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“Onto a chilly aerial road to new worlds”: global affective landscapes of transience in Olga Tokarczuk’s and Amitav Ghosh’s writing

In Olga Tokarczuk’s novel *Flights* (2005; 2018), the idea of movement as inevitable existential condition of humanity is developed through a meticulous and multidirectional exegesis from many cultural locations: the Orthodox heresy (hence the novel’s title, whose English version raises the idea of translation as creative transformation to yet another level); the “itinerary” of museums of medical science history, the comparative maps of world rivers and maps as world imaginaries, the exploration of heterotopias such as airports or subways and their no-place location in contemporary human geography. Mobility as that which makes us aware of our joint condition of transience and dislocation in not only space, but also time and, possibly, being, is a major concern in Tokarczuk’s writing. Local spaces which turn out to be inscribed in history’s shifting narratives, local communities which turn out to be but a temporary settlement in the process of permanent displacement and uprooting, and, last but not least, the transforming power of nature, seemingly passive and immobile, but in fact engaged in the ongoing process of complex metamorphoses, constitute a unique landscape of transience in Tokarczuk’s writing.

Amitav Ghosh’s unmatched work in tracing the routes of the human global connections and nascent cosmopolitanisms in various historical contexts, and his passionate involvement in investigating the history of colonization (extractivism, trade, genocide) whose contemporary correlate is the “great derangement” (2016) and the “planet in crisis” (2021) contributes a unique collection of local landscapes in transience as human and non-human ecosystems affected by the invading species, to keep to the ecocritical vocabulary to which his fiction is so sensitive.

In my presentation I would like to read comparatively how both authors engage the reconstruction of the local as a human and natural ecosystem in order to investigate its precarious ontology in colonial and global modernity and intimate the transformative affects generated by the loss of the sense of rooting and belonging on a global scale.

Through a dedicated ecocritical grounding of their writerly endeavours, Ghosh's postcolonial and Tokarczuk's posthumanist imaginations can be put in a productive dialogue contributing a unique cosmopolitical (Cheah, Robbins, 1998) hermeneutics necessary for envisaging a new world literature.