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The Postcommunist Supplement:
The Revision of Postcolonial Theory
from the East European Quarter

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Abstract

Postcolonial criticism appears today as the sole champion of the study of colonialism and its aftermath. However, viewed from post-Soviet Europe, it displays a number of flaws and lacunae: an amputated atlas of modern colonialism which ignores the experience of Eastern Europe under Soviet colonial occupation, a binarism that fails to explain the more complicated mechanisms of cultural colonization, and an in-built ideological bent that blinds it to the trans-ideological nature of colonialism whereby mutually incompatible ideologies have functioned as both the hegemonic and the counter-discourses of colonialism. While it has found the general framework of postcolonialism useful, postcommunist cultural studies has worked inside these theoretical interstices to supplement the orthodoxy of postcolonialism with equally sophisticated analytical tools that seem more adapted to deal with trans-colonialism in the global age. This article explains the added value of the cultural critique of (post)communist coloniality: how it has complemented the routine charts of colonialism during and after the Cold War by more accurately mapping the complex colonial relationships between all “Three Worlds”; how it by-passed the simple binary imagination of radical postcolonialism in order to address the political ambivalence and the ethical dilemmas of global (post)coloniality where there are no fixed hero/villain positions; and how it replaced Manichean anti-capitalist discourses with a more flexible and open perspective on the convoluted ideological rapports during the Cold-War and after the collapse of the Soviet empire.

Keywords: postcolonialism, postcommunism, comparative cultural studies, Soviet colonialism, Marxism, the Cold War, Eastern Europe

Introduction

In the West-centric world of academic publications, postcolonialism is showing its good profile.¹ This is a field of academic criticism which has long been known as methodologically sophisticated, ideologically enlightened, and institutionally secure. With time, postcolonialist discourse has started presenting itself not just as the better way to approach marginalized and subdued cultures – it would now pass for the only way. There is a sense of self-satisfaction in postcolonialism scholarship, a serenity given by the belief in its incontestable and impregnable validity. But, like all complacency, it is debilitating. The result is an indulgent cecity to its own flaws and lacunae.

Postcolonialism has always declared itself an adversary of the universalist claims of Western culture, and yet this quite particular type of discourse on colonialism claims to have produced the *universally valid episteme* for the study of all colonialisms. And, although it has been a fierce critic of any pretenses that Western rationalism and positivism made for their alleged objectivity or for their logical and empirical soundness, postcolonialism nevertheless posits itself, in spite of its open militant nature and polemical jargon, as the ultimate *empirically certified and infallible view on the reality* of colonialism. Also, while it dismisses the myth of progress flaunted by Western modernity, postcolonialism still parades its own version of a more *progressive* attitude in the analysis of historical, political, or social phenomena in comparison with the retrograde liberal, humanist, and capitalist discourse of the West. From this unflattering angle, postcolonialism appears as not exactly true to itself.

Especially when viewed from “the Second World” quarters, postcolonialism displays its other, less than perfect profile. Ever since the fall of communism in the Soviet bloc made it possible, postcommunist cultural studies has exposed not only the colonialist behavior of the Soviet Union, but also a few of the blindsides and inconsistencies in postcolonialist orthodoxy. I will deal here with three such shortcomings which I think are most pernicious and which, if adequately addressed, might reinforce the study of (post)coloniality. The first is that

postcolonialist discourse usually misrepresents the map and the history of high and late modern coloniality as a truly global phenomenon, a flaw which comes especially from choosing to ignore the reality and crucial role played by Soviet colonialism in the twentieth century. A second deficiency is the simple binarism of postcolonialist thought, which not only generates an inaccurate geography and timeline of recent colonialism, but also replaces the Manicheism of Orientalist discourse with its own counter-Manicheism (Băicoianu 51) – one which proves ignorant of the complications and complexities of global colonialism in the 20th century, and which is bound to misrepresent the multidirectional power games and colonial rapports both during and after the Cold War. The third major limitation of mainstream postcolonialism is its ideological dogmatism: although the field has, on occasion, opened up to studies of minor cultures, postcolonial cultures within Europe, the intersections of diaspora, migration, or colonial spaces outside the purview of the Anglophone, Francophone, or Hispanophone cultures, all these fringe critical efforts did not manage to shift the overall gravitational pull of anti-Western militancy and Marxist ideology.

