

## Beyond 'Global Babble'<sup>1</sup>. Comparative Literature as a Critical Metatheory for Glocalizing Humanities

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### ABSTRACT

The article is based on three pillars – convictions regarding both the strictly academic world and the highlighted position of comparative literature in modern humanities and social studies, and from a wider perspective, rational coexistence in multicultural, globalized societies. The first pillar is connected with the postmodern presumption that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be domain of globalized academic research and theories and truly cosmopolitan societies. I would not agree with this diagnosis. I argue that glocalization is a real perspective for this century. The second pillar is a conviction that comparative literature should expand beyond the academic realm to wider social life. The third pillar is located back in academic practice, and I argue that comparative studies could and should be a critical metatheory for all the humanities, for not only globalized but rather glocalized times. Glocalization of comparative discourse could be a good chance to, on the one hand, find our own voice in accordance with tradition, but – on the other hand – could allow us to find our own place in global humanities and social sciences. Thus, even if the social and political context is nowadays favourable to comparative studies, success is possible only in a new version of organic work – at schools, on the Internet, in public debates, etc. – on a planetary scale, beyond any centrism (Euro-, Sino- or other). Glocalization respects the local, but without its fetishization, and does so contemporaneously with consciousness of the other traditions and global scale of interactions. It is true not only in the financial world but also in the realms of cultures.

**Glocalization. Comparative Literature. Comparative Studies. Intentional Rationality. Non-Western Knowledges. Critical (Meta)theory.**

When the Non-Aligned Movement was founded in 1961 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, by – among other leaders – President Josip Broz Tito, the concept of globalization was not on the agenda of the humanities and social sciences. The idea of this block – as it is very often – was right and splendid: to be outside and beyond the Cold War order and division between fighting socialistic East and capitalistic West. Most of the non-aligned countries were connected with what we can call today the global South, and at that time, the Third World. The postcolonial background of most of those countries was also a unifying factor, especially if we treat the Bandung Conference

in 1955 as one of the crucial stages of this anti-westernism movement, as well as the turning point in history and mythology of postcolonial theory. Even if we look at a map of non-aligned countries today, this separation of the global South countries in opposition to the North is visible and obvious. However, if we take into account political practice and countries (and their leaders) engaged in the Movement, the idea of peaceful world coexistence is dubious. What is more, the global character of this movement is also far from fulfilment, because this partition of the world between North and South has even strengthened and the economic gap between richer and more developed North and poorer and less developed South is increasing. Even if we do not take into consideration other divisions in the world scale, how can we responsibly talk about global unity? Maybe globalization and world scale is only – apart from economic reality – an academic problem? This doubt is fundamental to the presented argument.

The article is based on three pillars – convictions regarding both the *strictly* academic world and the highlighted position of comparative literature in modern humanities and social studies, and from a wider perspective, rational coexistence in multicultural, globalized societies. The first pillar is connected with the postmodern presumption that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be a domain of globalized academic research and theories and truly cosmopolitan societies. I would not agree with this diagnosis so easily, though globalization is a Durkheimian social fact. I argue that glocalization is a real perspective for this century. The second pillar is a conviction that comparative literature should expand beyond the academic realm to wider social life – which is in fact happening, for example, to reading practices all over the world. The third pillar is located back in academic practice and I argue that comparative studies could and should be a critical metatheory for all the humanities, for not only globalized but rather glocalized times.

### **GLOCALIZATION OF NEOMEDIEVALISM**

The twenty-first century will not be the domain of – as postmodern thinkers presumed – globalized, uniformized academic research and theories, and analogical truly cosmopolitan societies, or, alternatively, as all traditionalists and conservatists thought, of national(istic) revivals, as it was in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Or, in other words: the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the scene of all those processes simultaneously on different scales and levels.

