

DIASPORA AND COLONIZATION IN THE WORKS OF SAPKOWSKI

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Abstract

This article focuses on the diaspora as portrayed in fantasy fiction in the Andrzej Sapkowski's Witcher saga. The depiction and parameters of diaspora as presented by Safran, such as the myth or collective memory of homeland; regarding ancestral homeland as true home, eventual return; being committed to the restoration or maintenance of homeland; relating "personally or vicariously" to the homeland to a point where it shapes identity, is employed as a departure point for analysis presented in the paper. The use of fantasy fiction provides an expansion in the concept of the term *race* that allows for the inclusion of other species. Similarly, to the expansion on the definition of race, an attempt to classify the relocation of a workforce without a homogenous homeland as a diaspora is analysed in the presented paper. The relocation of production lines to a more secure and stable region should enable for a creation of a diaspora from the war, at the moment of the relocation, torn homeland. The analysis focuses on three possible diasporas; the relocation of the human race, the relocation of the Elder race, and the relocation of the workforce, while only one from those can be considered a genuine diaspora.

Key Words: diaspora, race, fantasy fiction, Sapkowski, homeland

Abstrakt

Predmetom tejto štúdie je diaspóra, tak ako je prezentovaná v knižnej verzii Zaklínača Andrzeja Sapkowskiého. Na teoretickej úrovni sa autor štúdie opiera o parametre diaspóry definované Safranom ako mýtus kolektívnej pamäti vlasti, pohľad na vlasť predkov ako na skutočný domov, eventuálny návrat, snaha o obnovenie alebo udržanie vlasti a vzťah k vlasti, pričom prienikom týchto parametrov sa stáva formovanie identity. Identita ako taká v analyzovanom diele vytvára vhodné podmienky pre redefinovanie termínu *rasa*, ktorý na úrovni fantazy žánru zahŕňa niekoľko ďalších druhov. Ďalšou, i keď nie priamou, známkou diaspóry v predmetnom diele je nehomogénna pracovná sila, ktorej premiestnenie sa táto štúdia pokúša obhájiť ako diaspóru na základe komparácie jednotlivých prvkov takého premiestnenia, akým je napríklad premiestnenie výrobných liniek do bezpečného a stabilného regiónu v čase vojny, s parametrami diaspóry. Analýza sa preto sústreďuje na tri možné diaspóry, ktorými sú premiestňovanie ľudskej rasy, premiestnenie staršej rasy a premiestnenie pracovnej sily, pričom iba jedna spĺňa vyššie uvedené parametre diaspóry.

Kľúčové slová: diaspóra, rasa, fantasy literatúra, Sapkowski, vlasť

Introduction

This article focuses on the diaspora and colonization as depicted in the Witcher series by Andrej Sapkowski, thus ranking the primary literature into the genre of fantasy fiction. The main aim of the article is to analyse the diaspora of races and minorities as represented by the human and the non-human, or Elder Race, consisting of dwarfs, gnomes, elves, and halflings, along three individual lines. The first diasporic line is more obvious, as it concerns the relocation of the human race from another planet during the Conjunction of spheres. The second one is the relocation and integration of the population of Elder Races during the skirmishes and the human

expansion over the continent. The third, and the last one, is not the most typical representation of the diaspora, due to the circumstances of the relocation of a race or a minority group, which are not within the parameters as depicted by the definition of a diaspora. Nevertheless, such cultural incorporation of a group, while not being within the parameters of the diaspora definition, can be regarded as diaspora of the workforce. Workforce, understood as a single community irrespective of race, ethnicity, or nationality, is forced to relocate or incorporate into an alien culture that has annexed their former country of origin. While the author writes from the perspective of a European context, which is fairly homogenous in terms of race, a recent bid has been made that the texts should be examined in terms of post-colonialism due to the occupation of territory by the Soviet Union and their political and social incorporation within their cultural context. Therefore, it should be possible to utilise the diasporic reading within the confines of the postcolonial context in Europe. The choice of primary literature was based on the belief that it would increase a chance to analyse potential diasporas within the text itself, as fantasy fiction has the potential for the depiction of an increased numbers of races, which can be directly linked to a greater number of diasporas present within the chosen text. The multitude of races thus allows for the possible juxtaposition of the human and elven or Elder Race diaspora. While peaceful coexistence of races is possible, the ever increasing number and demands for more land to sustain these great numbers is crucial for the analysis presented herein and so turning humans into the colonizers of elves, the original inhalants of the land. The human colonization was a twofold process. First, the spread of the human culture domination over the “fauna” of the land, with the use of the witchers, and the establishment of the kingdoms. Second, the relocation and integration of Elder races as entire communities into the human culture and society. The methods used when analysing the diasporas and colonization in Andrej Sapkowski’s *Witcher* series are mostly standard qualitative methods used in literary analysis, such as close reading, in-depth analysis of the chosen works of the selected author.

