**UDC 82-3**

# Transcultural tricksters beyond times and spaces: decolonial chronotopes and border selves

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**Abstract**

The article considers the shaping and functioning of the main elements of the aesthetics of transculturation in contemporary fiction, art and cinema. The author defines transculturation not only as an anthropological but also as an epistemic and aesthetic transmodern model, and singles out the main features of decolonial aesthesis, aimed at the liberation of being and perception from the norms and rules of the self-proclaimed modernity. Specific attention is given to the analysis of trickster or border identity as the main agent of transcultural literature and art, negotiating modernity and the sphere of its otherness. The article also touches upon some plot elements of transcultural fiction. This refers to the leitmotifs of transit, inbetweenness, deterritorialization, the virtualization of the concepts of home and motherland and the corresponding subjects as the carriers of such sensibility. Important poetic features of transcultural fiction, art and cinema include a specific set of tropes, such as the metaphors of dislocation, postcontinental ontology, border, metamorphosis, etc. Finally, the author dwells at the rethought concepts of space and time in transcultural aesthetics and on the shifts in the traditional Bakhtin's interpretation of chronotope linked with the foregrounding of new chronotopic phenomena of transit, unhomed

state, imperial and colonial difference. The article ends with an attempt at transcultural decolonial understanding of semiosphere as a space of polylogue of many worlds, and art and literature as the most effective agents of this process.

## Introduction. Transculturation: from anthropology to aesthetics

In the majority of contemporary Western interpretations transculturation is seen as a process of changes in the material culture, values and customs of a socio-cultural group taking place as a result of a prolonged and close contact of this group with a different group carrying its own cultural tradition. This definition neglects the dynamic power asymmetries and reciprocal exchanges between the dominant and suppressed cultures, i.e. the gist of transculturation as it was first formulated by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in his 1940 book *Cuban Counterpoint. Tobacco and Sugar*. Ortiz's ideas were quite different from then fashionable functionalist theories of cultural contact and acculturation. His accent on the counterpoint of history, marked by politics instead of functionalist static ahistorical sanitized patterns, attracted attention to the painful issues of colonialism and imperialism. Ortiz's pride as a Cuban anthropologist was, in Fernando Coronil 's words, "not in the volume of sugar produced" in his country, but in the creation of a culture in Cuba that "countered the degradation of this history", while "the quality of its tobacco served as a metaphor of Cuba's unique culture"[1].

The revival of Ortiz's contrapuntal method took place almost half a century later with the emergence of postcolonial theory when Edward Said applied the same term in his *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) and stressed the complex interaction between the suppressed and the dominant cultures, never resulting in a complete dissolving or appropriation of one by the other, or in absolute domi-

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1    Coronil, F. (1995), "Transculturation and the Politics of Theory: Countering the Center", *Ortiz, F. Cuban Counterpoint*, Duke University Press, Durham, p. 35.

nance. The contrapuntal transcultural process generates very specific identities, non-linear and complex relations in which spatial sameness and otherness are not divided from each other. Here "home" as a space for formulating theory as well as a place of a researcher's birth, and the other colonial space with its objectified inhabitants (diaspora, periphery, exile), interchange and mingle.

In the term "transculturation" the Latin prefix "trans-" means "over", "through", "across", "beyond". These meanings somehow already presuppose an inclusion of several cultural reference points, a crossing of cultures, a transit between them and a state of a specific cultural in-between-ness – not here and not there or, here and there at once. Equally important is the disintegration of cultures and the creativity of the new cultural unions, as well as the dynamic shifting transcultural identity, linked with the complex processes of mutually directed interactions, under which the dominant culture experiences a constant influence of the dominated cultures, as a result of which new meanings and new cultural codes are born. This is an essentially non-conflicting model. It adjusts to the given power relations by way of deceiving them, always creating something new out of the destroyed or censored,

and transcending the passive or active resistance in the act of re-existence[2].

Even in the original Ortiz's understanding of transculturation, ontology and epistemology were always looming behind the anthropological dimension because he was not writing a book about sugar and tobacco, but rather about the history of colonial domination and the emergence of a peculiar and unique Cuban culture in spite of this domination and in complex contrapuntal interaction with it. Today, when transculturation has become both a global phenomenon and a particular perspective of egalitarian cultural and epistemic interaction questioning normalized asymmetries of power[3], it gives birth to its own epistemic model, discursive practices, aesthetics, and a specific semiotic sphere which has become one of the most promising models for the 21st century. What is important in transculturation is its mutuality and re-

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2 Alban Achinte, A. (2006), *Texiendo textos y saberes. Cinco hijos para pensar los estudios culturales, la colonialidad y la interculturalidad*, Editorial Universidad del Cauca, Colección Estiodios (Inter) culturales, Popayán, 121 p.

