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Polish Visual Culture in the Period 1861-1918 Examined by Postcolonial Theory

In my presentation I would like to present some remarks about Polish visual culture in period 1861-1918 in postcolonial (?) lens.

Study of Polish visual culture of the second half of the 19th century makes it apparent that artifacts of this time period are largely devoted to the preservation of Polish community's cultural integrity. So, because of circumstances, culture from that period was in the middle of struggle with cultural hegemony of Russia, Austria and Prussia (Germany) and being of cultural hegemon for its own artists.

The main goal of my research is a post-colonial reflection on the Polish art from the second half of the 19th century. Since the methods in question have been successfully utilized by the Polish literary critics, in my studies I will draw from their experience.

The postcolonial framework, as it could be called, provides necessary analytical tools for several issues concerning Polish visual culture of the second half of the 19th century, such as:

1) Polish painting (not just history painting) as visual and symbolic struggle with the partitioning powers, i.e. the Colonizers. Artistic choice of themes as a manifestation of artist's own visual discourse, a resistance to partitioning powers.

2) Polish artists in partitioning powers' Academies of Fine Arts as a case of "imperial centre – colonial periphery" relationship.

3) Attempts at Polish art institutions (schools of fine arts in Warsaw and Kraków, societies for encouragement of fine arts, and self-teaching clubs) as acts of resistance to partitioning powers' centralist attitude.

4) Andriolli, Gerson, Pol, Matejko, Estreicher and others – the case of foreigners turned Polish patriotic authors.

5) A manor and its visual depiction as a symbol of resistance to superficial modernization (i.e. colonization) enforced by partitioning powers'.

6) Eastern Borderlands (Kresy) perceived as "Polish colonies". Formation through art of: a) a myth of lost Arcadia, b) an "inferno", c) glorification of past magnates-colonizers as the "good hosts" and "civilizers".

7) Cosacs as the Polish "Subalterns" and „Others". Impact of Polish painting on the

formation of the myth of Cosacs' as "savages" to be colonized and civilized, but also a fascinating symbol of freedom, the irrational, and the uncanny.

Keywords: postcolonialism, Polish art in nineteenth century, identity of Polish culture