

Is There an East-Central European Postcolonialism? Towards a Unified Theory of (Inter)Literary Dependency

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ABSTRAKT

This paper interrogates the existence of an East-Central European (post)colonialism, which has known considerable dissemination in the postcolonial studies of the last decade. There are two versions to the thesis mentioned: (1) that of “remote” (post)colonialism, according to which East-Central Europe was the field of a colonization carried out by the great Western powers (especially the United Kingdom, France and the USA), which was seen in the construction and propagation of the so-called “East-European Orientalism”; and (2) that of (post)colonialism “by annexation”, according to which East-Central Europe was colonized by the regional empires (particularly the Soviet Union and its predecessor, the Tsarist Empire, but also by the German, Hungarian and Ottoman Empires). My premise is that, in order to become a truly efficient analytical instrument, postcolonialism requires integration in a unified theory of (inter)literary dependency and, at the same time, it must be dissociated from certain concepts that concern interrelated phenomena, such as imperialism, domination or oppression. On this view, the thesis of “remote” postcolonialism is rejected, as “Orientalization” is a process which was applied not only by Western Europe to Eastern Europe, but it can equally well be said to characterize the relations between countries situated only in the West or only in the East of Europe. Therefore, in its current configuration, such a thesis faces the danger of blending any conceptual distinction in a postcolonialism without shores. In order to prevent such conceptual indeterminacy, the thesis of (post)colonialism “by annexation” is reformulated here within a theory of (inter)literary dependency, based on Wallerstein’s world-systems analysis, Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory and Āurišin’s theory of interliterary process. Against this new background, my study differentiates among four types of “dependent” literatures – minority, marginal, (post)colonial and mimetic – which are then used in the characterization of the position of East-Central European literatures over the past two centuries. The conclusion of this paper is that, with the exception of the former Soviet Republics, postcolonialism represents a valid instrument in the analysis of East-Central European literatures only for several provinces in the Tsarist and Austro-Hungarian Empires. However, in a broader context, the quadripartite classification I propose can serve as a conceptual device for the exploration of the interliterary relations characteristic of East-Central Europe literatures over the past two centuries.

Over the past two decades, the collapse of the communist regimes in East-Central Europe and the accession of several countries in the region to the European Union have generated more than a string of new social, political and economic phenomena; they have also led to a renegotiation of the condition and frontiers of specific domains in the field of the humanities and social sciences. Among these, the one subject which was impacted most, undoubtedly, the discipline known, prior to 1990, as “Sovietology” or “Soviet studies,” which, subsequent to the political interest in the countries behind the Iron Curtain, had tended to dominate the study of East-Central European societies and cultures in Western universities. After the fall of the Soviet Union, experts in this field had to redefine both their object of study and their approach. Admittedly, some of them continued along the lines of the earlier paradigm, merely updating it in the form of post-Soviet, post-socialist or post-communist studies. Others drew attention to the fact that the polymorphous identity of this area could not be limited to communism and, consequently, opted for an area studies perspective, materialized as (Russian and) East(-Central) European studies. Finally, a third group of researchers attempted to integrate the entire field in a global frame, from the vantage point of the recently established postcolonial studies.

The origins of postcolonial studies are, on the one hand, in the increased interest in non-Western cultures and societies shown by Western academic establishments after the Second World War, and, on the other hand, in several seminal works by authors born in Third World countries, such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon or Albert Memmi, published in the 1950s and the 1960s. By merging sociological analysis and cultural criticism with obvious political stands, they drew attention to the oppressive nature of the Western colonial discourse, which, under the pretext of “civilizing” various “primitive” or “underdeveloped” peoples from Africa, the Caribbean and the Middle East, had, in effect, developed a system of economic exploitation and cultural domination. As a field of academic inquiry, however, postcolonial studies came to the fore only in the second half of the ninth decade, with several key stages marked by the publication of Edward Said’s masterpiece, *Orientalism* (1978), and the 1983 MLA panel on the topic of “Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse”, attended by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. The three mentioned above rank among the most important scholars who, at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, developed the theoretical foundation of postcolonial studies, a discipline that, once established in universities in the English-speaking countries, gradually gained ground throughout the world.¹ By appropriating a specific vocabulary, focused on concepts such as “Other(ing)”, “Orientalism”, “subaltern”, “mimicry”, “hybridity”, “creolization” etc., postcolonial studies undertook the analysis as well as the criticism of the institutional forms in the (former) colonial countries. In fact, the imbrication of a political stand with academic practice stems from the ambivalence of the prefix “post-”, which, as frequently noted, means not merely (or not only) “after the end of colonialism”, but (also) “after the beginning of neo-colonialism”, which materializes as an insidious remnant of colonial discourse in postcolonial countries.

This ambivalence explains why postcolonial scholars generally agree on their purpose rather than on the object they need to study. Given that, in certain cases, (post)colonialism occurred covertly rather than overtly, the issue was raised of the

legitimacy of extending Postcolonial studies beyond the territories of “historic” colonialism, i.e. in countries that, without being officially “colonies” of Western empires, had a similar status to the latter (e.g., the countries in the former Soviet bloc or Tibet under Chinese domination). But, far from being mere examples of “traveling concepts”, such an extension would call for a reconsideration of the very understanding of (post)colonialism as such. Therefore, I will not begin my approach with a didactic definition of postcolonialism (such a definition would cancel, from the onset, though arbitrarily, the problem that I intend to settle here); rather, I will discuss postcolonialism as a reading mode which can be applied more or less successfully to different contexts. However, I will also try to avoid the risk of turning postcolonialism into an all-purpose (i.e. good for nothing) “sponge-concept” and I will focus, while tackling a liminal case such as East-Central European literatures, on obtaining, if not necessarily a standard definition, at least a clearer delineation of this phenomenon.