However, in contrary to these either-or predictions, we can observe symptoms of another process – that of glocalization, which will achieve a wide range of academic discourse and intellectual speculation, as well as social life, in coming decades. I would argue that literature and particularly comparative literature is the best forecast for such a change. Hence, on the one hand, the process of globalization occurs; on the other, resistance to such a planetary unification is evident. In the humanities this double motion (global – local) is clear, e.g. in discoveries of forgotten local intellectual traditions and re-actualization of their hidden theoretical and interpretative potentials (Ulicka). It is obvious from a semi-peripheral perspective, where – as it is in East and Central Europe – more than twenty years after the collapse of com-

munism, the humanities and social sciences were, during the transformation period, and still are, determined by dependence on Western patterns. The explanation of this situation sheds new light on East-West relations on a European scale. First of all, this separation caused by the Iron Curtain in the fields of the humanities was not absolute and it is possible to find a lot of examples of cooperation and interaction. Of course, the dynamic of those interactions is different in each period and in particular countries during the Cold War, and this process is still waiting for its historian. For example, the 1960s were one of the best moments of East-West cooperation (the institutionalization of the international semiotics movement in that time, where Polish scholars play the central role in this formalization, is the best example), whereas the 1970s and the 1980s in Czechoslovakia – after the invasion by military forces of the Warsaw Pact countries – were much more restrictive. The second argument is connected with the problem of interpretation of Eastern European schools in humanities and social sciences. I would argue that all those examples – such as Polish second-wave structuralism from the 1960s–1970s – underline that those schools and groups were less formalized and unified than it is usually presented, and – in consequence – to a higher degree idiosyncratized than it appeared. Hence, the poststructuralization and postmodernization of literary studies occurred in an analogical way, as it did in Western humanities, but without similar labelization. The reasons for this situation were connected with the political situation and with the fact that structuralism – at its surface politically unengaged – was allowed to exist juxtaposed to official Marxism, whereas all postmodern paradigms were politically engaged and in that sense competitive and dangerous for official communist doctrine. That is why all the nuances and colours of Eastern European literary studies of those times are misunderstood and misinterpreted. However, and this is the third problem with East-West relations in the humanities, it is an unquestionable fact that after the collapse of communism we swallowed and admired all which came from the West, and during the following twenty years we made up for lost time and greedily accepted all new trends and contemporary fashions. In contradiction to this tendency, during the last few years we can observe another trend. It is the revival of forgotten and abandoned local traditions and paradigms, which are nowadays treated not only as sanctified and canonized ancestors (Zelenka *Literární; Komparatistika*), but also as vivid traditions that can be still used as analytical and interpretative tools. This inter-, or even transgenerational, dialogue is and will be one of the most important factors in the development of the humanities and social sciences for the next few decades. And only if it is understood in comparison to Western trends, without and beyond any kind of servility, can we expect interesting theoretical and literary historical results of such a marriage.

For all these reasons, we are not foredoomed to – as David Damrosch echoing Janet Abu-Lughod calls it – the white noise of “global babble” (Damrosch *What 5*; Abu-Lughod 131). Comparative studies seem to be a perfect field for such a reconfiguration of planetary humanities.

To ground this theoretical intuition in our world we can refer to political philosophy and the concept of new medievalism or neo-medievalism, presented – among others – by Jan Zielonka in the book entitled *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the*

*Enlarged European Union* or by Jacek Czaputowicz in his remarks on the influence of globalization on the nation-state. In medieval times there existed two levels of human dependence: a minor, internal one – that is the loyalty to the feudal lord – and a major, external one – that is the loyalty to the Pope and the Church. Czaputowicz quotes Hedley Bull’s opinion, which states that in the Middle Ages “none of the rulers or states were sovereign in the sense of being equipped with supremacy over a particular territory” (qtd. in Czaputowicz 32). When a nation-state arises, this stable system has changed and the inner circle has extended, whereas the external has shrunk. Globalization leads to the converse of this process: sovereignty of the nation-state transferred into two levels: external and internal. The external level includes two elements: integration with supranational regional organizations, such as the European Union, and globalization. The internal level is a fragmentation and is related to the transfer of some part of authority to the regional and local powers. “In this system, just like in the Middle Ages, the dependence relationships do not run vertically, towards clearly geographically separated states, but horizontally – in accordance with functional criteria” (33; see Kola “European Identity”; *Europa* 217-221).

