

Decolonial perspectives. Polish theatre in the face of migration crises after 2015

The present project has two goals, which are not separate, but mutually illuminating and interpenetrating.

First: to broaden the debate that has been going on in the Polish humanities for the past two decades or so about Poland's colonial past and post-colonial condition with a theatrical decolonial perspective reinterpreted and adapted to Poland's cultural and geopolitical specificities. And through this, I will also enrich global discussions with a local, Polish voice. **Second:** placing theater in this frame and analyzing the ways in which Polish theater has responded to successive migration crises, considering what has changed in artistic strategies and ways of representing and telling stories about refugees between the "crises" of 2015 and 2021 (those involving non-European Others) and the one of 2022, when refuge was sought mainly by close "white" neighbors.

I treat theater here as a specific and unique variant of the public sphere: a place for the production and, at the same time, disclosure of hidden meanings, an arena for the clash of social traumas and affects, but also as an institution that reacts vividly and intervenes in the socio-political fabric. Thus, theatricality, understood in this way, is not only founded on aesthetics, but becomes a balancing artistic practice between fiction and non-fiction that enables the reorganization of the social imaginary and the production of knowledge. The focus on theater not only fills a clear gap in theatrical research in the area, but also offers a unique decolonial perspective.

Attempts to locate Poland on the horizon of global colonial and post-colonial transformations usually end up automatically placing the Polish context (depending on the perspective adopted and the moment studied) either closer to the center or closer to the periphery, looking at Poland either as a victim or perpetrator of violence. In my opinion, this perspective should be more strongly nuanced and directed towards the decolonial perspective. The fact that Poland did not directly participate in overseas colonial expeditions (or at least not on the scale that was fought for in the 1930s) does not mean that it does not participate in the present structures defined by coloniality. What's more, I believe that Poland – due to the specifics of its complicated history – has developed something of a colonial lens or colonial imagination, the operation of which can be observed, starting in 2015, if only in the example of its response to further migration crises. This is because they have set in motion, on an unprecedented scale, a rash of narratives involving colonial and post-colonial narrative-visual strategies with their accompanying affects. They can be found both on the side of those emphasizing the civilizational superiority of the Polish nation towards the Others (especially those non-European ones), and those somehow allied with the refugees. Therefore, it is 2015 that seems to me to be a good starting point for analysis, although in the analysis. It is in the study of theater that I see the potential for the creation of a unique, pluralistic epistemology based on other, more embodied and affective modes of knowledge production that can be treated as the realization of decolonial *praxis*.

In the project, I will study theatrical performances dealing with refugee themes produced in Polish theater since 2015 (both those co-created by people with and without refugee experience), as well as the theater reviews analyzing them and the narrative strategies through which refugees and migration crises are discursively in Polish media. I also plan to interview artists who implement projects dealing with themes of migration and refugees. In view of the above, in this project I will seek answers to the following **research questions:** how are refugees racialized in discourses present in the Polish public sphere? Is this racism mainly related to the color line or to other factors? Are xenophobic attitudes toward refugees class-conditioned? If so, what influence did or could the political transformation and the introduction of capitalism in Poland have on their formation? What tensions, present in the public sphere, are addressed by artists who take up themes related to the migration crisis in their works and which ones do they omit (and why)? With what strategies and tools do theater artists narrate the experience of forced migration? How does the representation of the experience of forced migration change when it is created from the perspective of people who do not have such experience, and how does it change when it is created by people with refugee experience? How do the ways in which migration crises are depicted differ – and what influences this? How do these performances function in critical discourse, and what are the strategies for discursivizing them? And finally – what can the Polish artistic decolonial perspective contribute to the discussions taking place on this topic on a global level?

The project will result in at least two scientific articles submitted for publication in international journals. I promise to participate in at least two international scientific conferences and one local conference. And also publication in a professional journal of at least four interviews with theater artists who co-create projects dealing with refugee themes.