The thesis of an East-Central European postcolonialism, launched in the 1990s by Western scholars coming from this geopolitical region and later adopted, to various extents, also in the countries of their origin, springs from the premise that the condition of the countries in this region does not differ in essence, but in details from the (post)colonial experience undergone, in the modern age, by most African, South Asian and Latin American countries. However, such a hypothesis is far from being dominant at present either in the field of East-Central European studies, or in that of postcolonial studies; additionally, its endorsement is made tacitly rather than by engaging in counterarguments. For example, in the recent *Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, not only is there no chapter dedicated to East-Central European countries, but the editor of the two volumes does not even consider the possibility of including one.² Hence a certain polemic vehemence of East-Central Europe postcolonial theorists, visible, for instance, in the programmatic statement of the editors of the recent issue of *Journal for Postcolonial Writing*, in whose opinion, the fact that Western postcolonial studies did not “take notice of the anti-imperialist implications of the 1989-91 velvet revolutions crowning the decade of change in East-Central Europe” merely reveals their “bizarrely parochial” nature, if not even a certain complicity with Soviet imperialism.³

WHO’S WHO IN POSTCOLONIAL EUROPE

On this view, can it be said that there has been a *factual* (post)colonialism in East-Central Europe? Raised in these restrictive terms, this question is strictly rhetorical (and, therefore, uninteresting), because, as opposed to the maritime Western powers, the empires that occupied East-Central Europe never assigned colonial status to the territories they ruled in this region. A more relevant challenge can be formulated as two interrelated questions: (1) To what extent is it legitimate to *read as (post)colonial* the literatures created in East-Central Europe over the past two centuries? (2) What would we gain if we used such a procedure? However, before attempting to answer these questions, I need to clarify a preliminary issue. The fact that East-Central European (post)colonialism – if such a thing exists – was not institutionalized as such, but was always an implicit, concealed phenomenon, disguised in other forms of political and cultural dependency, has stirred numerous controversies not only with respect to

the colonized (where and when did “colonization” occur?), but also to the colonizers (who and, especially, how did they do it?). In what follows, I engage in a systematization of the various points of view.

In the field of East-Central European literary studies, it is likely that the notion of “postcolonialism” was used programmatically for the first time by Stephen Tötösy de Zepetnek, the editor of a special section in an issue of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, published in 1995. There he stated: “Based on the assumption that the former USSR may be understood as centre by its political, military, economic and ideological parameters in its relationships with its satellite countries, *East Central European* countries are understood as the periphery in relation to the Soviet centre and consequently, as postcolonial situations.”⁴ However, the first clear enunciation of this thesis comes from David Chioni Moore, who, in a 2001 article that turned into a reference point in the bibliography dedicated to this issue, claimed that: “it should be clear that the term ‘postcolonial’ and everything that goes with it – language, economy, politics, resistance, liberation and its hangover – might reasonably be applied to the formerly Russo- and Soviet-controlled regions post-1989 and -1991, just as it has been applied to South Asia post-1947 or Africa post-1958.”⁵

The USSR (and, by extension, Tsarist Russia) is not, however, the only candidate for the status of former colonial power in East-Central Europe; arguably, the German, Habsburg and Ottoman Empires competed against Russia in order to colonize this geopolitical area in the 19th century. More relevantly, it has been claimed that East-Central European countries (including Russia/USSR!) have been the object of “colonization” by the great Western European empires (particularly France and England) and by the United States. In its most radical form, this interpretation was expressed by Nataša Kovačević, according to whom neo- or post-colonialism has taken the shape of an “East European Orientalism” manifested as “a long history of Western attempts to identify Western Europe as enlightened, developed and civilized in distinction to Eastern Europe and, as a result, to intellectually master Eastern Europe through description and classification, fixing it into stereotypes of lamentable cultural, political or economic backwardness (e.g. agrarian, old-fashioned, despotic, totalitarian, obedient, abnormally violent, bloodthirsty), or, alternatively, praiseworthy conservation of its ‘noble savages’ (here, pallid Western city-dwellers, enervated by industrial fumes or corporate discipline, are contrasted with big, healthy, lazy, and gregarious Eastern Europeans).”⁶

The two dimensions of the East-Central European “(post)colonialism” do not necessarily exclude each other; on the contrary, they often meet in the studies of the region and are even seen as defining elements for the geopolitical profile of this area. Thus, Stephen Tötösy de Zepetnek believes that the status of East-Central European societies and cultures after the Second World War must be read as an “in-between peripherality”, determined by the attractive force of three cores: a Marxist/Socialist one, an Indigenous one and a Western one.⁷ A similar position (which eliminates, however, the “indigenous” hub) is defended by Janusz Korek, editor-in-chief of the online journal *Postcolonial Europe*, specializing in postcolonial approaches to East-Central Europe in the past three years;⁸ and, equally, by the editors of the already mentioned issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, for whom East-Central Eu-

rope is a “doubly postcolonial” region, whose discourse interrogates not only “the former imperial power”, but also “the West” as “both historically complicit with the political subjugation of the region behind the Iron Curtain and at the same time functioning at present as a peripheralizing metropolis.”⁹ In what follows I discuss these two approaches separately, as they do not exclude each other, but they are not necessarily interconnected either.

