COLLOQUIA

HUMANISTICA

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Introductory Comments

The eighth issue of *Colloquia Humanistica* actually contains two thematic sections: the extensive *Hierarchies and Boundaries. Structuring the Social in the East and the Mediterranean* and a second, shorter section in the *Discussions* part of the volume, entitled *Culture and Economy*.

The exemplifications for our discussion on hierarchies and boundaries (true to the authors' earlier declaration) come from the Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe; in the case of culture and economy, they come from Croatia, Yugoslavia and Russia. One could deliberate over the cultural differences between these two geographical areas, but we in Central Europe see internal divisions that might be harder to notice from the viewpoint of Western Europe or the Americas. Both sections, though separate, in fact supplement each other.

The exemplifications we propose in the first thematic section concentrate on boundaries and hierarchies that are focused on individuals as well as on large cultural and civilizational areas. Malka Szpilman considers a topic from the border of literature, linguistics and medicine, asking some fundamental questions: is language only a prosthesis that people can live without, and

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how does not hearing, and thus not speaking, restrict our world, or does it restrict it at all?

Kristina Voronsova in turn illustrates the topic of hierarchies and boundaries with a very interesting image of Poland as a great borderland space with the fundamental role of uniting cultures and nations – an image that is relatively unknown in contemporary Poland and Europe. The author introduces the term “great borderland” after Ukrainian historian Jaroslav Dashkevich (1989) and Russian cultural geographer Dmitry Zamiatin (2003), while seeking exemplification in the newest Russian poetry. It is interesting to juxtapose this image with an earlier perception of Poland as a mediator between the West and the former Soviet Union, which she has also cited in her paper. Although it is a little hard to imagine being a mediator in a world where the Polish People’s Republic was completely dependent on the Soviet Union, we must keep in mind that the author is writing about the literary, cultural space, not about realpolitik. Thus, Vorontsova’s text makes us realize some limitations of the Polish 1990s viewpoint on the Polish Eastern Borderlands from the time of the Second Republic. Already great Polish sociologist Antonina Kłoskowska (1919-2001) proposed that this space be treated as a great borderland, multiethnic and multireligious (Kłoskowska, 1997, pp. 229-237), and not just considered in nostalgic terms as a lost homeland, part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth’s own space. Many years later, when I taught a seminar at the University of Warsaw’s Faculty of “Artes Liberales” on the understanding of peripheries and borderlands in Europe, a student from Ukraine made me and all the seminar participants realize that when we used the term “borderland” towards the (former) Polish Eastern Borderlands, we were actually incorporating Ukraine – her native country – into this space. To this day, I thank fate for that meeting of two different national perspectives: it enabled me to grasp that we in our Polish arrogance had failed to notice an identity which had emerged and then matured right next to us.

A very different illustration is presented in the papers concluding this section, by anthropologists and an art historian. All of these authors propose we traverse the Balkans: Theodoros A. Spyros writes about a world that, as a result of the Holocaust, “disappeared” from the map of Central Greece, from the city of Trikala in Thessaly. Its “salvation”, however, made possible by studies on memory and “cultural heritage”, also offers a unique opportunity to reconstruct the ties between prospective members of the community and thus to virtually “rebuild” it as a network of sociocultural interaction. Meanwhile, Marzena Maciulewicz shows how a divided city within Kosovo – Mitrovica – functions today, creating invisible divisions which, due to the unstable population structure, are much more complicated than is suggested

by the dominant narratives on divided cities, which give crucial importance to ethnic and national divides. Agata Rogoś introduces us to the capital of the Republic of North Macedonia, Skopje, showing us its multiethnic, multicultural character as well as symbolic divisions in the shared space between the Albanian and Slavic populations. The author might have too easily adopted a split into two rival components: Slavic and non-Slavic, identifying them with Macedonian versus Albanian character, whereas both Macedonian Slavic and Macedonian Albanian character are ambiguous, multi-layered in the Balkan sense of the term (Sujecka, 2018, pp. 597-606).

Slightly different aspects of boundaries and hierarchies are discussed in the papers by Péter Krasztev and Tomasz Kamusella. Krasztev writes about a peculiar relationship between Soviet authorities and esotericism/occultism; the author suggests it was due to the very nature of occultism, which entered into a kind of symbiosis with almost every 19th-century ideology. Kamusella's paper, meanwhile, simultaneously offers a material discovery and an interpretation of a certain cultural hybrid that could only have emerged on the border of the Polish and Belarusian cultures. The author informs us how the Cyrillic alphabet has been used to record Polish-language Roman Catholic prayer books. The official ban on using the Polish language in post-WWII Soviet Belarus meant that the region's residents obtained their education in Belarusian and Russian, both languages that use the Cyrillic alphabet. After 1991, the diocesan authorities decided to publish a few volumes in Polish, but these were printed in Cyrillic because the local Polish population was not very familiar with the Latin alphabet. Such cultural hybrids are usually found in the Balkans, but also in culturally multi-levelled areas such as the Mediterranean.

The other thematic section is no less interesting. It has been placed in the *Discussions* segment for a reason: the topic of culture/literature and economy is recent enough to merit reflection, and the papers presented here definitely encourage a discussion. Maša Kolanović considers the possibility of creating a new economy, referred to as a "moral" economy due to the post-socialist (in this case Croatian) context in which it is emerging. Danijela Lugarić Vukas incorporates economic terms (valuable, useful, valid) into the analysis of literary memoirs. At the same time, this serves as an introduction to a very serious question the author asks about Danilo Kiš's well-known work, *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich* (*Grobница za Borisa Davidoviča*, 1976). Kiš's use of Štajner's memoirs in his piece launched a smear campaign in the former Yugoslavia, accusing him of plagiarism. Kiš tapped into the memoirs of the author of *Seven Thousand Days in Siberia* (*7000 dana u Sibiru*, 1971) in order to construct his own narrative. The paper's author asks whether we can view this operation as "as an outlet for reclaiming the voice not only

of Štajner, but also of Kiš's father, who perished in Auschwitz" (Lugarić Vukas). Lana Molvarec investigates the relationship between tourism, space and economy in works by selected Croatian writers. And again, like Kolanović in her paper, she juxtaposes narratives from two periods: socialism and capitalism.

This time in the *Discussion. Presentations. Book Reviews* segment, we offer readers as many as five reviews and also one presentation of an interesting series from the Faculty of Humanities at Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen (Bulgaria), *Limes Slavicus*, by the series' initiator Dechka Chavdarova. It is worth reflecting with her on the problem of the semantic content of the title's "Slavic cultural concepts".

Finally, it gives me great pleasure to announce that the book *French Image of the Peoples Inhabiting Illyrian Provinces* by our colleague from the Editorial Board of *Colloquia Humanistica*, Wojciech Sajkowski, PhD, which appeared in the *Colloquia Balcanica* book series as Volume VI, received recognition from the jury of the Professor Jerzy Skowronek Award.

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Note

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