Comparative literature in its glocalised version seems to be even more all-encompassing than the previously presented political neomedieval idea, because all the mentioned levels – trans- and supranational global and regional, state and/or national, local – are taken into account. It is done on the theoretical level, as well as on the practice of literary historians and critics. Glocalization is in that sense a frame of reference for comparative studies.

### THE AGENCY OF GODS AND SPIRITS

This multilayer and multilevel situation is obvious in shifts in postcolonial paradigms. The canonical texts from the first stage of postcolonialism are – paradoxically to the presented ideology – deeply rooted in Western philosophical and theoretical thought, especially with reference to Marxism and left wing works. It is true, even if we take into consideration that the matter under discussion was non-Western. *Orientalism* by Edward W. Said is the best example of this strategy. Bengali historian Dipesh Chakrabarty goes one step further. Even if the basic concepts of his postcolonial writing are connected with Western traditions, he also presents some non-European ideas, which influence subaltern studies. His critical interpretation of the text “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency” from an early volume of *Subaltern Studies* by one of the founding father of this tradition, Ranajit Guha, is instructive. It is the story of the Santal, “a tribal group in Bengal and Bihar who rebelled against both the British and nonlocal Indians in 1855” (Chakrabarty 102). From the perspective of the Santal, the god Thakur was an agent of change, of the aforementioned rebellion and even a command to arouse the revolt. “The leaders of the rebellion, Sidhu and Kanu, said that Thakur had assured them that British bullets would not harm the devotee-rebels” (103). Afterwards Chakrabarty pointed out Guha’s inconsistencies and his efforts to reconcile a rationalistic, Western, Marxist, modern worldview and historic narrative with the claims of the rebels. Chakrabarty (105) says:

Fundamentally, then, the Santal's statement that God was the main instigator of the rebellion has to be anthropologized (that is, converted into somebody's belief or made into an object of anthropological analysis) before it finds a place in the historian's narrative. Guha's position with respect to the Santal's own understanding of the event becomes a combination of the anthropologist's politeness – 'I respect your beliefs but they are not mine' – and the Marxist (or modern) tendency to see 'religion' in modern public life as a form of alienated or displaced consciousness.

In that sense, the position of Guha is one step forward towards the classical uses of Marxism and Western paradigms in humanities as it was before him, for example in Kavalam Madhava Pannikar's persuasive book *Asia and Western Dominance: a Survey of the Vasco Da Gama Epoch of Asian history, 1498-1945*. However, Chakrabarty's critical remarks are legitimate. In his own interpretation of the Santal rebellion, we should go one more step forward. In the first move – to a living past – he re-actualizes the Santal and re-defines the place of historians and their attitude towards their object of research and narrative, and he changes this position into a subject (and in that sense subject-ive). He questions: "Does the Santal help us to understand a principle by which we also live in certain instances?" (Chakrabarty 108) and he explains that "[t]his question does not historicize or anthropologize the Santal", because the "illustrative power of the Santal as an example of present possibility does not depend on his otherness". The point is that "the Santal stands as our contemporary, and the subject-object relationship that normally defines the historian's relationship to his or her archives is dissolved in this gesture" (108). Chakrabarty deduces that "the nineteenth-century Santal – and indeed, if my argument is right, humans from any other period or region – are always in some sense our contemporaries", and what is more "that would have to be the condition under which we can even begin to treat them as intelligible to us" (109).