AGAINST A POSTCOLONIALISM WITHOUT SHORES

The first thesis is that of “remote” (post)colonialism, according to which, as shown before, East-Central European countries were (and still are) an area of (neo)colonial relations with the great Western powers (especially England and France, and, more recently, the United States; Germany is not included – it is a special case, because this country continues to share borders with some Central European countries). In the form rendered by Kovačević (but frequently circulated in the postcolonial studies applied to East-Central Europe), this thesis has two versions: a *hard* (mainly political) version, which incriminates as “imperialist” the conditions required by the European Union and NATO from the states adhering to or recently admitted to these supranational bodies;¹⁰ and a *soft* (mainly cultural) version, for which (post)colonialism is manifest as “Eastern European Orientalism.” Of these, I focus, for now, on the soft version of “remote” postcolonialism, as the hard version is articulated particularly at the political level, which would render it relevant to sociology, economy and politics rather than to literary studies;¹¹ and, moreover, its cultural implications are included or, at any rate, rely on the data provided by the soft version. Therefore, I propose to undertake a discussion of the hard version only after – and especially if – the plausibility of the soft version is confirmed.

This soft version of the thesis relies on two strong arguments. First, it is the very use of the concept of “Orientalism”, theorized by Edward Said in his famous 1978 book, that has been for more than three decades one of the most solid theoretical platforms of postcolonial studies; secondly, the fact that, over the past two decades, East-Central, Eastern and/or South-Eastern Europe represented, to the Western imaginary, a target for the projections of “Otherness” somewhat similar to the Middle East. In fact, this was proven, before Kovačević, by two of the most pertinent works of imagology and cultural critique published in the 1990s and signed by Larry Wolff and Maria Todorova.¹² Despite these arguments, I believe that approaches of the kind undertaken by Kovačević generally make three mistakes: first of all, they look at the “West” and “East” of Europe as clearly delineated and relatively homogeneous geopolitical units;¹³ secondly, they consider that Orientalism is both a necessary and sufficient criterion of postcolonialism;¹⁴ finally, they expand the notion of “postcolonialism” to such an extent that it becomes useless.

I argue that these three claims are deeply questionable. First, the “West” of Europe is far from being a monolith which exerts its colonial domination on another monolith, the “Eastern” one. While it is true that the ostentatious assertion of the differences between East and West generally materializes as an “Orientalization” of the East, it is equally pertinent that such phenomena occurred both *in* the “West” and *in* the “East” of Europe. For example, for a large part of what we usually call “Western”

Europe, the identity opposition against the “East” was crossed in the last two centuries by another opposition, which is no less important: the one between the “North” and the “South.” As shown in an excellent book by Roberto Dainotto,¹⁵ the image of an uncivilized, old-fashioned, violent, despotic, lazy etc. “other” was assigned by the French, the English and the Germans not only to the “Eastern” people, but also to the inhabitants of certain “Southern” countries, such as Italy, Spain or Portugal. On the other hand, a similar division took place in “Eastern” Europe, where imaginary borders were drawn between “Central” Europe (including mainly countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) and the Balkan states.¹⁶ Finally, Russia itself was “orientalized” not only by the “West”, but also by other Eastern European nations, which often qualified it as a gregarious, savage, irrational “other.”¹⁷

Thus, on the one hand, the “West” and the “East” are not clearly delineated and homogeneous units, within which hetero-images coincide with auto-images; and, on the other hand, Orientalism is an insufficient clue for the adequate circumscription of (post)colonialism. Certainly, Orientalism was used frequently as a *pretext* and subsequent *justification* of colonialism; but it is not a *criterion* for the existence of the latter. If it were, we would obtain a series of anomalous frames. For example, we would have to accept that countries which grew in the modern age as colonial powers (Spain, Portugal and Italy) were, in fact, in their turn mere colonies of more powerful countries in Western Europe (England and France); or else we would accept that Russia itself had been, at least until 1945/1948, a colony of smaller countries in Eastern Europe (such as Romania), which is plainly absurd.

I am not saying that the West did not exert a significant domination over the East-Central European countries over the past two centuries. I believe, however, that this relation cannot be limited to “(post)colonialism,” but it must be included in a larger frame of both political and literary dependency. Otherwise, the risk is to simply equate postcolonialism with any form of dependency/domination. However, such a possibility, far from emphasizing the crucial importance of postcolonial studies in the current humanities (in the form of the so-called “global postcolonial critique” envisaged by David Chioni Moore), would in fact cancel the utility of the concept. A concept is relevant in relation to a certain research field only to the extent to which it (*it only*) can contribute to the formulation (and, implicitly, the solution) of certain problems, which other concepts cannot grasp. Consequently, postcolonialism is a useful concept in the criticism of (inter)literary imperialism/ domination/ dependency only when it refers to *some* forms, and not to *all* the forms of imperialism/ domination/ dependency; otherwise, it becomes simply a fallacious substitute for concepts such as “imperialism,” “domination” or “dependency”.

FOUR TYPES OF (INTER)LITERARY DEPENDENCY

As the hypothesis of a postcolonialism without shores tends to cancel the utility of the concept as such, I think we need to dissociate postcolonialism from other forms of (inter)literary dependency. It is what I intend to do in what follows, by drawing a conceptual frame which borrows elements from Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems analysis, Dionýz Ďurišin’s theory of interliterary process and Itamar Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory. Several preliminary observations are essential here.

First, the relation between the metropolis and the colony is a mere particularization of a broader dependency that we can describe, in terms of world-systems analysis, as a relation between core and periphery.¹⁸ Secondly, I will use one of Itamar Even-Zohar's fundamental dissociations, according to which "literary interference" (as a form of dependency) occurs only when a culture acknowledges the ascendancy of another culture either owing to its "prestige" (as a "model to emulate"), or owing to its "dominance" (based on "extra-cultural conditions").¹⁹ Finally, I find important Dionýz Ďurišin's warning that (inter)literary communities are not organized according to a single principle, but rather according to a plurality of factors, among which ethnic, linguistic, geographic and administrative criteria are determinative.²⁰ Consequently, we can circumscribe certain "minimal ethno-literary communities," a notion that should include, in my opinion, not only "national literatures" as envisaged by Ďurišin, but also what the Slovak comparatist calls "modern ethnic literatures".²¹ In Ďurišin's view, the two terms mentioned indicate "majority" and "minority" literatures, respectively, produced in the modern era in the nation or federal states. In order to save space, I will simply use the indefinite phrase "(a) literature" to name a (relatively) autonomous literary system that corresponds to a "minimal ethno-literary community" and is characterized by ethnic, linguistic and administrative unity (the geographic factor is less relevant here, as are the distinctions between literary "groups" and "schools"). Starting from these coordinates, I will try to approximate the extent and manner in which these systems depend on other systems, in terms of both their production ("interferences") and their reception (the need of external homologation). More specifically, I distinguish here four kinds of literary dependency, i.e. four types of "literatures":

