

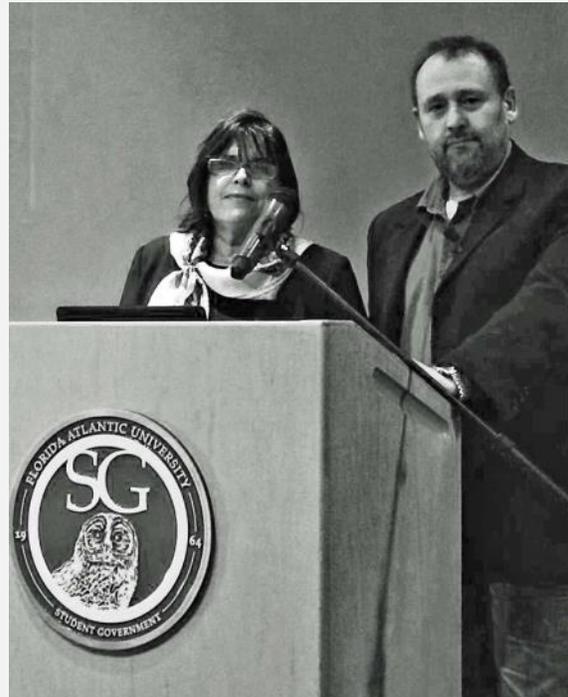
RSAA JOURNAL

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Florida Atlantic University, March 2015. Conference organizer, Dr. Marin with Dr. Ștefănescu who presented part of his book as a keynote speaker. The conference was sponsored by the Peace Studies Program on colonizing discourse as part of Eastern European and Eurasian Studies.

Bogdan Ștefănescu:

Postcommunism / Postcolonialism: Siblings of Subalternity.

Bucharest: University of Bucharest Publishing House, 2013. ISBN: 978-606-16-16-0244-5

From Chapter 1:

“Claiming the Critical Territory. The Case for an Analogy between Postcommunism and Postcolonialism”

Ideologies and the Relational Construction of Identity

The persistence of a foundationalist agenda in the discourse of most postcommunist critics must be an abomination to most Cultural Studies scholars from both the West and the Orient, and it must smack of their arch-enemy—traditional Western ideology. Post-communism may well sound to such critics like the very attitude that they have been opposing in their effort to assist in the emancipation of groups that were marginalized by the alleged universalism of capitalist modernity. To postcolonial cultural critics it might look as if the postcommunist world operates in a reactionary mode as it regresses to a liberal humanist and capitalist mentality.

And yet, is not the philosophy of Cultural Studies an anti-essentialist insistence that all discourses are historically situated and that their significance is entirely contextual? For the sake of consistency, then, postcolonial cultural criticism should valorize each strategy of postimperialist emancipation according to the context of its occurrence. Postcolonialist cultural critiques should not mechanically revile liberal postcommunist forms of discourse as universally and essentially inadequate, but rather judge them in their proper historical context as antiimperialist. Conversely, it is just as inappropriate to mechanically hail a supposedly context-free, immutable Marxism as essentially just, no matter what its historical situation might be.

In other words, I am proposing that the political and pragmatic function of ideological paradigms is dependent upon historical and cultural variations of context and that on occasion this function can be reversed accordingly. To be a

Marxist *in the context of postcolonialism* is to be a progressive, reformist critic of late capitalism and an advocate of decolonization from Western hegemony, whereas to be an impenitent liberal humanist might well be seen as a retrograde, conservative or reactionary position. By contrast, however, to be a liberal humanist and a supporter of the core values of capitalist democracy *in the context of postcommunism* may equally prove a progressive, liberating stance, whereas to entertain Marxist ideas under the same circumstances can function as a regression to the oppressive ideology of communist totalitarianism. (endnote 1)

Assessing ideology in relation to the particular determinants of historical and geo-cultural contexts allows for a more flexible critical understanding that is occasioned precisely by the manner in which postcommunism complicates the simple binary oppositions and destabilizes the order and direction of progress which we employ in our usual mapping and chronicling of cultures. The postcommunist situation calls for a new critical approach grounded in a relational understanding of the space and time issues that are involved in the reconfigurations of cultural identity once imperial dominion has been shed. Rather than conceive of history in a teleological manner as a fixed chronological succession from primitive to more evolved stages of consciousness, researchers might do better to assess events and epistemes in terms of the opportunity, the occasion, or the “season” for their occurrence in particular historical situations. This would mean that historical situations need to be reconsidered not in terms of traditional chronology, but in terms of a *kairology*, that is, an awareness both of the peculiarity of historical and cultural contexts and of the recognizable generic scenario when one critically considers the worth of a kind of discourse as *kairos* or appropriate moment. (endnote 2)

In these terms, one must reconsider how opportune a Marxist discourse may be in the context of a former communist country. From the perspective of its kairotic value, preaching Marxist values to subjects who were forcibly indoctrinated with Marxism-Leninism might be just as pointless as trying to help someone who is recovering from near-drowning by offering them a glass of water. We tend to think that water is something essentially beneficial, but disregard the fact that water can be damaging if we take into account issues of quantity and proportionality (as in the case of catastrophic flooding) or of contextual appropriateness (as in trying to extinguish with water an electric fire without cutting off the power supply).

Postcommunism and postcolonialism are not rigorously coeval. Because historically unsynchronized, postcommunism and postcolonialism have often been declared unrelated phenomena. However, if we shift our focus from chronology and the valorization of historical dates to kairology as the assessment of successive stages in a process (a descriptive rather than an axiological concept, that is why I shun terms like development, progress, evolution etc.), then postcommunism and postcolonialism are consistent with each other in terms of the structure of their transformation.

A similar fixity seems to inform our spatial representations of colonization. We usually think in terms of colonized “spaces” which we assign to remote, clearly defined areas on geographical maps. However, more sophisticated accounts of coloniality talk of internal colonization, whether “internal” means inside the borders of the very metropolitan center (endnote 3) or in the inner world of our consciousness. (Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and others have shown how minds can be colonized more efficiently and lastingly than territories.) These nuances of colonization have prompted a subtler understanding of colonized space by dislodging our representations of coloniality from questions of locale or physical/geographical space to those of sites of colonization. In doing so, one must heed to Arjun Appadurai’s analysis of “locality as pri-

marily relational and contextual, rather than scalar or spatial” (178) and to the “new ways of thinking the relationship among geography, culture and identity” that Janice Radway talks about or to “the radical disturbance in the links between culture and space” detected by George Lipsitz (qtd. in Mihăilă 135). Rodica Mihăilă has chronicled the new critical process of problematizing and transgressing borders in the construction of virtual (American) identities:

The new American Studies has mainstreamed the border discourse and, at the same time, operated a reevaluation of the category of border through a shift of emphasis from „border” as „periphery” in relation to a center, to a relational idea of border/boundary as Janus-faced, a hybrid place of multiplicity. (134)

Rogers Brubaker has similarly indicated the need to move away from the realist accounts of nationalities and ethnicities as “substantial, enduring, internally homogenous, and externally bounded collectivities” (292) and to reconsider questions of locating such communities:

The constituent [ethnocultural] blocs may be intermixed in space, for their ‘blocness’ – their boundedness and internal homogeneity – is conceptually located not in physical but in social and cultural space. (295)

A geographical approach to postcolonialism and postcommunism may help with more detailed and particular *descriptions* of these phenomena, but not with their *systematic explanation and structural understanding*. For the latter, we need to shift our focus from *locale* to *sites* of hegemonic relationships. This should facilitate the realization that the territorial positioning of groups is *not* an essential factor in understanding imperial domination strategies. If one looks at related forms of hegemonic domination like gender and sexual orientation, hyphenated identity groups/ethnic minorities, social classes, age/generation cultures etc., one surmises that they are para-territorial, although most studies deal with geographically determined phenomena. In the case of Orientalism, postcolonialism and postcommunism, critics

generally focus on trans-territorial hegemony, that is, one imposed at a distance onto a different political/administrative territory. Naturally, this kind of imperialism is often found in history, and the assertion, augmentation, and preservation of trans-territorial hegemony may require different techniques, strategies, and instruments than the exercise of hegemony in co-territorial situations. But we should not be distracted by these differences in the arsenal of subjugation when we ascertain that, in fact, we are dealing with *structurally* the same type of hegemonic *relationship* and the same *goals*.