But how exactly does postcommunist cultural studies supplement these three major fissures in orthodox postcolonialist discourse? In the following sections of this article, I will be reviewing alternative approaches to (post)coloniality from postcommunist cultural critics who have tried to cover these blind spots and have moved beyond lukewarm and parochial portrayals of colonialism as a West-centric phenomenon. While finding the general framework of postcolonialism useful, postcommunist cultural criticism has worked its way inside these theoretical interstices to supplement traditional postcolonialism with a critical vocabulary and with analytical tools that have helped paint a more comprehensive, sophisticated, and accurate account of *trans-colonialism*ⁱⁱ as a genuinely global phenomenon. It is my aim in this article to explain what the added value of the cultural critique of (post)communist coloniality really is: how it has complemented the routinely clipped charts of colonialism by devising a more accurate way of mapping the complex colonial relationships between all “Three Worlds” in high and late modernity; how it by-passed the binarism of the typically radical,

oppositional imagination of postcolonialism in order to address the political ambivalence and the ethical dilemmas of global trans-colonialism where, contrary to critical lore, there are no fixed hero/villain positions; and how it replaced the Manichean anti-capitalist discourses with a more flexible and open perspective on the convoluted ideological rapports during the Cold-War and after the collapse of the Soviet empire.

Mending the Amputated Atlas of Global Colonialism in High and Late Modernity

The postcolonialist critical paradigm has been extremely beneficial in understanding the epistemic, moral, and cultural issues of modern Western colonialism, especially when dealing with the abusive exercise of power against the so-called Third World colonies. However, mainstream postcolonialism entirely disregards other kinds of colonialist behavior, including that of the Soviet Union. This is in total disregard of the imperialist and colonialist practices of the USSR documented by a long line of scholarly and polemical discourse that can be traced back, among others, to Walter Kolarz (*Russia and Her Colonies*, 1952, and *Communism and Colonialism*, 1964), Olaf Caroe ("Soviet Colonialism in Central Asia" and *Soviet Empire: The Turks of Central Asia and Stalinism*, 1953), and Władysław W. Kulski ("Soviet Colonialism and Anti-Colonialism," 1959).

It does not come easy in today's academic world to be speaking of the similarities or the relationship between the postcolonial condition of former Western colonies and that of former Soviet satellites and republics. Only a few Western researchers, very few of whom are in postcolonial studies, have been willing to admit (some only complacently so) that the countries of the former Soviet bloc should be acknowledged as colonized cultures. Third World scholars have yet to take that step. This comparative perspective is met with similar reserve in the post-Soviet world where the intellectual elites are wary of accepting a (post)colonial status. The glaring exceptions come mostly from the Baltic states and Poland, but they have been joined in recent years, among others and with notable results I might add, by a few Romanian scholars.

But wherefore this resistance? I will summarize the probable reasons in passing as I have dealt with them in detail elsewhere (Ștefănescu, *Postcommunism / Postcolonialism* 15-34). There are two kinds of reservations against a comparative approach to Western and Soviet coloniality: *epistemic* (intrinsic to the theory and methodology of the study of coloniality) and *contextual*. I will start with the latter because this discussion is less productive from a scholarly perspective. One such reason has to do with the specific social context of postcolonial studies as an academic domain. As it is derived from and subsumed to, cultural studies, postcolonialism has catered directly to the relevant needs of minorities and marginalized groups in the West. East Europeans and exiles from the communist bloc were not as significant socially, at least until the fall of the Soviet Union followed by the European Union expansion, as, say, the black or the native communities, females, non-heterosexuals, or immigrants from the former colonies of the West. These cultural minorities are far more important politically and economically, both inside and outside the walls of universities. With disciplines and departments multiplying in the social and human sciences against a less than generous endowment and a dwindling general interest, fighting for *Lebensraum* and resources in a university often trumps the solidarity between academic groups studying the various marginal cultures (Sagar 426). Postcolonial/cultural studies would not rush to open the gates and welcome postcommunism. David Chioni Moore has also intimated that there is a sordid financial advantage to postcolonial studies: by lumping together under the same category and discipline a several-billion section of the Earth's population, literature departments could only hire one academic for the entire Third World instead of one for each (sub)continent or region (113).

Another contextual reason for postcolonialism shying away from any association with postcommunist cultural studies is the *ideological embarrassment*. Although a certain ideology of postcolonialism has permeated and even conditioned its epistemic profile as well, I will treat the ideological reason as contextual because the study of postcommunist coloniality has shown that the ideologies of colonialism and anti-colonialism are neither necessary nor prescribed to a fixed role, but

instead they vary from one historical or cultural context to the other. However, this is something I will be discussing in the last section of my article.

