education based on cheap sensationalism, pointed out alternative practices of stimulating the students’ interest in literature:

And there are still humanities students that you can interest (in the literature). And it’s not like I have to interest them with some scandals of a given author. Because you could explore..., take for example our romantics, each of them has such a rich and truly sensational life, that you could present them based on their biography as people who experience different..., who also travel so are really citizens of the world...

She also recounted her acts of civil disobedience as a manifestation of her protest against the introduction of new teaching theories like assertiveness and methodologies like project methods in teacher training classes:

I remember (when there was a trend for assertiveness a while ago) all teacher training sessions began with the definition of assertiveness. Which after a while I began to get tired of - and I remember that was the way I would choose my sessions - as soon as the first thing about assertiveness was mentioned, I would leave. It was the same thing 3/4 years ago with a trend for the project method, everything was (to be done by) the project method. I warned one of the Polish teaching instructors that if they begin the class in this way, I am dropping the course because I am not ok with it.

Finally, in relation to the previously criticized prevalent beaurocratization of schooling under the present system, this teacher upheld the traditionally Polish world of values, citing instances of reclaiming this territory with her approach to handling various disciplinary situations or student initiatives of for example a theater despite official procedures:
Because I think people won’t be able to function if they don’t base their mentality on a system of values, and not some randomly constructed ones, because somewhere down the line it will collapse, whether with respect to the pension or healthcare system. So it turns out that there is a certain responsibility that at least I feel and I believe others will feel as well. (…)

When there is a disciplinary problem that has to be solved, it also turns out that this system of values is important for us and our students. Despite a semblance of departure from it, of rendering everything transparent, reducing it to the form of procedures, it turns out that this world of values is important. That everyone would prefer to be valued in the realm of values and not procedures, that the procedure will not value them. (Despite the fact that the system does not foster it, there is a will and need for it). Yes, I think this is very human, that we must create a friendly environment and not constantly fight with something or merely exist at the level of procedures, because that would be too difficult, we would feel alienated in such an environment... The same with our students, if a former student calls me after 3 years and tells me that on the exam she remembered something that I told them in grade 1. So in a way, we pick out what is ours from this message and that is what remains. (…)

There are still many such opportunities, many youth groups who still try to..., for example our school theatre where students want to stay after school not according to any procedure. And later they take the train and lug (all that heavy stuff) so they can perform their play on that one night. So there are still many such things that the procedure spared. And it is very possible...

A university teacher educator I also had the opportunity to interview shared the complexity of her situation of navigating the colonial power matrix which involves a constant maneuvering of the dictates of the education reform, following her pre-existing time-tested teacher conscience and engaging in counter-practices while still protecting the safety of her student-teachers under the new system, a very risky task for which she pays a personal price, as she admits:

I don’t know how to educate teachers, you know, right now. Because earlier when I taught, I told them what is wrong with the reform and what to avoid. Later I realized that unfortunately that is not the best way because all those bad things are preferred. For me it is a matter of - to be in accord with what is happening now, I would have to teach contrary to my own self. And teach contrary to my own self I will not because after all I am at the university and not a trade school training idiots. And that is the problem. But on the other hand if I do it wrong, because this is professional training, the student will suffer because of it. I really have big problems...

In response to my observation that most older teachers continue old teaching practices, this professor expressed her approval and admiration for such teachers who have the courage to practice traditionally while bemoaning the inevitable reform of new teacher generations:
It’s still very fortunate that my children are taught by people who taught back in the day and who simply teach the important things. It is very difficult for them, but they do it anyway. Whereas the young (teachers) will simply already produce these half-wits.

This professor ended her reflection on an optimistic note of a promise of revolt and change despite the stultifying effects of the reform:

A stupid people is easier to govern. But this is illusory, temporary. Because this stupid nation begins to rebel, and not knowing whom to rebel against, it rebels against everything - and then it becomes impossible to contain.

The next teacher reverberated the other teachers’ stance on the traditional practice of a fully contextualized teaching of literature which as an older teacher she also continues to abide by, while assuring that the same was the case also even for younger teachers:

That is, not only old teachers (conform to the old system). Many Polish teachers follow (the old system): we situate the text in the historic context, while drawing connections with Modernity. So that the student is able to understand why for example the Baroque was so important, if writers like Grochowiak or Bialoszewski ie. contemporary poets allude to the Baroque. Or why Romantism was so important that it influenced the works of Kaczmarski for example. So most of us do that, that’s a fact, but (with this new reform it will be more and more difficult).

This teacher gave the example of her practice of discussing patriotic poetry, so discredited under the present system, to a resounding response from the students who crave such knowledge:

For example this year I taught a lesson on the poetry of Wojtek Wencel who last year published a book of poems entitled ‘De Profundis’. And these are patriotic poems. Who writes patriotic poems these days? Young contemporary poets write... they don’t write about patriotism. Such a seemingly outmoded, unimportant, irrelevant topic. He is simply the successor to Herbert. It is superb poetry, not only with respect to its patriotic content but also its form. And in addition these poems also allude to the latest history of Poland, to the Cursed Soldiers, the Home Army soldiers and what happened in Wolyn for example when these lands were invaded... And I have to tell you that when this book of poetry came out, I read one of these poems in a grade 2 class and for me the whole review of this book were the tears in the eyes of one student, who upon hearing the text, exclaimed: God, nobody told me about this, why don’t I know about this?!! And indeed this type of stuff is not always discussed in school.

This teacher expressed her decided opposition to the reform, as both a teacher and parent, citing the rupturing of intergenerational continuity the destruction of the school canon is
causing, alluding to the massive anti-Polish “take away your Grandma’s ID card” media campaign surrounding the political elections of 2005, pitting the young generation against the villanized ‘Mohair Grandma’ stereotype embodying the Polish traditional ethos:

Many of us - teachers and parents too, because we are also parents - do not accept this reform, or at least see many of its drawbacks - it is not completely thought through. Reform was necessary no doubt, but (...) essentially for the most part it is not good. (For example, it is said now) that today’s world is a world of specialists, so why should a microbiologist or a biotechnologist need ‘Konrad Wallenrod’, for example. But it’s not about ‘Konrad Wallenrod’, but about forming certain attitudes. If we are to be an intergenerational community where the grandma gets along with the grand-son, and not where he takes away her ID card.

