Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich, LXV, z. 1
PL ISSN 0084-4446
DOI: 10.26485/ZRL/2022/65.1/1

Natalia Lemann
Uniwersytet Łódzki*
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2972-9404

Consulting co-editor
Donna Landry
University of Kent**
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8492-3109

Emigrants, Refugees, and the Post-Colonial Novel, or the In-Between as an Articulatory Space. Editorial Introduction

Abstract
The issue of emigration and refugees is one of the major global problems of the contemporary world. The challenges faced by nations, states, and cultures in the face of the above-mentioned phenomena include issues of social, historical, and cultural policy, but also an ethical dimension and the character of practical social involvement. Challenges to work through historical legacies and traumas in a spirit of respect for difference and the cultural legacy of peoples who were once colonised play an extremely important role. The multicultural tendency of the politics of history is inclined towards a project of entangled history or histoire croisée. In the context of increased emigration phenomena, it is necessary to rework and refashion the notion of nation, to remove from it the traces of an essentialist approach marked by nationalism and ethnocentrism. The most important challenge, however, is to change the way we think about the concepts of nation, emigration, and exile, i.e., to 'decolonise minds'. The postcolonial novel is a literary genre that is closely related to the aforementioned challenges. The key issues of the postcolonial novel are emigration and exile. The genre addresses the theme of emigration both synchronically, diagnosing current problems, but also historically, recalling the colonial conditions of current relations. Emigrant narratives are about articulating the experience of being between cultures, countries, and times. The postcolonial novel provides an insight into the dynamics of changing attitudes of successive generations of emigrants towards the culture of the ancestral country and the country of present residence. The generational dynamics of the postcolonial and expatriate novel show the transformation of rhetoric from nostalgia to irony. As proposed by Rosi Braidotti, one can speak of a transition from the figure of the outlaw to that of the nomad; the figure subversively oriented, questioning all restrictions and top-down imposed political and cultural orders.

emigrants, refugees, postcolonial novel, nomadic subjects, dyssemiNation, cultural difference, heterotopie, histoire croisèe, tangled history

* Uniwersytet Łódzki, Wydział Filologiczny, Instytut Kultury Współczesnej, Katedra Teorii Literatury
ul. Pomorska 171/173, 90-236 Łódź
e-mail: natalia.lemann@uni.lodz.pl

** University of Kent, Rutherford College, School of English
Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NX, UK
e-mail: D.E.Landry@kent.ac.uk

One of the most pressing issues facing the contemporary world is the growing refugee crisis and the increasing presence of migrants, including in countries that until recently appeared to have an ethnically homogeneous status. Refugees and emigration are a global phenomenon, for we must remember that, alongside war refugees and economic migrants, we are increasingly faced with climate-driven relocations (famines, droughts, and other natural disasters). The issues concerning migrants and their position (not only) in the Western world are a global and local political, social, economic, and cultural, and above all, ethical human challenge. It is through their attitude towards migrants and refugees that Western societies pass the most important test of humanism, consisting of a practical test of ideas present in public space and social reflection, such as understanding, solidarity, empathy, respect for the Other, hospitality, humanity, and, above all, openness. On the map of contemporary society, a battle is being fought over the politics of involvement and social responsibility, embodied in the idea of coexistence/cohabitation, not only in the geographical sense, but above all in the cultural sense. The central ideas of a broad and ever-evolving humanism, however, this time must not just remain a matter for philosophers to ponder and scientists to empathise with but must be put into practice at all levels of society. Of course, it should be noted that the problem of migration and refugees is not an 'invention' of the 20th and 21st centuries; it is permanently inscribed in the existence of human civilisations. The difference, however, lies in the scale and intensity of the challenges, as well as in the social visibility of these phenomena. In the age of globalisation, the Internet and social media, there are no borders. While, in relation to earlier eras, it can be said that the phenomena of migration and refugees were dealt with by governments and nations, today they are becoming a problem of human civilisation, understood *en bloc*. The burden of history, which still weighs down on states and nations with a colonial past, as well as the entire anthropologically understood Faustian civilisation of the West (Spengler 1991), reminds us of the obligations and challenges towards ethnic and cultural minorities. It is the historical past that largely determines the level of complexity of contemporary policy issues towards migrants and refugees.