The ideological resistance of postcolonialism might have conditioned the *epistemic presuppositions* which are meant to help explain (post)coloniality. The result is that sometimes the silence is broken, and we see mounted a theoretical opposition to the (post)colonial condition of Sovietized cultures. No doubt it is difficult to treat in conjunction the coloniality of Western and Soviet subalterns when you are constrained by a reductive description of colonialism as the sixteenth-to-twentieth-century oppression of racially different overseas populations by the Western invaders who slaughtered, enslaved, and exploited them, and who destroyed their traditions and identities together with their livelihood by virtue of their self-appointed role of a superior, civilizing society.

Janusz Korek believes that postcolonialist perceptions are limited by the preconceptions that it takes “classical colonies” and racial oppression in order for colonialism to exist and that none of these apply to Soviet colonialism. However, historian and theorist of colonialism Jürgen Osterhammel has eloquently dismantled the fixation on “classical colonies” by showing that there are three different types of colonies: exploitation colonies, maritime enclaves, and settlement colonies, the latter further dividing into an additional three different sub-types (10-12). He also replaces the racial criterion with the ethno-cultural one in explaining colonialist practice as a foreign domination that is disdainful and intolerant of otherness and that obliterates the colonized cultures (15-18). Even more to the point, Osterhammel explicitly warrants that “concepts of colonialism and decolonization might further our understanding of multicultural Soviet Union and neighboring satellite nations that were under its military control” (118). Similarly, when dealing with Soviet colonialism, Henry Carey and Rafal Raciborski identify three types of colonies: the “classical colonies” of Central Asia, the “inner colonies” of the Transcaucasus alongside the European Soviet republics, and the “arguable or semicolonies” of Central and Eastern Europe (210-211).

Yet another argument mounted against the comparative study of Western and Soviet colonialism claims that the two have disparate chronologies and that they were conditioned by unrelated historical contexts. However, Monika Albrecht has eloquently documented the lack of justification for this thesis in her “Introduction” to a volume of collected articles that “cross-examine” postcolonialism from non-West-centric angles. Her conclusion is that “the Ottoman Empire or the Soviet Empire shares certain characteristics with the simultaneously existing Western Empires” (13). Additionally, a number of researchers of (post)communist coloniality have suggested that a “long history” or “longer perspective” contradicts the grand narrative of mainstream postcolonialism (Hofmeyr 589, Götttsche in Albrecht 218). Some have even advocated new accounts of (post)coloniality that should focus less on historical embeddedness that they may reconceptualize the notions of colonist and colonized as part of *structural* relations of power rather than matters of historical and geographic circumstance (Ștefănescu, *Postcommunism / Postcolonialism* 39, Albrecht 15-16).

Even from a materialist perspective, there have been political-economic analyses of (post)colonialism in the Soviet(ized) states (see, for instance, Carey and Raciborski, or Chari and Verdery) which serve as perfect counterparts for the established anti-capitalist and anti-Western critiques. Freed from the theoretical limitations and preconceptions of mainstream postcolonialist discourse, postcommunist scholarship on comparative (post)coloniality was free to approach the field in novel ways and devise new categories and interpretive tools. In line with Osterhammel’s belief that colonialism is defined by cultural violence (15), postcommunist critiques have zeroed in on the cultural trauma inflicted by communist colonization as one of the shared features of Western and Soviet colonialisms (among others Kiossev, Dupcsik 37, Kovačević 18, Șandru 8-9, 31, Ștefănescu, *Postcommunism / Postcolonialism* 66-81, Pucherová, or Smola and Uffelman 9). Other postcommunist conceptual innovations to the comparative study of coloniality include a reluctant Maria Todorova’s “relative synchronicity” (*The Trap of Backwardness* 149-150), Milica Bakić-Hayden’s “nesting Orientalism,” Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek’s “filtered colonialism” and “in-between peripherality” (9,

10), Ovidiu Țichindelean's "intimate colonization" (135), Madina Tlostanova's "intersectional optics" (30), Cristina Șandru's "mutated colonialism" (24), Ștefănescu's "residual colonialism," "triangular identity formation," and "conceptual colonization" (*Postcommunism / Postcolonialism* 30, 41, 108-109, 213 and "Filling in the Historical Blanks" 108), "post-dependence" (Gosk), "dual periphery" (Skórczewski 87) and "double-centered peripherality" (Băicoianu 51), or the dislocation of the notion of "semi-colonialism" from the Leninist-Maoist propaganda and its postcommunist resemanticization (Lefter 119, Surdulescu 54-55, Andraș 107, Lazăr 223, Bideleux and Jeffries 169, Horvath 49, Carey and Raciborski 206).