This process can be explained by using the category of "intentional rationality". The dividing line in the debate on the term "rationality" in intercultural relation and interpretation (as it is for example in comparative studies or in social and cultural anthropology) runs through – on the one side – "zealous universalists", such as Ernest Gellner, for whom "rationality is paired with rationalism, a philosophical doctrine on the promises of adequate cognition" (Buchowski *The Rational* 160). What is more, "[r]ationalists want also to ground their views in metaphysics, in the notions of objective truth and reality" (160). In that sense there is one rationality in the world, and it is European rationality. On the other hand, we can find "rigid relativists", especially in postmodernism, who "ignore the possibility of any valuable notion of rationality" and are focused on "subjectivity and insistence of the flux of meanings" (160). However, I would agree with cultural anthropologist Michał Buchowski, who offers a different, pragmatic point of view that goes beyond the mentioned division, and who proposes the term of "intentional rationality". This understanding of rationality is pragmatic, contextual and relativized. Buchowski says that "people act rationally", but this rationality refers to "cultural norms shared by them" (160). This term is not related to Western rationalist epistemological doctrine but is closely connected with the inner patterns of each culture. Within these rules people behave in a rational way,

even if “we should not try to establish any transcultural criteria for the rationality of beliefs” (161). Rationality in this proposition is a kind of regularity, which is prerequisite in the process of participation in everyday life and cultural interpretation. Hence, intentional rationality should be a crucial category for all comparative studies, because it sets the common ground for any comparison and interpretation *per se*.

Now we can finish the story of the Santal. The conclusion of Chakrabarty’s arguments is crucial for this explanation. He claims that if we want to conduct real subaltern studies or non-Western historiography we have to go beyond the limitation of European tradition and this modern rationalism. “What gives us a point of entry into the times of gods and spirits – times that are seemingly very different from the empty, secular, and homogeneous time of history – is that they are never completely alien; we inhabit them to begin with” (113). It is possible, because “gods and spirits are not dependent on human beliefs for their own existence; what brings them to presence are our practices” (111). In that sense, if we want to think about and practise glocalized comparative studies, we cannot do it without, on the one hand, the global perspective of different traditions and intentional rationalities, and on the other hand an awareness of local specificity; in such case – gods and spirits as agents.

### GLOCALIZATION SHIFT IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

This problem should be translated into the comparative literature field. There are a few solutions for this glocalization shift. The first one is connected with the concept of world literature as understood by David Damrosch. He claims that world literature is “a mode of circulation and of reading” (*What* 5) and that it – among other features – does not force one understanding of literature or literacy (*How* 7; see Zhang “What is” 62-63). Damrosch says (*How* 7):

Many cultures have made no firm distinctions between imaginative literature and other forms of writing. ‘Belles-lettres’ would be a good translation of the ancient Egyptian term *medet nefret*, ‘beautiful words’, but *medet nefret* could refer to any form of rhetorically heightened composition, whether poetry, stories, philosophical dialogues, or political speeches. The classical Chinese term *wen* is translated as ‘literature’ when it refers to poetry and artistic prose, but it carries a much wider set of meanings, including pattern, order, and harmonious design. In view of this variety, we need to prepare ourselves to read different works with different expectations.

This understanding of world literature protects us from Eurocentric overinterpretations and imposing conditions of classifying what is or what is not literature, and the modes of reading and understanding the texts. It is a step in the right direction.

But what about non-European theories of literature? What about non-Western poetics? How to use it on a world scale? Four propositions presented below – which are another manner of conceptualization of glocalization shift – go beyond Eurocentric bias<sup>2</sup>.

The second – after the first presented above in the context of Damrosch’s world literature – solution for the issue of glocalization of comparative literature is related to re-construction of non-European paradigms and their canonization. The role of such works is significant and crucial in a real globalization of literary studies. The

great advantage is that they discover the unknown for a wider audience and make it universally available. The more we know, the more we can use in this process of glocalization. I would just mention the works of Stephen Owen, Zong-qi Cai (*Chinese Aesthetics*), Earl Miner or – from a less theoretical perspective – Dev Amiya and Sheldon Pollock.