Talking about the topic of migration and refugees, it is therefore important to bear in mind that we are navigating the shifting sands of 'entangled history' (Werner, Zimmerman 2006) and 'multidirectional memory' (Rothberg 2009). The process of 'decolonisation

of minds' (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o) also implies the need to rework historical and cultural memory. To paraphrase, the 'decolonisation of history' is a necessary condition for the 'decolonisation of the present'. Let me at this point offer an anecdote to illustrate the ever-present need to 'decolonise minds'. Well, the excellent translator Robert Sudół, in translating into Polish the congenial novel by the Jamaican writer Marlon James entitled *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, made an important oversight. The characters in the novel often address each other as 'nygus'. This is done by mothers to their sons, but also by subordinates to their bosses, including criminal organisations. For the Polish reader, such a cognomen may cause confusion. However, the explanation for this situation is exceedingly simple, but requires reference to the etymology of the word in Amharic, one of the languages spoken in Ethiopia. This country, its culture, history, and language are, in turn, as is well known, highly relevant to Jamaican culture, especially the Rastafarian movement/religion. The word 'nygus' (collateral form 'negus') in Amharic means king; the last Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie I, recognised by Rastafarians as God's chosen one, bore the title 'nygus negesti', or 'king of kings'. Meanwhile, in Polish, the term 'nygus' means 'lazy'. The colonial underpinnings of this meaning need no further explanation. The absence of even a minor philological explanation here has powerful interpretative and imagological consequences. For Robert Sudół, the question of the etymology of the word 'nygus', left in its original sound, giving a specific rhythm to the whole translation, was probably obvious. I fear, however, that for Polish readers this is not the case. In the field of postcolonial studies, it is reiterated that the postcolonial novel enters a rebellious dialogue with the metropolis also through the linguistic layer, changing the meanings and semantic structure of the English language and expanding it with lexemes derived from the languages of colonised peoples. Dorota Kołodziejczak even proposes to call this phenomenon a 'postcolonial coup d'état in literature' (Kołodziejczak 2008). It seems to me that the case of the word 'nygus' is an excellent example of this phenomenon. Unfortunately, it is one lost in translation.

The complex map of problems resulting from, as already mentioned above, the increasingly abundant presence of migrants in 21st century societies forces, as it were, in practice, the redefinition of the category of nation. Homi Bhabha already decades ago proposed the term dyssemiNation as the most apt term for the post-Derridean proliferation of the ever-mutating and variant category of ethnos in the reality of the so-called 'locality of culture' (Bhabha 1990). Bhabha, like Benedict Anderson (1983), recognises the performativity of the category of nation; however, the author of Places of Culture goes further than Anderson when speaking about imagined communities, recognising that a homogenised, closed nation is doomed first to stagnation, then to decline. Bhabha writes "The barred Nation It/Self, alienated from its eternal self-generation, becomes a liminal form of social representation, a space that is internally marked by cultural difference and the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic author-ities, and tense cultural locations" (1990: 299). Performative writing of nation — writing performative and pedagogical — requires efforts to rework the post-colonial past and introduce a pluralistic politics of (cultural) difference.

Nowadays, voices can also be heard saying that the outdated notion of the nation, essential in its essence, a concept of the 19th century, and no longer applicable to the complexity of the contemporary world, should be consigned to the dustbin of history and ideology. The category of the nation, entangled in history with its traumas, resentments and, above

all, historical and cultural ethnocentrism, seems incompatible with modernity and the globalisation of the world. And yet it must be remembered that the category of nation must be understood as processual, viewing it through the prism of change and the continual semiosis of the past. As Anthony D. Smith puts it: "[...] the core of ethnicity, as it has been transmitted in the historical records and as it shapes individual experience, resides in this quartet of 'myth, memories, values and symbols' and the characteristic forms or styles and genres of certain historical configurations of populations" (1986: 15).

