

## THE IMPERIAL-COLONIAL CHRONOTOPE

### Istanbul-Baku-Khurramabad<sup>1</sup>

Mikhail Bakhtin in his studies of historical poetics of the Western European and Russian novel singled out a specific type of existential psychological chronotope connected with human self-identification and exceeding the frame of static mythic and folklore elements. The scholar named it a border chronotope or a threshold chronotope and linked with the problematic of existential transition, a critical transitory moment in the life of a character (Bakhtin 1986).

Obviously, Bakhtin was not interested in imperial/colonial relations, and even less with imperial differences<sup>2</sup> (Lieven 2000, Mignolo 2002, Mignolo & Tlostanova forthcoming, Tlostanova 2003) between Russia/Soviet Union and Western European imperial countries. That is why his border chronotopes are silent about imperial and colonial power differential. But what happens if we depart from Bakhtin's 'border chronotope' and look at this no doubt fundamental and useful concept through the lens of 'coloniality of power' (Quijano 2000) as it manifests itself in the works of transcultural writers coming from or writing about the cultures that have been marked with imperial/colonial difference. The imperial/colonial chronotope is characterized by in-between-ness, the protean nature, the constant state of transit, non-finality, parallel deterritorialization and dehistorization (i.e. falling out of space and time) – in short, by everything that Salman Rushdie called 'being elsewhere' (Rushdie 1991, p. 12), thus defining a possible territory of transcultural fiction, which is not limited politically or linguistically, but only in imaginative sense. Contrary to Rushdie, I think that it is not just the blurred category of imagination that is at work here, but a particular condition of transcultural subjectivity – that of restless non-belonging and a specific double consciousness, which generate complex relations with time and space and work for the creation of imperial/colonial chronotope that Bakhtin could not possibly write about. In this article I would like to dwell on the way the three contemporary transcultural writers coming from different traditions and places but equally marked with the colonial/imperial difference – Orhan Pamuk, Afanasy Mamedov and Andrey Volos – create each his unique chronotope of imperial or colonial city that in its turn defines the subjectivity of its inhabitants and the ways they cope with imperial/colonial differential.

## A few preliminary remarks

The degree of invented-ness of the colonial/imperial topos, of the imagined nature of space – is different in the works of various transcultural writers, but almost always it negates the conglomerate of locale, ethnic culture and time as the basis of poetological system typical for authenticity discourses. The way out of the dilemma of permanent transit has been looked for, both in the stale by now postmodernist paths and in the more attractive in-between routes, born at the juncture of the Western and non-western epistemology. The number of traditions, played on, questioned and interrelated in the trans-cultural works that I am going to discuss, most of which are not familiar to Western readers, is much wider and more complex than e.g. in case of the British empire and its (ex)colonies. As a result we have a complicated picture – on the one hand, these authors may demonstrate a certain nostalgic and at the same time parodic memory of their ethnic cultural background. On the other hand, there is a balancing between their inclination to several imperial and colonial traditions – e.g. a combination of the Ottoman and Russian-Soviet, or Austrian-Hungarian and Russian-Soviet imperial influence. Finally, the subaltern position of these very imperial histories in relation to capitalist modern empires and recently, the dictate of Americanization and globalization – lead to additional splitness of identification in the works of trans-cultural authors, who cannot avoid reacting to the Western cultural expansion, which is also reflected in the way they interpret the imperial/colonial chronotope.

The ‘imagined geography’ of trans-culturation is an intentionally invented space, based on playing on various cultural topoi, recreating and rethinking the artistic reality, distorting the angles under which it is placed in relation to the real world. It is built on the tendency to subjectification, to the more and more pronounced isolation from any real locales, to the unimaginable and ephemeral nature of the spaces, which gradually leads the authors further and further away from any spatial stability and materiality.

In the imperial/colonial chronotope the topos largely recreates the old model of utopia or dystopia adding to it the mutopian<sup>3</sup> element as well. The idea of nowhere-ness, lying in the basis of this chronotope, is close to the meaning of the word ‘utopia’ itself. What comes to mind here is not even the classical case of Thomas Moore’s *Utopia*, but rather such trans-cultural works as Anglo-Australian author Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon* (1872) – an anagram of the word ‘nowhere’ and a literate translation into English of the Greek ‘utopia’, where we encounter the theme of naming as the creation of the symbolic and real ‘home’ that lies in the basis of many literary works from various locales, sensitive to the imperial/colonial problematic. A classical example in this case would be of course the Caribbean aesthetics. In the local history of Eastern Europe, Russia, Caucasus and Central Asia the imperial/

colonial configuration was different, but here as well the toponymics retains the traces of various colonization layers, while the colonizers use the common strategy of erasing the previous cultural, linguistic and religious traditions even on the level of place-names.

The logic of interaction of cultural influences in the subaltern empires and their colonies is deeply rhizomic and based on the horizontal links and non-systemic differences, while any efforts to impose binarity on these locales from outside ultimately fail. At the same time the cultural, religious, ethnic incompatibility of the colonizers and the colonized in the space of Russian/Soviet or Ottoman empires has never been clearly asymmetrical in favor of the more modernized colonizer, as it was in case of Great Britain or France. On the contrary, in Russian empire it was often the logic of interaction of two or more subaltern and marginalized cultures, often on a similar or same stage of modernization, or it could be the logic of subordination of the more Europeanized people, e.g. the Baltic countries by a less European Russian colonizer. Finally, it could be the subordination by the in-confident Russian colonizer of the people with a much more ancient non-European history.

Time in the chronotope of in-between-ness changes its usual characteristics, such as linearity, one dimension, irreversibility, becoming multi-dimensional and moving with different speeds and in different directions, while the point of non-return (irreversibility) becomes highly arbitrary and can be easily negated. The Christian linear evolutionary idea of time, dominant in modernity, as well as the efforts to correlate it with the destiny of the whole mankind, is constantly presented as relative and arguable. This leads, on the one hand, to the revival of various concepts of cyclical time, both connected with traditional cultures and newly created, and on the other hand, sometimes, in the works of the same authors the concept of time correlates with the re-conceptualized but recognizable idea of time and history, coming from natural sciences. That is why a character from trans-cultural fiction easily combines in his concept of time the cyclical half-forgotten traditions, the logic of a net-game and the concepts of post-human existence.