The result of postcolonialism's oversights, whatever may have caused them, is that the entire Second World or the (post-)Sovietized region of the globe is entirely absent from all postcolonialist accounts of the supposedly global phenomenon of colonialism. Postcolonialist critics have consistently presented an amputated atlas of modern colonialism, and, again, Moore offered if not the first, at least one of the most eloquent demonstrations. He provides a telling example of how an "apparently exhaustive" overview of colonialism by Ella Shohat leaves a conspicuous blank space in the global map of colonizations:

the broadest range of nations is generally mentioned, both colonial and colonized, except for those of the former Soviet sphere. Ella Shohat's fine 1992 article "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial'" – today a classic postcolonial-studies reference – is an excellent case in point. . . . The great blank space on the map I have asked my reader to create is, of course, the former Soviet sphere and China. . . (Moore 115-116)

Truncating the map of global colonialism in the twentieth century is harmful in more than one way. It reduces the size of the phenomenon; it instrumentalizes a bowdlerized history of anti-colonialism and decolonization, and it also disparages the claims to colonial trauma for a great number of peoples on this planet. Historians should have no difficulty showing how the decision of the Western powers to grant Third World countries their independence was also part of a propagandist and ideological arm-wrestle between the Western and communist versions of

progress, modernization, and social justice (Chari and Verdery 18-22). It served as a Western counterstrike against the anti-colonialist Soviet cant and against the direct involvement of the Soviet bloc in the anti-colonial fight of the Third World against the West. The post-World War II clash between the West and the USSR meant a reshuffling of the geo-political map not just of Europe but also of the rest of the world, with old strategic positions being relinquished and new ones being sought in the new world domination power game. Cristina Șandru intimates that the analysis of Western neo-colonialism must be evaluated against the mirror of neo-colonialist conduct of the Soviet Union in order to draw a more exact map of postcolonialism and to understand the interconnectedness of the Three-Worlds system:

not only are there institutional, political and ideological overlaps between [*the Second and Third Worlds*], but also geographical ones (with areas of the “Third World” under the direct neo-colonial influence of the Soviet Union, and where quasi-socialist economic and political structures are either still present or in the process of being dismantled). (29-30)

A more convincing narrative of decolonization and anti-, neo-, and post-colonialism can only be told against the match-up between the capitalist West and the communist East. This can best be done, as explained by Sharad Chary and Katherine Verdery, by placing the Cold War at the center of our accounts of (post)colonialism and by recognizing the crucial role of Soviet colonialism and postcommunism in (post)colonial history (12). But the Cold War was a complicated affair, and Monica Popescu is right in concluding that “the Cold War needs to be understood as a complex confrontation rather than a Manichean conflict between the supporters of capitalism and those of communism” and that it produced “complicated alliances and points of divergence” (185).

Rather than being the simple binomial relation between the West and its colonies as postcolonialist critiques will have us believe, colonialism during and after the Cold War consists of multiple interactions between all Three Worlds or rather three systems/regimes – Western capitalism, Eastern communism, and their former dependent cultures. To start with, there was a direct relationship between the

Western and Eastern European colonial powers. Russia had always been intimidated by the power and prestige of Western civilization which it tried to emulate with its own colonialist and imperialist exploits. The inferiority complex, the mimicry, and the counter-colonial imperialist policy were inherited and continued by the Soviet Union which remained, like its Czarist predecessor, a “subaltern empire” (Morozov), while the rivalry between capitalist and communist models drove the world throughout the twentieth century and into the era of globalization (see, for instance, Gille’s overview). Additionally, each of these two giant power poles struggled to preserve and enhance its respective colonial fiefdom. At the same time, especially during the Cold War, each of them fought to loosen the adversary’s grip over its colonial dominions and spheres of influence by undermining its prestige and control, and by presenting itself as a valiant savior.

On top of all these interactions, there was also a direct relationship between the two types of subaltern cultures. Sovietized Europe was in turn a desirable model (African secessionists dreamt of “the Baltic states of Zaire: Katanga, Kasai, and Kivu,” while federalists like Buthelesi preached the “Yugoslavia option”) and a scare against the “Balkanization” of African politics and against falling prey to the more insidious type of colonialism to which Eastern Europe was a victim (Neuberger 528). Conversely, while magnanimously sharing its educational and technological superiority with the less fortunate brotherly nations of the Third World, the Sovietized Eastern Europe nevertheless envied their counterparts’ recently gained decolonization success and their exotic allure and self-confidence. Yet, even in recent postcommunist times, East European polemical discourse still deplores the region’s “Africanization” during and after the Soviet colonial occupation: Milan Šimečka claims his own Sovietized Czech culture became a kind of “spiritual Biafra” (qtd. in Todorova *Imagining the Balkans* 146), while the Yugoslavs of the 1990s felt they were living with the spectre of *Afrikanizacija*, “a grand metaphor for our region’s descent into a world of neo-colonialism” (Mayer 54).