It is easy to see that literature becomes a key element in the process of national and transnational semiosis. Literature is open to all forms of signifying and evoking the past and to cultural hybridity, conditioning the cultural and political *hic et nunc*. What is at stake, however, is the process of "the transformation of once-oppositional, minority histories into 'good' histories", illustrating "how the mechanism of incorporation works in the discipline of history" (Chakrabarty 1998: 14–15), in the terms postulated in the founding number of "Postcolonial Studies". Let it also be said that this process of incorporation should also be the case in literature, and not only within the discipline of history. Postcolonial literature is the best opportunity for the implementation of postulates of 'good history'.

It is not surprising, then, that the issues of emigration and exile occupy such an important place on the map of contemporary literature, mainly, though of course not exclusively, in postcolonial literature. However, it is postcolonial literature in all its varieties, inextricably linked to postcolonialism as an interdisciplinary research methodology, that becomes a kind of battleground for the representation of the theme of emigration. The figure of the emigrant and the refugee in the postcolonial novel occupies an important position, both in the revisionist variety, subordinated to a counterpoint reading (Said 1993), or the multicultural and globalising novel, and in the historical variety of the postcolonial novel, reconstructing the colonial past from a contemporary, postcolonial point of view. There is a process of relentless negotiation of historical and cultural memory between migrants and 'locals'. Postcolonial battles over history and memory, are particularly difficult because "the search for identity is an imperative inscribed in the very idea of the migrant's story, and in the broader socio-political plane of the novel world, postcolonial emigration always takes place within the horizon of historicism" (Kołodziejczak 2012: 15). The processuality of experiencing and exposing cultural difference is inscribed in postcolonial literature.

When considering the question of migrants, a distinction must be made between forced and voluntary emigrants. The first generation of forced emigrants experiences this historical and cultural difference most strongly. Schematically, this can be stretched between two metaphors: "the struggle to save the old self" and "the struggle for the new self".

In the case of the forced emigrant, the main mode of experiencing the new reality is the rejection of the new, inherent in the phenomenon of culture shock, while cherishing the abandoned old; language, history, culture, landscape and everyday life. The primary mode of experiencing reality is therefore nostalgia, for what has been and what has been taken away/abandoned. At the same time, there is a heightened effort to preserve the old identity and an open aversion to transformation and awareness. The sense of alienation here also flows from the attitude of the subject rejecting any change of identity, so one can say that the nostalgic subject alienates himself or herself from the Other, the alien natives for him or her. In the case of voluntary emigration, there is a feeling of resentment related

to the fact that all attempts to penetrate the new environment and get rid of the alien status are doomed to failure. While in the first case cultivating cultural difference is a choice and a desirable phenomenon, in the second case it is an obstacle to the full transformation into a 'true' native.

The second generation of forced migrants is particularly relevant to the issue of 'differences of culture'. They are forced constantly to balance on it every day; adopting a different identity at home (surrounded by the old culture and homeland abandoned by their parents) versus the natural desire to live comfortably in a new environment and thus shed the label of 'migrant', newcomer, and the accompanying aura of exoticism and, at worst, perpetual suspicion. The second, but also the third generation of emigrants by choice seems to 'melt' into a new identity since their parents do not want to cherish cultural difference. Paradoxically, a nostalgic longing (armchair, or phantom, nostalgia: Appadurai 2003), for the abandoned homeland can become the experience of precisely the second and third generation of voluntary emigrants. They may perceive the abandonment of the ancestral homeland in terms of the betrayal perpetrated by their parents and try all the harder to maintain a connection with the abandoned homeland and its culture. Recent history shows that it is the children of the second and third generation of voluntary emigrants (economic and educational) who become culturally radicalised. The terms 'old' and 'new' swap meanings here. For the second and third generations, what was new/foreign to their parents/grandparents is now new/familiar to themselves. They long, therefore, for what is truly new and tantalizingly unfamiliar to them: thus, the homeland and ancestral culture, which they perceive in an idealised way, through the mode of armchair nostalgia (Appadurai) and exoticism. The irony, then, is that they orientalise — Edward Said, in turn, has shown that orientalism is a tool of colonial domination — what for their parents was everyday life. The third generation of emigrants, both forced and voluntary, is characterised by the greatest range of attitudes — simultaneously cherishing and rejecting elements of the old culture — although it seems that both attitudes here are subordinated to the dynamics of performance and a kind of imitation, striving to achieve an effect of 'truthfulness' and naturalness, to produce a kind of 'reality effect', lined, however, with an ironic sense of the impossibility of achieving this 'truthfulness'. Again, using metaphors, the attitudes, and transformations of the experience of being between migrant cultures can be described as follows: "more there than here"; second generation "both there and here", third generation: "neither here nor there".