This teacher went on to proudly elaborate her specific instances of resistance to the reform, in addition to the previously mentioned class trips to the museum and cemetery, of her school’s patriotic concerts at the local church for the National Cursed Soldiers Remembrance Day, again with enormous success. Despite her overall somber diagnosis of a general decline of the humanities, she ended with a hopeful message of these students’ relentless efforts for change:

I will say, because I would hate to make it seem like I’m only complaining, like it’s all bad. Because it’s not. It is a fact that in our country issues pertaining to pedagogy, discipline, schooling have significantly deteriorated, have gotten commercialized. Now there is a prevalent commercialization. And that’s regardless of where it comes from, the East, the West, the North or South. So really, in my opinion, you can say that the humanities/humanism have died. Because now everything has to be specialized, commercialized or manipulated. But that is not to say that there are no enthusiasts or no great students out there. (...) For example, this year we celebrated National Cursed Soldiers Day, March 1st, for the second year in a row. And I was able to gather up a group of students, we staged a concert in (the city cathedral). And only when these young people, after the Mass, saw the tears in the eyes of these older people, these veteran soldiers from Freedom and Independence, the Home Army, did they understand what patriotism and the intergenerational bond was all about. Those people fought and we don’t have to.(...) So I have much respect for these children of mine who despite having different views, not necessarily religious, showed up at all these concerts in the churches on time, sat 4 hours on Sunday, which they didn’t have to, they could have said they are not interested, but nonetheless (they did)...

Finally, one teacher dismissed any questions of dim prospects for the future of Polish education, summarizing the status of the teacher practitioners on the ground of firm
resistance to the top-down imposition of the reform and opening the gates to anti-colonial transformation:

No, because here there are people who remember different times and who are committed to upkeeping certain traditions in this country. We take from the West what is necessary, sometimes for the good and sometimes for the bad, but I cannot imagine having ‘Pan Tadeusz’ excerpts here, that would be a complete downfall.

Notably, all teachers, despite their critique of the present reform, acknowledged the need for change in Polish schooling, especially following the yet unresolved communization of schooling from the previous colonial era, stressing the mere misdirection of the present reform and thus debunking the present stereotype of the alleged “backward” rigidity of old teachers, One teacher emphasized it was also young teachers seeing the problems of the present reform thus defying the Western false dichotomy between tradition and modernity:

These young teachers also (who come for training to our school) do not like this kind of (assertive) attitude. It’s not just the old teachers who think that it was once better and now it is (all bad). No - before it was not good either. School under communism also had many faults, that is a well-known fact, especially history was falsified, and so was the interpretation of literary texts. But young teachers also notice that now this kind of (assertive) attitude is not good either.

Another teacher eloquently articulated this older teachers’ openness to innovation:

I think that (even though as humanists we should persevere in our old teaching goals), we should still be open to changing our teaching methods. I mean in general I consider myself a teacher who likes to seek and I never dogmatically insist on a particular method, although I do require students (to do the full readings which as an old-school teacher I later test on quizzes). Although I would not consider myself a traditionalist teacher. I always like to try something new. I am constantly searching and I have yet to find the best way to transmit content and readings. And I myself like to learn. And somewhere you can converge with students’ interests.

Former Solidarity activist Jadwiga Chmielowska, one of the leaders of the hunger strike of 2012 in defense of the Polish school (which swept through the whole country from Krakow, to Warsaw, Siedlce to Upper and Lower Silesia), gave an impassioned account of this drastic form of protest, revealing once again the whole neo-communist, post-Round Table/Magdalenka socio-political arrangement underpinning the education reform and
expounding routes for anti-colonial resistance and indigenous Polish resuscitation through a national education program:

I will repeat what I said to the Deputy Minister of Education when our hunger strike group entered the Ministry. (They didn’t want to let us in, but somehow we managed to get inside. We pitched a tent and threatened that we would camp out here). What a diseased state: to get the ministers’ attention, you have to make a scandal or some major commotion, otherwise they don’t give a damn about us. But at this meeting I asserted the need for a cohesive education policy for the whole country. I don’t believe that future governments will do this, unfortunately I lost trust in state structures. And I believe that just like now we have underground media, we should as a society gather specialists from various fields and draw up a plan of repair of the Polish state, including the education system. We went on strike, people from Solidarity and the Independent Students’ Association from 1980/81 and it just so happened that these were all people who were against Magdalenka and the Round Table where - I am not afraid to say it - sat officers in charge with their agents and a few useful idiots, who agreed to the talks when Father Suchowolec and Father Niedzielak were being murdered. Father Zych was murdered a bit earlier. His funeral took place when these Round Tablers chose Jaruzelski for president of Poland. The same day, Poland’s president in London, Mr. Sabbat died. And this is what the whole society must understand in order to get together and be able to develop a state restoration program in all areas.

Following the hunger strike we started the National Education Movement. We have legal personality to have the capacity to act. We are a registered association. Right now we are supporting the collection of signatures for a referendum and we are even prepared for the worst: for saving schools from getting closed down, including undertaking more hunger strikes. We are also developing an alternative matura that you can take from Polish, history on an optional basis so that youth can understand that it is worthy to study and have such a matura. Indeed, I am afraid that while for now we have official education, soon we will have underground education, where there will be a need for tutoring in math, physics, history. Some places already have self-study groups which provide extra lessons. We are trying this right now in Silesia where people have no identity (hence the separatist movement) because they don’t know one: history (of the region and country), and two literature. In Silesia right now we are trying to officially implement a patriotic education program. And this should work in some schools, we’ve already introduced it in some cities. There should simply be a possibility for parents to demand a good education from teachers at school. And this is doable - I’ll give the example of my own education under communism where I learned history while my history teacher taught (something completely abstract). So teachers can do a lot. They can teach properly, suggest things and encourage. The more people engage in social activity in Poland, in various fields, the greater the chance of saving our country. What was the point of those reforms - we had the example of the II Republic, where everything was built from a Polish education system to the industry, so we have a model.

This hunger strike was supported by representatives of Polish academia all over the country which oppose not only the degradation of higher education, but of all levels of Polish
education, most notably the immediately preceding high school, resulting in a drastic decline in the quality of first year university students. This protest, culminating in a nationwide Funeral Procession for the Polish University organized by the Polish Humanities Crisis Committee in 2015, the largest such event since the anti-communist student strikes of 1981, is exemplified by these words of protest issued by the Independent Academic Forum (2012) in support of the 2012 hunger strike:

These reforms, which in effect lead to the loss of national identity and a reduction in a sense of self-worth can only prepare the young generation for the role of cheap labor force for wealthy hegemons. This is not a role within the European community that Poles deserve. Such a vision of a new society is unacceptable. It’s high time that a country as large as Poland, with a proper system of (higher and lower) education, took its rightful place amongst European states and not vegetated in the periphery.
References