The external and seemingly more objective time moves in several directions, so that linearity entangles and clashes with cyclical and backwards time models. Several time models also coincide in the minds of transcultural characters who cannot be easily attributed to the archaic cyclical model of time, because they live in the lacunas and gaps between the linearity of western modernity, the inadequacy of which they 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 duration in the usual understanding of the word, or, in Bakhtin's definition, 'falls out of the normal flow of biographical time' (Bakhtin 1986, p. 280). Subjectification of external time leads to extreme relativity of personal time, to its arbitrary

acceleration or (less often) slowing down, sometimes, thickening, when an *other* acquires the ability to live out several lives – no matter how short or unhappy they are. Such characters live out several lives which seem to be crammed into one physical existence, pressed like a spring – in accordance with the fairytale beginning of B. Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* (1991): 'My past happened many lifetimes ago' (Mukherjee 1991, p.5).

## The city chronotope

Let us now look at the chronotope of the imperial and colonial city in contemporary transcultural fiction from the point of view of imperial and colonial difference. The imperial city is often a sinister space where the imperial myths take shape and are realized in the life stories of various people. Here the colonial subject is defenseless and invisible. The imperial side of the city is viewed in utmost ruthless and phantasmagoric details by the individuals rejected and exiled by this space. They can be both colonial subjects and representatives of empire, carrying its deadening nature in themselves. Such a fearful and sickeningly attractive space is Moscow for the Bakinian character of Afanasy Mamedov and for the Western Ukrainian poet Otto von F. from Yuri Andrukhovich's book *Moscoviada*, or Istanbul – in Orhan Pamuk's *Black Book* and London in Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*.

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 do not necessarily base it on predictable accusations and resentment, but rather mark these portraits of colonial spaces with paradoxical nostalgia for the lost and imperfect, but still a paradise. Hence comes the idealizing of his childhood Baku by Mamedov and of Khurramabad (Dushanbe) by Volos, hence comes Bombay and Hong Kong nostalgia of Salman Rushdie and Paul Theroux.

Deleuze and Guattari, reflecting on the contrast of the State and the Nomadic War Machine, divided spaces into smooth and striated, giving an example of Chess and Go – the smooth space of Go in contrast with the striated space of Chess game, *nomos* against *polis* (Deleuze & Guattari 1992, p. 4). The chaotic post-imperial space – particularly in those territories of Eurasia where previously the nomadic empires existed for a long time, often acquires again the quality of smoothness and stops to be striated, but it retains definitely the traces of previous times, of crisscrossing of various imperial state machines, and it is important to try to understand the logic of these half-erased lines, which still determine the psychological types and reactions of the people living in these spaces.

The imperial city is the center of metropolis and its miniature model, a conglomerate of its main discourses, both verbal and non-verbal, connected

with human behavior, with architecture and with the very way of domesticating the space. The colonial city is a playful space of mimicry, of non-identical copy of metropolis, where not only the recognizable signs of colonization are palpably present in all their forms, but also the stability of original is effectively shaken, leading to its hybridizing. Both *topoi* – the imperial and the colonial – undergo various artistic interpretations in the frame of the fantastic, the magic, the metamorphing, giving birth to imagined hybrid urban spaces, particularly if the time aspect of the urban chronotope corresponds to the moment of destruction, disintegration of empire and its reference system.

The global urbanization of the postmodern space in its relation to exodus and re-rooting of deterritorialized people in the imagined gigantic cosmopolis, also brings forward the rethinking of the city chronotope. Here the problem of skidding of the modernizing logic with its linear progressivist change of more archaic community forms to more modernized urbane ones comes forward. In the locales of civil wars and political turmoil in various parts of the world today one can encounter the peculiar phenomenon of de-urbanization and the reverse archaization of socio-cultural and economic reality, that also is reflected in fiction. Typical examples of such tendency would be the destroyed Yugoslavian towns, the Chechen capital Grozny, the ex-South African ‘pearl’ Johannesburg, the Tadzhic capital Dushanbe, etc.

The most interesting interpretations of imperial/colonial city chronotope emerge in the works of those writers whose cultural, linguistic, ethnic, imperial/colonial and religious positioning is marked with a paradigmatic insuperable in-between-ness. They cannot be classified unanimously within one local history, living on the crossroads of many instead, and not accepting any of the histories completely. For this reason their works cannot be so easily coincided with the well-known post-colonial fictional models. In the post-soviet space there are transcultural writers, whose identification is not firmly fixed in ethnic-cultural, linguistic or religious sense. Among them – A. Mamedov, A. Volos, M. Adamova and several others. Due to their in-between transcultural positioning they are far from ethnic-cultural extremism of any kind, their works cannot be regarded within the ethnic-national frame, interpreted according to political belonging or civil status of their authors. Very often, there are two or more cities living in them, creating a third one in the author’s imagination. Rushdie, who can easily be regarded as a paradigmatic case of such sensibility, called himself and those like himself, the people marked with the insuperable sense of exile and loss – ‘the world community of displaced authors’ (Rushdie 1991, p.15). 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 art is born.

## The defeated capital. Orhan Pamuk's Istanbul

The polyphonic mythology of Istanbul – a mysterious ancient city between Europe and Asia, between the East and the West – lies in the center of Orhan Pamuk's novel *The Black Book*, overloaded with mysterious semiotic signs and marked with specific transcultural positioning of the author. In his 'autumn retrography' of the former Constantinople, in the winter Istanbul dream, the author is free from nostalgia of the great Ottoman Empire, but at the same time there is no feeling of inevitability and indisputability of the Western variant of modernization, chosen by Turkey with the collapse of the empire. Pamuk tries to make out in the ancient city the signs of alternative but never realized possibilities of another being, of other, almost lost epistemic traditions – Sufism, the Khurufites order doctrine, based on religious mysticism of the revelation type. A recurrent motif of the novel is an effort to formulate what would a different, non-western modernization of Turkey be like, a modernization, that in Pamuk's view, was strangled by Mustafa Kemal Ata Turk, whose image in the novel is compared indirectly with the famous dictators of the twentieth century. But in modern Istanbul even Ata Turk shrinks and turns into a kitsch plaster figure with blue light bulbs in place of eyes, put on sale in a junk store.