1 Diaspora

Diaspora can be defined as the movement, migration, or scattering of people away from an established or ancestral homeland (Merriam Webster, 2016). In 1991, William Safran set out six essential features distinguishing diasporas from migrant communities. The features set out by Safran include the group’s maintaining a myth or a collective memory of their homeland; their regarding their ancestral homeland as their true home, to which they would eventually return; their being committed to the restoration or maintenance of such a homeland; and their relating themselves, ‘personally or vicariously’, to the homeland to a point at which it shapes their identity (Safran 1991). All the above-described features are taken into consideration when determining whether or not the transition of a race or a minority group within the *Witcher* series can be regarded as diaspora.

There are two very common terms discussed in the context of diaspora and those are race and minority. First, it is necessary to establish that in the context of fantasy fiction, the definition of race as used is often a misdemeanour, due to the fact that from a biological standpoint other

non-human but sapient humanoid characters should be labelled as other species not races. Yet within the context of fantasy fiction “many fantasy stories and worlds refer to their main sapient humanoid species as races, rather than as species” (Tresca 2010 p.30). With this slight oversight accounted for, but placed within the margins of the elaborated theory, we can proceed to the discussion of race within the A. Sapkowski’s Witcher series. Race itself can be understood as a social construct of a group of beings who share similar and distinct physical characteristics. The basic division in the works of Sapkowski within the Witcher series is the distinction between human and non-human. The non-humans were the main sapient humanoid species comprised of elves, dwarfs, and gnomes pertaining to the standard fantasy setting (within the context of the Witcher series also includes vampires, dragons, etc., which are only marginal in their prevalence yet labelled as sentient humanoid species by the author himself). A minority group is a term referring to a category of being differentiated from the social majority, i.e., those who hold the majority of positions of social power in a society, and may be defined by law. The differentiation can be based on one or more observable characteristics. These observable characteristics may include: ethnicity, race, religion, caste, gender, wealth, health, or sexual orientation.

Poll tax and winter tax were doubled, the taxes which directly fund the army pay. All merchants and businessmen must make additional payments to Royal Treasury: the ‘tithe’, a whole new tax, one tenth of all profits. Dwarfs, gnomes, elves and halflings pay higher poll tax. If they’re involved in commerce or manufacture they’re also burdened with the ‘nonhuman’ income tax, a ten out of every hundred. Because of all this, I have to give up to state more than sixty percent of my income. My bank, all branches included, pays the Four Kingdoms annually six hundred marks. Allow me to elaborate: it’s almost three times the charge of a noble duke or count with a huge estate. (Sapkowski 2013 p. 32)

What the author establishes is a simple plain definition of the human and non-human dichotomy institutionalized by law in most of humans are presented as more powerful and less taxed, while the marginalized non-human minority of the dwarfs, gnomes, elves and halflings are placed on the margins of the society through the unequal legal treatment within the dominant human society.

Upon initial inspections one might presume that the focus of the diaspora will be the humans. However, the humans in the works of Sapkowski within the Witcher series, although relocated, cannot be considered as diaspora because they do not prescribe to the basic diasporic features as proposed by William Safran. Even though relocated initially after the Conjunction of spheres to a new world, followed by a second relocation to a new continent within this land, labelled as the first landing according to an elven legend, humans, as portrayed in the selected works, do not maintain a myth or a collective memory of their homeland; thus, by default, they cannot regard their ancestral homeland as their true home, and as a collective they are not working towards their eventual return. Due to the cataclysmic event, they cannot be committed to the restoration or maintenance of that homeland, hence, as a race, they abandon the notion of a homeland, because the notion of homeland bears little influence on the shaping their identity. Suggesting the possible adaptation that humans are just another kind of monsters that seeped through the thin veil during the Conjunction of spheres, they breed at an enormous pace, and

utilize their innate abilities to adapt, inhabit, and conquer the land before them. While humans are not notably of the main focus, in the case of the original inhabitants of the continent the diaspora is evident.