3 Mignolo, W., Schiwy, F. (2003), "Transculturation and the Colonial Difference: Double Translation", *Translation and Ethnography. The Anthropological Challenge of Intercultural Understanding*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, pp. 3-29.

jection of any homogenous synthesized worlds and selves.

The aesthetics of transculturation is primarily a trans-modern aesthetics in the sense of overcoming modernity and its myths, values, taste norms and thinking patterns, thus decolonizing being, knowledge and perception. A crucial sphere of the intersection of being and knowledge is art. It is perfectly suited for a decolonial turn because it links reason and emotions through epistemology. In many non-Western, ex-colonized and newly re-colonized spaces the sphere of art remains one of the few islands of liberation of subjectivity and knowledge, superseding the familiar discourses and clichés of modernity, not merely through political opposition but also through an aesthetic subversion[4]. These models undermine and destabilize modernity from the position of the outside created from the inside[5] thus deconstructing modernity's "hubris of the zero point"[6].

4   Tlostanova, M. (2011), "La aesthesis trans-moderna en la zona fronteriza eurasiatica y el anti-sublime decolonial", *CALLE14,* No 5.6, pp. 10-31.

5   Mignolo, W., Tlostanova, M. (2006), "Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo – and Body-Politics of Knowledge", *European Journal of Social Theory,* No 9.1, pp. 205-221.

6   Castro-Gómez, S. (2007), "The Missing Chapter of Empire: Postmodern reorganization of Coloniality and Post-

## Tricksters as decolonial border selves

Trans-modern decolonial creativity becomes a way of liberating knowledge and being through subversion, tricksterism, resistance, re-existence and overcoming modernity and its creative mechanisms, norms and limitations. Under tricksterism here I mean the contemporary understanding of the term, which is linked with, yet departs from, the classical mythological, religious and folkloric meaning where it referred to gods, half-gods, anthropomorphic animals and humans with supernatural characteristics. What is important is the insurgent nature of any trickster, his/her tendency to disobey the normative rules and conventions. From the classical understanding of tricksterism come such qualities developed and sustained in modern tricksters as ambiguity, deceit of authority, playing tricks on power, metamorphosis, a mediating function between different worlds, manipulation, and bricolage as a mode of existence. In this sense, trickster becomes not only one of the most ubiquitous figures of world literature in modernity and postmodernity (up to its internet form as a troll today), but also

Fordist Capitalism", *Cultural Studies,* Vol. 21, No. 2-3, p. 433.

acquires specific features in colonial/ postcolonial/decolonial traditions where tricksterism acts as a form of resistance and re-existence.

More specifically, I am referring to a dialogic concept of a trickster that negotiates between Donna Haraway's[7] and Chela Sandoval's[8] interpretations, as well as to the real trickster traditions that grew out of the geo-politics and body-politics of particular locales. Donna Haraway's trickster is a revolutionary form of human being who becomes an amalgam of technology and biology, the machine and the human, but also the dominant and the oppositional, the first and the third world, the men and the women. She takes up the Native American trickster metaphor (that of coyote) to formulate her position of a radical critical 'mestizaje' or a Cyborg machine, which is linked to the indigenous peoples' resistance through looking for similarity in difference. In Sandoval's dialogue with Haraway, the differential mode of social movements and consciousness depends on the ability to read a concrete situation of power and consciously chose an ideological position that poses the most adequate opposition to this power configuration. The individual practicing such a mode is required, according to Maria Lugones[9], to make a nomadic journey between the worlds of meaning. Differential consciousness inclines to other principles of mobility and to metamorphosis and transformationism.

Tricksters dwell in the borders of imperial/colonial differences and from this experience emerges a new trans-aesthetics that connects people who have suffered the colonial wound throughout the world[10]. This trans-aesthetics emerges in visual and verbal artists who dwell in the cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious spaces of the imperial/colonial borderlands. In their case *topos*, in a sense, reconquers *chronos*. A trickster becomes a site and an agent of translation/transculturation; he or she is translating the world and himself or herself, question-

7    Haraway, D. (1991), "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature,* Routledge, New York, pp.149-181.

8    Sandoval, C. (2000), *Methodology of the Oppressed*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, p. 62.

9    Lugones, M. (2003), "Playfulness, "World"-travelling and Loving Perception", *Lugones, M. Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes. Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppression,* Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., New York, Oxford, pp. 94-95.

10   Anzaldúa, G. (1999), *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Spinsters/ Aunt Lute, San Francisco, p.25.

ing normalized aesthetics through liberating his or her aesthesis – the ability to percept, a sensitivity, or a process of sensory perception (visual, auditory, palpable, etc.), closely linked not only with understanding and evaluating art but also with knowledge production.