Another leitmotif in Pamuk's novel is a specific restlessness of his compatriots, their inability to finally master Istanbul's topos. They remain the aliens in the ancient Constantinople, who only manage to externally acquire the legacy of other ancient cultures, at the cross-roads of which stands the old city. For this reason Pamuk's characters are haunted with the sense of their own defeat, sadness, despair, peculiar stagnation (typical of all inhabitants of the defeated empires) and various post- and neo-imperial inferiority complexes. For the main character of Pamuk's novel Istanbul is a hostile place, floating from under his feet, as if in a nightmare. Pamuk sees his compatriots as stuck at the border, their modest world lacks a center and is not indicated on the maps, it is everywhere and nowhere at once, and they are not able either to be themselves or someone else.

The magic chronotope of Istanbul is based on the constant transit of the characters from Asia to Europe and back. The transition from Europe to Asia is connected with the metaphors of threshold, bridging, a complex mixture of various cultural influences and historical layers. European Istanbul is a synonym of Western modernization while the old Asian city is not just a way to the past, but to the impossible renaissance of the forgotten traditions – not necessarily archaic or authentic. Pamuk also strives to show that modernization and urbanization do not necessarily have to be in the form of painful breaking up, an artificial imposing of the Western models, as it happened in the ancient cosmopolitan city culture of Istanbul, which always – in its Byzantine and Turkish times – was marked by ethnic religious and

cultural tolerance. The millet system as the Ottoman variant of multicultural existence was destroyed together with the deterioration of territorial unity of empire and penetration of nationalist and socialist movements in the late nineteenth century. Istanbul of Pamuk's novel somehow retains a confluence of left radicalist, communist, nationalist sentiments and medieval mysticism of various Muslim heresies and secret orders, banned by Ata Turk in 1926.

The possibility of non-Western modernization stands in the center of the story of Bedyâ Ustod, who created the first Turkish mannequins for the museum of sultan Abdulhamid. His creations, competing with Allah – the exact copies of human beings, repeating even the typically Turkish gestures and mimics, were rejected by the religious elites of the country that had not started then yet its history of constant europeization. Later they were also rejected by the modernized style of the first years of the Republic – on account that their form was not Western enough and they desperately embodied the rejected national dream. They resembled the ordinary Turks too much, the people whom you could meet in the streets of Istanbul and thus – they did not correspond to the new myth of the West, that allowed even a common customer, buying a European dress, to feel himself a person from a far away and wonderful country. Pamuk ironically points out that it was for the sake of this dream of the West that the revolution in clothes, shaving off the beards and even changing of the alphabet – were introduced (Pamuk 2000, p. 81).

The semiotic nature of the city in this book lies not only in its buildings, squares or minarets, but also and more importantly in the faces and looks of the people living in Istanbul. The topography of the city is closely connected by the author with the topography of the human face and with the symbolic correlation of the alphabetic letters and the lines on the faces. The lines are connected with Arabic letters and for this reason, when the Turks rejected the Arabic alphabet in favor of the Latin one, they lost their secret and never acquired a different one instead. Now they are in need of a new way of discovering the mystery which would allow them to correlate the lines on the human faces with the 29 letters of the Latin alphabet. It is precisely the forgetting of the 'Sufi secret' that acts in the novel as a fantastic reason of the Ottoman's empire's defeat. In Pamuk's idea, when a civilization forgets about its mystery it means negating its own basis of thinking, and every people, copying others and forgetting about its own sources, inevitably dies (p. 537).

One of the crucial motifs in the interpretation of Istanbul's topos is the Western violation of the Eastern city which is recreated mostly in the metaphors connected with the magic meaning of geographical maps and the remaking of the real city under the influence of westernization. That is why on the pages of Pamuk's book we encounter the retired *pashas*, who all their lives long were trying to adjust the art and science of the West to the East, for many years creating on the maps the linden alleys in Berlin style – instead of

crooked Istanbul streets, or the straight boulevards with bridges like sun rays in Parisian manner; the photographers making the sky look Prussian blue and retouching the black earth, making it the color of the English green lawn (p. 242). The city becomes almost an animate character in Pamuk's novel with its grotesque descriptions of the old Istanbul lopsided bay windows, hanging over the street, the darkness of the abandoned waste lot, where time and space disappear, the upper floors of the buildings on both sides of the street – flowing towards each other (Pamuk 2000, p. 148).

The western culture is presented by Pamuk as simultaneously attractive and destructive for his Turkish characters. Thus even their love is presented as a juxtaposition and a complex interaction of various models of modernization – the wife and cousin of the main character is called Ruya which means a dream, an attractive reverie and not a Turkish one at that, but rather a product of cultural hybridizing with the West. She is easily led by the socialist and left-radicalist theories, choosing a more dynamic, cruel, critical towards Turkey path of her step-brother and lover Jelal – a doppelganger of the narrator, whose identity he is striving to claim. As the illusive city itself, its inhabitants are balancing on the verge of real and imagined, the mundane and the mysterious. This is clearly expressed in the image of the narrator spying on himself and looking from the mysterious windows of the city at the man in a dark coat walking along its snow-covered streets – it is Galip meeting himself on the boulevards and side streets of old Istanbul.

For Pamuk the material reality itself and not just the internal worlds of human beings is influenced by various ideas and discourses and hence is quite vulnerable and fragile. That is why he says that people make murders copying other, earlier committed crimes, that they fall in love under the influence of already known love stories which are connected with each other as the enfilades of rooms in a palace, that is why Istanbul itself can change under the influence of the changed attitudes of its people. The motif of fragility and elusiveness of space and its dependence on the human will is central in Pamuk's book where the theme of violent westernization of Istanbul is expressed – among other things – in an incomprehensible change of the climate in the city, of its flora and fauna. The parrots left the city and their place was taken by the crows, when it started snowing in Istanbul. The modern Istanbul is also a scary city that forgot its mystery and borrowed the external elements of someone else's life. Hence the apocalyptic pictures of destruction and slow deterioration, constantly emerging in the character's imagination, in the reasoning of his interlocutors, in the artistic reality of the novel. Pamuk speaks again and again of the miserable crowd, the old cars, the bridges slowly sinking into water, the heaps of cans, the warped pavement, the incomprehensible large letters, the unclear bill boards, the inscriptions on the walls, the advertisement of alcohol and cigarettes, the minarets, that no one reads azan from any more, the mounts of stones, dust and dirt (pp. 169–170).