1. Minority literatures, which operate as literary (sub)systems that do not hold (yet) the state of "national" literary systems (as defined by Ďurišin). In other words, these are literary works whose language does not coincide with the "national" language of the country/region where they were published. Typical examples include Hungarian literature published in Romania or in Slovakia or literary works published in Galician, Catalan and Basque before the fall of Franco's regime. Minority literatures must not be mistaken for minor literatures. A "minor literature" indicates the position of a literature in the world literary system, whereas the term "minority literature" indicates the position of a literature in a determined administrative unit (most often a "national" state). For these reasons, French literature of the past five centuries is a "major" literature *par excellence*; but, in certain cases, it (or, at least, a subdivision of it) is also a minority literature (e.g., French literature written in Alsace-Lorraine in the Second Reich period).

2. Marginal literatures, which, although produced/published within the (national or multinational) literary system of a certain country, still linger in a dependency relation (at least a linguistic one, if not even an ethnic one) to the literary system of another country. The typical case of marginal literature is exile and diaspora literature defined, from a certain point of view, as a periphery of literature created in the writers' country of origin. At the same time, many of minority literatures are also marginal literatures, in relation not to the literary system of the country where they are written, but to the literary system of another country, whose "national" language co-

incides with the language in which the book was published. For example, Hungarian literature from Romania is a minority literature in Romania, but a marginal literature in Hungary. A literature can be marginal in relation to another one even when the language in which the relevant works were written is acknowledged as a “national” language in the country of their publication. This is the case of federal states such as Belgium or Switzerland (whose literatures in French are marginal in relation to French literature published in France), but also of “national” states such as the Republic of Moldova (whose literature written in Romanian is marginal in relation to literature in Romania).

3. (Post)colonial literatures are literatures produced by the native populations in the territories that are/were under colonial domination. Typical examples include the literatures created in the Caribbean, in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Fundamental to the understanding of the specificity of these literatures is a certain ambiguity resulting from their (post)colonial condition. On the one hand, it is known that colonies exhibit a certain political alterity in relation to the metropolis, so that the status of their native inhabitants does not fit the classical paradigm of minorities in nation states. On the other hand, the acknowledgement of such alterity does not materialize in full autonomy (specific to federal states), because the native population does not have citizenship rights equal to those of metropolitan inhabitants. Hence the ambiguity typical of (post)colonial cultures, which postcolonial theorists assimilate in terms such as “ambivalence,” “hybridization” or “mimicry”²² and which could be described, from an (inter)literary point of view, as an oscillation between the condition of minority literature and that of marginal literature. On the one hand, postcolonial literatures remain connected to their vernacular languages and their native cultures, so that they tend to be enclosed as distinct “minorities” within the dominant literary system. On the other hand, postcolonial literatures tend to adopt the metropolitan language and, thus, integrate as marginal literatures, within the dominant literary system.²³ In reality, however, they achieve fully none of these possibilities, because postcolonial mimicry always means “almost the same, but not quite”²⁴ and it is precisely this indetermination that marks the specificity of this category of literature.

4. Mimetic literatures denote literary systems that replicate literatures written in countries on which they do not depend in any way, politically or linguistically. Certainly, (inter)literary mimetism must not be mistaken for traditional *mimesis*: the latter operates along the “literary representation – reality” axis and it is used mainly in poetics, while the former operates exclusively on the “literary representation – literary representation” axis and was borrowed from cultural anthropology.²⁵ Moreover, although the mimetic phenomenon frequently resembles in structure what Homi Bhabha called (post)colonial *mimicry*, the causes and meanings of the two processes are profoundly different. Whereas *mimicry* is forcedly caused by the expansion of metropolitan culture, mimetism is, instead, a phenomenon initiated by the target-culture that is permanently free to choose from among a larger number of literary models. On the other hand, whereas postcolonial *mimicry* risks leading to acculturation and the deletion of the identity marks of the “peripheral” literary system, “voluntary” mimetism often acts as a catalyst that stimulates the construction of an ethno-cultural identity. Typical instances include the circulation of German nationalism and

romanticism in East-Central Europe during the first half of the 19th century, a period when Germany was not yet an imperial power; or the circulation of French symbolism at the end of the same century. In both cases the selection was made by peripheral literatures which were thus able to (re)invent their own literary traditions.

Several general observations are needed with respect to this classification. First of all, we must specify that the “core” – “periphery” opposition and thus the distinction between the four types mentioned above are relational and not substantial categories. This is why a literature that operates as the core for another literature can be, in its turn, peripheral in relation to another, more powerful literature (these may be called “semiperipheral literatures,” in an attempt to adapt here one of Wallerstein’s terms). However, we may ask whether certain literatures, which are (almost) always at the top of the pyramid, form a fifth category, the category of non-dependent or independent literatures. A (negative) answer to this question is suggested by the three “general principles of cultural interferences” proposed by Itamar Even-Zohar: (1) “interference is always imminent,” therefore, there are no isolated cultures; (2) “interference is mostly unilateral,” therefore, interference is manifested as dependency; but (3) “interference does not necessarily occur on all levels of culture,” which I could rephrase in the sense that, in reality, no literature can dominate all the literatures with which it interferes, *at all levels*; even literatures that, at some point in time, appeared as the core of world literature depended on another literature *at least at a certain level*. Finally, we need to add that, since they are relative and not essential categories, several types of (inter)literary dependency can coexist in the profile of the same literature and, furthermore, the very status of an ethno-literary community is defined by the nature of the dependency relations it contracts or abandons along its history. For example, American literature remained a postcolonial literature until the end of the 19th century,²⁶ then it alternated between the condition of marginal literature in the British literary system and the condition of mimetic literature in relation to modern French literature, and in the second half of the 20th century attained the core role within world literature.