## Toward a definition of transcultural fiction and art

Transcultural literature is a phenomenon that has existed for a long time, but before it was regarded more as a deviation from the national canon form with it predictable combination of language, literary tradition, ethnic belonging and fixed territoriality that defined the author's identity. Transcultural writing often remained unaddressed in the study of world literature as a constellation of national literatures. However, it is obvious today that the critical mass of transcultural writing overweighs the traditional national canon structure and in the post-national age it shifts more and more towards the centre of the global literary process.

Today the previously existing cultural links between ex-colonies and ex-empires are blurred and often transcultural writers find themselves in someone else's metropolis or in the symbolic global cultural metropolis of neo-liberal age – the USA. In case of many authors we find a complicated imperial-colonial ligature of attractions and alienations which gives birth to a specific poetics, reflecting their multiple crossing of modernity spaces and the ontological dimension of transit.

Contemporary transcultural subject tends to associate him/herself more and more with migration and transit. If he/she arrives someplace, it is likely to be not a new home where he/she can and want to permanently re-territorialize, but an airport, a ship, a train. There is a pronounced focus on movement, not on locality, on unhomed[11], in-between state, and on hybridity as a chosen identity. This specific self juggles and shuffles cultures and does not regard its deterritorialized condition as something that has to be overcome. Place in this case is not just a topographic space, but also a way of life in its material and spiritual manifestations. In the centre of such existential condition lies the cultural, linguistic, and epistemic translation as an interpretation in the course of self-identification. It is a reconstruction of the past as a result of which many recollections are erased and only some of them remain relevant –

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11   Bhabha, H.K. (1994), *The Location of Culture,* Routledge, London, New York, p. 9.

giving birth to the myth of exile and often turning the past into commodity. The state of in-between-ness is interesting from the point of view of the signifier and the signified and the problematic of referentiality, because the in-between-ness of an exiled or transcultural person, his/her being outside of the common system of coordinates almost prescribes a non-stop movement, a dynamics, a change questioning the stability of the signifier and the signified complex and the peculiar logic of the sign and referent interaction. The carriers of such sensibility are border dwellers, not border crossers. And the fiction they write is not centred or arranged around previous hierarchies and binarities of home and exile, motherland and foreignness, immigration and exodus.

There is a constant threat of sliding towards a commercialized literature as (post-)colonial goods which is possible to overcome only through self-conscious irony, fluidity, flexible unsettled selves and forever changing masks avoiding any stable definition and playing on previous models of assimilation. This set of features is born out of necessity but can and does become a new and productive aesthetic mode. The majority of writers and artists who are traditionally regarded as diasporic or postcolonial have radi-

cally questioned and re-conceptualized their links with a particular locale and communal identity, opting for a border transcultural mode of living and creativity instead. That is why from continent to continent in the books written by transcultural writers we encounter vivid metaphors of such de-centred existence and negotiating selves. New meanings and border identities are constantly born in these whirlpools and spatial-temporal lacunas; the meanings and identities which in their turn are to be questioned, deconstructed and arranged into a new and unfinished design in a strive to create a liveable world of multiple options and playful juggling of cultures instead of schizophrenic focusing on rejection and alienation.

Any primordial original homeland is questionable, particularly in case of those who were born already in immigrant families abroad, who are mixed racially, linguistically and culturally, who have no access to native languages and whose allegiance to a possible nation state is highly problematic. Their assimilation is often quite successful, particularly if they chose a commercialized multiculturalist stance. Most of them voluntarily came to the global North and do not plan to ever go back to the global South, or only as tourists. Group consciousness

and solidarity in their case has more to do with critical cosmopolitanism than any diasporic imagination per se. Their India, Russia or Africa is on a bookshelf or in a museum rather than in reality. If in Goethe's idea of world literature, a literary text as a reservoir of foreign experience travelled long distances and was translated into different cultures, today it is often the writer himself or herself who travels and becomes a translated individual, forever hybridizing and creolizing his/her initial culture(s) with the new ones in the process of double translation. There have always been hybrid and creolized cultures but before there was no language and no conceptual frame for their theorizing. After postmodernist rereading of modernity and globalization impact on societies these tendencies have become increasingly common and in a sense, the whole world has become uprooted. Transcultural writers are particularly sensitive to the constant chaotic movement of great masses of people – looking for better jobs, better life, protection, basic human rights, survival under the growing sense of lacking roots, national cultures, time as past, or belonging to any group.

Most transcultural writers cling to in-between hybrid model, balancing the asymmetry of assimilation and tran-

sculturation. Rejecting the linear temporal matrix means also rejecting the idea of going back in time to some tradition or going forward – to modernity. Space in this case is rehabilitated and taken out of the generally accepted model of time prevalence over space. But space is also virtualized and problematized and re-rooting takes place based on principles other than language, soil, or religion. Embracing almost all sides of identification, from national which it largely denies, to ethnic-racial and ethnic-cultural and gender problematic and regional differences, from ecological discourse to the efforts to formulate the basis of the post-human existence, the aesthetics of transculturation focuses around the genealogy of colonial and imperial differences, within which the concrete local histories defining the creative worlds of various writers have been shaped.

