



# East Central Europe Between the Colonial and the Postcolonial: A Critical Introduction

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Immigrants en route to that fair, idyllic country they were sure was somewhere in the West, where people are brothers and sisters, and a strong state plays the role of parent...

Olga Tokarczuk, *Flights* (2017)

## EAST CENTRAL EUROPE: THE ALLURE OF IN-BETWEENNESS

East Central Europe is a region that imagined itself as a space between, constructing historiographies of bulwarks and borderlands. When European modernity started to be synonymous with imperial powers, central

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and eastern parts of the continent found themselves even more ambiguously in the off-centre position. Not only were they not as “Europeanized” in economic and political spheres as the core European nations, but they were, to a varying degree, included into larger European empires, or remained suzerainties of the Ottoman Empire. The in-betweenness of the region has been inherently contradictory: on the one hand, founded on the strong identification with Europe, and, on the other, driven by the anxiety of incomplete belonging and not ranking high enough to merit the status of Europeanness. In response to this and to launch their own politics of nationalism, East Central European nations and societies developed, from the nineteenth century onwards, a special brand of self-reinforcing peripherality, neatly connected with narratives of fidelity to the European project. Europe was in this off-centre imaginary devoid of ambiguity: premised on the Enlightenment foundations of liberalism, human rights, and civic ethos, it was something to aspire to.

In relation to the Western European modernity, which was to a large degree concomitant with overseas imperial expansion, East Central Europe did not have an opportunity to join the imperialist rivalry. Despite being dependencies of the Prussian/German, Austro-Hungarian, or Russian empires up until the end of World War I, the countries which lost statehood to intra-European imperial domination would not consider themselves colonies. Overseas imperial expansion of European powers was rarely an object of critical reflection from the East Central European peripheries. Even if traces of empathy for or comparison with colonized populations were occasionally an element of nationalist discourse in those subordinated societies, the overall agreement that European imperialism was a consequence of civilizational superiority prevailed until World War II. Being subjected to foreign rule was not regarded a colonial dependence. Insurrectionary nationalism claimed the right to statehood on the criterion of nationhood—if a society had its own language, high literature, which had been preferably developing for centuries, and its own political culture, it merited its own state. The concept of colony was reserved to non-European territories and populations, as those which, arguably, had no national consciousness to speak of. In this, East Central European nationalisms followed here the normative concept of the nation inscribed within a historiography of development reaching its full mature form in Western European nations. In the light of Partha Chatterjee’s critique of the division into Western and eastern nationalisms in which eastern nationalism can only emulate the paradigmatic Western nationalism, and,

additionally, deviate from the paradigm, East Central European insurrectionary nationalisms would likewise be classified as eastern (Chatterjee 1986, 2).

As a result of labour migration, East Central European history also includes involvement in the empires of other nations. Not only did large numbers of people from the region migrate to the (former) colonial world, but they also provided personnel to occupy, administer and police colonial empires. Even if largely excluded from colonial politics at an international level, the region played an important role in generating new discourses based on data gathered in the colonial contact zone. These usually were inscribed in colonial ideologies of racial difference and civilizational mission (cf. Ureña Valerio 2019). Although East Central Europeans in colonial territories blended with the colonial ruling class and acted in a transnational capacity as “Europeans,” they nevertheless preserved shades of difference. Social scientists, such as Bronisław Malinowski, were able to turn their experience of “in-betweenness” into an epistemic resource. Malinowski reinvented his own ambiguous status as an insider/outsider within colonial society into the ethnographer’s ideal subject-position (Lebow et al. 2019). Joseph Conrad’s notorious ambiguity concerning the imperial venture stemmed from the East Central European experience of an existence at the edges of modernity. Growing up under the pressure of the Russian empire, observing the operations and development of the Western empires, Conrad exposed in his writing both the bare racism at the foundations of the empire’s “civilizing mission,” and yet, iterated the deep racial fear of sharing humanity with those whom he considered to remain at a lower level of development. For his representation of Africans as inarticulate and primordial, Chinua Achebe called Conrad, both arguably and contentiously, “a thoroughgoing racist” (Achebe 1978).

With different motivations, this contact continued in the postcolonial period in the form of socialist states’ cooperation with the Soviet-supported postcolonial countries (Westad 2005; Kola 2018). If modernity meant for core European powers the consolidation of their imperial status, for East Central European countries it meant the consolidation of their peripheral status. The post-World War II order turning East Central Europe into the Eastern Bloc added to this peripheral indeterminacy—decided already in 1943 in Tehran and sealed in Yalta and Potsdam without the participation of interested nations. It was imposed with some semblance of democratic procedures that were in fact thinly disguised

*coups d'état*, and it added to the region's experience of modernity as a condition of intermittent dependence.