4. Towards Decolonization: Polish Indigenous Knowledge:

In summary, this thesis has offered a conceptual framework for the theorization and interrogation of colonial relations of power in Polish society, historic and present, with a specific focus on the education system. From a theoretical conceptualization to a practical analysis of an actual example of colonial discourse manifested in the present education reform legislation text (2012), this thesis has engaged in an exploration and critique of (neo)colonial forms of oppression in the current Polish society. However, returning one last time to the Anti-colonial Discursive Framework that forms the backbone of this study, it is clear that an anti-colonial research project remains incomplete unless complemented with a practical strategy of decolonization and liberation. Just as schools are sites of social reproduction, they can be potent loci of social change and transformation. According to the Anti-colonial framework, such a project of decolonizing the dominant schooling system is inspired by the critical pedagogy model espoused by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, where the oppressed are subjects of their own pasts, present and future, rather than objects of various imperial projects. As Friere (1970) underscores, “No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption” (p. 39). However, the decolonizing project I propose for the Polish schooling system, rather than being an abstract Frierian-based model rooted in radical Marxism which in the Polish context would mask another top-down imposed hegemony, is crucially grounded in Polish indigenous epistemologies, as also advocated by the Anti-colonial Discourse approach. As Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) posit: “There is a site of/in tradition, orality, visual representation, material and intangible culture, and aboriginality that is empowering to colonized and marginalized groups. The anti-colonial perspective seeks to identify that site and celebrate its strategic significance (in decolonizing praxis). A politicized evocation of culture and tradition has relevance for a decolonization project” (p. 301). Hence, I propound a Polish-centric curriculum and pedagogy anchored in the indigenous Polish pedagogic traditions of the truly independent preceding Second Polish Republic.
Already adumbrated in the previous chapter (in the local Polish teachers voices of resistance), this chapter is devoted to expounding these Polish indigenous knowledges in detail. Rather than education “reform” that is in fact a violent revolutionary severing of previous Polish experiences and brutal rupturing of continuity with Polish history, I postulate a home-grown evolution of the modern Polish education system based on Polish indigenous traditions, particularly through Polish literature, as a rich source of Polish indigenous knowledge. In arguing for educational change, I make a case for broader social change of Poland, also in line with its age-old traditions, dismantling the false Western binary between tradition and modernity and contending for a locally-derived modernization program, as opposed to the Western Eurocentric imitative “photocopy” (in the words of Polish political philosopher Ryszard Legutko) model of development Poland adopted since its post-communist transformation. Here, I draw once more on the Critical Discourse Analysis’ conceptualization of power as hegemony, a constant struggle and contestation through a dialogic relationship between discourse and social structure, painting an optimistic vision of true social transformation with educational discourse and practice as a focal point of change in the larger Polish social structure, in synergy with other crucial realms of society, including the media, culture, politics, the law etc. Just as the present colonial educational discourse that arose out of a hegemonic social structure serves to further reproduce such a structure through its dominant producers, so the inclusion of hitherto marginalized and excluded indigenous Polish voices which reflect Polish traditional worldviews in the dialogue on Polish education can begin to, in tandem with other social domains and institutions, contribute to the (re)construction of a truly sovereign, self-determining Poland.

As stated in the Introduction chapter, Dei et al. (2000) define indigenous knowledge as: “a body of knowledge associated with the long-term occupancy of a certain place”, the “traditional norms and social values, as well as mental constructs that guide, organize, and regulate the people’s way of living and making sense of their world” (p. 6). As opposed to the “Third World’s” indigenous societies whose main source of indigenous knowledge is oral tradition, for Poland and other “Second World” colonies deriving from the European cultural influence, it is literary culture that constitutes the main repository of their local epistemologies (inspired, verified and amplified by oral accounts of members of the society). The Anti-colonial Discourse also encompasses literacy, pointing to “the relevance of using
indigenous language and knowledge forms to create social understanding that draws and combines literature with politics, culture, history, economics and understandings of spirituality” (p. 304), asserting further that “a politicized evocation of culture and tradition has relevance for a decolonization project” (p. 301). The practical role of literature in anti-colonial praxis is especially relevant in the case of Polish literature, which traditionally has always served a political function, becoming especially prominent in Polish Romantic writing in the heyday of Poland’s captivity under foreign imperialisms during the partitions of the 19th century, the poet being the spiritual leader of the nation, providing moral counsel and guiding it towards independence. This is in stark opposition to the literary cultures of Poland’s colonial oppressors, most notably Germany and Russia, for which historical and humanistic writing always had an insular, theoretical and elite nature (Nowak, 2012). This political significance of literature in Polish history, often underscored by Polish writers’ personal public engagement, has been present since its inception from the Renaissance (eg. royal court official Frycz-Modrzewski’s “On the Improvement of the Commonwealth”), and intensified with the threat of colonial imposition beginning in the 18th century Enlightenment (the political journalism of the Great Sejm and Kosciuszko Uprising eg. political figures Hugo Kollataj and Stanislaw Staszic, or the statesman Niemcewicz’s political drama “The Return of the Deputy”), to 19th century partition era Romantism and Positivism, to the 20th century World War Two patriotic literature. As Barbara Sharratt (1997) says “when history textbooks are nonexistent or falsified, literature tells the truth: thus it takes upon itself the role of history as the educator of the nation”, stressing its “role in transmitting Polish national tradition and in keeping the national spirit” (p. 17). In the context of Poland’s colonization, with the delegalization of Polish language, literature, history and culture, under the partitions, Nazism and communism, Polish poetry and prose constituting a well-established literary canon were passed around secretly and read clandestinely in the privacy of the home, to keep the flame of Polishness alive, despite the threat of persecution. It is this literature, which constituted the beating heart of Polish culture from the outset and formed an intricate part of Polish being throughout the centuries, that in the present Third Republic of the 21st century is being completely removed or diminished to fragments in school curricula under the current education reform.
The local Polish conceptualization of a canon of Polish culture, and specifically literature, is closely akin to that proposed by Dei et al. (2000) in the context of Third World indigenous knowledges. This thesis’ reference point for defining the indigenous Polish canon are patriotic Polish proponents of the Polish canon rather than Polish post-modern imitators of Western deconstruction of universalist canons, which rather than the indigenous Polish view, represent internal Polish intellectual collaboration with present Western hegemony, as has been argued in this thesis. Inglot and Patrzalek, in a pre-reform 1995 Polish Studies Conference, articulate the literary canon to be: “a fundamental code which ensures the continuity of collective memory and a field of shared cultural experiences” (cited in Mazur, 2012, p. 188). Ewa Nowak, another advocate of the literary canon, describes it similarly as: “a collection of literary works commonly recognized as valuable that sustains collective memory and is a carrier of tradition essential for the continuity and development of the community. The works of the canon entrench and transmit values whose inheritance by next generations guarantees the existence of a collective identity” (quoted in Mazur, 2012, p. 189). Traditionalist Polish literary studies professor Bortnowski (2007) sums up these reflections on the Polish literary canon, expounding its national aspect:

The canon is collective memory, crucial for the functioning of any community, an indigeneity and a space of homeliness, i.e. a homeland without which we are doomed to a crippled existence. The canon points to a natural need for genealogy, it preserves the continuity of tradition, enables the dialogue of generations oriented towards a common imaginary and a common language of symbols, and thereby it is a guarantor of the covenant between the old and new times and a mainstay of communication between the grandfathers, fathers and grandchildren (p. 16).