## Transcultural tropes as hermeneutic tools

The in-between space of transculturation gives birth to its own aesthetics, based on the optics of stereoscopic vision and creation of the specific fictional reality under an angle to the real one, the stylistic and discursive collages, and certain recurrent leitmotifs, the essentially

unfinished and open metamorphosis, the turning of the self/other dichotomy inside out, the inclination to complex grotesque forms and the fantastic, as well as certain metaphors, such as the metaphor of home and symbolic un-home-le-ness and hybridity, to specific images, such as the image of the ex empire and ex colonizer, an interest in the creation of the chronotope of in-between-ness and constant transit, to the negative time-space, giving birth to migrating, self-rejecting, de-centered narrative forms.

Understanding transcultural fiction requires a set of tropes rather than scientific approaches, a non-rationalist metaphoric imagery rather than binary thinking. In the case of Africana Diaspora the Atlantic Ocean acts as a graphic symbol of constant dis(re)location. In the case of other diasporas there are also visual metaphors of exodus, transit and crossing. Thus, an Adyghean Diasporic anthropologist Seteney Shami points out the importance of ship imagery as a symbol of dis(re)location for the gendered diasporic imagination of Northern Caucasus people who left their land en mass in the mid 19th century, as a result of its annexation by the Russian empire and were crossing the Black Sea in unbearable conditions, packed in many ships in the direction of the Ottoman sultanate.

In Shami's formulation, this largely unknown diaspora was a prehistory of globalization generating a complex negating-continuing attitude to the homeland[12]. Many of these people were forced to change their identities literally on board – from pagan to Muslim, from peasant to warrior, often from free to slave. A modern transcultural self in contrast with these historical instances, feels truly at home only in transit and in transgression. Hence the repeated re-emergence of various transportation (i.e. originally progressivist) metaphors often ironically rethought and destabilized in transcultural fiction, art, cinema. Take for instance an Uzbek artist Vyacheslav Useinov's rendering of the theme of migration and new dispensable lives. In his installation *A Guest Worker's Flight,* Useinov presents a plane made of adobe bricks as those that are still used by peasant of Central Asia to build their houses. The unlikely combination is shocking, as is the forced modernity in this locale. What is awaiting them on the other side of the globalization migration? The worker's overalls closely resembling prisoners' clothes, made of checked plastic hold-all bags – a staple of the post-

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12  Shami, S. (2000), "Prehistories of Globalization: Circassian Identity in Motion", Public Culture, No 12.1, pp.177-204.

socialist shuttle traders and refugee life. They symbolize the illegal migration status of millions of Uzbeks today, who flee their homeland to find low paid jobs in Russia. It is a sad way of telling an alternative history of Uzbekistan: from the adobe house through high-tech modernity to the same age-old status of a low paid worker with no rights, whose life has no value[13].

Transgression questions the linearity of the process and rejects the previous idea of continuity offering instead of the familiar either/or logic, the possibility of a non-positive assertion. What is crucial here is crossing the border that used to be uncrossable, going beyond some un-surmountable limit. Within the postmodernist frame this limit remains inside the Western tradition, even if critically assessed. In case of alter-modern paradigms it is connected with the fact that people do not just cross borders, they become borders themselves, to quote Anzaldua: "To survive the Borderlands/ you must live *sin fronteras/*be a crossroads."[14] What is at work here is the birth of a new subjectivity which abandons not only the commercial paradigm,

but also the deeper epistemic and ontological grounds of modernity performing a rupture and delinking from its rhetoric. The aesthetics of transculturation seems to be one of the most fitting places to practice this new subjectivity.

Transculturation is based on dynamic multiplicity, presupposing a new understanding of borders, migrations, multilingualism, cultural diversity, transnational languages and traditions. Transculturation is grounded in a cultural polilogue in which there should not be a complete synthesis, a complete cultural translation, where cultures meet, interact, but do not merge, retaining their right to "opacity." A Caribbean philosopher and poet Eduard Glissant claims that linguistic creolization inevitably leads to epistemic creolization. He speaks not only of the right to difference but also of the right to opacity, "that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand this truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its component."[15]

Metamorphosis is expressed not only in the creative idea of the world as

13  "Useinov Art", available at: www.useinov. sk.uz/

14  Anzaldúa, G. (1999), *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Spinsters/ Aunt Lute, San Francisco, p. 217.