These haunting descriptions strangely resemble the pictures of the immigrant poor part of Babylondon, seen by Gabriel – a half fantastic character of Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, and primarily this refers to the characteristically easy and almost imperceptible shift, a lacking boundary between the signs of material and spiritual deterioration and decline.

The key theme for the understanding of Istanbul's chronotope is the theme of original and the copy, mimicking, borrowing and independent creative work (the latter is impossible for the author, moreover, he even states that imitation in art is the real mastery). But in the interpretation of simulacra and copies Pamuk follows Baudrillard's and Deleuze's ideas with a clear variation. The novel is full of copies, they literally chase the main character everywhere – from the annoying commercial of olive paste 'Ender', the copies of which are multiplying and diminishing on the labels, to the flat in the building that the family used to own, as a stiff copy of the past, recreating the smallest details of the dust, the smell of forgotten perfume, the yellow newspapers. The city itself also is presented as a copy – good or bad – of the western original, resembling a museum exposition. But in Pamuk's de-centered world none of the copies equals the original word for word, and in fact none of the originals is possible in the long run, because each of them is a copy of something that existed before. Finally, in a certain sense, the theme of the copy is regarded within the mimicry problematic and that of imperial difference, which in its Turkish variant acquires a specific overtone – here we speak not of a colony in the real sense of the word, but of a defeated empire, conquered by the winning West not by means of colonial expansion, but rather by more subtle ways of cultural and epistemic colonization. Among these 'humanistic' means of modernization, that the author connects with deprivation of memory, of the past, of history, Pamuk points out the cinema, the music, the demonstration of the beautiful women's faces and landscapes, the bright bottles, the weapons, the airplanes, the clothes, etc. – they all attain better results than the more traditional methods of colonization, that he did not even give a name to, only commenting that they were used by the missionaries in Latin America and Africa (p. 165).

### **Afanasy Mamedov's 'Bascow'**

The chronotope of the imperial and colonial city plays an important role in the nostalgic novel *Khazar Wind*, written by Afanasy Mamedov and superimposing Moscow and his native Baku. If in Pamuk's book the ancient underground of Istanbul was the focus of the esoteric mystical knowledge, in Mamedov's work the underground clearly carries a negative infernal meaning, and is expressed in the image of Moscow metro where 'God disappears', as people and birds disappear, where the muscular sculptures at the station 'Revolutionary Square'

seem to be ready to come alive and jump off their granite places directly into the horrible 1937 and take all passengers with them, along the dark underground tunnels to their native Lubjanka' (Mamedov 2000, p. 242).

The metro-underground is similar to the fairytale wonderland that you can get into not only through the rabbit hole, but also through the sewage hatchway. The laws of time and space here change and time can freeze, but one can also go through an existential moment of spiritual enlightenment and revelation. That is what happens with Mamedov's character – the ascensionalist (the one who strives to the vertical) painter, who envisions his most successful canvas precisely in metro, together with seeing his own life under a new and unexpected angle, because every ascending along the vertical starts always from the absolute bottom symbolized by the underground.

But it is not the Moscow tube that is used by Mamedov as a fantastic transport, connecting the past and the present by a myriad of strange coincidences. It is tram No 6 from his Bakinian childhood, unexpectedly coming into the Moscow present and bringing him into the small flat at the outskirts of Moscow. The tram imagery is crucial here as well as in Pamuk's book, working for the creation of a specific atmosphere of a southern town by the sea, where even the trams lazily shine in the sun and move slowly, allowing the fast boys to jump off while the tram is still moving. Pamuk's main character desperately tried to read his city as a book and decipher its secret signs. Mamedov's autobiographical hero is also looking for the mysterious signs and correspondences, pointing in the direction of his previous Bakinian life in alien Moscow.

Mamedov creates a hybrid imagined space, as a collision of the real, native topos of Baku (the lost Eden of his childhood) and an other, alien topos of Moscow, where only small and carefully chosen isles can become native for the character. Finally, he creates an absolutely imagined, hybrid space in between, conceptualized mainly in visual terms, because the protagonist is an artist. Salman Rushdie would probably call this phantasmagoric hybrid world – 'Bascow' (a cross between Baku and Moscow). Such a subjectification leads to the character's strive to narrow down and limit his life space, e.g. when he recreates his ex-Bakinian flat that does not exist any more in a Moscow slum at Skhodnenskaya metro station, or when he chooses particular patches and little spaces in the alien Moscow topos, pierced here and there with Stalin's 'Vampires' (the word refers to the style in architecture that was associated with Stalin and called Stalin's Empire). A specific feature of this topos-creating activity is the unity, the magmatic plasticity of various times and spaces. That is why a tram from the Bakinian past materializes suddenly in Moscow present.

Baku and Moscow are not just two cities which live in the main character, they are two capitals – one is a colonial capital and the other is imperial, one is cosmopolitan in a specific Oriental way, almost as multicultural as Odessa or Tashkent, the other – with its official status of metropolis and a pseudo

European tint. The names and titles from his Bakinian childhood carry not only a sign of coloniality, of the outskirts of the Russian and later Soviet empire, but again, as in case of Istanbul, the remnant of a more ancient and non-western urban culture of a trade megalopolis, a multi-linguistic and tolerant port-city at the crossroads of civilizations, on the border of Europe and Asia. This city saw the caravans and the merchants, the Roman legions and the Zoroastrians. As in Pamuk's book, Baku is presented by Mamedov as almost a living being – with its lopsided old streets smelling of sweat and meat, its houses, growing together as the eyebrows of Eastern beauties, and the balconies, covered with vines as if with veils, where the long Bakinian evening tea-drinking takes place. The governor's park with the green theater, where the author used to be taken for a walk when he was a kid and where he had his first date under a palm tree, exists in this topos along with the Old Town – the fortress, Icheri-Shekher, the famous Sea Boulevard and the Torgovaya (Trade) Street, and the Soviet-imperial motif – the Bolshevik Kirov's monument over the restaurant 'Friendship', the old men with their Muslim beards under the palms, along with the tolling of the bells at the Armenian church that sounds so close from the Jewish quarter Juude-Meilesi – 'a real present for Shagal' (p. 110).