The third solution is cognitively very fertile and innovative. In some ways, theoretical background for such a use of theory and poetics can be found in the works of Earl Miner. However, Miner's approach, e.g. in *Comparative Poetics*, is deeply – paradoxical in the context of his knowledge and theoretical consciousness – rooted in Western categorical frames of reference (theory and poetics as defined fields; drama, lyrics or narrative as basic genres), even though he puts his project of comparative poetics in the context of relativism (213–238). Zong-qi Cai's book *Configurations of Comparative Poetics: Three Perspectives on Western and Chinese Literary Criticism* is focused on the two traditions mentioned in the title and tries to go beyond Western language and categories, which is one of the greatest advantages of this proposition. What is more, Cai asks fundamental, philosophical questions about the essence (if there is any?), origins and functions of literature. His examples and case studies are also instructive.

Two decades after Miner's book, Revanthi Krishnaswamy in his article *Toward World Literary Knowledges* (plural is crucial here) tries to go further and beyond this limitation of Eurocentric theory. Hence, he proposed the concept of “*knowledges* instead of *theory, poetics, aesthetics, or criticism*” (400–401, italics from the author). He is right when he underlines in his essay that:

comparative literature, literary theory, and comparative poetics [...], despite the good intentions of many scholars, all three fields continue to be Eurocentric pedagogical projects that reproduce colonial stereotypes and perpetuate a neocolonial division of labor between the knowing West and the known rest. (401)

In the second part of his text Krishnaswamy explains the term of “world literary knowledges” and its uses in the context of Indian literature. His understanding of “knowledges” is close to the proposition of Walter D. Mignolo. In Mignolo's *Local Histories/Global Designs* the author – among other concerns – describes “[t]he link between knowledge and geohistorical locations” (316). Mignolo is right when he states: “Border thinking could open up the doors to an other tongue, an other thinking, an other logic suspending the long history of the modern/colonial world, the coloniality of power, the subalternization of knowledges and the colonial difference” (338). In the article “I am Where I Think: Remapping the Order of Knowing”, Mignolo – referring to Santiago Castro-Gómez's zero-point epistemology – proposes decolonizing epistemology or epistemic democratization (169), which is needful in the context of “pluriversality of global futures” (167).

In that sense, we need to be “engaged in the difficult task of recuperating and re-activating diverse indigenous knowledges” (Krishnaswamy 408). The idea presented herein is analogical to the intuition expressed by Damrosch about open-ended understanding of literature, but it is transferred to the field of world literary knowledges. Krishnaswamy defines his own purpose as to “open up the canon of literary theory

and criticism to alternative ways of conceptualizing and analyzing literary production" (408). However, in the word "alternative" he betrays his own idea, because he makes his benchmark Western tradition for which non-Western is an alternative. Sometimes language fails and reveals our powerlessness in the face of thinkers canonized and socialized in Western ways. Haun Saussy is right, when he says that "it is harder than it may seem to break the Eurocentric habit" ("China" 170). In fact, most of the discussed propositions fall into the trap of binary oppositions, where one side is always the West/Europe, and the other is a selected region or country (such as China, India or Latin America). This bilateral perspective is understandable in the context of the "production capacity" of the human mind, but is, on the one hand, far away from truly comparative studies on a global scale, on the other, a drift to break through all either-or constructions, especially from the political realm (like it was during the Cold War), and to follow a plurilateral world.

Notwithstanding, Krishnaswamy's proposition is worth taking into consideration. As he claims:

regional, subaltern, and popular traditions, whether latent or emergent, may be studied, analyzed, and evaluated as epistemologies of literature/literariness alongside the traditions of poetics that currently constitute both the canon (Euro-American) and the counter-canon (Arabic, Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese) of literary theory. Hence, we can call this proposition the creolization of theory (Lionnet, Shih). (408)