To use an analogy, people may kill other people in a wide variety of manners: they can run them over, shoot, stab, drown, strangle or poison them, inculcate suicidal tendencies in them, deprive them of food or water, push them off a cliff, bomb them from an aircraft etc. Some of these methods involve proximity others kill from a distance, in different circumstances and for different reasons. What remains of paramount importance, despite the wide discrepancies in motive, techniques or strategies, is that we are still dealing with a crime, that is, with the similar scenario of someone trying to kill someone else. In this case, it is the *structural* relationship that defines the action as killing and the subjects as perpetrator or victim. The significance and social or moral value of the action depends entirely on situation and circumstance, therefore we ought to be looking for a *contextual* relationship.

One may conclude that an ideological description of postimperialist identities, whether postcolonial or postcommunist, should, therefore, look for structural relationships between colonizer and colonized, rather than to the particulars of colonization. In the contextual understanding of (post)colonial/communist relations, kairological and situational analyses replace the chronological and spatial accounts, which focus on mere physical determinations. The worth and function of the different ideological discourses is not inherent and absolute, nor does it depend on synchronization with a supposedly universal calendar of progress—rather they are the outcome of being situated in the particular historical and cultural

context of their own evolution. This is why Marxism and liberalism may acquire similar emancipatory values in the circumstances provided by postcolonialism and postcommunism, respectively. One may, therefore, recognize a similar structure and situational value in the relationship between the two ideological discourses and the contexts of their occurrence. This homology will be the subject of the next section.

The Contextual Relevance of Postcolonialism and Postcommunism

Postcolonial cultural studies focus on marginal, alienated or underprivileged cultures and communal identities whose evolution was coerced by an alien power (another culture with a privileged, colonizing or majority status). This new critical field operates with the hindsight provided by decolonization, and with the accompaniment of economic or cultural neocolonial tendencies. The new political situation of postcolonialism involves a *redressing though rupture* from colonial domination as well as a *continuity* through the lingering effects of colonization and of residual cultural colonialism. The newly acquired political situation calls simultaneously for a retrospective reevaluation of colonialism and the projection of strategies for identity reconstruction, both of which are performed on the basis of an allegedly new, liberated and liberating episteme.

In the case of postcommunist countries, we are similarly dealing with identities which were forcibly and abruptly altered, their evolution broken off and pushed into an unexpected and “unnatural” direction. Such countries and cultures eventually became liberated and regained their right to reconstruct themselves. As with the case of former colonies, new historical retrospects are produced together with projects for immediate renovation.

Postcommunism and postcolonialism (as well as the study of these phenomena) are compatible not just because they share what seems to be the same general historical situation, that of cultures recovering from traumas inflicted by imperial

oppressors, but also on account of their contexts of emergence.

Postcolonialism occurred at a time when, after WWII, there was an accumulated potential of discontent and revolt against the major imperial powers of the time. The political inability and instability of France, the United States, and the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s (the French-Vietnamese war of 1946-1954, the Korean war of 1950-1953, the war in Algeria between 1956-1962, the prolonged Vietnam war, Kennedy's assassination and the Watergate scandal, but equally the repression of the 1956 anti-Soviet uprising in Hungary and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968) made the younger generations feel disgruntled and distrust political and cultural authorities, which led to a series of uprisings and micro-revolutions of the marginalized groups. The *Beatniks* and the Angry Young Men in the 1950s, the *hippie* movement in the 1960s, the student uprising of the French May 1968 were landmarks in the emancipation of the younger generations. The feminist movement picks up momentum at the end of the 1960s, the blacks launch widespread activist movements (the Rastafarians beginning with 1953 and the Francophone critics of negritude in the late 1950s, the rise of the Nation of Islam in the United States under Malcolm X. They are accompanied by the Gandhian movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr. in the 1960s), the Chicano movement emerges in the late 1960s and the 1970s, and the homosexual who begin to clamor and win civic rights in the United States from 1969 onwards. All of these movements raised public and governmental awareness and triggered social reforms for underprivileged cultural communities.

Intellectually, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the ascent of poststructuralism and of postmodern philosophy which mobilized critical intellectuals and students to press for a reform of the educational system. In the 1970s, MA programs in Cultural Studies are designed by red-brick universities on the pattern proposed by Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall at the University of Birmingham between 1969-1979. The United States adopt the episteme and develop their own version of cultural studies in the 1970s and 1980s. Under this gen-

eral heading sprouted feminist, youth, and popular culture studies, Afro-American criticism, Latin-American and Chicano/a Studies, Orientalism and subaltern studies, gay and lesbian studies etc. The general outcome was that the combined pressure from activist movements and the intellectual community caused a mutation in mentalities and a series of reforms in public policies. Western society and international organisms became more aware and tolerant of the multicultural structure of human communities with their parallel values and cultural practices and showed growing support for minority rights.

On the model of Frantz Fanon and the negritude critics (Aimé Césaire, Albert Memmi, Léopold Sédar Senghor), the 1960s and 1970s yield the first statements from spokespeople of the colonized or marginalized cultures and culminate with Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. By the 1980s and particularly the 1990s postcolonial studies had become an established field in the academia and the press.

The particular political and cultural context for the occurrence of postcolonialism and of postcolonial studies is characterized by three coordinates. Firstly, a new political militancy for the emancipation of underprivileged cultures surfaces as a result of the regression of Western empires from domination to predominance (that is, traditional military, economic, and political forms of imperialism collapse and are replaced by neocolonial strategies of influence and prevalence on the economic and political stage). Secondly, the post-modern and poststructuralism emerge as the new intellectual paradigms in representations of history and culture. Thirdly, the states consent to a reformist policy regarding educational and cultural institutions.

The question, therefore, is whether Romania and the other postcommunist countries exhibit a similar kairologic context, even though chronologically there is roughly a forty-year lapse. I think there is evidence of the same three coordinates of the postcolonial condition in the political and cultural context of emergence of postcommunism and postcommunist cultural studies.

Firstly, one can notice similar mutations in international politics, that is, the crumbling of the

Soviet Empire and Russia's new politics of predominance in the Soviet Union area. Former communist countries, like the former colonies, negotiate their political emancipation through regional alliances and integration in broad international structures.

Secondly, there is evidence of an infusion of the poststructuralist and postmodern paradigm among the intellectual elites, especially the younger scholars in the humanities and social sciences who won academic degrees and went on study trips to the West. The result is a more serious and unfettered reflection on the ideological and political aspects of culture, on the subjectivity and relativity of cognition, and on the constructed nature and diversity of our (self)representations. A sluggish and hesitant reform of education is still under way and it has yielded new disciplines, new departments and study programs, and only occasionally new research, teaching, and evaluation methods. In the public sphere, divergent discourses on the reconstruction of traumatized cultural identities compete and intersect one another and the former hegemonic discourses acquire new status and function.