The Russian empire imagery is brought forward when the author describes the character's family dwelling and their favorite places – Agamaliev's flat with the door chain from tsar Nikolay's times, the Vorontsov's palace, the pre-revolutionary books that belonged to the grand-grandfather. When Afik is reading these books he is annoyed with their imperial sense of the 'big time', expressed not only in the fine paper and print, but also in the 'short-sighted and simple cheerfulness' – an unjustified self-confidence (p. 95). This link between his family and the Russian-Soviet imperial-colonial complex causes Afik's rejection of the present Islamic-Eastern variant of Azerbajdzan's re-colonization.

As in Pamuk's book, the transcultural topos of Baku which is called by the author simply the City (with a capital letter), as Mikhail Bulgakov did describing his Kiev, is clearly marked with specific tolerance, which couldn't be eliminated even in the Soviet decades, but was destroyed in just several months after the collapse of USSR and the conflicting building of the independent nation-state.

The winter miserable Baku in Mamedov's book comes unexpectedly similar to the winter myth of Istanbul in Pamuk's novel. It is also an Eastern city where there should not be any snow, but ironically it finds itself in a new and more Western climate zone due to its peculiar imperial/colonial configuration.

Discussing the presentation of Baku and Moscow topos by Mamedov it is important to take into account a paradigmatic duality of the main character, his inability to become a native in any culture – Azeri or Moscow, colonial or metropolitan. Brought up on the Western European and Russian-Soviet

intellectual and aesthetic canon, he cannot completely reject certain deeper Eastern epistemic roots. Although the main character calls his family an imperial one, rather it should be called cosmopolitan. It answers the definition of not quite Russian/Soviet variant of modernization, close to what Pamuk is describing in his book. Mamedov's character knowing almost no Azeri language and very little about its culture – tends to see it at least in the beginning in exoticist terms. Aestheticizing the Oriental difference, including his own, as if he was looking at it with the Western eyes, he is trying to remember his disappearing city, knowing that his life would continue from now on – bypassing Baku. But he is remembering it clearly in the wrong way, already changed and seen through the prism of stereotypes of Western exoticism and nostalgia: 'the flat roofs, the Maiden Tower – the symbol of Baku, the Nargen island, the women, cooking piti-bozbash in big iron pots, the girls with jugs on their shoulders, the minarets of Teze-Pira, the poetic side-streets and little yards, the blue communal night where everyone knew everything about everybody, the flowers, the tastes, the odors of the Bakinian life, the dark-blue shadow of the streets and the melting heat of the summer, the slow speech of Bakinian inhabitants . . . ' (p. 64).

In this sense the main character is entirely the product of this Bakinian city subculture, which is between the quasi-western modernization of the Russian and Soviet empire and the more archaic non-urban culture of the rest of Azerbajdzan. Hence the constant juxtaposition of a specific Bakinian microcosm and the 'regions' (provinces), the inhabitants of which are dreaming of making their way to the capital, even if colonial, that lives according to its own laws and in its own pace of modernization of an Eastern city. In the Bakinian part of the book the character acts as a colonizer of his own native city, exoticizing its topos, making it correspond to the norms acquired as a result of education and bringing up in a particular family and social environment. The character would acquire a completely different way of looking at things in Moscow, where the object of exotization and imperial demonization would be himself. He will mockingly play on the Moscow stereotypes about the people from Caucasus and Trans-Caucasia, whom they cannot tell apart either in ethnic-cultural or religious and linguistic sense. In the description of Moscow the optics changes as this city is regarded not through its imperial ethnic and cultural discriminatory elements, but rather through totalitarianism of the communist regime – the sensibility of a colonized subject here mingles with and flows into the sensibility of an individual, repressed by the ideological system.

As Mamedov was writing his novel for several years, the book turned out to be a diary of his own changing self positioning in relation to the Soviet Empire. In the beginning, the gloomy image of the Soviet Union – still intact – is hovering over the heroes of *Khazar Wind*. The people leaving the City in the late 1980s still do not see themselves as immigrants or refugees, but

only as lucky colonial subjects going to live in the metropolis and on top of that – having all the legal rights, equal with the titular nation – at least on paper. They do not yet understand that metropolis has its own subtle ways of repression and discrimination, which easily combine with formal egalitarianism. Urbanization as one of the important sides of modernization is recurrent in the novel and repeated in the experience of the village people coming to Baku, as well as on the larger scale, in the story of the migrants from the outskirts of the empire who are looking for luck and wealth in its center. Toward the end of the narrative the main character would become more and more aware of his double status – now he is an immigrant who never became a native in the unfriendly and cold Russia, and a person, whose childhood world is forever lost and nonexistent, who is expelled by the new and hostile Baku together with his family.

The disappearing city of the childhood is succeeded by the scary Baku of the civil war, following the Sumgait massacre. It is the city where one can always hear the machine guns and where people have to make it home before the curfew. There is an episode in the book which is important for the understanding of the relations between the colonized (Azeris and Armenians) and the Russian/Soviet empire, just before its collapse, half-heartedly trying to put the order back into the colony which it does not really need any more. The attitude of Slavic soldiers and officers to both the ethnic group they are persecuting and the group they are presumably protecting in this conflict clearly echoes the racism of the White man's burden type, which does not make difference between the Chinese, the Black and the Indian. The author casually informs us about a patrol tank riding along the old Bakinian street, destroying everything alive and man-made in its way and violating the beloved city. The two Slavic representatives of the empire, driving the tank, behave as if they already had all the keys from all the doors of the City and could not tell an Azeri from an Armenian calling all of them the 'Chureks' (corn bread, also in condescending Slavic slang – a non-European, Asiatic person) (p. 82).