15  Glissant, E. (1997), *Poetics of Relation*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, p. 190.

a re-enchanted space, as a non-ending chain of changing, impossible to fix, rationalize and define once and for all, negating the very possibility of naming, but also in the principles of constructing the fictional characters and the negotiating narrative itself. Metamorphosis is often regarded in connection with mythology of opposition, survival, tricksterism, developed in every colonized tradition. A poetic play on metamorphosis presented in a peculiar canonical counter discourse is a South African writer Achmat Dangor's novel *Kafka's Curse* (1997) – a transcultural and transgender palimpsest. We meet a modern trickster Omar Khan passing for Oscar Kahn in order to win a place in the apartheid society and later – the love of his White Anna. Kafka's curse afflicting Oscar (as Majnoen, he turned into a tree) is a punishment for his urge to assimilate, for his breaking the nature to fit the life of the White establishment. Oscar and his wife switch the usual assigned gender roles – she, as a White person, performs the part of the desiring actor and it is not the husband that looks at her with desire but rather she herself gazes at him with a typical Western male gaze, at the same time remaining a chaste female on a pedestal. But we would find practically no description of Oscar's gazing at Anna while he remains apprehen-

sive in a typically colonial way of how others see him.

There are many variants of tricksters in transcultural fiction – a lumpen, a rogue, a homeless, a sorcerer. Sometimes all of these identities merge in the image of a new Ahasuerus, a paradigmatic example of which is Rushdie's Moraes Zogoiby. If before there was a firm connection of identity with the concept of home in a wider metaphorical sense, today individuals radically change their sense of belonging together with the collapsing institutes of state, family, economics, education, that provided their stability and socialization before. Such people become adventurers without stable and far-reaching motivations. They are modern *picaros* without biographies, with just a chain of loosely connected adventures in each of which they act in a new role and in a sense – create themselves anew.

Countless variants of deterritorialization metaphors are particularly interesting when the authors attract attention to the existential aspects and the characters undergo not just a physical transplanting, but an involuntary movement from one system of values into another – in the form of internal migration or a violently imposed immigrant status. Cultural translation and untranslatability is problematized yet without such a

translation – however inadequate and tentative – an exiled person remains with no identity and hence invisible. In this situation the easiest way out is self-irony and tricksterism, manifested in today's fiction in an infinite number of unruffled ironists with easily hurt souls and a detached attitude to their own translated image.

## Topos in transcultural fiction and art

No matter if transcultural writers occupy a celebrating or a negating position, focus on nostalgia or melancholy, their main reference points will be those of time and space, and consequently home and memory, border crossings and border dwellings, and a transcultural persona – who she or he is, what are his or her ways of adapting to multiple realities, how is he or she created as a playful, forever changing trickster.

Contemporary transcultural fiction, art, cinema, theatre goes in the direction of further problematizing space and weakening of its links with any concrete locale. A graphic realization of this tendency is to be found in transcultural in-between chronotopes. Mikhail Bakhtin singled out a specific kind of existential chronotope connected with

human self-identification and exceeding the frame of mythic and folklore elements. The scholar named it a border chronotope or a threshold chronotope[16]. Obviously, Bakhtin was not interested in imperial and colonial differences. But if we depart from his "border chronotope" and look at this concept through the decolonial lens in the works of transcultural writers coming from or writing about the cultures that have been marked with imperial/colonial difference we would be able to see the frame of an in-between chronotope, marked by a protean nature, transition, nonfinality, parallel deterritorialization and dehistorizaion, restless non-belonging and a specific double consciousness, which generates complex relations with time and space[17].

The "imagined geography" of transculturation is an intentionally invented space, based on playing on various cultural topoi, rethinking the artistic reality, distorting the angles under which

16  Bakhtin, M. (1975), "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel: Sketches on Historical Poetics", *Questions of Literature and Aesthetics* ["Formy Vremeni i Khronotopa v Romane: Ocherki po Istoricheskoy Poetike", *Voprosy Literaturi i Estetiki*], Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, Moscow, pp. 234-407.

17  Tlostanova, M. (2007), "The Imperial-colonial Chronotope: Istanbul-Baku-Khurramabad", *Cultural Studies*, No 21.2-3, pp. 406-427.

it is placed in relation to the real world. It is built on the tendency to subjectification, to a more and more pronounced isolation from any real locales, to the unimaginable and ephemeral nature of spaces, which gradually leads the authors away from any spatial stability and materiality. For example, Rushdie, marked with a specific imperial-colonial history, who began with the highly politically engaged and rooted in reality Peccavistan in his *Shame*, gradually came to such consciously utopian constructed spaces as Palimpstine and Mooristan in *The Moor's Last Sigh,* that exist entirely inside the character's mind, inside his split "self" and are often based on fictional and mythic rather than any real political overtones.