He adds: “the canon determines our national consciousness to a great extent. We are Poles because there is a certain mythology surrounding the concepts of Mickiewicz (Dziady, Pan Tadeusz) or Sienkiewicz (Krzyzacy, Trylogia) which we cannot escape even if we reject these readings” (p. 16). He makes a firm case for the Polish canon: “our over 100-year tradition of indigenous literature education clearly argues for the canon, which was subject to change, but nonetheless existed” (p. 18), reminding also of the possibility of critique of the canon embedded in its very notion (exemplified by Gombrowicz), as also highlighted by Dei (2001). Defined as such, the Polish literary canon has always played a key role in the Polish educational tradition with respect to its formatory, patriotic, religious and moral goals, most
notably with the cultivation of the traditional intelligentsia ethos of the Polish school, maintaining Polish continuity especially in the face of colonial aggressions (Gella, 2001). This is epitomized by the intelligentsia “generation of Columbuses” of the Second Polish Republic who, raised on such literature, undertook the enormous task of rebuilding Poland from the destruction of the partitions and stood the greatest test of their patriotism in laying down their lives for Poland in World War Two (for example poet Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński) (Gella, 2001, Sharratt, 1997).

Canadian Aboriginal scholar Marlene Brant Castellano (2000) specifically in the context of Canada’s native people, says about traditional Aboriginal knowledge that it:

has been handed down more or less intact from previous generations. (...) It tells of the creation of the world and the origin of clans in encounters between ancestors and spirits in the form of animals; it records genealogies and ancestral rights to territory; and it memorializes battles, boundaries, and treaties and instils attitudes of wariness or trust toward neighbouring nations. Through heroic and cautionary tales, it reinforces values and beliefs; these in turn provide the substructure for civil society (p. 23).

Such a historic, moral, existential and pedagogic function of the native Canadian knowledge system directly mirrors Poland’s indigenous cultural canon, as articulated for example by the aforementioned Bortnowski (2007):

The canon is a set of values, ultimate truths, ideals, it is a moral code, a set of norms regulating people’s behaviour, a suggestion of a code of conduct and a proposition of role models (...) proposed by this set of books and accepted by all members of a given community. It includes existential issues, questions about the meaning of human existence and of the world (p. 17).

Just as Aboriginal knowledge encompasses an originator mythology of the Aboriginal people, creation stories and cosmogonic tales, reflecting and inspiring the life of the community, its worldview, value system and moral code, so the Polish literary canon tells the story of the Polish nation from its very inception with the country’s Christianization in 966, marking its introduction to the Christian community of European nations. From its classic-Christian roots represented by the ancient Greco-Roman mythology and the Biblical canon, to its flourishing in Poland’s Golden Age of the 16th century under the glorious First Republic epitomized by the Polish language canon beginning the Renaissance, heralded by the bold assertion of Mikolaj Rej that “Poles are not geese and they have their own language”
to its artful mastery by the greatest Slavic poet of the period, Jan Kochanowski, to its struggle for survival, including life in exile under the partitions of the 19th century, two World Wars, Nazi and Soviet occupation of the 20th century, it conveys a message of Polish pride, resilience and endurance through the ages of the nation’s existence despite the odds of constant brutal assaults, through the power of its national spirit (reflected and nourished by this canon). Foundational to this common national imagination was the belief in the legendary origins of the Poles in the mythical Sarmatians, a proud Eastern tribe of invincible warriors who settled on these Slavic lands in antiquity, linking family, clan and tribal histories of these indigenous noble Polish rulers to the political history of the nation and enshrining the right to Polish ancestral territories through Poland’s ancient noble heraldic system. While Gallus Anonymus - who despite being foreign, provides a uniquely Eastern European perspective on the dominant Western-centric history of the continent - was the first historian to write about Poland in his “Chronicle of the Poles”, a medieval deeds narrative extolling the virtues of the ancestors, it was Polish medieval historian Jan Długosz who, continuing this Polish historiographic tradition, was the first to note the Sarmatian heritage of Poland in his 15th century work on the history of Poland (Wasko, 1997). The culture of Polish Sarmatism, most prominently reflected in the 17th century Polish Baroque writing, most notably in Jan Chryzostom Pasek’s “Memoirs” and the poems of Waclaw Potocki, became subject to sharp criticism in Poland’s Enlightenment as a symbol of Poland’s backwardness, only to be reinstalled as the marker of Poland’s greatness during Romanticism with the advent of the “nobleman’s tale” genre (Adam Mickiewicz “Pan Tadeusz”) and Positivism (Henryk Sienkiewicz “Trilogy”).

In its eclectic blending of Eastern, Western and native elements, the culture of Sarmatism gave rise to Poland’s revered political system of the Rzeczpospolita, based on the Greco-Roman model of a just and good polity rooted in the moral ideal of the Latin “res publica” (“public/common” “good/wealth”), a common-wealth ensuring the happiness of all of its citizens. This unique phenomenon of a Nobles’ Democracy formed a bulwark of freedom and equality epitomized by its central tenet of “Golden Liberty” in opposition to the absolutist governments of other European states prevailing across Europe at the time. The wellbeing of the Rzeczpospolita formed the locus of concern of Polish writing since its beginnings in the Renaissance, hence Polish literature is rife with models of good citizens, in
both peace and war time. From Rej’s “The Life of the Honest Man” to Kochanowski’s Song XII (on Virtue) which contain a moral code of service to the nation, sacrifice for the common good valued over self-interest, personal glory and material gain, a citizen’s moral uprightness is measured by his attitude towards the Rzeczpospolita. In conditions of peace, the glorified ideal becomes the dignified nobleman who leads a modest and peaceful life on his land in harmony with nature and in accord with the virtues of integrity, wisdom, prudence and most importantly patriotism, fulfilling the ancient Greek goal of inner harmony and moral order and the Christian transcendental reward of accession to Heaven. Equally importantly to depicting role models for emulation, Polish literature condemned undesirable behaviours, which if not kept in check, were professed to lead to Poland’s downfall, epitomized by Piotr Skarga’s famous “Parliamentary Sermons”. Vices of disobedience of the king, self-pride, greed, oppression of peasants were pointed out, as well as an uncritical imitation of Western trends exemplified by Ignacy Krasicki’s satire “Stylish Wife” of the Enlightenment, conveying a message of warning directly preceding Poland’s fall under the partitions. Here a key distinction is made between endogenous critique of Poland’s shortcomings by the progressive nobility for the purpose of defensive reform and improvement of the country and a foreign-inspired deconstructionist and anti-polonist condemnation of Poland’s traditions serving to justify its conquest by its “superior” neighbours. The pedagogic character of Polish literature was continued in the neo-Sarmatic 19th century, most notably in the historical novels of Sienkiewicz which reinstate the Medieval knightly ethos of service to the king, God and lady, transposed in the Polish context to Poland’s national motto: “God, Honor, Fatherland”, forming an indispensible part of every Polish independence military campaign since the country’s enslavement in the partition era. This ethos, more relevant to circumstances of war (very prevalent in the Polish experience), is embodied by model knights like Jurand of Spychow from “The Teutonic Knights” based on real-life heroes like Poland’s greatest warrior Zawisza Czarny (also enshrined in the novel). Here once again a blending of ancient virtue of valor, gallantry and honor, is evident together with the Christian ideal of mercifulness and forgiveness typified by the attitude of Jurand who rather than take revenge, admirably sets his oppressor free. In addition to portraying ideal types, Sienkiewicz’s prose records history, memorializes Poland’s epic battles, forming myths about the past and shaping attitudes to its neighbours. As Kolodziejska (2004) says, “It was
Sienkiewicz’s ‘With Fire and Sword’ and not the works of historians that entrenched ideas about our conflicts with Ukrainians, the wars we engaged in and the sufferings we incurred’.