THE LIMITS OF (POST)COLONIALISM IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

In what follows I return to the other interpretation of East-Central European postcolonialism, which approaches the dependency of the area’s states and cultures on the metropolitan powers situated in the same geopolitical region rather than on the Western empires. I begin by examining the situation of the Soviet Union, which, in fact, was the most frequently debated and most solidly argued case, and which, to a certain extent, seems to stand out due to its blatancy. Indeed, at least in the first post-war decade (from the installation of the communist regimes in 1945/1948 until the 1956 “de-Stalinization”), in some cases even longer (until the first half of the 1960s), the literature of all East-Central European states was dominated firmly by the so-called “method of creation” required according to the Soviet model: the socialist realism. Nevertheless, I believe that to classify this type of literature as (post)colonial would be a mistake on account of at least three aspects. First, (post)colonial literature is the result of an imperialist discourse that attempts to universalize a certain concept of the nation (French, English etc.), to which class membership is a secondary issue;

however, as “party literature,” socialist realism attempts to universalize a certain idea of class (“the working class”), for which nationalism is a bourgeois reminiscence to be eradicated. Secondly, literary colonialism required models that in the metropolis were perceived as “organic” products; socialist realism, instead, was required equally forcedly and artificially both in the metropolis and in the alleged “colonies.” Finally, the dominant nature of the metropolitan culture marginalized but did not annihilate the native cultures in the (post)colonial territories – hence the effect of “hybridization”; but in the East-Central European countries of the 1950s, socialist realism was *the only* existing literature. It is precisely these differences that outline, I believe, the specificity of socialist realism in relation to (post)colonialism. The fact that socialist realism was required with equal insistence in the mother-country and in the alleged “colonies” indicates that it was not a strategy to civilize the “*other*,” but merely an instrument of propaganda and control used by the communist countries against *their own* citizens. Therefore, socialist realism does not fit in the paradigm of (post)colonialism, but only in the totalitarian one; it pertains to a sense of extra-literary dependencies rather than to a sense of inter-literary relations.

But what about the periods preceding and following socialist realism in East-Central Europe? I believe this is where we should distinguish between the countries that were included in the USSR before 1945 (Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic states, etc.) and those that fell under the USSR sphere of influence after the Second World War (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria). In the latter group of countries, the governments were always local (even if supported or endorsed tacitly by Kremlin); although introduced after 1945 as the favoured “foreign language,” Russian never became the official language in any of these states; there were no massive migrations (“colonizations”) of USSR people to these countries; there were, however, various autonomist movements holding the status of state politics (the Hungarian Revolution, the Prague Spring, etc.); there weren’t major cultural “hybridizations” between these countries and the USSR, although many of the satellite-states were already sharing certain ethno-linguistic affinities with the so-called “metropolis” (Slavophilism); but, most importantly, after 1964, all these states saw the rebirth of a powerful re-bonding with the West as well as a rebirth of nationalism.²⁷ The privileged cultural relationship of all these countries with the USSR was admittedly preserved until 1989, but in the satellite-states the Russian cultural influence began being competed against and even surpassed by the Western European influences even before the fall of communism.²⁸ Therefore, between 1964 and 1989, East-Central European literatures oscillated between two types of mimetism (Russian and West European) – or, better still, opted fully for Western mimetism in order to prevent the risk of Soviet cultural colonization.

The situation of the “republics” included in the Soviet Union was different; some of these republics (Ukraine, Belarus, the Caucasian republics) were in this state entity since its foundation, while others (the Baltic nations or Moldova) joined the Union in 1940. In any case, with the exception of the brief attempt at actual federalization in the 1920s, I believe that both types of republics fit the pattern established by Epp Anus for the history of the Baltic nations: “from occupation to colonization”,²⁹ which, in literary terms, involves the evolution from the condition of minority literature to

that of (post)colonial literature. Indeed, numerous arguments plead in favour of the (post)colonial status of these countries: the selection of the republics' leaders is exclusively made by Moscow (sometimes based on the "staff rotation" principle); Russian is the mandatory official language; massive colonization and increased migration between republics at the level of state politics; the absence of powerful "localist" (nationalist) movements, which should require the armed intervention of the "centre"; numerous cultural "hybridizations"; the absence of their own politics in relation to other cultures, particularly Western ones. Consequently, the ethnic literatures produced in the former Soviet republics can be considered minority literatures (in the Stalinist period), colonial ones (between 1956 and 1992), and postcolonial ones (after the dissolution of the USSR).

But can East-Central European postcolonialism be extended beyond the region or before the time of the USSR regime? If so, how far? Very little, to Tsarist Russia, which fits perfectly the paradigm of "classical" imperialism, based on political annexation and cultural denationalization. The only (debatable) exceptions to this rule were represented by the Kingdom of Poland (1815–1863), the Grand Principality of Finland (1809–1917) and the controversial Viceroyalty of the Caucasus (1801–1917), which, for the periods mentioned, benefited at least apparently from the colonial status. The (post)colonial paradigm is even less applicable in the case of Imperial Germany during 1871–1918, when, for example, the territories inhabited by the Polish minority were, unlike the numerous autonomous German "kingdoms", "dukedom" and "princedom", an integral part of the Kingdom of Prussia. However, in the case of the Ottoman Empire, (post)colonialism is an inappropriate concept for the opposite reason: the tradition of the *millets*, correlated with the liberal politics of the *Tanzimât* in the age when East-Central European nationalisms were born (1839–1876), resulted in a high degree of cultural independence, comparable with the self-determination of the ethnical groups in some federal states, in the different nations within the state, despite the fact that they did not have any administrative autonomy.