The idea of nowhere-ness, lying in the basis of this chronotope, is close to the meaning of the word "utopia". Migrations in utopian or dystopian space are a metaphoric way to salvation by means of some magical reality which turns into a mirage intrigue, a vicious circle, a wandering in the literal and figurative sense, based on temptations and semblances. Wonderings and deceptions, the mirage glimmering and enchanted space lie in the basis of the characters' misadventures. The enchanted nature of such other world with its highly subjective time

and relative space can be defined as the deception of space, where the characters' existential adventures are set in a number of plot units – each of which has its own mini-topos and often a number of well known and actively re-conceptualized literary allusions and myths.

Typical topoi of transcultural films, books, art works include metro, market square, yard of a big apartment complex (a communal yard), home, ship, airplane, funicular, railway-station, small town, doctor's office, church, school, etc. For lack of space I will concentrate here on the topos of the cemetery as one of the most profound transcultural leitmotifs. At first site our last refuge seems to be the only space relatively immune to transgressive tendencies, transcultural and transnational journeys. Crossing the boundary between life and death we all hope to return to our ancestors and finally reterritorialize. Yet, the life/death boundary does not guarantee a final happy homecoming. In 2004 Georgy Paradzhanov made a documentary *I died in Childhood* about his famous uncle – a film director, artist, philosopher and poet Sergei Paradzhanov. The film keeps coming back to the lost grave leitmotif and the idea of remaining restless even after death. Paradzhanov tells a disturbing story of the destruction of Tbilisi old

cemeteries in the 1970s to make room for parks and to leave the dead unhomed and unclaimed. He aptly calls this an exile from his childhood and clings to the only remaining link with the erased past – the cemetery cypresses which touched his ancestors with their roots. It is fascinating that Ariel Dorfman – a writer, activist, poet from the other side of the Earth, a truly transcultural person with Jewish-Russian origins, who was born in Argentina, became a Chilean citizen and Aliende's companion in arms, who lived for decades in European exile and ended up in the US, a writer who has never heard of Paradzhanov, recreated this same sensibility and displaced cemetery topos in almost minute detail in his recent autobiography *Feeding on Dreams. Confessions of an Unrepentant Exile* (2011). Dorfman is writing about borders not between countries and continents, not even between languages and identities, but between life and death, between memory and forgetting of the living people and some higher memory of no less than the universe. This motif emerges in connection with a paradigmatic inescapable exile and restlessness of the three generations of his family – even after death. The writer offers us a stirring story of his grandparents' displaced graves in Buenos Aires Cemetery

with no one left to take care of them and their ashes being finally transferred together with other unclaimed burials under a beautiful tree – his only link with the fragile past. Further Dorfman remarks that the urn with his parents' ashes stays in his sister's kitchen cabinet because they cannot decide in which country to bury their parents. As if there is no soil which would completely accept the exiles and grant them peace. But then the border between life and death is probably that utmost line which finally defines human belonging or exclusion.

Another fascinating example of the artistic recreation of the intersection of space, memory, alternative histories and topographies is a recent project *Gamsutl* (2012) by a diasporic artist with Russian citizenship, Western education and Daghestani ethnic roots Taus Makhacheva. She questions various ways of masculine appropriation of space, and communicating with the natural, the manmade, the animal, the machine, the human, the social, and the historical. Acquiring one's masculinity anew through rediscovering and reliving space and going back to spatiality through gendered forms of identification, is crucial in contemporary culture. The frozen time of globalization and the end of history sensibility makes people turn to forgotten

spaces (local and global), spatial histories and glocal identities, to various ways of possible re-rooting in new topoi – real as much as imagined and constructed.

Gamsutl is an abandoned and collapsing ancient Avarain mountain settlement carved in and from the rocks, once famous for its skilful jewelers and armourers, as well as religious and cultural tolerance. Its picturesque ruins are not grim as they grow into the wild landscape harmoniously blending with the environment, as if it is time for nature to claim its eternal rocks back from the people. The protagonist is a young man taking part in a peculiar ritual of remembering and reenactment and striving to carefully recreate the spatial memory of the forgotten past. Through a bodily "merging" with this space – a palimpsest of many cultural strata and dramatic historical events (the Russo-Caucasus War, the Soviet modernity, the post-Soviet abandonment and return back to nature) the "dancer" is trying to corporeally relive Gamsutl in his mimicry of natural and architectural objects. He is trying on various identities imagining himself alternately a defender and an assaulter, a warrior and Gamsutl's citizen, a collective farmer brigade leader incorporating Soviet modernity symbols into his traditional dance and mimicking inanimate objects – *becoming* a tombstone, a watchtower, a crack in the wall[18].