Similarly, literature of Polish Romanticism, the apotheosis of Poland’s captivity is also filled with both good and bad characters with respect to the subjugated country, encapsulated in Adam Mickiewicz’s “Warsaw Salon” scene from the national drama “Forefather’s Eve” which epitomizes Polish society under the partitions. The centre is occupied by the affluent and cosmopolitan aristocracy, state officials, military leaders and literati constituting Poland’s contemporary elite comprador who is conformist towards tsarist rule over Poland, while the periphery features the marginalized indigenous Polish elite (a rising nobility-derived Polish intelligentsia class in conversation with Polish patriotic elders) engaged in resistance towards the foreign power. Mickiewicz presents the former in a unequivocally negative light, portraying the repercussions for the greatest sin of a Polish citizen - betrayal of the homeland in the fate of the traitor character Doctor who gets stricken by lightening, whereas patriots like the protagonist Konrad, who although suffer persecution, will be rewarded in the afterlife, supported by the prayer of the drama’s Catholic priest, Father Peter. Polish Tyrtaean Romantic poetry, just like its ancient Greek model, glorifies national liberation struggle, showing strategies of Polish resistance, from open battle (Slowacki’s “Kordian” - Winkelriedism), to underground conspiracy (Mickiewicz’s “Konrad Wallenrod” - Wallenrodism), to passive suffering (Mickiewicz’s “Dziady” - Messianism). The philosophy of Polish Messianism developed by Mickiewicz provided a metaphysical explanation for Poland’s persecution that visualized Poland as the Christ of Nations whose suffering was necessary for its own salvation and the redemption of other nations. This perception of a special role of Poland in the history of Europe stemmed from its Sarmatic mythology imagining Poland as the oasis of freedom and the bulwark of Christianity, playing a key historical role in defending Europe’s Christian roots from Turkish Islam in the 17th century (Sobieski’s victory in Vienna 1683), communist atheism in the 20th century (the Pilsudzki-lead “Miracle of the Vistula” 1920) and potentially today (from Europe’s internal neo-communist transformation). It was also Mickiewicz who expounded the role of Poland’s Catholicism in Polish national identity epitomized by a famous quote popularly attributed to the poet: “Only under the cross, under this symbol, Poland will be Poland and a Pole, a Pole”, emphasizing the anti-colonial role of the Catholic Church in Poland as the bastion of
Polishness in the face of external heterodox occupation. This crucial role was further elaborated by Sienkiewicz during Positivism who in “Quo Vadis” portrayed the heroism of Catholicism and in “Trilogy” where he conveys the idea that as long as the symbolic Czestochowa, Poland’s spiritual capital existed, the Polish nation was guaranteed continuity. The motif of the Saint Mary of Czestochowa, the Queen of Poland, also prevalent throughout Polish literature from the oldest Polish hymn and national anthem in the Middle Ages “Mother of God”, epitomizes the specificity of Poland’s Catholicism in Poland’s devotion to the Virgin Mary seen as the historic protector of the Polish nation. The Czestochowa icon, revered for its miraculous role in Poland’s liberation struggles, has formed an inextricable part of its independence battles, appearing on the Polish military uniform from the Bar Confederation of the 18th century to the anti-communist resistance and Solidarity movement of the 20th century.

Polish Romantic insurrectonal patriotism, entrenched in and instilled by Romantic literature, remains the dominant mode of Polish culture, giving rise to the greatest Polish patriots raised on it from Pilsudzki to Pope John Paul II. Even the anti-Romantic (post)modernists who debunk the Romantic ethos, epitomized by Gombrowicz (“Trans-Atlantic”), as Sharratt (1997) argues, are romantic at heart because their point of reference remains romantic. Polish martylogical Romantism, constituting the heart of Polish indigeneity, embodied today in the neo-Romantic poetry of Jaroslaw Marek Rymkiewicz, is the subject of brutal attack by dominant forces in Polish society today, seeing its glorification of defeats (the dates: 1794, 1830, 1863 1944 - all fallen national uprisings) as irrational, misguided and harmful. Even Ewa Thompson (2006), otherwise a proponent of Poland’s colonization thesis, locates Polish indigeneity in the pre-colonial Sarmatism, pathologising Romantism as a symbol of Polish resentment, pessimism, apathy and xenophobia. As Sharatt (1997) asserts however, Romanticism taught the prevalence of spiritual forces over the physical, the ideals the fighters died for making the physical defeats worthwhile. Polish Romanticism ingrained the view of Poland as a spiritual entity, which endures despite material assaults, as experienced under the various phases of Poland’s colonization, manifest in Slowacki’s “Genesis from the Spirit” defining Poland as a chain of great men who were all incarnations of the national spirit, echoed later in Wyspianksi’s neo-Romantic drama “The Wedding” (Sharratt, 1997). Polish Romantic idealism, an undying love of freedom, so
engraved on the Polish soul, is symbolized by the national motto “For our freedom and yours” utilized on Polish military banners from the November 1830 Uprising to World War Two. Polish Positivism, following the failure of the national uprisings, re-geared the patriotism of armed struggle to the pacifist notion of “organic work” of educating the masses, emancipating minorities (peasants, urban poor, women, Jews etc.) and strengthening Poland’s economic and cultural potential as a means of national empowerment and anti-colonial resistance to the Germanization and Russification under the partitions. The Romantic Promethean attitude of self-less sacrifice for the public good is reflected here in the intelligentsia ideal of devotion and work for the common people, embodied by the characters of Zeromski such as doctor Judym from “Homeless People” and the teacher from “The Wrestler” (Sharratt, 1997). This intimate connection between Poland’s national liberation struggle and the concern with social justice have been present in Polish literature from its inception, beginning with Rej’s “A Short Discourse Between the Nobleman, the Reeve and the Vicar” of the Renaissance (Sharratt, 1997).