Thirdly, in domestic affairs, some postcommunist countries have become more democratic and tolerant to the free expression of hitherto underprivileged groups which have had no public voice before, like women, ethnic minorities, the youth and the less educated, the homosexuals etc. Though the activist performance of such communities is generally unimpressive, the central authorities have met it with indulgence and a moderately reformist attitude, mostly because these new or refashioned states are seeking recognition from international organizations and from the public opinion, and feel under scrutiny.

The respective contexts of state and cultural emancipation for the former colonies and the former communist countries, though not concomitant, are structurally homologous. The actors may be different, but the roles are the same. The conditions for a posttraumatic restoration of cultural identity are similar, even though some of the actors may have switched characters, such that those who formerly played heroes are now villains and vice versa. This may serve as an example for what

Ernesto Laclau calls "floating signifiers" and the "relational" nature of discourse and identity (in Docherty 335-7).

*From Chapter 3:
"Thinking in Pairs. Problems in the Comparative Study of Postcolonialism and Postcommunism"*

The Comparative Conundrum

This chapter examines the context of and grounds for, a comparative approach to postcommunism and postcolonialism. Comparing implies that two different things may be alike or equal when in fact they are not. They remain irreducibly different and disproportionate. Ranking one over the other is always a simple choice, really. But comparisons also speak indirectly about the comparers themselves. The very act of comparing is itself conditioned by the status of the comparer (who may be, for instance, a Western, a Third-World or an Eastern European intellectual), just as it is affected by the position of the subject in the academic field or in the larger epistemic horizon of a culture.

Sadly, in this post- or neocolonial age, we can no longer be seduced by the metaphor of a "free" global market being driven by an "invisible hand". The hand is only invisible because the puppeteer is cautious enough to disguise it. The recent recognition of exotic cultural market products such as Romanian cinema or fiction is just temporary and is only tolerated when it may serve the interests of the main market players. The new wave in Romanian cinema is no more than a fling as was the presence of Romanian writers in the edition dedicated to them by the French annual festival *Les Belles Étrangères*. (Consider the title of the festival itself, which institutionalizes the stereotypical assimilation of the exotic with the feminine that Said and other postcolonial critics have talked about.) Romanian art, the minion of the day, is no more than a momentary thrill and like all non-Western cultural products is already condemned to ephemeral consumerism. Such

fleeting pleasures are usually the subject of pornography.

By contrast, Western cultural products remain something permanent, the stable ground for the Western life style and worldview. And not just for the West. They are exported and many marginal cultures “buy” them, taking Western standards and models to be universal yardsticks. The West will occasionally open to Romanian or other exotic cultural products in order to either validate its own established values or justify their revision, but never in order to embrace the values of that exotic other. Hence, such works will remain evanescent, brief encounters. The transient function of their strangeness is either sensual or comic. Note that the received work of Brâncuși, Cioran, or Ionesco, who are now considered French artists and have been canonized there and elsewhere in the West, is almost entirely purged of any native or pidgin accent, which may very well have been a condition for their Western assimilation.

The asymmetric dynamic of the relationship between the metropolitan center and the colonial margins has been carefully and extensively investigated. It is by now part of the axiomatic grounding of postcolonial studies that the colonized culture is relegated by colonialist ideology to an inferior position where it can be disregarded or minimized. This situation affects all comparative attempts which are, in fact, the very substance of postcolonial criticism:

In a way, cultural and postcolonial studies are what comparative literature always wanted or claimed to be but in reality never was, due to a deliberate and almost desperate clinging to Eurocentric values, canons, cultures, and languages. The closest parallels in the many debates within the field of comparative literature from the 1950s and 1960s are those involving the French comparatist René Etiemble, who pleaded for an open and planetary comparativism that would address questions of coloniality and examine literatures outside the Euro-American center. No discipline is unaffected by the colonialist paradigm, and every discipline, from anthropology to cartography, needs to be decolonized. (Gugelberger 385)

Though we can be comforted by the belief that globalization and the onslaught of postcolonial

studies have somehow brought us closer to a “planetary comparativism”, the task of decolonizing every discipline – including comparativism itself – is still far from completion. Formal inclusion in global or international structures is not in and by, itself a solution to neocolonial discrimination and inequality.

Sukehiro Hirakawa (1979) saw comparativism as an exclusive Western club in the 1950s, just as postcolonialism was making its entry on the intellectual scene of the West:

It is true that great scholars such as Curtius, Auerbach and Wellek wrote their monumental scholarly works in order to overcome nationalism. But to outsiders like me, Western Comparative Literature scholarship seemed to be an expression of a new form of nationalism – the Western nationalism, if I may use such an expression. It seemed to us an exclusive club of Europeans and Americans. It was a sort of Greater West European Co-Prosperity Sphere. (“Japanese Culture: Accommodation to Modern Times” qtd. in Damrosch 8)

David Damrosch is partly right in claiming that “this situation has changed dramatically in recent years, and both the globe and the map of Europe itself have opened up” (8). However, the real world of globalization may look slightly different to postcolonial countries. Opening the EU door for less developed, former communist countries or opening the cultural market for marginal and exotic literatures or arts (take, for instance, the “new wave in Romanian cinema”) did not automatically generate the conditions needed for genuinely even-handed comparisons. I am afraid that any parallels, juxtapositions or analogies between what are still seen as the major Western cultures and the minor non-Western ones are going to remain asymmetrical.

In fact, they are just as asymmetrical as the political balance of European and world power. Though the European Union claims to be a club of peers, some of its members have a privileged position and increased powers, just as in the case of the United Nations. That is why Germany and France could put up a discretionary (and for some even discriminatory) opposition to Romania and Bulgaria accessing the visa-free Schengen space. If it were only for the discourteous way in which

French president Chirac admonished Eastern European states (Donald Rumsfeld's "New Europe"), especially the still aspiring EU candidates Romania and Bulgaria, for supporting the US intervention in Iraq and we would still understand how former communist countries are perceived by the West:

They missed a great opportunity to shut up. . . .
If they wanted to diminish their chances of joining Europe they could not have found a better way. ("Chirac Lashes Out" 1)

One finds that the positioning of both Third World and Eastern European cultures versus Western ones is constantly asymmetric, as is scholarship of these regions itself. In spite of all efforts to redress this *a priori* inequality and even in the context of the new international dynamics of globalization, there is a huge disparity between the attention given to products coming from Western literatures (especially in English) and that elicited by Third World or Eastern European ones. This can only increase and modulate the hegemonic position of the West in both the field of literary and cultural production and in the academic study of this field.

Since scholarship is itself a part of the culture it belongs to, it is ideologically ranked accordingly. Moreover, it is still no more than utopianism to believe that enlightened scholars from different parts of the globe can sit together and exchange ideas as peers in a global environment. Peer-reviewing itself hardly operates among peers, we are not equal, there is no comparison, if only because to compare the West with the rest is always done in the terms set by Western institutions and practices.

Additionally, there is also the question of institutional positioning in the politics of knowing. Postcolonial cultural critics are entitled to operate within the institutionalized arena of the *humanities*, one that has been authorized by the Western academe as the medium for militancy and the propagation of culturalist agendas, where postcoloniality is a *mainstream, canonical subject*. The legitimacy of postcommunist cultural scholars, on the other hand, extends only as far as the *social sciences*, which appear to be more innocuous and neutral from an ideological standpoint,

and even there they are seen as quirky and *marginal*. Though accepted without reservations as a valid field by the Western academe, postcommunism as an academic subject populates a rather marginal domain. There are, consequently, institutional and social limitations to the comparison between postcommunism and postcolonialism.

An implicit hierarchy attends all comparisons, as well as the dramatic story of success and failure that accompanies them. And comparers are part of this story. To be an East European comparer is to be doomed to an ineluctable sense of failure. This has been convincingly argued by the Bulgarian cultural historian Alexander Kiossev:

The hypothesis of this text is, therefore, the following: the birth of these nations is connected with a very specific symbolic economy. It seems that the self-colonizing cultures import alien values and civilizational models by themselves and that they lovingly colonize their own authenticity through these foreign models.