The postcolonial novel is, of course, too complex a phenomenon to lend itself to simple generational formulas. It is clear, however, that the subversive and provocative *Writes Back to the Centre with a Vengeance* (Rushdie 1982) is most often the work of later generations of expatriates, or of writers who moved with their parents to a new homeland as children (such as the aforementioned Salman Rushdie himself). Similarly, the voice of later generations becomes the characteristic abandonment of strictly realist narrative in favour of the mode of magic realism, or the use of the parodic 'ironic realism of cultural difference', which is characteristic of some postcolonial novels. The postcolonial legacy cannot be completely discarded, although the nurturing of essential difference and the attempt to overcome all the residuals and mental artefacts of colonial enslavement patronising the first generation, turns further generations into a demonstration of the ambivalence of the effects of coloni-

alism and the impossibility of fully transcending their sphere of influence. The next step is to adopt an attitude of distance and irony, to enter the sphere of cultural and historical nomadism (Said 1993: 54).

Intriguingly, Rosi Braidotti (1994) precisely uses the figure of the nomadic (cultural and intellectual) subject to describe a new style of thinking and being in the world. Admittedly, Braidotti is a feminist philosopher, a representative of New Materialism, but, as the researcher herself states, the category of the nomadic subject can also be applied to the analysis of postcolonial and transActional identity categories (Bhabha). This category allows for the abandonment of classically conceived categories of race, gender or environment and implies a conscious and ostentatious transgression of these categories. The nomadic subject volitionally challenges these categories by sitting at their intersection, freely migrating between them, abandoning all top-down, imperial, and violent attempts to embed themselves within one category. The nomadic subject is not so much suspicious of these categories but exposes their artificiality and the violence inscribed in them. The nomadic subject is thus accompanied by tropes of irony and parody, signifying a radical refusal to be inscribed in the limiting drawers of race, gender, or environment, followed by specific ideologies or attitudes. In Braidotti's proposal, the nomad is another figure alongside the outlaw and the migrant, but one that takes a radically different stance towards dislocation or uprooting. While the outlaw is an exile who always longs for his homeland and treats the new location as a punishment, the concept of the migrant implies, according to Braidotti, the category of race or social class as difference and disenfranchisement. The nomad, on the other hand, is located outside these categories. Braidotti also attributes specific literary styles and genres to the figures of outlaw, migrant and nomad. Outlaws feel acutely about being foreigners, and their literature is marked by a sense of loss and nostalgia for the lost country, with one dream being that of return. The literature of the outlaw, rejecting the present and reviving the past, locates itself in the future. The migrant permanently functions in between, caught in time and a lost place, unable to find himself at the same time in the present. In migrant literature, the past is a burden, while narratives are geared towards reviving the past in the present. The nomad, on the other hand, rejects all externally imposed forms of representation; their memory and present are a relentless rebellion against any attempt to be set in place. Nomads are relentless in their attempts to rewrite the past in the name of freedom and the idea of the cyclical nature of time.

It seems to me that an initial, simplified reconciliation can be made between Braidotti's proposal and the dynamics of the postcolonial novel. The first generation of migrant writers corresponds to the definition of the outlaw, the second would be the migrant *sensu stricto*, while the third and subsequent generations, in a vastly simplified manner, would be most likely to reach for the nomadic position by making ironic attempts to rewrite the past and history. Nomads, questioning all imperial and static categories, including the vision of the past and history, show in their narratives its irreducible entanglement (*histoires croisée*). The nomad, questioning all attempts at categorisation, is thus a rebel; an effective yet selfish one, because for its own freedom it is able to 'burn' the outlaw and migrant's needed vision of the past, historical politics and cultural memory. The nomad questions and invalidates everything, making a permanent revolution. Let me remind you that the postcolonial novel is described as a rebellious battle with language, history, and culture.