Apart from the political, social, historic and moral function of Polish literature, the Polish canon has traditionally always played an aesthetic role in establishing an aesthetic order and developing the artistic tastes and values of beauty of its recipients (Bortnowski, 2007). In accord with the ancient classical ethos, just as knowledge was to reflect truth, human action morality and religion - God, so a marker of art was to be beauty (Jaroszynski, 1996). This aspect of traditional Polish culture is especially under attack today with the postmodernist desecration of national icons under the guise of artistic innovation, the invasion of popular culture and the deconstruction of the Polish highbrow cultural canon. As Bortnowski (2007) states, navigation of this postmodern chaos can be facilitated by the canon, a mainstay of order and a time-tested, trustworthy guide that has nourished generations of Poles and most importantly, guaranteed their very existence under the threat of various usurpations throughout the country’s history. This has been achieved by the critical role of the literary canon in the sustenance of the Polish language, the beautiful and rich Polish literary tongue, as contrasted with colloquial Polish or regional dialects. Proper Polish in turn has always been the effect of the school. The school cultivated Polish literary language, utilizing the tool of canonical literature (Kolodziejska, 2004). Thus, apart from the molding of national, moral attitudes, the ultimate goal of the Polish school subject is the
mastery of the Polish language as a living carrier of these cultural values. Today, the school by sanctioning film adaptations, summaries, abstracts, fragments of books, prizing visual over print media, loses its role in shaping a symbolic cultural community and the development of the mother tongue (Kolodziejska, 2004). Ngugi wa Thiong’o, a Kenyan post-colonial writer, spearheading the African decolonization project based on a revival of indigenous languages describes the insidious role of cultural control apart from political and economic domination in the colonial subjugation of a people, specifically through colonial language, in his manifesto “Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of language in African literature” (1989) speaking from an African perspective: “In my view language was the most important vehicle through which that (colonial) power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation” (p. 9). In the Polish context today, while the Polish language has not been officially banned, its deformations from the prevalent newspeak, shorthand, vulgarisms, Anglicisms, to poor vocabulary, a change in accent, diction, grammar, syntax (Kolodziejska, 2004) are closely reminiscent, in their effect, of “Third World” linguistic imperialism. Similarly to the African model of colonization, some words and expressions were removed altogether (eg. virtue, honor, mercifulness, homeland, nation, patriotism), others were appropriated to a new context (eg. truth, beauty, freedom), still others were newly injected (eg. assertiveness). Wa Thiong’o (1989) goes on to articulate a cultural theory of language which is not only a means of communication, but also a carrier of culture. “Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next” (p. 15). As such it constitutes a potent source of empowerment and decolonization. Just like for the African predecessor, a key precondition for achieving Poland’s liberation is reclamation of indigenous Polish language, specifically through the school literary canon, enriched with new contexts, yet grounded in age-old traditions.

Hence, a program of decolonization for the Polish school, as advocated by the indigenous Polish voice, would be anchored in the restoration of the authority of the full national literary canon as part of the broader humanities ethos of the traditional Polish school, once again not unquestioned authority, the Polish cultural canon encompassing the
possibility of its own critique and modernization. In addition to the recovery of the Polish humanities tradition, equally important to this goal is the recuperation of the technical subjects, which form an integral part of the solid knowledge base of the traditional Polish education system which has historically ensured the country’s strength and survival, despite colonial encroachments (eg. the great scientific and technical discoveries by Poles under the partitions and beyond) (Legutko, Wasko, & Zyzynski, 2010, Jaroszynski, 2001c). Most importantly, the Polish school needs to reclaim its traditional role in the formation of character of young Poles, inculcating patriotism and devotion to an independent Poland as the highest value (Jaroszynski, 2001c), in which Polish literature education plays a key part, instilling both an intellectual and moral foundation of Polishness (Wasko, 2010). As inspired by the Afro-centric schooling system (eg. Dei, 1994) in the African anti-colonial context, such a Polish-centric curriculum and pedagogy, rooted in the teaching traditions of the Second Polish Republic, would resume its fundamental role of the formation of a national indigenous elite, the traditional critically-minded anti-colonial intelligentsia class that would replace the present conformist colonial elite comprador and stand at the helm of the country’s struggle for true independence since its emergence from communism. A truly endogenous Polish education reform since the country’s post-communist transformation, responsive to the needs of the people on the ground, calls for a completion of the process of de-communization of the education system, ie. removing the legacy of communism, specifically with regards to the strongly ideologized (Marxism) field of humanities (eg. recognition of the hitherto obscured communist past of Polish authors Szymborska, Milosz and Kapuscinski and, conversely, the underestimated anti-communist poet Herbert), as well as a rehabilitation of the present damages caused by the (neo)liberal westernizing reforms of the last two decades under the Third Republic (Jaroszynski, 2001c, 2007).

Polish professor Wasko (2010) clearly differentiates between the present liberal education model based on market economics and decentralization and the indigenous Polish national schooling system rooted in the nation’s cultural heritage (spiritual and material) since the Commission of National Education of the 18th century (Poland’s - and Europe’s first Ministry of Education). As such, it comprises the curriculum, textbooks, a canon of history and humanities subjects, an exam system, a certain school culture, as well as a material base of school buildings (Wasko, 2010). A comprehensive program of repair of the
present Polish education system in all these areas, articulated at various patriotic symposia on the subject (eg. “Debate on education” 2010, or “Catastrophe in the Polish school”, 2013) includes: a departure from the specialization of schooling and a return to the traditional holistic teaching foundation of high school based on traditional subjects (versus the present educational streams, thematic blocs etc.), a withdrawal of standardized testing and a concomitant return to a focus on knowledge versus skills and a reinstatement of a traditional grading scheme most notably with regards to the current 30% matura passing mark, a restoration of the traditional continuity of teaching with an 8-year elementary school plus 4-year high school (8+4) system versus the present fragmentation of education in a 6+3+3 model with an ultimate removal of the most problematic gymnasium and a reinstitution of the ancient Pythagorean-derived tradition of the age of 7 (not the present 6) beginning of the whole process, a recouping of the authority of the teacher by a change in the students’ statute and thus a recovery of school discipline, a revival of professional technical and trade schools and thus an alleviation of the problem of the mass matura and disturbed Polish professional demographics of a lack of tradesmen, and a reclamation of the responsibility for public education by the state from local governments to combat the present post-modernist decentralization. The key significance of such a reformed education system in the wider change of Polish society is represented by the famous quote by Jan Zamoyski, foremost Polish statesman of the 16th century: “Such will be the Commonwealths as the upbringing of their youth”. Such a pedagogy of Polish pride and truth, in place of the present school’s anti-polonist pedagogy of shame, erasure and deformation, can be the foundation of a strong sovereign Poland firmly grounded in its own indigenous history and traditions, replacing the small empty imitative colonial artefact it has been reduced to under colonization, past and present.

Rooted in the indigenous Polish culture of Sarmatism is the traditionally Polish notion of citizenship, articulated in opposition to the Enlightenment-inspired modern Western model. Conversely to the top-down, imposed, hegemonic Western conception (implemented into reality in the West beginning with the French Revolution and extended abroad with the practice of colonial conquest in the “Third World”, and adopted also by Russia actualizing Western modern ideologies in the “Second World”) resulting in, utilizing Ewa Thompson’s (2000) terminology, aggressive nationalism, notions of national belonging
grounded in the bottom-up ancient national communities of the CEE are based on the crucially distinct defensive nationalism, more aptly reflected in the indigenous Polish vocabulary of “nationhood” (versus the pejorative Western-derived “nationalism”), epitomized by the opening words of the Polish national anthem of “Poland has not yet perished” versus its power-extolling equivalents of Western nations. The modern Western construct of the nation-state equating notions of citizenship with nationality stands in stark contrast to traditional Polish/CEE notions of nationality where the nation-as-people maintains sovereignty regardless of the political situation, including colonial usurpation of state structures by foreign powers, and as such constitute a negation of Russianness and Germanness (Poland’s main colonial oppressors) where the very existence of the nation is determined by political power (Thompson, 2007). Despite dominant Western discourses of the purported inclusivity of the modern democratic construct of civil society defined in opposition to the allegedly exclusive and ethno-centric nationalisms of the CEE, in reality, it is Western nationalisms that violently homogenize their internal and external minorities towards the dominant ethnic/national model, whereas the commonly pathologized as racist, xenophobic, fascist, anti-Semitic etc. dominant Pole-Catholic identity, forcibly chiselled under the pressure of external heterodox nationalisms (most notably Protestant Germany and Orthodox Russia), under conditions of self-determination gives way to a most multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious ideal of citizenship, as manifested in the glorious Jagiellonian Poland of the 16th century (and harkened back to under the II Republic and today in Polish indigenous thought) (Zarycki 2008, 2009).