Little by little Mamedov shows how in the new independent Azerbajdzhan the imperial-colonial configuration is changing once again – the pendulum of identification goes in the direction of Turkey and not the defeated Russian empire. Even the change of alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin demonstrates a clear change of the model to the Turkish variant of modernization. Connecting the disappeared Baku of the Russian and Soviet imperial times and Baku at the crack of the twenty-first century, the author mentions that the main character's grandmother went to a specific gymnasium where the local girls were made into the good second-rate copies of the Russian mademoiselles, and now in the new Baku this old school turns into a Turkish Lyceum and the new director equals Azeris and Turks, making the former be a copy of the latter.

A similar historical parallel is constructed by the author in connection with the crisscrossing and clashing of the Ottoman and Russian influences in the local Bakinian and Agamalievs' history. It is the Turkish genocide of the Armenians at the end of the nineteenth – beginning of the twentieth century that still lies deep in the genetic memory of the Bakinians, it is the arrival of Nuri-Pasha, Ata Turk Anver's brother, later on – the coming of the Scottish troops, and finally – the 11th Red Army – the succeeding colonizers that would be always remembered by the city. The new genocide of the looming twenty-first century leads to similar historical cataclysms and mass migrations, which will be forever imprinted as deep lines on the City's ancient face. Agamalievs' family is culturally European oriented and striving for assimilation, and therefore it always finds itself on the side of the Russian/Soviet empire, which with the same consistency grinds and destroys these people with its ruthless millstones. The grandfather of the main character *bey* Agamalievs is fighting the *basmachs* (the counter-revolutionary groups in Central Asia during the 1918–1920 Civil War), the people who are closer to himself than the new Soviet power, but this does not save him from Stalin's camps. Afanasy, who inherited the name of his grandfather that perished in Stalin's purges in 1937, is trying once again to acquire the colonial strategy of mimicry that did not save his ancestor. It is presented as a certain strategy of keeping out of sight, hiding in his hole, until the stormy times finish, waiting for the better moment. In the story of the main character's parents it is the Western model mediated by Soviet modernization, that comes forward. The same way as Pamuk's characters, Afanasy's parents were fascinated with Western cinema and in stuffy Bakinian nights easily repeated the great deeds of the foreign movie heroes, borrowing their clothes together with their beautiful names and their post-war popularity. These layers of previous cultural models again and again bring Afanasy to painful nostalgia, to the image of the sunny Baku of the 1950s that, alas, vanished forever.

### **The city of happiness and joy. Andrey Volos's Khurramabad**

*Khurramabad* tells the story of the mass exodus of Russians from the ex-Soviet colony of Tadzhikistan. It is written by a Russian writer, who should have been classified as a colonizer rather than a victim of the empire. And yet this is probably one of the most clearly anti-colonial and anti-imperial books in all post-soviet fiction. The most powerful stories in this book deal with the problem of the ex-colonizer's self-identification. But no less important is the metamorphosis of the alien land into the native one and the ex-motherland Russia's becoming alien for the new refugees. Thus, Volos touches upon the arbitrary and open connection of territory, ethnic-national identity, language and culture. The prototype of his imagined topos is quite real Dushanbe, the

capital of Tadjikistan, while Khurramabad is a hybrid, based on the contrast of the cruelty of Volos's stories and the folklore toponym Khurramabad, the city of happiness, full of green trees and generous people, which was borrowed from the Turkish and Persian fairy tales.

Volos also touches upon the Oriental topos put under the artificial and deadly influence of Soviet modernization, although Khurramabad, or its real prototype Dushanbe, is an forcefully created urban topos, the same way as Grozny in Chechnya: for these mountain regions the urban culture has never been a typical element of social structure and partly because of that, as soon as the Soviet modernization went away, it gave place to de-urbanization, characteristic for many megalopolises throughout the world.

The writer sees the war in Tadjikistan as a social, rather than ethnic-national or political upheaval. That is why in his stories there is always a motif of the quest for the others to blame – be they Russians, Armenians or even Tadjiks themselves belonging to various fighting clans. The author stresses here the non-ethnic nature of belonging to a certain locale. In the absurd world of Khurramabad both the Tadjiks and the Russians may become 'aliens' and 'natives' – may find themselves among the thugs and marauders or in the self-defense regiment, meeting in the streets of the city, which is howling with horror and pain, the city where the air itself is full of violence, humiliation and robbery (Volos 2000, p. 367). The destruction of the urban civilization in Khurramabad during the civil war is also shown by Volos as a clash of a more modernized culture with the archaic one. The nationalistic opposition uses as its cannon-fodder the poor jobless youngsters from the villages, easy to manipulate by the ancient (and endemic for Tadjikistan) clan social structure that just takes the form of the new political forces. The pictures of de-urbanization are terrible, absurd and even fantastic in this book – we see the people, who live in sky scrappers, but do not have running water, gas, electricity for months, spending days and nights in the lines for bread, making fires in their balconies and washing their hair with clothes washing detergents. But these pictures are also marked with almost documentary objectivity and a complete lack of sensationalism, at times bringing Volos's narrative to a truly tragic level.

In Khurramabad, a city where time stopped or started moving backwards, there are several *minitopi* around which the narrative is organized. It is the topos of the market as the center of any urban culture in the East, the *topi* of the city square and the cemetery, each of which presents a particular time layer corresponding to a certain stage of modernization and consequently, is closer or farther from the indigenous culture of this locale. *Khurramabad* literally starts in the cemetery and it will appear more than once in the book as a leitmotif of the contradictory connection with the past and with the alien land that became native for its Russian/Soviet inhabitants. The market in *Khurramabad* has two images. First, it is a real noisy Oriental bazaar with its

traditional division of roles, but seen through the exoticizing eyes of a Russian, who connects this imagery with Oriental fairytales from his childhood. The author constantly stresses this difference, juxtaposing the more or less objective descriptions of the bazaar and its interpretation by the newcomers for whom even the quarreling of the two Tadjik onion sellers about the price sounds like wonderful poetry. Another face of the same market topos is presented in Khurramabad's city square which retains some of its initial characteristics and adds new imperial-colonial layers connected with distorted in Soviet time ancient symbolism of the market square. The city squares, along with their official role of the Soviet imperial centers, become for Volos the places of mass massacres, the un-ruled instincts, presented with no fairytale touches.