As Hanna Gosk rightly observes "[Migration] is not emotionally neutral. [...] Migration produces its own amorphous narrative" (2012: 7). Migrants, as people forced to abandon their homeland (for political, economic, and sometimes cultural reasons) find themselves with a perpetual in-between: between places (abandoned and newly inhabited), memory (of what was; of what and how remembered in the abandoned place and in the inhabited place), language and culture. As a result of the phenomenon of migration, modes, places and ways of viewing reality and cultures are multiplied. The production of a new identity in the migrant subject is associated with a state of cultural identity dislocation. One can risk the claim that migrants and refugees have a privileged cognitive position: everything they experience becomes strange and alien, demanding a taming cultural shock of understanding. Emigrants thus become *nolens volens* anthropologists, and the terrain of their research is the perfectly familiar everyday life of the 'natives' of their adopted homelands.

Migrant literature is thus programmatically and indelibly binary: it is a literature written between displaced foreignness and familiarity. The migrants — the former Selves, at home — become the Others in the new place, who continually watch and analyse the Selves, who in their eyes are the Others. The same mode of multiplication of Strangeness and Otherness also applies to the geography experienced by migrants, specific locations, nature, and inanimate nature. Metaphorically speaking, the figure of the migrant is a shifting heterotopia. Michel Foucault's (1997) term seems to capture perfectly the mode of perception of reality by newcomers and inhabitants of perfectly tame places. The migrant carries heterotopia within himself, and transforms into heterotopia every place he enters, with the power of the outsider's gaze turning every space into a strange, disturbing, incomprehensible space, incompatible with the migrant subject's previous experience. The migratory subject continually transforms perfectly familiar and tame spaces, phenomena, behaviour, habits into something intense. One could risk saying that the migratory subject "enchants the disenchanted world" anew (in the migratory perspective, the Weberian term takes the form of *(Ent)zauberung der Welt*). It is not surprising, then, that in the postcolonial and migration novel, the prose model of magic realism, which allows us to find the extraordinary in the everyday, co-occurs alongside the hyperrealist, reporter style of reporting on the new reality. Migration narratives, literary testimonies of identity transformations, are thus a valuable source for learning about reality. Such texts are always stretched between what was and what is, between culture and the abandoned world and the new world that is trying to be tamed. Migration narratives can and should be read not only from the perspective of the migrant subject (changes of identity, taming the foreign), but also from the point of view of the observed/researched subject, in line with the idea of the anthropology of everyday life.

The previous year of 2021 confirmed the importance of the postcolonial novel in the contemporary world. The most important literary prizes went to postcolonial writers. The Nobel Prize for Literature went to Zanzibar-born Abdulrazak Gurnah, who has lived in the UK for several decades and is Emeritus Professor of English and Postcolonial Literatures at the University of Kent.

About the crux of colonialism Gurnah wrote: "Colonialism legitimised itself by reference to a hierarchy of race and inferiority, which found form in a number of narratives of culture, knowledge and progress. It also did what it could to persuade the colonised to defer to this account" (2004: 9). In the same article Gurnah's sense of history is defined by

"imperialism, dislocation, by the realities of our times. And one of the realities of our times is the displacement of so many strangers into Europe" (2004: 10). As scholars of Gurnah's work have noted, the specificity of his treatment of post-colonialism, and of migrants with regard to the problems of displacement, rests on a complex grasp of the currents and power dynamics of imperial history and its afterlives:

> In contrast to an imaginary of cultural nationalism or ethnic autochthony, Gurnah offers stories that imagine 'Africa' and indeed 'Britain' as inter-cultural and inter-linguistic spaces of geopolitical proximity and possible affiliation. His stories cautiously celebrate alternative social encounters, but these are always under threat by exploitative economic relations masked by violent identity politics which defend 'home' and 'belonging' against the perceived stranger or outsider. (Steiner, Olaussen 2013: 2)

Sissy Helff perceives Gurnah's authorial stance in the novel *Paradise* (1994) as representing a unique narrative perspective, complex and offering possibilities of hope as well as hostility: "Abdulrazak Gurnah's narrative project seems to be concerned with [...]: namely, language and the translation of cultures, the past and mnemonic processes, and, last but not least, a longing for forgiveness and reconciliation" (Helff 2015: 156).