Yet which are, in fact, the cultures that we call, using a strange metaphor, "self-colonizing" cultures?

From the point of view of the modern globalization of the world, there are cultures which are not central enough, not timely and big enough in comparison to the "Great Nations". At the same time they are insufficiently alien, insufficiently distant and insufficiently backward, in contrast to the African tribes, for example. That's why, in their own troubled embryo, somewhere in the periphery of Civilization, they arise in the space of a generative doubt: *We are European, although perhaps not to a real extent . . .*

Aren't we then forced to describe the historical rhythm of such traumatic, self-colonizing cultures as a constant repetition and return? Maybe the constitutive traumas cannot be overcome and they will occur over and over again in the form of various historical symptoms - as a *Wiederkehr des Verdrängten* - a recurrence of the suppressed?

Or maybe this is just a reminder that the history of Modernity could not be written as a composite history consisting of the histories of many separate nations (that means as histories of the Native and the Alien), but should be written (described, analyzed, criticized, etc.) globally, as a history of the entire process of asymmetrical modernization,

transgressing the boundaries of the established historiographical narratives about states, cultures and ideologies? (115, 118)

Comparison, by which the minor cultures might hope to assert themselves in relation to the greater ones, is a Trojan horse. Maria Todorova has denounced historians, anthropologists, economists, and political scientists for working with a “rigged” comparative concept, that of an *origin* of ideas or models (always Western) which can only be “pirated” and “copied” by sluggish Central and East European nations (Todorova “The Trap of Backwardness” 145 and *passim*). She notices that the commercial metaphoric imagination which is at work in comparisons between Western and Eastern accounts of nation-building (150) condemns marginal nations to an eternal life in the past, in a different time, constantly lagging behind and hopelessly aspiring towards modern models. The metaphor of the race is constitutive of modernity which is a temporal construct. One’s modernity consists in leaving the others behind: the primitive and the obsolete, the tardy and underdeveloped nations etc. In this cultural race, those who get there first become the origin, the source, the genuine article, whereas the others are left to copy and mimic. Todorova proposes that within a Braudelian perspective of the *longue durée* one ought to abandon the obsession of genealogies and adopt the notion of relative synchronicity in spite of chronological precedence. This is predicated upon the anthropological observation that similarities exist even when cultures are not in immediate contact (149).

Todorova’s proposed concept of “relative synchronicity” can be complemented by my kairological perspective on historical comparativism. The traditional notions of synchronicity and synchronization that are being revised by Todorova are vestiges of a chronological understanding of historical events and they call for evaluation of actions and phenomena based on their *timing*, that is, on the synchronization with a fixed calendar whose value is implicitly considered to be universal and absolute. Historical and cultural value is predicated on the synchronization or deviation from that timetable of “human” evolution. If some process or event happens at its prescribed calen-

dar time it is validated and, if it occurs earlier, it becomes exceptional. Belated occurrences are thought to be a sign of backwardness. By contrast, the kairological interpretation of history disregards the time of an event in relation to a putative universal calendar of human evolution and instead tries to evaluate the *timeliness* (i.e. the opportune or seasonable nature) of phenomena in their particular historical and cultural sequence. The question is, therefore, not whether the culture under scrutiny undertook the same evolutionary steps at the same time and in the same order that is recommended by the calendar of progress of the standard culture by which it is measured, but rather which is the relative contextual relevance of certain actions or discourses and whether they occur at the right moment and are beneficial in the historical situation of *that* culture.

While the old, chronological comparison between cultures of the West and the rest of the world is still in place, East European scholars such as myself cannot help being painfully aware of traumatic disproportions. Such asymmetries are replicated and sometimes augmented in the global environment by the metaphorical arsenal that attends the comparative imagination.

What this subsection has tried to illustrate is that different, unequal contexts work to make the comparison implausible if not impossible. Comparisons and evaluations are usually engineered by nationalist agendas just as attempts at neutrality in comparative studies are thwarted by the metaphors of origin and originality or of modernity and progress as a race. The insights of such post-communist critics as Maria Todorova and Alexander Kiossev suggest that figurative representations of world culture contaminate the study of transnational cultural phenomena and that a new historical and comparative framework needs to be used to avoid nationalistic and hegemonic images in present-day scholarship.

The Awkward Positioning of Eastern European Identity

The problematical mechanism of cultural and political positioning of East European countries is

cause for further nuisance in establishing their (post)colonial status. It also complicates the usually simple process of comparing two things and establishing such familiar and comfortable binary oppositions like “us” versus “them” or colonized East versus colonizing West:

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. (Thompson, “Whose Discourse?” 1)

Romania and similar cultures in the region already possessed the heritage of a neurotic, insecure Europeanism before their communist trauma, situated as they were at the Eastern extremity of the continent. We have seen Kiossev submit that marginal and transitional cultures at the Eastern edge of Europe are apprehensive about their identity, one that they are prone to relinquish in a strange act of “self-colonizing” and of “lovingly coloniz[ing] their own authenticity” (114).

To make things much worse, Soviet colonialism obfuscated the previously banal in-betweenness of this cultural space which Tötösy de Zepetnek has described in terms of “(post) colonial in between peripherality” (*Comparative Central European Culture* 13). Once Eastern Europe was simply poised half-way between the Western civilization and the exotic Orient and it combined features from both extremes of this binary opposition. With the interpolation of the Soviet Empire, Eastern European countries were forced to adopt what I would call a “triangular identity formation”. A third pole was added and the usual binaries of (post)colonial imagination (West/Orient, us/them) were replaced by what may seem to most like an impossible positioning of the East European self between *three* instances of the Other, all of which are at one and the same time adversarial and contaminating: The West, the Soviet Union, and the “Orient” (the colonial primitive).

Anca Băicoianu is only partly right when she offers a slightly more complicated identification scheme for postcommunist Europe (“double-

centred peripherality”) in contrast to the simple opposition between peripheral self and imperial other with which postcolonial identification operates and when she talks of the Manicheism by which the Eastern reference point is demonized while the Western one is idealized (51). What I propose is an even more complicated relationship, where the colonial periphery (the Orient or the Third World) becomes a third center or reference point in the awkward positioning of the Sovietized Eastern European.

Also, instead of the simple Manicheism, I would suggest that all three centers were at once repulsive and hypnotically powerful. The West was both coveted for its freedom and opulence and vilified for its betrayal and naiveté. The Soviet Union was, on the one hand, a national adversary and criminal oppressor and, on the other, an impressively massive and sly victor, as well as the champion of the poor and the unexceptional many. The Orientals/Third World colonial subjects were at once the spectre of the Eastern Europeans’ own failure and barbaric backwardness, but they were also natives of a romantic paradise of exotic opulence, as well as former subalterns who had gained their freedom just as the Eastern Europeans were losing theirs. All of the three reference points had something that the Eastern European lacked: a definite identity. The Sovietised Eastern European was neither a clear winner, nor a clear victim, neither Western, nor Eastern, neither entirely civilized, nor an utter barbarian or natural man. To be a Sovietized Eastern European was to be *almost* like any of the three stable identities —*but not quite*— in an area of endless interference. (endnote 4) Life inside this unstable area is further complicated by gradual scale of Orientalization. Milica Bakić-Hayden proposed the notion of “nesting Orientalism” as the ripple effect or mise-en-abyme whereby “a pattern of reproduction of the original dichotomy upon which Orientalism is premised” generates a “gradation of ‘Orients’” with orientalized cultures further orientalizing their neighbors to the south and the east [918 and passim].