Once these multiple interdependencies and influences are recognized, it becomes clear that the simplistic bipolar epistemology of postcolonialism, still constrained by the primitive Us versus Them

imagination, is inadequate for the understanding of global colonialism in the twentieth century. Instead, one must acknowledge that cultures are not inherently and essentially either colonialist or colonized, rather they assume structural and relational positions which can be de/activated in certain situations, such that one and the same culture may play a number of different roles in different (post)colonial conjunctures (Ștefănescu, *Postcommunism / Postcolonialism* 39, Florian Krobb in Albrecht 100). Yet, mainstream postcolonialism seems unaware of this, and, in order for the vast and shifting landscape of colonialism to fit into its two prescribed camps, it has levelled the cultural and political terrain in an unacceptable way. Șandru's dissatisfaction is entirely justified:

postcolonial theorists all too often conceptualise "Europe" as specifically *Western*, in effect replicating the homogenising gesture which construes the "Third World" as a unitary field of analysis. They treat "Europe" as their opposite pole, and as a result conflate their concept of "Europe" to fit the European/postcolonial binary opposition. Even while deploring the totalising gaze of Western knowledge that seeks to subsume distinct traditions, cultures and subjectivities under a coherent system of representation (such as "Orientalism"), many postcolonial critics perpetuate a similar type of epistemic violence by "erasing" from the intellectual and cultural map of Europe those small nations which have never been part of the imperial project. (19)

In the next section, I will be dealing with the inadequacy of this kind of binary logic as an explanatory mechanism for (post)coloniality in high and late modernity.

Beyond Binary Logic. The (Post)Communist Complication

More often than we would like, we have seen postcolonial criticism draw simplistic, polarized maps where the two contenders – the First World colonizers and the Third World colonized – are assigned fixed adversarial locations in a bubble that ignores the rest of the world. In its Manichean drive, the radical anti-capitalist discourse of postcolonialism simply volatilizes the Second World from the global landscape of modernity and postmodernity, thus generating reductive and ultimately inadequate accounts of coloniality in an effort to conceal the awkward historical

that arise baffle radical anticolonialist critics and cause failures and contradictions. In an exemplary fashion, Alastair Bonnett spots the inconsistencies in the argument of a Soviet apologist like Robert Young, who gauchely has to admit that “the Soviet government was at once anti-colonialist and colonialist” (Young 124). Incidentally, this was a truth that Kolarz and others like him have been exposing from the early 1950s onwards (*Communism and Colonialism* 14-23, *Russia and Its Colonies* 307-315). According to Bonnett, Young is apparently unable to break free from his Leninist sympathies, which is why “the issue of communist colonialism is raised by Young only to be pushed aside” in an effort to justify the colonial behavior of the Soviets in the Ukraine and the Central Asian republics (103-4). Finding that Young is not alone in his disregard of Soviet colonialism, which is more of a routine omission in postcolonial criticism, Bonnet picks up where Moore’s famous indictment left off, and unabashedly takes Edward Said to task for his similar critical blindness:

Yet Moore’s criticisms arise from the fact that this focus and this kind of omission have been routinized and, hence, become a form of avoidance. Indeed, we may add to Moore’s reading, by pointing out that Said’s mention of the way Russia first acquired its territories, is itself indicative of a politically myopic representation of colonialism. For while it acknowledges that pre-communist Russia was an imperial state, it draws a veil over the possibility that the Soviet Union might also have been a colonial regime. Indeed, the only substantive mention that the Soviet Union gets in *Culture and Imperialism* refers to its anti-colonial agitation. (99)

I find that critics like Hofmeyr, Gill, and Bonnett make a compelling argument for a more nuanced and complex depiction of colonality. And, while they are right to push postcolonial discourse beyond the reductive ideological dualism and the binary evaluation of the colonial condition, it is also clear that they are obviously preaching against the grain of mainstream postcolonial criticism. The situation is different, however, in the field of postcommunist cultural criticism, where it is precisely through such problematization and sophistication that the (post-)Soviet condition is defined in the study of colonality in Eastern Europe. Sensitive critics with more direct experience of Eastern European (post)communism protest the simplistic comparisons based on familiar and comfortable

binary oppositions. Tötösy de Zepetnek, for instance, has acquainted us with the notion that Central Europe has experienced a colonial status of “in-between peripherality” and has used the term to problematize the received and underdetermined categories of center and margin (13). Ewa Thompson has similarly questioned this binarism in connection with the Eastern European condition:

At the foundation of this “orientalization” of Others were such binary oppositions as we vs. they, West vs. East, Europe vs. the rest of the world, whites vs. blacks, better vs. worse. Recently, scholars have argued that such facile binarism falsifies the realities of other civilizations and drags them onto the Procrustean bed of Western concepts and social customs. (1)

Like Tötösy de Zepetnek and Thompson, Andrzej Szczerski has aptly claimed that in cultural regions like Central and Eastern Europe such unequivocal oppositions fail to operate, because here most self- and other-representations have always been ambiguous and confusing, leading to a traumatic erosion of identity. Szczerski insists that Central European art has to be understood through a deconstruction of the center-margin duality:

The peripheries become, then, a zone of tension between the normative and what questions the norm. The binary models such as ‘centre – province’ or ‘universal West – particular East’ are therefore dislodged once more as falsifying the actual tension generated by the constant exchange of ideas between the norm-text and its criticism-margin. (qtd. in Górska 204)

One reason for resisting the simplistic binary oppositions of postcolonial criticism is Eastern Europe’s unstable location between the West and the East. Historically, it has been perceived as a no-man’s-land which was neither recognized as the West (and, therefore, as Europe proper), nor comfortably dispatched to the remoteness of the Orient. Larry Wolff’s imagological monograph on the region documents this as a constant cause for identitarian concern since the Enlightenment. At the end of his *Inventing Eastern Europe*, he concludes that:

The Enlightenment's idea of Eastern Europe was based upon neither definitive exclusion nor unqualified inclusion, but rather on the powerful prerogative of formulating that dilemma. The philosophers, geographers, and travelers of the eighteenth century reserved the right to decide for themselves, or to pose the problem and leave it undecided. (364)

And Wolff aptly points out that this philosophical dilemma did not keep the West from making momentous political decisions about the region from a distance throughout the nineteenth century. Such decisions sometimes benefitted and sometimes hurt East European nations, but they almost always sanctioned territorial and political changes in the region, thus confirming the might of the West. Todorova promotes the "imputed ambiguity" of the Balkans to the rank of a defining feature of the discourse of Balkanism as opposed to the discourse of Orientalism which is predicated on an "imputed opposition" (*Imagining the Balkans* 17).

Wolff's historical account of the conceptual mapping of Eastern Europe, "a concept that flourished on its own instability" (358), makes it clear that the regional identity of this other Europe has been problematic and traumatizing for its inhabitants. In addition to the ambiguous intermediate location between East and West, the geo-cultural placement of Central and East European nations is further complicated by the constant and baffling shifting of state borderlines. As a result of the fluctuating fates of the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Czarist, Nazi, and Soviet empires, Eastern Europe appeared in history as "a domain of geo-political chaos, of sliding borders and slipping parts" (Wolff 362), and the tragic existential instability of its peoples has been absorbed in popular self-identifications in the area, sometimes under the guise of bitter laughter. A Hungarian site on migration quotes an anecdote which is, no doubt, familiar to the neighboring countries as well and which illustrates the trauma of impermanence and of volatile identities:

Uncle Cohen is speaking about his life: "I was born under the monarchy, I went to school in Czechoslovakia, I got married in Hungary, worked in the Soviet Union, and I am a Ukrainian citizen." One listener remarks, "You are a much traveled person." "Not at all," Uncle Cohen answers, "I never left my hometown..." (Juhász)

Péter Esterházy bitterly and parodically claims this is how East Europeans experience cosmopolitanism (74). Scholarly discourse is not free from this discomfiture. Todorova notes the many puzzling sub-categories concocted by area studies, such as *Mittleuropa*, *Westmitteleuropa*, *Ostmitteleuropa*, Central Europe (not the same as *Mittleuropa*), East-Central Europe, Southeast Europe, the Balkans, and so on (*Imagining the Balkans* 140-60). The abundance of such terms points to the failure of binarism and of simple oppositions like center/margin. For Milan Kundera “Central Europe is polycentral and looks different from different vantage points: Warsaw or Vienna, Budapest or Ljubljana” (12). Though “central,” this unfortunate “other Europe” was still expelled from *Kerneuropa*, the “core” and “true” Europe (Habermas and Derrida 292, Habermas 3) and left to waver between several marginalized positions. Like Andrzej Stasiuk and Adam Krzemiński Esterházy responded:

Once, I was an Eastern European; then I was promoted to the rank of Central European. Those were great times. . . . Then a few months ago, I became a New European. But before I had the chance to get used to this status—even before I could have refused it—I have now become a non-core European. (74)

So far, it may seem that the only snag about Eastern Europe is its uncertain intermediary position between the two cultural poles – the civilized West and the barbaric Third World/Orient. But there is yet another impediment to binary explanations: the interference of the Soviet Union *as a rival and inverted colonizing power* in the historical development of the region. After World War II, East Europeans found themselves confronted with several unacceptable options: to acquiesce to the imperfect Oriental identity enforced by the West, to become an imperfect example of Asian communism under Soviet pressure, or to struggle with their failed European identity. The process of identity formation in the region was hindered and distorted by the painful confrontation with two hegemonic centers, and like the physical territories themselves, the consciousness of CEE subjects became the battlefield where two colossal civilizations clashed over this disputed colonial space whose inhabitants were deemed marginal by both contenders, although in

different ways and for different reasons. In the collision between these alternative discourses of progress and modernization, Eastern Europe (and arguably the Western postcolonies as well) became aware of both the importance and *the versatility of ideologies*. This will be the subject of the next section, where I will try to offer a solution to the ideological confrontation between postcolonialist and postcommunist discourses.

Beyond Ideology: A Coda

Postcolonialist studies are dominated by various denominations of Marxism and by anti-capitalist, anti-Western vituperations. This makes it awkward to admit the historical evidence of a Marxism-driven, socialist colonialism whose victims were Caucasian peoples, people of the same race, or even European nations. To add insult to injury, postcommunist scholarship insists on exposing, anatomizing, and condemning communist colonialism with non- or even anti-Marxist agendas. Moore was possibly the first Western scholar to denounce this as the reason behind postcolonialism's refusal to acknowledge Soviet colonialism. He explains that, from the very beginning, postcolonialist criticism has rested on "the belief, not without reason, that the First World largely caused the Third World's ills, and an allied belief that the Second's socialism was the best alternative," to which he adds that "many postcolonialist scholars, in the United States and elsewhere, have been Marxist or strongly left and therefore have been reluctant to make the Soviet Union a French- or British-style villain" (117). Moore is not alone in claiming that ideological embeddedness is why postcolonialism has kept silent about (post-)Soviet coloniality. He has been joined by many postcommunist scholars including Mircea Martin, Rodica Mihăilă, C. Șandru, Violeta Kelertas, Karl E. Jirgens, Vytautas Rubavičius, or Kārlis Račevskis, to name just a few (Ștefănescu, *Postcommunism / Postcolonialism* 22-34). Moore also notes a mirrored reluctance on the part of post-Soviet scholars to acknowledge their postcolonial condition and to employ the critical arsenal of postcolonialism. He imputes it, on the one hand, to the "racial" divide – Sovietized subaltern cultures with a claim to Europeanness do not identify with the racially different Third World postcolonies. On the other hand, Moore feels that it is a "compensatory behavior" typical of peoples

submitted to prolonged subjugation. A mimicry of the Western discourse of cultural supremacy is quite common in post-Soviet cultures, which would prefer a Western European, rather than a Second or Third World identity that involves racial otherness (117-8).

In broaching the “postcoloniality” of postcommunist Europe, Neil Lazarus is making a show of objectivity and historical broad-mindedness, but ultimately is unable to break free from what seems to be his commitment to a Marxist, therefore clearly ideologized agenda. In spite of his pretense at impartiality, the result both undermines the attempt to revise the common postcolonialist explanations of colonialism and renders inequitable his dissimilar treatment of postcolonialism and postcommunism. Lazarus starts by crediting Moore’s assessment of Soviet colonialism, which he also finds undeniable, and accepts the need for “a broader-based geo-historical comparativism than has hitherto been in evidence in the field” (7). However, he immediately claims that putting this expanded comparativism in practice faces an obstacle which he refers to in strangely metaphoric terms: “the *fields of vision* generally governing ‘postcolonial’ and ‘post-Soviet’ criticism, respectively, constitute a block to rigorous historical understanding of colonialism” (8, emphasis mine). As far as I can tell, the metaphor may mean “perspective” or “point of view.” So, what are these perspectives which supposedly preclude historical precision? Lazarus claims that both critical camps misunderstand what Europe and the West should mean, for which they offer an unwarranted homogenizing image. While there seems to be an inverse symmetry in Lazarus’ treatment of the two critical positions, postcommunist discourse appears to err more grievously: not only does it homogenize an otherwise diverse Europe and Western world, thus contradicting itself (post-Soviet cultures cannot claim to be *both* “core” European, i.e., modern, *and* postcolonial at the same time), but, unlike the postcolonialist, it is headed recklessly in the wrong direction because it sympathizes with capitalism and the (Orientalist) Western canon. It all becomes clear now. In order to be historically rigorous, you need to embrace *the right ideology*. After all, and in spite of the show of impartiality and historical precision, Lazarus is taking an ideological stand which conditions his scholarly accuracy, and which he had made clear from the very beginning in the abstract that precedes his article:

On the “post-Soviet” side, I worry both about a premature (if understandable) anti-Marxism and a tendency to insist precisely on that narrative of “the west” that postcolonial studies, in its indispensable critique of Eurocentrism, has managed to dislodge. (5)

Albrecht has rightly pointed out that not all of the East-Central European scholars who criticize Soviet colonialism are anti-Marxist (15). The trouble is that most (not all) Western scholars who are willing to “grant” postcommunism a postcolonial status are careful to restrict admission in the select club of postcolonialist scholarship to Marxist or socialist sympathizers. Chari and Verdery’s article “Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War” is another case in point. While offering an uncompromising criticism of “actually existing socialism,” deploring the separation between postcolonialist studies and postsocialist studies, and providing a number of solid reasons why the connections between the two disciplinary fields are warranted and would benefit all, the authors are very clear about the kind of postsocialist scholarship they endorse:

Though many postsocialist critics, academic and otherwise, continued to view Marxism with some suspicion as the ideology of totalitarian socialist states, some, such as Burawoy, championed the usefulness of Marxism for understanding concrete struggles and outcomes after socialism. In other words, while many postcolonial scholars fled from Marxist political economy for new kinds of archival, textual, and philosophically informed critique, some postsocialist scholars turned to ethnographic fieldwork, sometimes with Marxist tools, in order to fight World Bank orthodoxy. (9)

I have already pleaded for epistemological consistency in the study of postcoloniality – scholars should stay true to their principles of anti-essentialism and the historical embeddedness of cultural discourses (*Postcommunism / Postcolonialism* 35-36). This must also be applied to the evaluation of all ideological positions. Ideologies are not ethereal abstractions and do not have inherent meaning or value. They must be subjected to validation procedures that judge them within their respective historical contexts with as much non-partisan scientific rigor as is available at the time. It is only in such contexts of occurrence that they

acquire benefits or incur damages and they should be judged in such terms as opportunity, occasion, timeliness, or adequacy to their contexts.

The discourses of humanism, liberal democracy, capitalism, and modernization, while continuously perfectible, have provided excellent instruments for the liberation of individuals and communities, and they have served, among other things, to free people from communist (as well as other) totalitarian regimes, from Soviet colonialism, and from Marxist indoctrination. Leftist discourses, including some parts of the Marxist canon and some varieties of Marxism, have been equally apt in providing instruments that helped deliver people from slavery, the colonialist exploitation, and the Orientalist indoctrination they suffered at the hands of certain Western countries. Or, as I put it elsewhere: “Marxism and liberalism may acquire similar emancipatory values in the circumstances provided by postcolonialism and postcommunism, respectively” (*Postcommunism / Postcolonialism* 40). And sometimes the anti-colonial and emancipatory mind frame was an undecided mixture of both these contending ideologies. Today we find ourselves in a particular historical conjunction of different cultural and political contexts, none of which are the same as those of either Western or Soviet twentieth-century colonialism. Postcoloniality should, indeed, be approached through an open-minded, expanded comparativism which must select from the theoretical and analytical arsenals of both postcolonialist and postcommunist studies, and must, no doubt, imagine new investigative tools in order to bring it all together in novel explanatory narratives. This must be an act of epistemic daring in which our understanding of (post)coloniality may juggle ingeniously both the old and the new, both the *alazon*-like discourse of no matter which hegemon and the *eiron*-like counter-discourses of resistance. A feat that calls for an enlightened *bricoleur*-cum-engineer – and a vexation to Lévi-Strauss’ clean dichotomy, to be sure (Lévi-Strauss 19).

Notes:

ⁱ I am referring to its mainstream, dominant variants, that is, *both* the more radical and materialist (or “hardcore”) discourses *and* the simplified, defused versions of poststructuralist/postmodernist stances within postcolonialist criticism—in other words, the academic vulgate of postcolonialism.

ⁱⁱ Trans-colonialism is a term that indicates not just the transnational nature of colonialism in the global age, it also refers to the interconnectedness of various types, agents, and domains of colonialism. See Ștefănescu, "The Complicated Selves of Transcolonialism" for a more detailed description of transcolonialism.

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