## Temporality in transcultural fiction

Time in the chronotope of in-between-ness changes its usual characteristics, such as linearity, mono-dimensionality, and irreversibility, becoming multidimensional, multicyclical and moving with different speeds and in different directions. Characters of transcultural fiction, cinema, art, easily combine the mythic cyclicity, the logic of a net-game and notions of post-human existence. Various time models coincide in the minds of transcultural characters who cannot be easily attributed to the cyclical model of time, because they live in the lacunas and gaps between the linearity of modernity, whose inadequacy they sharply realize, and other time structures, which are being brought forward in their minds in various situations and often act together. A relatively subjective time which is born as a result, does not have a duration in the usual understanding of the word, or, in Bakhtin's definition, "falls out of the normal flow

18  Tlostanova, M. (2013), "The observatory of the bereaved: unbinding the imaginary in Eurasian borderlands", *Social Text Periscope,* in print.

of biographical time."[19] Subjectification of external time leads to extreme relativity of personal time, to its arbitrary acceleration or (less often) slowing down, sometimes, thickening, when characters acquire an ability to live out several lives crammed into one physical existence.

This peculiar complexity of temporality stems out of the rethinking of the idyllic chronotope analyzed by Bakhtin in relation to Western European novel. But in transcultural fiction, cinema, art the idyllic is always already destroyed and it is obvious that the forces of modernity acted as its gravediggers. A recurrent motif of a longing for an idyllic fusion of the cradle and the grave, of the childhood and old age, is always crossed out by history which throws the characters against their will into the forced linearity of modernity. Such is a powerful metaphor of the railroad as a cruel sign of modernization and erasing of all other ways of life in the Uzbek exiled writer Hamid Ismailov's novel of the same name (2006). It is a story of painful modernization, conquering the previous local

19  Bakhtin, M. (1975), "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel: Sketches on Historical Poetics", *Questions of Literature and Aesthetics* ["Formy Vremeni i Khronotopa v Romane: Ocherki po Istoricheskoy Poetike", *Voprosy Literaturi i Estetiki*], Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, Moscow, p. 399.

traditions, bringing forward its own meta-narratives and unresolved dilemmas of subjectivity.

## Decolonial urban chronotopes

Particularly interesting in this respect is the chronotope of the imperial and colonial city in contemporary transcultural fiction. This is a larger topos which demonstrates the writer's, director's, artist's ability to see time within space, to present streets and buildings, squares and boulevards as materialized history. Such are the recent films and documentaries where the urban space becomes the main character, the focus of the narrative – Oleg Safaraliyev's Baku in *Farewell, Southern City* (2006), Georgy Paradzhanov's Tbilisi in *Everybody is Gone* (2012), Mark Weil's *Tashkent. The End of an Era* (1996).

In the sinister, ruthless and often phantasmagoric imperial city the colonial subject is defenceless, rejected and invisible. Often he/she is previously shaken out of an idyllic pastoral or quite real social and cultural native space to find himself/herself in this new unhomed condition and subject to the ethics of war. Such a fearful and sickeningly attractive space is Moscow for the Bakinian character of Afanasy Mamedov's *Khaz-*

*ar Wind* (2000), or Istanbul in Orhan Pamuk's *Black Book* (1990), and London in Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988). Transcultural authors often juxtapose the colonial city topos and the space of the imperial capital. Depicting the colonial city as a crisscrossing of various imperial and colonized cultures, they practice a love-hate relationship with this space, invariably marking their urban colonial portraits with paradoxical nostalgia for the lost and imperfect, but still a paradise. Hence comes the idealizing of his childhood Baku by Mamedov, the pre-war idyllic Grozny in a Chechen woman writer Lula Kuni's novelette *Outlines* (2010), Khurramabad (Dushanbe) in Andrey Volos's novel of the same name (2000), hence comes Bombay and Hong Kong nostalgia of Salman Rushdie and Paul Theroux.

The colonial city is a playful space of mimicry, of non-identical copy of the metropolis, where recognizable signs of colonization shaken the stability of the original imperial capital. Both imperial and colonial urban spaces undergo various artistic interpretations in the frame of the fantastic, the magic, the metamorphing, giving birth to imagined hybrid cities, particularly if the time aspect of the urban chronotope corresponds to the moment of disintegration of empire. The

global urbanization in its relation to exodus and re-rooting of deterritorialized people in the imagined gigantic cosmopolis, also brings forward rethinking of the city chronotope, where the modernizing logic with its linear progressivist change from rural to urban is reversed, particularly in the locales of civil wars and political turmoil today. Instead of simply tracing the scars of history on the faces of different cities the decolonial transcultural chronotope rehabilitates spaces and gives them new impetus to live and not just to survive. Since this is hardly possible in reality the authors have nothing to do but turn to fantastic utopian urban spaces, imagined parallel worlds with invented names and identities. It is only here that their characters can find a solace and a re-existence. Rushdie, who can easily be regarded as a paradigmatic case of such sensibility, called himself and people marked with the insuperable sense of exile and loss – "the world community of displaced authors"[20]. This becomes not only the acceptance of their often immigrant status, but also the sign of the deep spiritual internal exile, a metaphysical outside-ness out of which their very art is born. An Australian liv-