Similarly, the phenomenon of Poland’s “Noble Democracy” of the I Republic, officially derided as socially elitist and classist, in reality represented a most democratic society of the time, Poland’s 10-12% democracy surpassing the 1-3% standard of contemporary Western European states, epitomized by the old Polish proverb: “the noble on his estate is equal to the voivode” (Thompson, 2006), the Polish nobility class spanning a broad spectrum of contemporary Polish society, from the wealthiest magnates to the petty nobility poorer than some peasants, Polish noble citizenship serving as an invitation open to all devoted to this common national ethos regardless of social standing (see most notably, Norman Davies for a non-antipolonist account of Polish history). In that sense Poland’s traditional ideal of freedom, equality and pacifism - an internal orientation towards peaceful
living (Thompson, 2006), delegitimized as anarchic, undemocratic, parochial and backward by its despotic, expansive and aggressive Western European counterparts, in fact proved to be more democratic, modern and progressive than its Western neighbours. Western modernity rooted in violent revolutions is thus contrasted with the traditional Polish/CEE model of modernization through non-violent evolution, the Western bourgeois revolution finding its equivalent in the Polish nobility-inspired “intelligentsia revolution”, extending political rights to all social classes through a peaceful and voluntary process of “universal ennoblement” (Zarycki, 2009) and thus replacing the West’s entrapment in a permanent class struggle with the Polish timeless ethic of public service of the privileged classes and social solidarity. This republican notion of citizenship, evoking traditionally inclusive concepts of development blending modernity with tradition, revived in the anti-communist Solidarity movement which was to form the basis of the III Republic, can serve as a restored prototype for Poland’s post-communist modernization today, where present hegemonic (post)modern Euro-centric conceptualizations of membership in a “post-nationalist” Poland under the European Union are reserved for the “progressive” part of the Polish population which embrace Westernization (cultural and economic), while the whole traditionalist segment of the national community embodied by the “Mohair Grandma” social category deemed unfit for this (post)modernist project is left excluded.

More broadly, Poland’s national indigenous culture forms part of the larger Greek-Christian heritage of Thomism grounded in the cornerstone philosophy of personalism based on the dignity of the human person, again, defined in opposition to the Western-centric (post-Enlightenment) philosophy of nominalism of the Western European world (including Russia) (Staniszkis, 2005). This tradition underpinned by philosophical realism which validates lived experience and the existence of an organically-arising reality, epitomized by such homegrown ancient CEE formations as the family, nation, Church rooted in a living lineage of a people, is juxtaposed with their perception as mental constructs under Western idealism which prizes the construction of abstract utopian modernizing projects onto reality (Kieres, n.d.). Western nominalism, in turn fractured into the artificial extremes of rationality and irrationality (known as modernism and post-modernism) is thus balanced by the “third way” which Poland/CEE traditionally harkens back to, anchored in the center of morality, aligning both the modernist mind (Aristotelian rationality as distinct from the hegemonic rationality of
the Enlightenment) and post-modernist emotion with the ancient notion of virtue (Thompson, 2010). Key to Poland’s classical culture is the transcendentalist view of the human person as a child of God, the mortal manifestation of the immortal God, who utilizing the God-given faculties of both reason and faith, fulfills his God-like human potential within the natural environment of the family, and the extended family of the nation, in solidarity with other fellow children of God (in that sense the Catholic worldview is universal across humanity - Greek katholikos - universal, yet being centered in a concrete community crucially distinguishes it from the abstract universalism of Western modernity (Jaroszynski, 1999)), in accord with natural law (Jaroszynski, 2001a, 2001b, 2002). Such an ancient spiritual conceptualization of natural law as intimately tied with the moral ideal of the common good and natural ties, represented by the organic community of the Res publica (Common-wealth) conflicts with the modern liberal materialist articulation of natural law as the right to private property, leading to a distortion of the classical notion of positive freedom as the natural divine propensity to do good with the Western concept of negative freedom rooted in the man-made idea of social contract and individual interests safeguarded by the state (Jaroszynski, 2005). A political system centered on the good of the concrete individual whose well-being becomes the goal of politics, epitomized by the ancient Republic is contrasted with the modern socialist utopia (exemplified by Western - and Russian - internally and externally colonizing nationalisms, and inter-nationalisms of the Soviet Union and European Union), where the human individual becomes an instrument, a mass to be molded, human capital to be utilized towards an never realized abstract end of common happiness and progress of a utopian society, always resulting in material violation of actual individuals, Leviathan states devouring human lives (eg. Kieres, 1998, Jaroszynski, 1996).

Such a view of Polish culture as a locus of dignity, humanity and spiritual sovereignty has crucial importance for anti-colonial work, colonialism being conversely articulated by classical anti-colonial theorists like Fanon (1961) and Cesaire (1972), as dehumanization, objectification and “thingification” of the colonized subjects, reducing them to instruments at the service of the colonizer. Pope John Paul II, in his philosophical works evoking neo-Thomist principles often emphasized the fundamental role of national culture as the foundation for national sovereignty based on the protection of the spiritual sovereignty of each person within that culture (the Polish word person “osoba” implying sovereignty, as
someone who decides about one self “o-sobie” or self-governs (Jaroszynski, 1996): “There is a basis for the sovereignty of a society; it finds its expression in the national culture. It is the same sovereignty by which the human being becomes the most sovereign” (UNESCO speech, 1980, cited in Bratkowska, n.d.), “The right of nations to exist naturally implies the right of each nation to their own language and culture which allows people to express and represent what I would call spiritual sovereignty” (“On the right of nations”, 1996, no.8, cited in Jaroszynski, 1996), “The nation exists out of culture and for culture. That is why it is an eminent educator to being more within the community which has a longer history than the person and his family” (UNESCO speech 1980, quoted in Bratkowska, n.d.). Stressing its function as an social cement, a peculiar internal code, inaccessible to foreigners, serving to strengthen internal communal ties and act as a protective shield against the invasion of foreigners (Jaroszynski, 2001b), he also warned of the catastrophic consequences of the loss of culture, of atrophying and falling prey to manipulation and appropriation by outsiders, of becoming slaves without a past, future and without basic relations and ties (Bratkowska, n.d.). John Paul II, himself an utter masterpiece of the Polish culture, as observed by Professor Marek Dyzewski (2013), elaborated at length the superiority of the spiritual forces of culture over the material power of Poland’s aggressors which guaranteed the nation’s survival, sovereignty and self-determination throughout the ages, in his book “Memory and Identity” which while added to the mandatory high school reading list by the short-lived oppositional government in 2007, was later removed by liberal minister Katarzyna Hall:

I am a son of a nation which endured the most difficult of experiences, sentenced to death by its neighbours so many times – yet it survived and did not lose its identity. It kept its own identity and maintained its own sovereignty as a nation amidst the partitions and occupation. To survive it did not use any means of physical power, but only its culture which proved to be a power greater than the other forces (UNESCO speech, 1980, quoted in John Paul II, 2005, p. 90).