The disparaging stereotypes of Orientalism and Balkanism are sometimes embraced by the mimicking victims only to perpetuate the harm to

themselves and to their neighbors or other cultures pushed into submission. This behavior was analyzed by Ewa Thompson under the rubric of adopting a “surrogate hegemon” (“Whose Discourse?” 5 and passim) and her examples of Poland treating the Euro-Atlantic organizations to which it is a member as “an assembly of judges” hold perfectly true for Romania and other post-communist countries.

Romanian and to some extent East European intellectuals display a certain discursive and ideological duplicity, a rhetoric of resentment and table-turning typical of the trauma of marginalization that is still confined to a canonical essentialism as it proclaims allegiance to the great and eternal values of humanity. Such marginalized elites scramble for a privileged minority status, the merit badge of honorary secondariness: Central Europeans over (South) East Europeans, the Second World over the Third World, Asian over African immigrants (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in Brydon I, 57-8). Subaltern elites sometimes adopt the vocabulary of discrimination against “inferior” cultures (sometimes with racist overtones) in order to ease the pain of their own dismissal by and inferiority to, the West.

Inside such a vague and shifting area, Romania seems like the prime candidate for ambiguity neurosis. Romanian elites have traditionally defined their nation as a mongrelized cross between Greek Orthodoxy and linguistic Latinity, a Balkan culture in the eyes of most which, nevertheless, obstinately refuses to accept its Balkan identity, and a country that is neither entirely Central, nor entirely East European, as illustrated, among others, by Timothy Garton Ash:

The term East Central Europe combines the criteria of post-1945 Eastern Europe and pre-1914 Central Europe. By post-1945 Eastern Europe one means the formally independent member states of the Warsaw Pact, apart from the Soviet Union. The term Central Europe is, of course, more problematic, but for the period before 1914 it may be taken to mean those countries that, while subsumed in one of the three great multinational empires (Austro-Hungarian, Prussian-German, or Russian), nonetheless preserved major elements of Western traditions: for example Western Christianity, the rule of law, some separation of powers, a measure of constitutional government, and

something that could be called civil society. The Western Ukraine and the Baltic states are thus excluded by the first criterion, while Bulgaria is excluded by the second. *Romania is a borderline case.* (qtd. in Neumann 145, *emphasis mine*)

Such convolutions are, no doubt, a challenge for postcolonial critics as well, if we take Hélène Gill’s word that postcolonialism is “a strand of oppositional, radical thought. . . [which] is tempted to adopt strongly contrasted binary positions. By the same token, it tends to be uncomfortable with in-between situations: unclear ethical dilemmas, ambivalent political attitudes, divided loyalties” (qtd. in Bonnet 98). The unsettled significance and complicated place of postcommunist identities makes difficult all comparisons between postcommunism and postcolonialism, as well as between these forms of subalternity and the no less intricate shapes of imperialism. [...]

The Discourse of Soviet (Post) Communism and Its Rapport with (Post)Modernity

Postcommunism (also referred to as “postsocialism” or the “post-Soviet”) is *chronologically* the period that follows closely after communism, or, more exactly, that comes after the fall of the Soviet empire, the toppling of communist regimes in the Eurasian communist bloc, and the dismantling of the USSR. As postcommunism is predicated on its temporal, structural and epistemic consecutiveness to communism, some radical critics have questioned the very reality of postcommunism by claiming that communism proper never existed. The totalitarian Soviet rule (and its national Central and East European off-shoots) allegedly had nothing to do with the communist ideals and the spirit of Marxism, hence communism as a utopia, the ideal projection of a redeemed society, is presumably unscathed by the collapse of the USSR and the communist bloc. This argument is aimed to boost the morale of Marxist supporters and to legitimize their critiques of capitalism from such utopian perspectives, more than to actually provide a better description and analysis of what communism was and what

follows it. The Marxist argument against the use of postcommunism as a term to describe the aftermath of the USSR and of Soviet-type regimes in Europe hopes to counter the over-exuberance of unconditional supporters of liberal capitalism like Francis Fukuyama who have proclaimed the end of history and of ideology by suggesting that the fall of the Soviet bloc and the end of the Cold War prove that capitalist democracy is the unavoidable superior stage in the development of all human societies and that all other civilizational models were shown to be unsustainable.

But when nominal quibbles are left aside, there is no significant number of critics who would deny that communist regimes actually existed and that they were based on terror and discrimination, on mass murder, on deportation of entire communities and violent repression, on inefficient economies which pauperized the lives of ordinary citizens, on large-scale lying and forgery, on systematic brainwashing, on generating hatred and suspicion among individuals and social groups, and on disregarding, humiliating, and curtailing the basic rights of the individual (when that individual was left alive), such as, for instance, the right to hold and express personal opinions, to travel, to exercise free will, to elect and be elected, to associate freely, to own property, to decide whether to procreate or not, to enjoy equal opportunities, etc. Also, communism was shown to employ imperialist and colonial practices including the appropriation and/or control of foreign territories, the curtailment of national rights to self-representation, the subordination of the resources and economies of other countries, which it forcefully annexed or turned into satellites, the imposition on such countries of self-serving propagandistic campaigns, the misrepresentation, abuse, and traumatizing of the identities of ethnic or religious groups by the control over their administrative, political, economic, and cultural institutions. In other words, although professing Marx's liberating doctrine and implementing his economic, social and political solutions, communist societies were themselves oppressive, discriminating, and bigoted and the communist power center was just as ravenous a colonial empire as the capitalist ones, even though

there was no body of water between it and its colonial possessions.

Systemically, postcommunism is the awkward interdependence between this new stage in the organization of former communist societies and its eponymous predecessor against a context of pressures from the forces of postindustrial globalization. Whether the various postcommunist countries and regimes are trying to discard, surpass or merely tone down the totalitarian *ancien régime* with its party-state rule and its centralized planned economy, they remain under the shadow of their previous communist condition. This ghost may revisit the new postcommunist societies in the shape of lingering mentalities, or as the conversion of the older communist into new capitalist networks of influence, inside information, and preferential allocation of resources.

Finally, from an *epistemic* standpoint, postcommunism (though one should more correctly talk of "postcommunist studies") may sometimes denote indiscriminately all efforts to generate an understanding of the communist past and of its connection with the present, yet the term is more frequently used to refer to critiques of this field grounded in postmodern(ism), poststructuralism, and the cultural studies paradigm.

Chronological, systemic, and epistemic accounts of postcommunism all rely on its antecedence to communism and on the backdrop supplied by the no less problematic relation between modernity and postmodernity. Bauman is one of several important thinkers who take communism to be a manifestation of modernity:

Like socialism (and all other staunch believers in the modern values of technological progress, the transformation of nature and a society of plenty), communism was thoroughly modern in its passionate conviction that a good society can only be a carefully designed, rationally managed and thoroughly industrialized society. . . . Communism was modernity in its most determined mood and most decisive posture; modernity streamlined, purified of the last shred of the chaotic, the irrational, the spontaneous, the unpredictable. (Bauman 166-7)

However, for Bauman communism was also a frozen image of modernity, both as an episteme and as economic and social practice. As such, it

was unable to adapt and keep up with world evolution in late modernity/postmodernity. A prey to the dogmatism of Marx and Lenin, who were obsessed with their own feud with the industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century, Soviet-type communism took over that model of modernization, (“the nineteenth-century steam and iron ideal of modern plenty”) and mobilized its societies for a competition in those terms. But it was unprepared for the spontaneous shifts of market-driven economies or for the reorientation towards services which was brought about by postindustrialism and it consequently could not go like capitalism from metallurgy to semiurgy, as Baudrillard puts it. Communism could not survive in the postmodern age, because communism is dictatorship over needs and choices, whereas postmodernity is a proliferation of needs and a redefining of happiness in terms of consumption (Bauman 169). This view has sometimes been adopted by social scientists who, using “harder” empirical methods of investigation, still conclude that postmodern social changes include “the decline of the state socialist systems” (Inglehart 6).