The Gouncourt Prize went to Senegalese writer Mohamed Mbugar Saar for his novel *La plus secrète mémoire des hommes*, while the International Booker Prize went to South African Damon Galgut for his novel *The Promise*, whose entire work is dedicated to recalling the troubled past and the challenging coexistence of white Afrikaners and native African people. And last, but not least, the Nike Literary Award went to Zbigniew Rokita for his reportage *Kajś. A Tale of Upper Silesia*. Rokita tells the story of the multi-ethnic, multicultural identity of Upper Silesia, a region of Poland whose story cannot be told without reaching into the categories of emigration, intertwined history, or hybrid identity. The year 2022, in which this issue of "The Problems of Literary Genres" ["Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich"] is being published, has, as a result of the war in Ukraine, made war refugees more than just a matter of history, of stories drawn from the distant temporal and spatial past. Polish society, by voluntarily giving shelter and providing all kinds of assistance to Ukrainians fleeing the tragedy of war and being attacked by Russia, has positively passed the lesson in solidarity and humanism mentioned at the beginning of this text.

Bibliography

Anderson Benedict (1983), *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Verso, London.

Appadurai Arjun (2003), *Modernity at large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalizations*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Bhabha Homi (1990), *DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation* [in:] *Nation and Narration*, ed. H.K. Bhabha, Routledge, London, p. 291–322.

Braidotti Rosi (1994), *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Columbia University Press, New York.

Chakrabarty Dipesh (1998), *Minority histories, subaltern pasts*, "Postcolonial Studies" vol. 1(1), p. 15–29.

Foucault Michel (1997), *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* [in:] *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. N. Leach, Routledge, New York, p. 330–336.

Gosk Hanna (2012), *Wprowadzenie* [in:] *Narracje migracyjne w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku*, ed. H. Gosk, TAiWPN Universitas, Cracow, p. 7–14.

Gurnah Abdulrazak (2004), *Writing and place*, "Wasafiri" vol. 19, DOI: 10.1080/02690050408589910.

Helff Sissy (2015), *Measuring the Silence: Dialogic Contact Zones in Abdulrazak Gurnah's "By the Sea and Desertion"*, "Matatu" vol. 46(1), p. 153–167.

Huggan Graham (2001), *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing in Margins*, Routledge, Abingdon.

Kołodziejczak Dorota (2008), *Postkolonialny zamach stanu w literaturze*, "Literatura na Świecie" vol. 1/2(438/439), p. 241–257.

Kołodziejczak Dorota (2012), *Meta-fory, trans-lacje i hybrydy: tropy migracji w literaturze postkolonialnej* [in:] *Narracje migracyjne w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku*, ed. H. Gosk, TAiWPN Universitas, Cracow, p. 15–40.

Rothberg Michael (2009), *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the of Decolonization*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Rushdie Salman (1982), *The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance*, "London Times", July 3rd.

Said Edward (1993), *Culture and Imperialism*, Chatto&Windus, New York.

Smith Anthony D. (1986), *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken.

Spengler Oswald (1991), *The Decline of the West*, eds. A. Helps, H. Werner, trans. C.F. Atkinson, Oxford University Press, New York.

Steiner Tina, Olaussen Maria (2013), *Introduction* [in:] *Critical Perspectives on Abdulrazak Gurnah*, "English Studies on Africa" vol. 56(1), p. 1–3.

Werner Michael, Zimmerman Benedict (2006), *Beyond Comparison: Historie Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity*, "History and Theory" vol. 45, p. 30–50.