Perhaps the most intricate case in the region is the Habsburg Empire, particularly after its transformation into Austria-Hungary (1867), when the Empire and the new Magyar Kingdom adopted distinct cultural politics. Thus, Hungary became (again) a nationalist state, discriminating among its minorities (with the – partial – exception of the Croats and Slovenians) in the same way in which the Magyar minority will be discriminated in the "national" states that emerge after the Treaty of Trianon. However, the Austrian Empire continued its ambivalent politics conducted even before administrative dualism was instituted, insisting in the official discourse on its multinational character, but denying to the minorities the rights of a real federalism. It is precisely this ambivalence that justifies – at least partly – the postcolonial interpretations of the Austrian Empire's discourses, initiated after 2000 on the interdisciplinary platform "Kakanien revisited."³⁰

CONCLUSIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

To conclude, I believe that the term "(post)colonialism" can apply legitimately to East-Central European literatures in three cases: (1) the case of the republics included in the former USSR; (2) the case of more or less autonomous regions in the

former Tsarist Empire, such as Poland, Finland and Transcaucasia; (3) the case of the minorities in the former Austrian Empire (but not in Hungary). However, the real issue here is the relevance of this classification. Is there any importance attached to the fact that a certain East-Central European literature had, at some time, a “minority”, “marginal”, “postcolonial”, “mimetic” or “totalitarian” status? Or is this mere fashionable labeling?

In my opinion, the quadripartite classification I propose above and its application to East-Central European literatures are relevant from at least two points of view: political and cognitive. We must not forget that, before they became an academic discipline (and, of course, afterwards), (post)colonial “studies” were first of all a political stance in the West, meant to unify and intensify oppositional strategies against colonialism. This could also be the case in East-Central Europe, where the question whether certain inter-state and inter-ethnic relations designate “just” social and national problems or they also engage certain (post)colonial issues is not at all a matter of disinterest. The formulation of a problem always determines the nature of the solutions proposed: to describe, for example, the current status of Estonia or Bulgaria as “post-communist” means to blame a political system that has been dead and buried for two decades; but to describe it as “postcolonial” means to sound the alarm on the persistence of an imperial discourse that is still strongly instilled in the mentality of East-Central Europe. The former interpretation is a memorial service; the latter is a call to arms.

Beyond its political implications, I think that the theoretical outline I propose here allows us to explain or, at least, to express more adequately several research challenges of the East-Central European literary history (and not only). It allows us to avoid the thesis of a postcolonialism without shores and to dissociate, for example, the postcolonial francophone literatures from the marginal francophone literatures or from phenomena such as bilingualism and acculturation.³¹ It provides us with the tools needed in explaining why during the past two decades nostalgia has manifested itself completely differently in the USSR satellite-states as compared to its former “republics”: while for the former communism meant, at most, order, security and economic stability, for the latter *l'ancien régime* also acquires the connotations of an imperial phantasm. It helps us to better understand why the main target of Central European imperial nostalgias was always Vienna, and not Berlin or Budapest: because, unlike German or Hungarian nationalisms, the Habsburg (post)colonialism managed to provide its “colonies” with a constant sense of a certain co-membership. It shows why, despite the zonal linguistic contiguity and affinity, French literature was more successful than the German one in Central Europe and the Balkans:³² mimetic dependency on the former was preferred here at any time to Berlinese nationalism or even to Viennese (post)colonialism. Then, it allows us to catch a glimpse of, if not a law, at least a marked tendency of peripheral literatures, which often contract mimetic relations precisely in order to prevent the condition of potential minority or (post)colonial literatures. Last but not least, it reminds us why East-Central European postcolonial studies, as an academic research paradigm, has been more successful in the last two decades in Poland, Ukraine and the Baltics rather than in Hungary, Romania or Bulgaria: because the countries in the former category were, at a certain

point of their modern history, colonies, whereas the ones in the latter were not.