For Lyotard, an unrelenting critic of the modern and an advocate of cultural postmodernity, the Enlightenment-driven totalizing episteme together with its Marxist revival is “the ultimate source of the totalitarian and ecological nightmares that have bedeviled the twentieth century” (Boyne and Rattansi 3; cf. Lyotard 12-13 and *passim*).

No doubt that, in the eyes of many anticommunists and victims of the Soviet-led nightmare, to consider Soviet-inspired totalitarianism or national-communism off-shoots of modernity is an undeserved compliment. The reality of communism displayed for the eyes that remained still open and clear a *feudal* mentality at best. Outhwaite and Ray evoke as indices of *pre-modern* practices and mentalities the gerontocratic organization of decision-making and the use of forced labor employed in the very process of modernization (92-3). Communist dictatorships did use nepotism and vassality, personality cults and courtly fawning on such a scale that they at times resembled an absolutist monarchy, rather than a modern democracy. Though no more than a sham, they did mimic modern Western societies in the

comprehensive use of science and technology, industrialization and massification of production, as well as in the features included in the Parsonian model of modernization: “bureaucratic organization of collective goal-attainment, money and market systems, generalized universalistic legal systems, and democratic association with elective leadership and mediated membership support for policy orientations” (Outhwaite and Ray 92). Not least of all, the Enlightenment did inform the overt mentality, the public discourse, and the official ideology of these societies.

The “modernity” of communism is hard to ignore. Whether we take communism to be a legitimate or illegitimate alternative to capitalism, a utopian excess, a disease of modernity or a competitor against Western modernity, communism is trapped in its mimic-and-outperform rapport with the discourse, ideology, and practice of modernity. What of postcommunism, then?

Postcommunism is seen by most as a “transition” (Balcerowicz 1994 and 2002, Nodia 1996, Pickles and Smith 1998, Berdahl, Bunzl, and Lampland 2000). Few realize the comparative implication of the term, since transition theories first emerged in the study of Third World countries from Latin America attempting to move from dictatorship to democracy. Postcolonialism itself has often been considered a “historical transition” (Parry 3). Some analysts of postcommunist societies believe that once former communist countries shake off their totalitarian regimes, they will automatically revert to the Western models of development constructed on liberal democracy and capitalism. This journey, which for some of the European postcommunist nations is seen as a return, is commonly referred to as their “transition” period, a very popular representation of postcommunism even outside academic circles. But additional factors like the speed of development and the fidelity to the Western economy *cum* democracy model have turned this voyage into a competition where some countries are seen as faring better than others:

Societies are relatively equivalent in this culture [of transition], and the successful can become exemplars for the rest. Estonia, for instance, is disciplined and open to the world, while Ukraine is beset by a parliament that obstructs privatization

and has an economy grounded in the informal. (Kennedy 273)

Obviously, the arbiter of postcommunist performance is usually the West. Various authorities like the European Union, NATO and the United States, the rating agencies, and great creditors like the IMF or the World Bank are in the business of sanctioning postcommunist countries' overall economic and political performance, and in their books it seems that the Central European (the Visegrad Four) and the Baltic states (the first wave of postcommunist states to be admitted in the EU in 2004) have overtaken the Eastern-European and the Balkan countries (Romania and Bulgaria are late comers into the EU that still need monitoring in certain areas), which in turn seem to be doing better than the former Soviet republics. Consequently, both a hierarchy and a calendar of transition separate postcommunist countries.

There are occasional optimists like John Mueller, who think that transition is over and that most former communist countries are democratic and capitalist. The totalitarian "cultural legacies" (Stephen Holmes) which produced anti-capitalist deformities of mentality were not that strong to Mueller. Democracy is all about leaving people free to complain, and capitalism is all about leaving them free to be greedy. Despite its opposite, negative image, capitalism rewards honesty, fairness, civility, compassion, and heroism (Mandelbaum 102-4). Democracy and capitalism are not necessarily connected, they can exist independently. They can also work well without people understanding them very well. Intellectuals, whose views are revered in such countries, can be detrimental because of their idealized image of democracy, and their embittered image of capitalism (105). Democracy can work without institutions that are traditionally considered essential (right to vote etc.). All it takes is that people agree not to overthrow the government by force, and the government agrees to allow people to overthrow it by any other means. Hence, political officeholders are responsible to the citizenry (107). The evolution of postcommunist countries has called for a reconsidering of traditional idea(l)s concerning capitalism and democracy.

If one considers all the above arguments for considering communism to be an alternative or an exacerbation that took modernity too far down the road of totalization and uniformity, than it is strange that instead of conceiving transition as a *horizontal* shift from one branch of modernity to another, or as a temporal *regression*, a retracing of steps to the previous historical node, most critics take postcommunist transition to be an acceleration of progress in order to catch up with the West. This is obviously the result of using the constrictive metaphoric representation of history whereby humanity progresses in a single file along the single, one-directional ladder of modernization and anyone who fails to fall in step and in line is evicted from the catalog of modernity.

Some "post" critics hope to modulate that historical understanding, though. For Gabardi, change and continuity coexist in postmodernity:

Social theorists who contend that our condition is late modern rather than postmodern offer accounts of the present that stress the theme of change within continuity, rather than radical rupture. They grasp our transition by working within the modernization paradigm. Thus despite their differences, Jürgen Habermas, David Harvey, and Anthony Giddens all agree that we are still operating within a modern world, albeit "late" or "radically reflexive." (Gabardi 22)

Gabardi is trying to moderate the accounts of institutional changes from (neo)moderns like Habermas, Harvey, and Giddens, as well as those of proponents of the postmodern cultural shift like Baudrillard, Lyotard, and Bauman when he puts forward his notion of "transition":

I contend that our present condition is neither a radical rupture with modernity, nor a continuation of the Enlightenment project of modernization. Rather, it exhibits the features of what I call *our late modern/postmodern transition*. (Gabardi 29)

Gabardi's proposition is not just a good compromise between radical supporters of either modernity or postmodernity. It also offers the basis for a comparative study of postcommunism and postcolonialism, both of which have been described as transitional stages, against the background of post- or late modernity. He may be

speaking of the logic of “post-“ historicism, one that was introduced by postmodernity.

However, the very concept of transition has come under attack from postcommunist critics, especially since transitologists seldom agree on whether all postcommunist countries will eventually become capitalist democracies (or even whether they are all really heading westward), on the basic concerns and strategies for a successful transition, or on whether one and the same postcommunist country has just taken the first steps or has already completed its transition. Perhaps the discrepancy between critical evaluations is all quite understandable given that postcommunism is a *sui generis* phenomenon with a considerable portion of the world having embarked on a daunting and unprecedented project in history, “the attempt to construct a form of capitalism on and with the ruins of the communist system” (Pickles and Smith 2). The task is more difficult and uncommon than what other nations had to face before because communist economies were not so much underdeveloped, as misdeveloped (Mandelbaum 11), which means that these new capitalist democracies are not going to arise spontaneously and evolve at a natural pace, but will have to be force-grown in unusual conditions and rushed “back on track” at a dazzling historical speed. Originally, transition theory emerged in the appraisal of Latin American and Southern European states that were shaking off authoritarian regimes and advancing towards more democratic governances, but those countries’ reconstruction could rely on some existing forms of capitalist economy and democratic political institutions, no matter how frail or perverted. Postcommunist countries, on the other hand, though once functioning on capitalist and democratic institutions, at least some of them, were entirely communized and transformed into centralized dictatorial party-states and now have to discard entirely their old communist structure and start from scratch.