20  Rushdie, S. (1991), *Imaginary Homelands: Essay and Criticism 1981–1991*, Granta Books, London, p.15.

ing in New York, Peter Carey, a Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk, a Muscovite with Bakinian roots Afanasy Mamedov, or a Russian from Tadzhikistan, Andrey Volos – all offer different spatial and temporal transcultural models, which are often based on the fairytale, fantastic imagery of utopian or dystopian kind, on the subjective, many-directional time. These different books are similar in their recurrent motif of forced modernity deforming the face of the city. It happens in a semiotic way in case of Pamuk, takes a nostalgic Proustian form in Mamedov's art, acquires a fantastic postmodernist twist in Peter Carey's fiction, is expressed in a specific double vision, circulating between the oriental fairytale and the cruelty of almost documentary Volos's narrative, while the empire itself acts for many new modern Ahasueruses as an absent and hostile space, where they do not and indeed cannot feel at home.

## Decolonizing semiosis

When Yuri Lotman's corrected Jacobson's formula and asserted that "language is a code plus its history"[21] he stressed the historicity of his approach

lacking in other semiotic models. If it is a colonial history or subaltern imperial history the picture becomes even more complex, contradictory and disturbing. Lotman's dynamic dimension is not just a diachronic element, but a set of laws that govern changes in signification and communication models both synchronously and diachronically, bringing forward the problematic of semiotic translation/transformation. Lotman's own geo-politics and body-politics of knowledge and being were far from the decolonial stance. Yet in his later works he stressed the importance of non-systemic elements in cultural dynamics, realizing that this incompleteness and openness is what makes cultures viable, creating a necessary element of unpredictability and borders as "translating mechanisms or filtering membranes"[22], transforming alien texts in order for them to be understood in the normative language of a certain culture, at the same time remaining sufficiently different[23]. The semiosphere and its major translating mechanism as described by Lotman are potentially pluriversal and multi-semantic and allow to go beyond and balance the extremes of absolute otherness and untranslatability of both cultural essentialism and post-

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21  Lotman, Y. (2000), *Semiosphere* [*Vnutri Mysljaschikh Mirov*], Iskusstvo SPB, St. Petersburg, p.15.

22  Ibid. P. 265.

23  Ibid. P. 268.

modernist refusal to know the other. Understood decolonially, the semiosphere is projected beyond this rigid opposition, stressing the importance of transculturation as a potentially more egalitarian and reciprocal cultural, linguistic, epistemic, ethical, existential, and aesthetic relation. It allows resistance to turn into re-existence taking into account the complexity of the world, yet believing in the possibility of co-existence and fruitful polylogue of many worlds that comprise it. Several examples of transcultural art and fiction analyzed in this article promise to be effective in the process of liberation of our knowledge, being and aesthetic perception from the myths and norms of exhausted modernity.

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# Транскультурные трикстеры по ту сторону времени и пространства: деколониальные хронотопы и пограничные идентичности

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**Аннотация**

В статье рассматривается специфика формирования и функционирования основных элементов эстетики транскультурации в современных литературе, искусстве, кино. Автор определяет транскультурацию не только как антропологическую, но и как эпистемологическую и эстетическую трансмодерную модель, а также выделяет главные черты деколониального эстезиса, направленного на освобождение бытия и ощущения от норм и правил самопровозглашенной западной модерности. Особое внимание уделяется анализу понятия трикстера или пограничной личности как основного агента транскультурных литературы и искусства, курсирующих между модерностью и ее сферой иного. В статье также исследуются некоторые сюжетообразующие особенности транскультурной литературы. Это касается лейтмотивов транзитности, междуместности, детерриторизации, виртуализации понятия дома и родины и соответствующих субъектов как носителей подобной чувствительности. К важным поэтологическим особенностям транскультурных литературы, искусства и кино следует отнести определенный набор тропов, включающий метафоры дислокации, постконтинентальной онтологии, границы, метаморфозы и т.д. Наконец, автор останавливается на переосмыслении понятий места и времени в транскультурной эстетике и на сдвигах в традиционном бахтинском толковании хронотопа, связанных с актуализацией новых хронотопических явлений транзитности, безместности, имперского и колониального различия. Статья завершается попыткой формулирования транскультурного деколониального понимания семиосферы как пространства полилога множества миров и искусства и литературы как самых эффективных агентов этого процесса.

**Ключевые слова**

Транскультурация, эстетика, эстезис, граница, трикстер, хронотоп, трансмодерность, метаморфоза, деколониальность, семиозис.

Transcultural tricksters beyond times and spaces: decolonial chronotopes…

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