Today such a threat to Poland’s personalistic culture is posed by the European Union with its focus on a materialist political-economic project of the construction of a supra-national, (ultimately) globalist, cosmopolitan utopia obliterating ancient national communities (applied unilaterally to the CEE while Western nationalisms persist unabated) under the doctrine of decentralizing Western liberalism proposed as a liberating antidote to the purportedly opposite centralizing power of Eastern (Russian) communism recently
experienced by CEE countries like Poland. Despite its promise of freedom, however, under the discourse of human rights and individual liberties, the professed liberal democratic system turns into new oppressive socialism under the present neo-Marxist Euro-communism, paradoxically dealing Poland another blow of (neo)colonialism. The Polish Pope, having personally experienced both modernist communism and witnessing the internal transformation of the West under postmodernist liberalism, cautioned against the new mutations of totalitarianism of the modern age under the facade of the ultimate post/neo-modern utopia of liberal democracy, pointing to their common roots in the anti-Christian, anthropocentric (versus theocentric) philosophy of Western Modernity:

Modern totalitarianism arises out of a negation of the transcendental dignity of the human person, the visible image of the invisible God, which by virtue of this very nature is subject to laws that can be violated by no one: neither an individual nor group, or class, nation or state. Not even by the majority of a given society turning against the minority, pushing it to the margins, oppressing, exploiting or trying to annihilate it (“Centesimus annus”, p. 44, cited in Jaroszynski, 2002).

Poland, with its relentless devotion to its national heritage sanctified by the Catholic religion, unchanged for over a millennium, today can serve as a crucial reminder of the European Union’s own Christian roots, embodied by its original founders like Robert Schuman, evoking the principle of self-determination of all nations in a framework of an egalitarian Christian brotherhood in place of the present post-Enlightenment, hegemonic model dividing the European continent between an excluded, marginalized and unworthy East and a superior West.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this thesis has offered a novel view of Polish education and culture through a colonial perspective, hitherto absent or grossly marginalized in scholarship on Poland. In doing so, this study recognizes its own limitations, providing a fragmented snapshot of the overall Polish educational scenario, focusing strictly on the level of high school, on the Polish language subject, and specifically Polish literature education. As such, this study anticipates further research into other areas of Polish education, closely in line with Polish lived realities, particularly the related high school humanities subject of history, also the object of radical Westernizing anti-Polonist reform and the cause of loud outcry and
widespread protest within Polish patriotic circles, as well as other levels of Polish education, most notably the widely criticized gymnasium as a chief destabilizer of the Polish education system, or the extensively resisted changing preschool (1 year earlier start) and higher education (fracturing under the Bologna system). Moreover, while focusing specifically on methods of document analysis and teacher interviews, this thesis welcomes other approaches to the topic based on, for example, interviews with students, commenced minutely by this study, or with other members of the educational community, including parents and educational officials, corroborating findings and shedding new angles on the issue. In providing a critique of Polish colonial society specifically through its education system, this work has also proposed avenues for liberation and change, rooted in Polish indigenous epistemologies, expounded prominently in Polish traditional literature. In its call for greater social change, this thesis has highlighted the key role of educational institutions in producing a traditional leadership class of Polish society (known as the intelligentsia) which by diffusing to other domains of Polish society (most notably culture, media, politics etc.) can be the nucleus of a true modernization of Poland, based on its indigenous traditions rather than imported hegemonic models. Through its suggestion of a Polish-centric education model, this thesis has laid a stepping stone to wider social change, in hopes of a future holistic theory and analysis of Poland’s colonization (and decolonization), past and present.

Rather than a simplistic linear model of social change of educational change leading to social transformation, this thesis evokes the conceptualization of society as a dynamic process, a constant dialogic interconnection between discursivity and materiality, changed education discourses and practices working in synergy with the myriad other social institutions, forces and processes of the complex network of Polish society including spheres of politics, culture, media, economics, law etc. to produce gradual yet lasting social reconstruction (Fairclough, 1992). While the material structure of Polish colonial society runs deep, its origins reaching over two centuries of colonial oppression, beginning with the 19th century partitions, to the most recent experience of Russian communism and the current Western liberalism, the present visceral awakening of Poland to the reality of its colonized condition and its indigenous roots, accelerated particularly in the wake of the 2010 Smolensk national catastrophe revealing Poland’s helplessly subjugated status on the international arena, symbolized by an utter flourishing of grass-roots patriotic organizations, associations
and initiatives in Poland today, offers optimism for the future. In addition, the results of the most recent (as of this writing) presidential election of 2015 with the victory of the anti-systemic opposition representative and hope for the upcoming Parliamentary elections the same year, paint a promising picture of change, providing the state, governmental and institutional instruments necessary in implementing such bottom-up ideas, discourses and programs, into material reality, including in the field of education. Such a growing “archipelago of Polishness”, using Polish critical sociologist Andrzej Zybertowicz’s term, can be the foundation for expanding continents of Polish culture, harkening to the encouraging words of Poland’s national poet Mickiewicz written in the heart of the partitions, where despite external oppression by a complicit minority, a passionate patriotic fire blazes underneath: “Our nation is like lava, on the surface, cold and hard, dry and wretched. But the internal fire, one hundred years will not quench. Let us shed this rotten shell and descend to the core”. The IV Republic, alluding to the traditions of the preceding truly self-governing I and II Republics, proposed by the Polish indigenous voice as an alternative to the present neo-colonial, neo-communist III Republic would be founded primarily on de-colonization or, in the Polish context, de-communization, clearing the yet unresolved post-communist legacy epitomized by the present proverbial Polish issue of an ongoing struggle between the third generation of Home Army soldiers with the third generation post-communist forces and supplanting Poland’s individual-centered predatory market liberalization based on post-communist privilege with an indigenous community-oriented social economy rooted in an equitable distribution of national wealth amongst all Poles. It is time for Poland, this continual work in progress, to reclaim the ideals of the first real Solidarity of 1980 of national liberation and social solidarity, and complete its unfinished revolution, redirecting its post-communist “transformation” to true independence it has been striving for the past 25 years and beyond.
References