Critics have variously objected to the metaphor of transition, especially when applied to postcommunism, because it rests on the assumption that this period is merely a fleeting stage in a process of acquiring genuine liberal democracy and free-market capitalism, because it implies there is a

necessary linear progress towards the Western ideal of capitalist democracy as the only feasible end of developing civilizations, and because it suggests that postcommunist societies are late in getting there. Alternatively, there are proposals that not all postcommunist states may be advancing anywhere, that some may be stagnating or even regressing to authoritarian or feudal-like structures, and that this type of postcommunist society, that appears to many as transitional, may prove definitive for certain nations. Students of postcommunism are also reserved as to the appropriateness of such “deficit models”, in Michael Burroway’s phrasing, whereby postcommunist countries are described in terms of what they lack, rather than by features of their own which they actually exhibit (Gans-Morse 334, Sakwa 1999, 119-22).

The debate over transition theories and analyses raises interesting questions about the rhetoricality of postcommunist discourse which are mostly asked within a comparative framework. The complaints about the inaccuracy of transitology and its explanatory patterns for the postcommunist situation occasionally have prompted comparisons with postcolonialism and the Third World. While some scholars find that the post-Soviet states of Central Asia and the Caucasus could aptly be described as decolonized nations whose evolution is similar to that of postcolonial Africa, others extend the analogy to Eastern Europe. As part of her comparative study of nationalism, Maria Todorova exposes traditional representations of the Eastern European and Balkan area for operating on prefiguring tropes of the lag, of the painful need to catch up with the speedier and more developed West, of the planting on the native soil of imported or “pirated” Western ideas etc., which have all ingrained an image of the Balkans and Eastern Europe as a backward area, with a separate, slower or belated flow of time. She professes bemusement at the similarities between the Eastern European and the postcolonial worlds and goes on to describe them:

Accordingly, the main categories of analysis of the past are ones that pertain to emptiness: lack, absences, what one is not, incompleteness, backwardness, catching up, failure, self-exclusion, negative consciousness, and so on. And in both

cases the reasons for the backwardness are external. (Todorova, "The Trap of Backwardness" 160)

While she is not the first or only critic to have dwelt on the similarities between postcommunism and postcolonialism, Todorova notices something else besides the usual and painful differences between the West and Eastern Europe, the Orient or Africa. She finds that the lag-and-lack trope is not a stranger to Western European culture either and illustrates it with the cultures of Germany, Italy or Spain. Moreover, she reminds us that some Balkan and East European states were created at the same time or even slightly before Italy and Germany (145). She consequently suggests that the trope (and "trap") of East European backwardness be replaced with the concept of "relative synchronicity" within the broader historical paradigm of the *longue durée*, where the quest for national emancipation and the push for civilizational progress were the common outcomes of a modernization process that spread through the whole of Europe, making the east and the west of the continent contemporary for all practical reasons.

Nevertheless, the backwardness trope remains a *topos* in the popular mentality which is informed by Balkanism and it perpetuates the anguish of the postcommunist subject. Apart from the physical and mental abuse inflicted upon them by communist dictatorship over an extensive period of time, such subjects have had to take the additional insult of having not just their personal, but also their collective identity humiliated and estranged. Eastern and even Central European countries have always been considered strange and inconsequential. Surely, the non-European postcommunist cultures have their own history of exclusion, but at least they have a definite status, whereas to be a Central or Eastern European is to be a failed European, one who is not classifiable either as European or Asian. The rejection by the West of this "other" Europe has always been a cause for suffering and it brought about disastrous consequences as British PM Neville Chamberlain's appeasement speech of September 27, 1938 demonstrates, in which he argued, in a typically Western European fashion, for non-intervention on the part of Czechoslovakia, "a small nation" and a "far-away coun-

try" locked at the time with Germany in "a quarrel between people of whom we know nothing". The war and its aftermath meant that these minor non-Western European countries were dismantled, traded, won or lost by the great Western powers and the USSR until they became mere satellites of the latter. This meant having to bear the humiliation of being regarded as barbarous, uncivilized communist dictatorships with meager living standards and inefficient economies, deprived of freedom and of basic individual rights, brainwashed into robotic caricatures of the utopian Soviet new man.

Larry Wolff amply documented in his imagological study *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994) how the stereotype of depicting Eastern European, Balkan, and Slavic peoples as barbarians was constructed by Voltaire, Diderot, Levesque, Marat, Herder, Gibbon, Rousseau, and other Western authors starting with the Enlightenment and that these clichés have been perpetuated through the canonization and recurrent citation of such texts throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries until as late as the 1990s. Such references to the backwardness of East European and Asian cultures have constantly shaped the popular opinion as well as the foreign policies and military strategies of Western governments. This cliché of barbarism obviously permeated into Eastern European intellectual circles and generated an inferiority complex.

One of the ways in which the traumatized personality of the Eastern European dealt with this burden was by what Alexander Kiossev has called "self-colonization" in which these marginal and ailing cultures "import alien values and civilizational models by themselves and that they lovingly colonize their own authenticity through these foreign models" (115). Their emancipation from the forced communist colonization of land and mind is achieved by a welcoming of Western neo-colonization, since these have been the only alternative models available to this marginalized European region by representations of the Cold War and even of the history that preceded it. It looks, then, like postcommunist countries, especially those at the edge of Europe, have traded one form of colonial subalternity for another as they join the

global political and economic networks with a painful sense of their lacks and imperfections and of the need to shape up in the vain hope that they will become equals in this game (Kennedy 272-4 and passim) and “return to normalcy” (Holmes 335).

Postcommunist cultures seem condemned to vacillate between ingrained forms of Western and Soviet subalternity that they cannot seem to shake off. Bauman brings to our attention some of the postcommunist frustrations that may explain various manifestations of *Ostalgie* (longing for the communist past of Eastern Europe) when he notes that the forces or agents which brought down the communist system, such as the workers in state-run industrial dinosaurs, did not reap the benefits in the new system (Bauman 160-2). One perfect illustration is the reaction of one of the most notorious anticommunists, Lech Wałęsa, at the 2011 commemoration of victims of the Gdansk strike of 1970, in the *Europe News* report:

‘It was such a big victory, but the effects are not on the scale of that victory,’ Wałęsa said at the Gdansk shipyard. ‘Look, for one, at this yard. It’s dying.’ (“Poland marks anniversary of Solidarity’s legalization”, *Europe News* Aug 31, 2011)

Postcommunist societies obviously display traumatized collective identities. Humiliation and marginalization, as well as the adulteration of their self-images by imperialist and colonial propaganda are features that bring postcommunist and post-colonial countries under the same rubric. Whether they are European, Asian or African, new states that have relatively recently emancipated themselves from colonial or imperial oppression are first and foremost cultures in distress. This may explain the difficulties of posttraumatic states in coping once more, even after apparently having secured their freedom and independence, with rules imposed by the new world powers and authorities of the day.