The Bakhtinian carnival meaning of the market square is replaced with communist symbolism, which strives to introduce the element of high official culture, building its own ideological sanctuaries – not Christian, not Muslim, but Soviet, as, e.g. a standard building of the central committee of the communist party, that had its clones in all Soviet republics/colonies. The Soviet Empire marked its political and cultural sanctuaries with certain signs, still found in many post-soviet spaces, modeling the architectural image of the colonial city. In the hot and dusty Khurramabad, this specific semiotization of reality is realized in the fountains. Before the Soviet rule the Central Asian culture associated fountains with oasis, with life-giving water, usually placing them at the crossroads of the caravan ways and in the center of towns and villages. In the Soviet time the fountain symbolism was frozen and stylized in the two official fountains of the city, marking the politicized square with Soviet establishments, and a 'democratic' fountain in front of the Opera theater where the author places the main character of another story – a Russian lumpen – alcoholic, nicknamed 'Beljash', who calls himself the 'boss of the fountain'.

Practically in every story there is the same compositional element at work – the flow of peaceful life and the images of wonderful Khurramabadian nature are suddenly disrupted with the scary, fantastic overtones, comparisons and metaphors, born in the minds of the frightened characters. This produces a strong impression on the reader because Volos generally works in a reserved and even seemingly mimetic narrative style, far from phantasmagoria or grotesque. The more shocking then comes the feeling of sudden split-ness, a crossed border, a point of non-return from the reality gone mad. The descriptions of Khurramabad before the civil war are full of gastronomic and still-life comparisons: 'the sugar bowl of the airport', 'the pink foam of the blooming almond trees', 'the glazed mountain peaks', 'the huge bowls of the stadium and the Komsomol lake' (p. 153).<sup>4</sup> While the later heaping images of violence, murder of innocent people, the looting – are presented in their bare, almost documentary laconic form, which, however, is often tinted with

expressionistic tones of a horrible metamorphosis. In front of the scared Volos's characters' eyes the city topos goes mad: 'This was so strange, . . . as if the trees would start walking or the buildings themselves would start moving along the streets, crushing the fleeing horrified people' (p. 159). Khurramabad is presented as an injured organism which can be hibernating or crucified with horror and pain in the midst of political turmoil, an organism, that can liven up with the tender colors and odors of the blooming trees and the sounds of the forever prevailing oriental bazaars in the spring, and finally, in the most telling episodes, the city is compared with mother's womb, where 'there is no hunger, no unhappiness, where you cannot call anything *your own* or *alien* because everything exists for you' (p. 371).

One of the best stories in the book – 'Little Grass Snake' – tells about a strange affection between the elderly Russian woman, refusing for a long time to leave the city because she has nowhere to go, and the poisonous snake, that crawled into her apartment by chance, looking for food and shelter and soon became a dear and close friend. Here the topos of Khurramabad is compressed into one injured building by the road, leading from the airport to the city center. The writer stresses the fragility of life balance, suddenly interrupted by the heavy tanks, that ironed the city, causing the people and animals living in and under the cracked land – loose their normal environment. The tanks of Empire, sent to repress the mutiny, are also presented in a personified way of the reality gone mad – not just as mechanisms, driven by people, but as fantastic green battle elephants, who seem to have their own will. 'Little Grass Snake' is based on a simple idea that when there is no platform for understanding left – either national or imperial, ethnic and religious – the only and last component, on which the main character is building her relations with the snake – a newcomer from an *other* world – switches on. It is an elementary unity of living beings, even if so different, 'and a human gets used to anything in the world, and moreover – to the living creatures' (p. 176), states Volos.

'Home' in Volos's book is presented as unattainable ideal for the people, who all of a sudden become the outsiders in this land. Home is the quintessence of stability, safety, protection. In Soviet times these people used to live on the thin crust of external artificially created life, and now they urgently need the material signs of their connection with reality, such as home. This is true about the main character of the story 'A House by the River', who almost lost his dream house and for whom the defense of his home turns out to be the dilemma of the moral choice – either to stay a human being with dignity, or to behave in the manner that is dictated to him by the crazy world around – i.e. to kill, to betray, to rob.

Unsuccessfully trying to answer the question of what makes a person an *other* or a *native* in the land, Volos's Russian characters, who are often the descendants of the Soviet unwilling colonizers, regard imperial Russia as an

alien space, while Tadjikistan that becomes alien for them in one blink, the land where already two generations of their ancestors were buried, still remains for them a native land. Such are most of Volos's characters, who were not asked if they wanted to be replanted in the new soil or not. In this sense his view of the destiny of Russian settlers in Central Asia is rather unconventional, because instead of usual charges against the colonizers, the reader traces here the absurd logic of the Soviet empire, which was vainly trying to reach the certain leveling of the economic and social status of the colonies and the metropolis and at the same time to implant the imperial Soviet ideology by constant inflow of Slavic people, often with infringed rights (the prisoners, the so called special migrants, the people fleeing repressions, etc.) into the under-modernized outskirts of the empire.

In Volos's book *topos* is presented as a complex natural-urbanistic phenomenon – the streets of Khurramabad are inseparable from the smell of dust, from the earth and the air, and the author states many times that it is not the language, not ethnicity, not religion that define the individual's belonging to the locale. Each of the empire's step-children is trying to reject the forceful deterritorialization in his own way, repeating stubbornly that he will stay in Khurramabad and it is better if they kill him there, on his native land. The *topos* of Khurramabad itself has a certain magic of clearly non-ethnic nature, and leaves its mark on all its inhabitants, irregardless of their ethnic belonging and age. That is why Volos calls his Russian heroes 'skinny, dark, dried out Khurramabadians'.