The fourth solution is interpretative practice – which was also present in the strategies mentioned above – used for example by Haun Saussy and Zhang Longxi. In Zhang's version it is hermeneutics and close reading strategy, so we can say that they are in fact Western. However, reading and interpretative practice shows that even if some of the methods and approaches are Western, their use is – what I would like to call – glocalized. In the case of Saussy it could be harder to find a common substrate for all his writings. But I would argue that the idiosyncratic, innovative, creative and stimulating character of his comparative works is also a result of glocalization: using different traditions on different levels of literary knowledges, mixing them in an astonishing way and achieving persuasive results. Even if he seems to be a student of deconstruction and deconstructionism, in this basic strategy he is close to the formalistic concept of *остранение* – defamiliarization or estrangement – developed by Viktor Shklovsky. At the same time his writings are not free imagination (or are they?) but are always deeply rooted in each of the mentioned traditions. But we have to remember, that "[e]very comparative project is in some measure an experiment, and the most imaginative ones best answer the peremptory challenge: [...] What can you show us that we could not have learned for ourselves by taking each object in the traditional perspective of its discipline?" (Saussy "Exquisite" 24). His book *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic* is the best example of the advantages of comparative literature.

The fifth solution is represented for example by María Rosa Menocal when she describes the role of Arabic poetry in the development of European literature, which is the forgotten influence on Western tradition, and which changes our understanding of poetry and literature as such. However, what is most important is she did not



limit herself to the contact zones, as it is described by Stephen O'Shea in the context of the Mediterranean milieu by the Spanish term *convivencia* (coexistence) (8–9). Glocalization does not have to be localized in a particular geographical spot but can be successfully used in a more metaphorical and figurative way. However, in both it could be effective.

### BEYOND ACADEMY – TOWARDS SEMI-PERIPHERIES

Comparative studies are, or rather could be, in conjunction with a certain institutional change and paradigm shift, not only in an Academy, but on a wider, social scale, a critical metatheory for other humanistic disciplines, and also in global ethics (of interpretation), intercultural communication, education on all levels, social policy, redefinitions of particular (national) traditions and history, etc. We can find a lot of examples in contemporary humanities and social sciences for each of the mentioned fields and problems in which this transglobal, cosmopolitan etc. approach is achieved. We can take into consideration the works and ideas of, for example, Martha C. Nussbaum, Daniel A. Bell, Ian Buruma and Kishore Mahbubani. But what about glocalization from this perspective? If the global and cosmopolitan approach is still a work in progress, glocal is not even in the waiting room of the humanities and social sciences.

However, in both – global and glocal – comparative studies, according to their theories, history, meanders, experiences and practices should be – as an instructive discipline – in the core of humanities, and in that sense we can clearly define its position as metatheoretical. Comparative studies are trans- and interdisciplinary oriented, with necessary in intercultural research – as was established in social and cultural anthropology in the twentieth century – language skills of their proponents, sufficient theoretical and ideological flexibility, openness to the Other, and propensity to change. Comparative literature vanquishing Eurocentric bias, is in effect nowadays one of the most real global perspectives in humanities. Although the complaints are audible/visible – that the belief that our discipline is in (*de facto* permanent) crisis is inherent for *conditio comparationis*, and what is more, it is probably the driving force for all changes, disciplinary (r)evolutions, etc. – contradictory opinions are not quite isolated. For example, the introductory article to the book *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* by Haun Saussy, is quite optimistic (26). He is right, because in the institutional sense, comparative literature is – even if we take into consideration all the problems of the particular comparative department – strong as it has never been before, and the feedback from all over the world, especially outside previous Euro-American centres, is significant evidence.

The success of comparative literature could be interpreted in some other ways, but it is not the issue under discussion. The point is that this success is closely connected with all decolonization processes, wherein comparative studies speak and argue not in the name of a previous colonial metropolis, but on behalf of subaltern communities. Together with entering a postcolonial perspective to the domain of common academic consensus, all non-European voices were incorporated into the humanistic mainstream, as it was and still is with Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi

Bhabha. This process started just after WWII, but in fact success was connected with Said's *Orientalism* in the 1970s. Postcolonial discourse has been so expansive that in our times it is impossible to write anything about literature and identity without taking it into consideration. The former Eastern Bloc, or – as I prefer to say – East and Central Europe (Kola *Europa*; “European Identity”), is a good example of this “necessity”. After 1989 and the collapse of communism, especially after 1991 and the end of the Soviet Union, East and Central Europe did not start to speak in its own name, in its own dialect, by its own voice, but without any hesitation and doubt, adopted postcolonial narratives as its own, but usually without a contextual sensitive adaptation, that is, localization of the theory. More than two decades after the transformation began, we can finally observe the first symptoms of changes and reflection that we should rather look for our own theorizing and conceptual solutions, or – as in all blurred genres – rather – as I argue herein – glocalized narratives. At this point one thing is important: a seemingly peripheral but in fact core postcolonial perspective is *de facto* academic or intellectual neocolonialism in semi-peripheral territories, where so-called “younger Europe” is under the dominance of the West and rest of the globe. East/Central Europe cannot sell its own narrative about the communism period and post-communist transformation and a transition from centrally controlled economy in socialism to democracy and capitalism (see Buchowski *Rethinking*). It is evident on many levels; among others I would like to underline three of them: (1) political; and (2) economical, where we were forced to accept the neoliberal rules of the global market without allowance – based on loans granted from the World Bank or International Monetary Fund – to implement our own model of economy and politics (based for example on the experience and intellectual potentiality of a great social movement like Solidarity); (3) on the cultural level, both in literature and in the academic discourse, global postmodernism became such a universal key to our cultural revolution, instead of local stories about transformation or some local post-s (like post-communism, post-socialism, post-Titoism, post-Yugoslavism). Postmodernism and postcolonialism prove functional to the neoliberal economical and political globalization, or rather, they produce an illusion that finally – after half a century – we are talking about ourselves in our own voice and perspective, whereas in fact all categorical and theoretical adjustments were imposed from the core discourses. The effect was (and still is, because postcolonial self-narratives are present) adaptation not of the language but of our experiences and identities into two patterns. On the one side, get rid of the peripheral identity complex towards the West – at last we are part of Europe; or – on the other side – resignation and reconciliation with peripheral, decolonial identities. Hence, all postcolonial narratives have one fundamental defect: they are not speaking in our own voice. As a consequence, interpretations of East and Central European worlds are very forecasted, which means that they are boring, because they are like ready-made (not in a Duchampian sense) and fill a core pattern. Only some local or regional colours and historical and political variables are changing; the base is analogous to the postcolonial discourse in Asia, Africa or the Caribbean region.

## CLOSING REMARKS

Glocalization of comparative discourse could be a good chance to, on the one hand, find our own voice in accordance with tradition (which does not mean in servile loyalty to the past) but – on the other hand – could allow us to find our own place in global humanities and social sciences. However, all these changes are possible only if we take into consideration critical theory (not necessarily following the Frankfurt School) as a regulative idea for engaged humanities. Critical here does not exclude affirmative, but it obligates us to go beyond beaten tracks. Thus, even if the social and political context is nowadays favourable to comparative studies (multicultural societies, global village, transnational identities and translingual writers, global migrations, etc.), success is possible only in a new version of organic work – at schools, on the Internet, in public debates, etc. – on a planetary scale, also there (or rather, especially there) where this institutional and ideological<sup>3</sup> situation is far from good, without or beyond any centrism (Euro-, Sino- or other). Glocalization respects the local, but without its fetishization, and does so contemporaneously with consciousness of the other traditions and global scale of interactions. It is true not only in the financial world but also in the realms of cultures.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The title refers to Janet Abu-Lughod's essay *Going Beyond Global Babble*.

<sup>2</sup> Proposition of Eric Hayot of his own understanding of "literary worlds" and "worldedness" as categories of analyses and interpretation of literature on a world scale exceed these deliberations in view of its idiosyncratic and authorial character.

<sup>3</sup> Institutional and ideological are not mutually determined and it is easy to find examples of countries of ideological one-way, orthodox thinking with strong comparative literature, as well as the opposite situation.

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