Postcommunism as a discipline of study is riddled with theoretical and ideological conundrums and is still tardy in instituting itself as a unified field of scholarship. A major obstacle is the absence of a common idiom for the postcommunist space, both because there is no *lingua franca* in place after the fall of the USSR in spite of its long

Russification campaign, and because there is no common theoretical core that grounds the various approaches to this subject (Oțoiu 88-91). Apart from the linguistic and geo-cultural diversity that hinders the circulation of scholarly findings and precludes the necessary debates, there are also competitive rather than co-operative attitudes between the different sciences and ideologies of postcommunism scholars. Just as there is a difference of status and prestige between the various postcommunist countries, there is a similar hierarchy at play between, on the one hand, the “harder” disciplines like economics, sociology, political science, or even history and anthropology, which claim to be relying on “factual” evidence and to be providing more “objective” and verifiable truths and, on the other hand, the “softer” approaches like discourse analysis, rhetoric, and cultural studies, especially when they espouse post-structuralist and leftist agendas. It may be that postcommunism has generated its own divisions and hierarchies of knowledge, different locally than in the West, in the same way that postcolonialism has, both part of the “Cold War division of intellectual labor” (Pletsch 1981, Chari and Verdery 2009).

On the other hand, it is to be expected, perhaps, that, in a culture which has been submitted for decades to a blatant distortion and mystification of both past and present events, to a sweeping and unashamed propagandistic campaign consisting of lies, defamation, and a reversal of broadly acceptable moral standards, the first order of business would be to restore the basic “facts” or “truths” about the past (especially the recent history of crimes and abuses). The priority in such contexts is to reestablish a firm and more “natural” system of values that would prevent further slippage and capsizing in the future, rather than to insist on the interpretive and rhetorical nature of our “truths”, on the inaccessibility of ultimate “facts”, on the in-built indeterminacy and ambiguity of all knowledge, or on the relative nature of moral values.

This justifiable bias, given the circumstances of emerging from communist dictatorship, is seen not just in certain scholars and intellectuals, but also in most citizens of postcommunist countries.

With no acceptable cure or compensation for their communist trauma, postcommunist societies may be expected to backlash and, in a rather perverse twist of fate, mimic the intolerance of their former oppressor. The ideological wars both in the scholarly disciplines and in society at large are consequently fierce and the opponent is often deemed not just wrong, but unacceptable and not even entitled to the opportunity to voice and exercise his/her options.

Under the circumstances, it often proves an uphill battle to promote analogies with the postcolonial condition and advocate theoretical infusions from postcolonial cultural studies. Various scholars have recently pressed for a connection and recontextualization of postcommunism and postcolonialism, as well as for devising new multidisciplinary approaches. However, there is still considerable apathy in the greater part of the academic community which displays inertial attitudes when it comes to this association. What is sorely missed from this rejected analogy is an understanding of the full extent and real nature of domination—whether (post)colonial, (post)communist or otherwise—of the problematic nature of power relations, of the ubiquity of discrimination, exploitation, and repression, which are just as likely to be found in capitalism and communism, in liberal individualism and in Marxist collectivism, in the West and in the East. Postcommunist studies could also benefit from the focus on the posttraumatic subject and from the subtle instruments for analyzing mind, discourse, and power relations that were developed over the past half-century by postmodern, poststructuralist, and postcolonial critics. Postcolonial studies would in turn benefit from the opportunity to revise and sharpen their theoretical and ideological grounding by looking at the intricacies, subtleties, and complexities of communist imperial/colonial forms of domination which include colonization in all its forms: semi-colonization, double colonization, self-colonizing (Kiossev), reverse-cultural colonization (Chioni-Moore), and “filtered” or secondary colonialism (Tötösy de Zepetnek).

Chioni-Moore has made an eloquent case for the connection between the two regions and areas of expertise and invited 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” (115). Other critics have also insisted that there are certain features that postcommunist and postcolonial societies share such as the experience of trauma (Kiossev 1999, Şandru 2005, Sztompka 2000, Ştefănescu 2009), hybridity and liminality (Oţoiu 2003, Mihăilă 2005), dependency and marginalization, structures of inclusion / exclusion, structures of othering, renegotiations of cultural / political identity (Şandru 2005: 37), as well as “durable external influences on sociopolitical [and economic] development” of the colonized (Carey and Raciborski 214).

In this light, postcolonial and postcommunist countries can be seen as (post)imperialist victim-cultures whose identities have been violated by a foreign oppressor and are now recovering in a posttraumatic interval. Despite the obvious differences between the particular contexts of occupation, submission and liberation, and irrespective of whether there was a body of water between them and the imperial force that subdued them, or whether they were conceived as the West’s religious, racial, ethnic or ideological Other, the generic historical situation of postcommunist and postcolonial societies is analogous: they are cultural communities that were conquered and marginalized by modern empires, they fought for liberation and emancipation, they achieved state-independence, and they engaged in national (re) construction and in the political and aesthetic restoration of their cultural identity.

From the perspective of postcolonial criticism, the polarization of reformist elites in postcommunist Romania may be viewed as a double process in which its cultural identity is both decolonized and neo- (or re-)colonized. The 1989 radical rejection of the *coercive* communist domination was supplemented by the rediscovery of an older form of *consensual* domination by Western culture, a “self-colonization”, to use the term coined by Alexander Kiossev in his controversial article *Notes on Self-colonising Cultures* to describe self-

inflicted identity traumas in Eastern European postcommunism.

The process of modernization in Romania both before and after the communist interlude often took this half-masochistic form of submissiveness. While Westernizing/modernizing the country was appreciated then and now as a strategy for recovering from Turkish, or Soviet domination, the fact remains that Romanian culture willfully positions itself as subaltern, minor, peripheral to a superior West. Since the latter cultural asymmetry is traditionally conceived as more “natural” in canonical accounts of Romanian history, the self-colonized subjects are placed in the perplexing situation where their emancipation and assimilation to the “civilized world” and to “universal culture” is achieved by embracing a subservient status and succumbing to a self-mutilating shame.

Ironically, this new colonization is duplicitous and perplexing. The coveted Western critical paradigm, which informs not just scholastic pursuits, but also public projects for social reform, lacks homogeneity and proves, in fact, to be a *Janus bifrons*: to some it offers the traditional values of capitalism and liberal humanism, to others the rebellious Marxist ideals of many Western scholars in the humanities. Moreover, as shown in section 1.4 above, the liberal and radical discourses are dislodged from their usual Western contexts and are transposed in a postcommunist situation where their significance and function undergo a process of conversion.

Additional complications arise from the reemergence in the cultural public sphere of several formerly suppressed and marginalized competitors: the discourse of precommunist interwar modernism, the discourse of the late modernism of the 1960s, the postmodernist discourse of the 1980s. Not least of all, an anticommunist realism of a documentary nature (operating as a counter-discourse to the mandatory socialist realism) was now free to engage fully the sordid and scandalous aspects of “real” life under communist totalitarianism, without fear of censorship and persecution.

NOTES

(1) The contextual reversal of the political function of Marxism and liberal humanism is but one in a fas-

cinating series of overturns typical of the emancipative discourse of the humanities in postcommunist Romania. Whereas postcolonial studies aim to re-read the context of oppression by bringing a new understanding of culture as directly engaged in, and instrumental to power struggles, a number of important cultural personalities in Romania still evoke theories of the autonomy of philosophy or of the aesthetic. These idealist precommunist vestiges still earn a good deal of public respect in postcommunist Romania, as they continue to be perceived as a subversive strategy of resistance against communist dictatorship through culture (usually conceived as a Eurocentric high-culture canon).

- (2) I am using the terms *kairos* and *kairology* devoid of their significance for theologians and motivational gurus and more in keeping with the rhetorical understanding of the opportunity for discourse.
- (3) Such is, for instance, Michael Hechter’s discussion of the relationship between center and Celtic fringes in the British Isles or the African-American activists Eldridge Cleaver, Kenneth Clark, and Stokely Carmichael on the coloniality of Blacks in the United States.
- (4) The concept of “interference” was put forth by Sorin Alexandrescu in his study on the fractured Romanian identity (*Identitate în ruptură* 12, 35-42).

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