Another important mini-*topos* in *Khurramabad* emerging in the story with a symbolic title 'An Other' is a train station. The main character San Sanych Dubrovin is reluctantly leaving Tadjikistan for unknown Russia. The *topos* of 'no-where-ness' here corresponds to the mood of tedious waiting and frozen time, in a wider sense – of exile, exodus, the pain of rejection, for the story is set between the old and new life, between Tadjikistan and the alien and hostile Russia. The author renders with graphic accuracy the sense of the halted time and the strange state of the character who is running away, remaining physically in the same place. San Sanych defines his state as exile, because even remaining in the same place he is already exiled, as everything around him all of a sudden became alien and dangerous. Volos carefully constructs the story on the contrast of the eternal – the nature, the mountains, the sky, the river, the previously existing peaceful life, and the absurdity of the present twisted reality. The fantastic suppositions, that he uses as the outset of many of his stories (e.g. in 'The Other' it is the railway, destroyed by an unknown opposition, thus delaying the main character for a month in the empty and miserable railway station, cut off the rest of the world) could be easily regarded as typical for existentialist parables, where the individual is put by the author deliberately in artificial conditions of survival and various hardships, but in fact, they are almost documentarily real.

The temporal aspect of the city chronotope is presented by Volos as several parallel coexisting times. The time of empire and its human remnants stopped, but the rest of the old city's life still continues behind the high clay walls. It stays almost untouched by the political events on the surface. And only a few neglected old Russian women, resembling absurdist characters in Ionesco's style, continue to sell in the streets of Khurramabad their strange useless goods, that stress the loneliness and uselessness of the owners: 'Everything they had was mysteriously single – a fork, a glass, a book with no cover, a boot with no laces, a torn wristlet, the watch itself, irreparably broken many years ago – and it was obvious that even if we gathered all these old women from all over the city, it would be impossible to find even two matching objects' (p. 370).

Russia is presented in Volos's book as an almost always absent, unfamiliar and hostile image of empire, an unfriendly step-mother for the characters, who rejects her step-children forever because they are stigmatized by their connection with Tadjikistan. For the young characters of *Khurramabad*, who are not familiar with the empire and associate Russia only with an Arcadian picture from the ABC book, Russia at first acts an ideal topos, which is finally destroyed only in the last story with a meaningful title 'Zavrzhje' (the etymology of this word clearly incorporates not only 'ovrag' – ravine, but also 'vrag' – enemy). Volos draws an almost biblical exodus of his characters, in the beginning of which there stands a fairytale image of Khurramabad ('Ascend'), equipped with all necessary dreamlike elements, constantly balancing on the verge between the real and the imagined (e.g. the unreal mountains are perceived as being drawn on a piece of fabric or cut out of huge pieces of dusty papier-mâché). In the last story, on the contrary, the author turns to almost naturalistic optics, finally making his characters wake up and shake off their long-time enchantment, so that soon they realize that neither blood, nor religion or national identity are able to define the concept of the native, making them forever *others* in Zavrzhje, as well as in all other parts of the drunk, degraded, lacking religious or any other faith provincial Russia, giving an unfriendly greeting to its unwillingly prodigal sons. Russia in Volos's interpretation is an absent actor, an object of blind hatred or equally blind idealization, it is yet another alienated *othered* space. The images of post-Soviet Russia are presented as cruel, rejecting the border characters, who are revolving in the vortex of history, unable to reterritorialize, finding themselves unwillingly in the position of the hostages of empire, its prosecuted messengers with no rights and no mission, in accordance with Amos Oz's idea that a typically western quest for identity in this trans-cultural fiction changes into a certain negation of the character by the place, when the problem is not that the individual does not know himself, but that the place does not know him and does not want him to exist (Gordimer 1995, p. 45).

In Volos's position there is almost no nostalgia, typical for Mamedov, and yet the pictures of hunger, the civil war, the lines for bread, the deserted Khurramabadian parks comprise a topos drawn with love and despair.

## Conclusion

Chronotope acquires a central function in the works of the transcultural writers marked with both imperial and colonial difference. Andrey Volos's, Afanasy Mamedov's, Orhan Pamuk's works are among the best examples of transcultural fiction, incorporating and sharing many themes, motifs and metaphors, and drawing specific characters who become the new Ahasueruses of globalization, the new cosmopolites (often against their will), the complex selves with multiple national, ethnic, religious and linguistic attachments. Transcultural aesthetics and ontology is grounded in and simultaneously generates itself the imperial/colonial chronotope, within which there are more local chronotopes of imperial and colonial city/town, exodus, home and unhomeliness, etc. It is marked with a protean and unfinished nature, with constant transit, with falling out of space and time, with de-territorialization and de-historization, with existential restlessness, which both the ex-masters and the ex-subalterns share. A Turkish author Orhan Pamuk, a Muscovite with Bakinian roots Afanasy Mamedov and a Russian from Tadjikistan Andrey Volos – all offer interesting and different spatial and temporal transcultural models, which are often based on the fairytale, fantastic imagery of utopian or dystopian kind, on the subjective, cyclical or many-directional time.

Within the city chronotopes presented in the works of these writers (the trans-imperial – Moscow and Istanbul, and the trans-colonial – Baku and Khurramabad) there are several minitopi organizing the space and the time of the imperial and colonial city – it is the market square, the cemetery, the underground, etc. Each of these books is also a story of painful modernization, fighting with and conquering the previous local traditions, bringing forward its own myths, meta-narratives and unresolved dilemmas of subjectivity. This happens in a semiotic way in case of Pamuk, takes a nostalgic Proustian form in case of Mamedov, finally, it is expressed in the specific double vision, circulating between the oriental fairytale and the cruelty of at times 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 feel at home.

Transcultural aesthetics generates a variety of imperial/colonial chronotopes, and in this article I dwelled on only three examples, leaving out many other interesting instances – from the Western Ukrainian Yuri Andrukhovich and American Paul Theroux to Australian Peter Carey and South African J.M. Coetzee and A. Dangor. The number and the impact of trans-cultural writings

has been constantly growing on the global scale lately and it is crucial to continue working on the conceptualizing of these phenomena, acutely reflecting our complex and constantly changing world.

## Notes

- 1 This article is based on a chapter from Tlostanova (2005).
- 2 By imperial difference I mean the difference between the capitalist Western empires of modernity (England, France, Germany) and the subaltern non-capitalist and non-western (not quite Western) empires, like the Ottoman Empire, Russia or Austria-Hungary. For more details see: Lieven (2000), Mignolo (2002), Mignolo & Tlostanova (forthcoming), Tlostanova (2003).
- 3 For the definition of mutopia see Csicsery-Ronay (1997).
- 4 See also the English translation, Volos (2001).

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