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NOTES

- ¹ Apart from Said's pioneering work (SAID, Edward: *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), other titles that establish postcolonial studies as an academic discipline are: ASHCROFT, Bill – GRIFFITHS, Gareth – TIFFIN, Helen: *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989; SPIVAK, Gayatri Chakravorty: *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. By Sarah Harasym. New York: Routledge, 1990; SAID, Edward: *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993; BHABHA, Homi: *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994; YOUNG, Robert J. C.: *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. New York: Routledge, 1995. For an overview of the basic issues associated with Postcolonial studies, the works written by three Australian scholars are already classic: ASHCROFT, Bill – GRIFFITHS, Gareth – TIFFIN, Helen (eds.): *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995; and ASHCROFT, Bill – GRIFFITHS, Gareth – TIFFIN, Helen: *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998. For a historic perspective on the institutional development and the current dissemination of postcolonial studies, useful details are provided in QUAYSON, Ato (ed.): *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, Vol II. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012 (see in particular PONZANESI, Sandra: Publishing, prizes and postcolonial literary production, p. 1127–1154, and RAJA, Ira – BAHRI, Deepika: Key journals and organizations, p. 1155–1188).
- ² Although he admits that, in general, “when talking about decolonization, scholars in postcolonial studies conventionally refer to India, Africa and the various countries in the Caribbean that gained independence from their European overlords in the twentieth century” (QUAYSON, Ato: Introduction: Postcolonial Literature in a Changing Historical Frame. In: *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, Vol. I, p. 12), the editor of the two volumes includes not only Latin American literatures, but also those of the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland. Nevertheless, the status of East-Central European Literatures is nowhere discussed.
- ³ KOŁODZIEJCZYK, Dorota, ȘANDRU, Cristina: Introduction: On Colonialism, Communism and East-Central Europe – Some Reflections. In: *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol. 48, Nr. 2, 2012, p. 114.
- ⁴ TÖTÖSY, Steven: Post-Colonialities: The “Other,” the System, and a Personal Perspective or, This (Too) Is Comparative Literature. In: *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/ Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, September–December 1995, p. 400–401.
- ⁵ CHIONI MOORE, David: Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique. In: KELERTAS, Violeta (ed.), *Baltic Postcolonialism*. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2006, p. 21.
- ⁶ KOVAČEVIĆ, Nataša: *Narrating Post/Communism: Colonial Discourse and Europe's Borderline Civilization*. Abington – New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 2.
- ⁷ TÖTÖSY DE ZEPETNEK, Stephen: *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application*. Amsterdam – Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998, p. 133.
- ⁸ The most relevant text for the journal's approach is KOREK, Janusz: *Central and Eastern Europe from a Postcolonial Perspective* (<http://www.postcolonial-europe.eu/index.php/en/essays/60-central-and-eastern-europe-from-a-postcolonial-perspective>, retrieved on May 20, 2012).
- ⁹ KOŁODZIEJCZYK, Dorota, ȘANDRU, Cristina: Introduction, loc. cit., p. 115.
- ¹⁰ KOVAČEVIĆ, Nataša: *Narrating Post/Communism*, p. 11–20.
- ¹¹ Nevertheless, I believe that at least two elementary facts should be mentioned in this respect: East-Central European countries became EU and NATO members on their own initiatives, validated by various opinion polls or national referendums; and the external “constraints” (if one could label them such) concerned the potential rejection of these countries' nomination, and in no way whatsoever was mentioned their force entry in the supra-national entities.

- ¹² WOLFF, Larry: *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994. TODOROVA, Maria: *Imagining the Balkans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- ¹³ That this position is but rarely theorized in postcolonial studies does not prevent it from guiding some of the current interpretive practices. For instance, Kovačević states that East-Central Europe involves a series of “open and shifting” borders and that, in general, “Eastern Europe, Europe and the West figure as concepts rather than monolithic geo-historical entities” (KOVAČEVIĆ, Nataša: *Narrating Post/Communism*, p. 9). But this does not prevent the author from assimilating the “West” to a non-differentiated imperialist discourse, and from frequently reducing “Eastern Europe” to the historical experience of the former Yugoslavia (chiefly Serbia), an aspect confirmed both by the paradoxical charge of “multicultural racism” brought against the “West”, and by the euphemization of the harmfulness of the communist regimes in East-Central Europe.
- ¹⁴ Again, the reduction of postcolonialism to Orientalism is not proclaimed, as such, by Kovačević. But, since other clear criteria of delineation of (post)colonialism are absent, this assimilation tends to become natural throughout her analyses.
- ¹⁵ DAINOTTO, Roberto: *Europe (In Theory)*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007 (see especially chapters 2, 3 and 4, which analyze Montesquieu’s, Mme de Staël’s and Hegel’s theories).
- ¹⁶ For example, in a parodic video clip on Eastern European identity stereotypes, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj ŽIŽEK states that one of the rivers that crosses Ljubljana marks the “geographical limit between Balkan and Central Europe” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwDrHqNZ9lo>, retrieved on May 18, 2012).
- ¹⁷ IVANOV, Leonte: *Imaginea rusului și a Rusiei în cultura română (1840-1948)*. Chișinău: Cartier, 2004.
- ¹⁸ Wallerstein’s fundamental work is *The Modern World-System* (4 vol., 1974–2011), but a very useful summary of his theory is available as WALLERSTEIN, Immanuel: *World-Systems Analysis*. In: MODELSKI, George (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS)*, Developed under the Auspices of the UNESCO, Eolss Publishers, Oxford, UK, 2004 (<http://www.eolss.net>, retrieved on May 22, 2012).
- ¹⁹ EVEN-ZOHAR, Itamar: *Laws of Cultural Interference*. In: *Papers in Culture Research*. Tel Aviv: Unit of Culture Research, Tel Aviv University, 2010, p. 63–67.
- ²⁰ ĐURIŠIN, Dionýz: *Théorie du processus interlittéraire I*. Bratislava: Institut de Littérature Mondiale/ Académie Slovaque des Sciences, 1995, p. 12–13.
- ²¹ *Idem*, p. 44–48. For a detailed, more recent critical perspective on Đurišin’s concept and types of “interliterary communities”, see DOMÍNGUEZ, César: *Dionýz Đurišin and a Systemic Theory of World Literature*. In: D’HAEN, Theo, DAMROSCH, David, KADIR, Djelal, *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. London: Routledge, 2012, p. 99–107.
- ²² For a more detailed discussion of these concepts, see ASHCROFT, Bill, GRIFFITHS, Gareth and TIF-FIN, Helen: *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, p. 12–14, 118–121 and 139–142.
- ²³ Here, I am considering literary systems instead of authors. The fact that an author is part of a peripheral literature (be it minority, marginal, postcolonial or mimetic) often hinders the distribution of his/her work outside his/her literary system, but it does not in any way prevent the adherence to a canon – be it the canon of the peripheral literature in which the work was published or (less frequently) the canon of the core-literature to which the former is in a relation of dependence.
- ²⁴ BHABHA, Homi: *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 86.
- ²⁵ See, for example, TAUSSIG, Michael: *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- ²⁶ Cf. BUELL, Lawrence: *American Literary Emergence as a Postcolonial Phenomenon*. In: *American Literary History*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1992, p. 411–442.
- ²⁷ Some of the arguments brought here were provided by two Romanian studies on postcolonialism – LEFTER, Ion Bogdan: *Poate fi considerat postcomunismul un postcolonialism?* In: *Caietele Echinoux*, Vol. 1, 2001, p. 117–119; and ANDREESCU, Liviu: *Are We All Postcolonialists Now? Postcommunism and Postcolonialism in Central and Eastern Europe*. In: BOTTEZ, Monica – DRAGA ALEX-ANDRU, Sabina-Maria – ȘTEFĂNESCU, Bogdan, *Postcolonialism/Postcommunism: Intersections and*