According to the mythology provided by the author, more than a thousand years ago, a cataclysmic event named Conjunctions of the spheres trapped unnatural creatures within the depicted dimension. According to an elven lore, it was at this time when the first humans appeared, with their original planet being destroyed, and settled on the continent hundreds of years later in the event known as the first landing. However, monsters brought forth by the Conjunction of the spheres still roamed the land and the humans were not equipped to deal with them. Hence, they employed witchers, an elite class of warrior-monks, possessing superhuman speed and strength due to the Trail of the grasses - a series of mutagenic mushrooms, herbs, and plants introduced into the bodies of would-be witchers, with a survival rate less than five percent. These witchers defended the human settlements against creatures and monsters. With the protection the witchers offered, humans stabilized and villages would expand and become kingdoms. Humans moved through the world - imposed their rules, their kingdoms, and their borders and laws, and reduced the threats against the human race to a minimum.

While the aggressive expanding colonizers – humans – used four major ‘techniques’ (the army, the economy, knowledge, and breeding) to eliminate or subjugate their ‘would-be’ foes. While the domination of land through military skirmishes was the most visible and costly, humans focused rather on knowledge and economy, as far as a land can be wasted without any soldier being endangered.

'That's what a customs war looks like,' Linus Pitt commented on the chaos with a wise expression on his face. 'Vizimir forced Novigrad to introduce the is stapulae. Foltest of Temeria retaliated with a retortive, absolute is stapulae in Wyzima and Gors Velen. That was a great blow for Redanian merchants so Vizimir increased the tax on Temerian products. He is defending the Redanian economy. Temeria is flooded with cheap goods coming from Nilfgaardian manufactories. That's why the customs officers are so keen. If too many Nilfgaardian goods were to cross the border, the Redanian economy would collapse. Redania has practically no manufactories and the craftsmen wouldn't be able to cope with competition.' 'In a nutshell,' smiled Geralt, 'Nilfgaard is slowly taking over with its goods and gold that which it couldn't take with arms. A sapkowski (Sapkowski 2009 p.96)

While the human kingdoms and empires were established their elven adversary was reduced to nothing more but rebels, scoundrels, and minor annoyance. The human kingdoms would turn the destructive power of their economy on each other to ensure victory. Even though still engaged in the land disputes with elves, humans would build their own cities on the ruins of the conquered elven cities. While they were doing it out of the conscious realization of the superior position, abundance of material for the construction of fortification, and established supply lines, elves grew disgusted by this affront to their heritage. So much so that the elves began sacking their own cities and they destroyed them rather than leaving them to be contaminated by humans.

Shaerawedd is a ruined elven palace — elves didn't build castles — which lies in the forests of Kaedwen. The elves themselves destroyed it after their second clash with humans to prevent them from building a city on the foundations as they had with so many other cities. At its heart is a rose bush covered with beautiful white-lilied flowers. Drops of silver glisten on the petals. They were Aelirenn's flowers, and she was known as the White Rose of Shaerawedd. In front of them, as far as the woods allowed them to see, rose smoothly hewn blocks of granite and marble with blunt corners worn away by winds, decorated with patterns long leached out by the rains, cracked and shattered by frost, split by tree roots.

(Sapkowski 2009 p.152)

With the armies, economy, and knowledge to be the preferred tools, the humans gained their upper hand only through breeding. In one of the last efforts to rebel, the elven youth was riled up to battle by Aelirenn, also known as the White Rose of Shaerawedd, or as known by the name of Elirena among dwarves and humans. Under her command, and against the wishes of the elders, a great number of elven youths fought with her to their deaths in the second battle against humans. The desolate city and the elven heroine both seem to represent a metaphor for one another. As only the elven youth can reproduce their resolve and so their future was crushed in this battle. Before the humans could claim it, the elves would rather destroy their most valuable gift than let humans have it. With little reproducing potential left and with their fast breeding adversary dominating the land, the elves were uprooted, moved into the cities, and partially incorporated into their colonizers' society and culture. From the perspective of the inhabited world, it is the demonstration of the dominant culture moving into the background, as far as the world discussed was initially occupied by the Elder races.

While the humans' uprooting and relocation to another world were already analysed within the series, there are several instances of uprooting and forceful relocation producing two potential lines along which the diaspora can occur. The first diaspora, depicted throughout the analysed works, is the diaspora of elves who, even though incorporated into the colonizers' society, maintain the collective memory of their homeland, many of which still fight for in the rebel bands spread throughout the kingdoms. Though initially lost to humans, after Nilfgaards' invasion to the Northern Kingdoms, Emperor Emhyr var Emreis gave Dol Blathanna to elves who had helped him and his empire to form a supposedly independent state for elves to relocate to; however, within the full control of Nilfgaardian Empire, elves still regard their ancestral homeland as their true home to which they will eventually return. Nevertheless, Dol Blathanna is presented as a puppet state, even though many believe that it is a step towards the restoration of their homeland. Without a doubt, it can be claimed that elves relate to the homeland to a point at which their identity is being shaped.

