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Summary of the doctoral thesis *Birthplace as a Critical Category of Cultural Studies. Identity Projects in Polish and Jewish literature*, written under the supervision of Prof. Ryszard Nycz

The doctoral thesis discusses the issue of birthplace in projects of space-oriented identities, which are influenced by experience of displacement. The analysis combines a theoretical reflection on the status of birthplace in identity formation with a reflection on its cultural and literary conceptualizations. It aims at determining a research and operational potential of the title category. To define a birthplace as a critical category of cultural studies, an assumption is made that the hominess and nativeness, which are usually associated with the birthplace, are not axiomatic. The proposed category indicates what is topographically close, individual, and intimate – therefore related to individual experience – and, at the same time, situates an individual in the collective geography, history, and social topology. It connotes what is domesticated, rooted, and static, but it simultaneously masks changes within the geopolitical landscape, as well as mechanisms of differentiation, exclusion, and (non)belonging.

The dissertation is divided into three main parts. The first part presents a methodological and theoretical frame of the work. The birthplace is situated in a conceptual constellation which consists of both theory of place, locality, and topography, and the oikology studies which propose a critical view of the idea of home. This methodological approach assumes transcending of the synecdochic understanding of the birthplace as a homeland, and emphasizes its local or regional meaning as an inhabited area. Therefore, the proposed approach allows to consider a possibility of the subversive and bottom-up process of identity formation, which takes place not only in opposition to a national identification, but also in response to increased migration flows. In a broader perspective, it indicates a different approach of analyzing a relationship between locality and mobility, which constitutes the experience of modernity. The category of birthplace aims at overcoming an opposition between two identity modes, which are determined – on the one hand – by nomadism, non-belonging, and emancipation, and on the other – by rootedness, familiarity, and feeling at home. The theoretical reflection is also

focused on the following questions: 1) what is a status of the birthplace in relation to the different contexts implied by it, that is: spatial, somatic, genealogical, and (auto)biographical/self-referential, 2) how is the process of shaping one's identity affected by different kind of connections with the place: where one was born (Hannah Arendt, Bracha L. Ettinger), where one dwells (Yi-Fu Tuan, Tim Ingold, Martin Heidegger), and where one comes from (Michel Foucault, Paul Connerton).

The analysis of the birthplace refers to peasant and Jewish experiences of the post-war migration and displacement. It allows to investigate identity projects from the perspective of the underprivileged birth, which – in the case of both Jews and peasants – determines a status of “other” in Polish culture. The discussed narratives of the birthplace affirm that the post-war period as a consequence of World War II and the Holocaust is paradigmatic in both Jewish and Polish experience. It resulted in a need for reorienting the common image of the birthplace as a stable and persistent centre of established values. The examples of (re)conceptualization of the birthplace are analyzed in the second and third part of the thesis.

The second part develops the question of Jewish birthplace in a twofold approach. Firstly, the production of locality in the practices of belonging to a diasporic birthplace are analyzed. Their objective is to revise the Jewish collective identity, and more specifically the diasporic imaginarium of Jewish culture, which is intertwined with the idea of *galut* (exile). The analyzed literary works, such as poetry of Rachel Korn, depict a tendency of shaping local or regional identities which are related to the concept of *doikayt* (hereness), a sense of rootedness in the surroundings. The birthplace discourse appears also in the literature of *landsmanshaftn* (in poetry of *landsmanshaftn* as well as in yizkor books), which uses a birthplace as a ‘retrotopia’ (Zygmunt Bauman). Another conceptualization of the diasporic birthplace is illustrated in the poetic works by Avrom Sutzkever (in Yiddish) and by Irit Amiel (in Polish). They allow to analyze a condition of ‘returning immigrants’ in reference to the concept of displaced landscapes. Secondly, the term of ‘oikocide’ is adopted to analyze implications of experience of the Holocaust and post-war migrations of Jews (especially the post-war return to their family places) for redefinition of birthplace. The destruction of the family area as a result of violence is considered from three different perspectives: of witnesses survivors (in the works of Henryk Grynberg), of indirect witnesses (in post-war Yiddish poetry, represented by Rejzl Żychlińska, Mendel Man, Binem Heller), and of bystander witnesses (in the prose of Leopold Buczkowski).

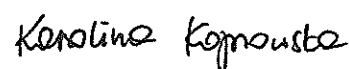
The third part of the dissertation addresses experience of displacement from village to city which is depicted in selected narratives about social advancement. Their analysis focuses

on the process of stigmatizing peasant origins which influences two modes of social advancement strategies, namely: assimilation (Stanisław Pigoń, Julian Kawalec) and disimmilation (Tadeusz Nowak, Marian Pilot, Wiesław Myśliwski). These articulations of shame of the peasant roots allow also to comment on bodily practices of mimicry, defamiliarization of the rural birthplace, and strategies of transcending the cultural image of peasant attachment to the land. The separate analysis refers to the condition of non-belonging to the birthplace, which is considered a result of experience of the socio-cultural displacement as well as of conditions of the rural community itself, both social and gender. This reflection is developed on the basis of the selected works by Tadeusz Nowak, Wiesław Myśliwski, Zyta Oryszyn, and Marian Pilot.

The category of birthplace as a tool of cultural research allows both to analyze existential and identity entanglements of the human condition and to diagnose processes taking place in the cultural and social field. To be born in a place means to be situated in a configuration of various relations. The subjective and self-conscious process of constituting one's identity implies – as the texts discussed in the dissertation indicate – their revision, overcoming or even contestation.



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