Overlaps. Bucharest: Bucharest University Press, 2011, p. 57–74.

²⁸ For example, for the last decade of communism (1980–1989), UNESCO Index Translationum registers 451 titles translated into Romanian from French and only 390 from Russian.

²⁹ ANNUS, Epp: The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics. In: *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2012, p. 21–45.

³⁰ Cf. <http://www.kakanien.ac.at/>, retrieved on May 25, 2012. See also the collective volumes published in the project: MÜLLER-FUNK, Wolfgang – PLENER, Peter – RUTHNER, Clemens (eds.): *Kakanien Revisited. Das Eigene und das Fremde (in) der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie*. Tübingen: Francke, 2002; FEICHTINGER, Johannes – PRUTSCH, Ursula – CSÁKY, Moritz: *Habsburg postcolonial. Machtstrukturen und kollektives Gedächtnis*. Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2003. I do not approach the topic in depth here, because it deserves a separate discussion. However, in the final section of this article I attempt to prove this thesis retrospectively, by the effects generated by the “Habsburg (post)colonialism”.

³¹ Such an error is present, for example, in SALHI, Kamal (ed.): *Francophone Post-Colonial Cultures: Critical Essays*. New York and Oxford: Lexington Books, 2003, where francophone literatures, such as the Belgian or Swiss ones, are included arbitrarily together with postcolonial literatures in South-east Asia or the Caribbean. A similar confusion occurs in RICE, Alison: Francophone Postcolonialism from Eastern Europe. In: *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2007, p. 313–328, where the literature by certain East-European writers, such as Julia Kristeva, is placed in the same category with postcolonial literatures produced by authors from “French” Africa.

³² Regarding this aspect, see CASANOVA, Pascale: *The World Republic of Letters*. Tr. by M. B. DeBevoise. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2004.

EXISTUJE STREDO-VÝCHODOEURÓPSKY POSTKOLONIALIZMUS? SMEROM K ZJEDNOTENEJ TEÓRII (INTER)LITERÁRNEJ ZÁVISLOSTI

Postkolonializmus. Stredo-východná Európa. Orientalizmus. (Medzi)literárna závislosť. Menšinové/okrajové/postkoloniálne/mimetické literatúry.

Štúdia skúma existenciu stredo-východoeurópskeho postkolonializmu, o ktorom sa v poslednom desaťročí teoretizuje v rámci postkoloniálnych štúdií. Existujú dve verzie tejto teórie: 1. vzdialený (post)kolonializmus, podľa ktorého stredo-východná Európa bola oblasťou kolonizácie veľkých západných mocností (najmä Veľkej Británie, Francúzska a USA), ktoré vytvárali a propagovali tzv. „východoeurópsky orientalizmus“; a 2. (post)kolonializmus „anxiou“, podľa ktorej stredo-východná Európa bola kolonizovaná regionálnymi impériami (najmä ZSSR a jej predchodcom, cárskym Ruskom, ale aj Nemeckou ríšou, Rakúskom-Uhorskom a Osmanskou ríšou). Naša premisa je, že na to, aby bol postkolonializmus naozaj efektívnym analytickým nástrojom, vyžaduje zjednotenie teórie (medzi)literárnej závislosti a zároveň musí byť odlišný od konceptov, ktoré sa týkajú prepojených fenoménov ako imperializmus, dominancia alebo útlak. V tomto zmysle odmietame tézu „vzdialeného“ postkolonializmu, keďže „orientalizácia“ je proces, ktorý nielen západná Európa aplikovala na východnú Európu, ale rovnako dobre charakterizoval aj vzťahy medzi krajinami len v rámci západnej alebo len v rámci východnej Európy. Preto v súčasnej konfigurácii táto téza čelí nebezpečenstvu, že bude miešať konceptuálne rozdiely v bezbrehom postkolonializme. Aby sme sa vyhli takejto konceptuálnej neurčitosti, táto štúdia formuluje opäť tézu (post)kolonializmu „anxiou“ v rámci teórie (medzi)literárnej závislosti, založenej na Wallersteinovej analýze svetových systémov, Even-Zoharovej teórii polysystémov a Ďurišinovej teórii medziliterárneho procesu. V tomto novom kontexte štúdia rozlišuje medzi štyrmi typmi „závislých“ literatúr – menšinovými, okrajovými, (post)koloniálnymi a mimetickými, ktoré nám umožňujú charakterizovať pozíciu literatúr stredo-východnej Európy posledných dvoch storočí. V závere štúdie tvrdíme,

že s výnimkou bývalých republík ZSSR postkolonializmus predstavuje účinný nástroj analýzy literatúr stredo-východnej Európy iba pre niekoľko provincií v cárskom Rusku a Rakúsku-Uhorsku. Napriek tomu nám navrhnutá štvoraká klasifikácia v širšom kontexte môže poslúžiť ako konceptuálny nástroj na skúmanie medziliterárnych vzťahov charakteristických pre literatúry stredo-východnej Európy posledných dvoch storočí.

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