The third, and less obvious diaspora results from the ensuing colonization of the Northern realms by the Nilfgaardian Empire in the south. This diaspora is not notably bound to any race, nor to any species, but rather to the notion of value. While the individuals' being relocated is not inherently depicted or discussed, and it is more like than not that these individuals are human but not necessary all of them, not necessarily hailing from the same kingdom, thus not possessing a common unified homeland. This diaspora focuses rather on the relocation of the technology and

factories, along with their workforce, and incorporation of such technology and production lines within the Nilfgaardian Empire, thus suggesting incorporation of a diverse social group of people connected to the factories, with a de facto war-torn homeland relocated and incorporated into the Nilfgaardian society. Even though the technology and knowledge are useful, it is the relocation and incorporation of the workforce from the conquered kingdom to a more secure location within the Empire of Nilfgaard that matters, resulting into a diaspora stemming not from race, but rather from a specialized and skilled workforce accompanying the essential and useful industry and the production lines.

But before the army destroys everything, ‘he explained to the silent registrars’, it is our task to extract as much as possible from this country and land, everything that will increase the power of our Empire. You, Audegast, you will collect and cart all agricultural crops and plants. Everything that remains on the fields that has not been destroyed by Coehoorns knights must be collected... ‘You two will collect all living stock. Chase up all herds, watch during quarantines in isolated places. Kill the sick and suspicious ones, the others have to be guided to the south on marked routes.’ ‘Yes sir!’ And now the special task, thought Evertsen, looking at his people.A special task. The Gulet iron factory with smelting furnaces. The kalamin works, the foundries and forges in Eysenlaan, fifty talents of a years production. The tin factories and laundries in Aldersberg. The distilleries, malt, weaving and coloring factories in Vengerberg... Dismantle and transport. That was the order of Emperor Emhyr – The White Flame Dancing on the Barrows of his Enemies. Two words. Dismantle and transport. An order is an order. It has to be fulfilled. And the most important task. The gold mines and their yield. Money. Valuables. Artwork. But I will take care of that. Personally. (Sapkowski 2013 p. 121)

While more focus is put on the acquisition of technology and material, the notable requirement for skilful workforce to incorporate in the culture for the production to operate on an optimal or peak level, while providing the stability and ‘security’ by the larger colonizing empire, the producing tools and goods would serve to undermine what is left of their former homeland or to wage wars on their former neighbouring land, all due to a simple order of ‘Dismantle and transport’. Under the circumstances discussed earlier herein, such a phenomenon can be regarded as diaspora in its own right, even though such a representation does not follow the features of diaspora as coined by Safran, yet it creates the possibility of unification of people into a coherent unit from the perspective of the ‘true Nilfgaardians’ as not the true members of the empire but rather as lesser citizens. Such people were relocated as based on their capabilities and skill and forcibly indoctrinated into the civilization that perceives them as the lesser members of a society. As many of the relocated citizens do not wish to return to the remains of their war-ravaged homeland, at this point it is difficult to regard such movement as a diaspora.

Conclusion

The focus on the main selected diasporic instances has yielded the followed results. The focus on the relocation of the human race from another planet has yielded little or no result, as far as diaspora is concerned. The cataclysmic event which resulted in the destruction of the original homeland has rendered the possibility of the return tenuous at best. The humans chose to conquer the land before them through the meditation of the witchers that could deal with the monstrosities present in the land after the Conjunction of the spheres. Thus this relocation would not resolve

itself to a diaspora, because of the lack of the homeland myth and its influence on their current identity. The juxtaposition of elves or the Elder races – the original inhabitants of the land – along with the human settlement and colonization of the land, can yield two very distinct examples of a diaspora. The first followed the wars with humans, the relocation and redistribution of the elder races' homeland into human kingdoms, while elves, limited in number, were forced to relocate under the rule of humans and integrate into a culture foreign to them. With the ever constant and present hope of reclaiming and reviving their former homeland, attempts are made that ultimately proved fatal in the long run, as the youth from the defeated elven race rose up to reclaim their former homeland, and was defeated once more, resulting in severely limited possibilities of reproduction. The second diaspora is presented from the perspective of the colonizers not caring about the race and ethnicity of the selected group, concerned only with their skill in crafting and producing for their new empire into which they were incorporated, producing a new dimension of diaspora; not a diaspora of a race or minority but rather the diaspora of the workforce, while, without an established homeland, such a diaspora cannot be considered as genuine.

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