Notwithstanding divergent political and historical perspectives that collide in various concepts of East Central Europe, the region emerged and solidified as that which considered itself essentially European, but felt it was looked at (and internalized that gaze) as different and lesser. The post-World War II order erased the historical borderland in-betweenness of the region imposing, instead, the binary of Eastern and Western Europe that still bears on contemporary identitarian and political transactions in the region. It emerges both in narratives of the “return to Europe,” as the EU accession has often been called, and in narratives of the region's inferior status in relation to Western Europe, or, even, in political discourses framing the European Union as a continued colonial hegemony.

The concept of East Central Europe resurfaced in the decades of state socialism as an expression of a shared sense of the loss of belonging in Europe, the most audaciously expressed in Milan Kundera's essay “The Tragedy of Central Europe” (1984). There, Kundera pitted Central Europe, “the kidnapped West,” against Eastern Europe, whose communist rule he straightforwardly defined as part of the Russian imperial project.<sup>1</sup> Central Europe became an identity project founded on the shared agenda of dissidence. Kundera developed a vision of a unique transnational ethos of diversity that historically defined Central Europe and was destroyed by the onset of Soviet domination: “Central Europe longed to be a condensed version of Europe itself in all its cultural variety, a small arch-European Europe, a reduced model of Europe made up of nations conceived according to one rule: the greatest variety within the smallest space. How could Central Europe not be horrified facing a Russia founded on the opposite principle: the smallest variety within the greatest space?” (Kundera 1984, 33). Drawing on Kundera's definition of a European as someone “who is nostalgic for Europe” (Kundera 1988, 1), Svetlana Boym developed her concept of “nostalgia for Europe”—a future-oriented vision uniting anti-communist dissidents via intellectual

<sup>1</sup> “Un Occident kidnappé ou la tragédie de l'Europe Centrale” (1983) was the essay's original French title, subsequently translated into English as “The Kidnapped West” by Edmund White, published in *Granta*, 11 March 1984, and in *New York Review of Books* as “The Tragedy of Central Europe” in April 1984. We are using *The NYRB* title as that which is more broadly used today.

and cultural allegiance to Europe (Boym 2001, 221). Nostalgia for Europe helped sustain the hope for a future return. These combined emotions premised anti-communist dissidence and postcommunist transition on the temporality of loss and return.

This cartographic and historical palimpsest that makes up East Central Europe has given grounds to an intensive debate on the region's condition as Europe's periphery, its close but still discursively and politically subordinated Other, or, in the context of world-system theory, the (semi-)periphery it has continued to be since the onset of modernity (Boatcă 2007; Sowa 2011; Zarycki 2014; Petrovici 2014). The experience of modernity as global coloniality of power (Quijano 2000, 533; Tlostanova 2017, 39–44) has befallen the region since at least the eighteenth century and continued intermittently until the collapse of state socialism in the years 1989–1991. The transition period revealed an ambivalence in reciprocal expectations. Postcommunist countries aspired to join the EU and NATO to seek redress for the decades of separation from Europe and the West. But joining also stirred anxiety in Western Europe about the possible change these new admissions to international alliances and communities could bring. The “Polish plumber” became an emblem of the threat from the “New Europe,” first expressed by French politician Philippe de Villiers in 2003 opposing the plans to open labour markets to the new EU member states from 2004.<sup>2</sup> Indirectly, this anxiety transpired in a range of transition discourses which exerted a didactic and disciplining pressure on postcommunist countries (Kuus 2007, 21–38; Gans-Morse 2004, 320–349). The ensuing dialogue of unequal partners was embraced by East Central European countries without much demur. Indeed, the narratives of transition to democracy and to free market enterprise did have a remarkable appeal to postcommunist polities in need of self-redefinition and eager to develop consumer markets for commodities-deprived postcommunist societies.

Whether the postcommunist period be called transition, transformation, or any other process of system change, it was not a unilinear narrative but, rather, a disarray of political visions, economic projects, and cultural imaginaries (Offe 1996, 29–49). Some critics in the social sciences would put the very term “transition” into doubt, arguing in their studies that post-socialist changes could not be all classified as

<sup>2</sup> See: Villiers: ‘La grande triche du oui.’ Interview with Philippe de Villiers, *Le Figaro*, March 15, 2003.

pro-democratic or even pro-market. Katherine Verdery as early as 1996 challenged transitology positing that in many post-socialist countries state clientelism looked more like a transition to new feudalism than democracy (Verdery 1996, 204–228). In the same vein, Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery observed that many forms of post-socialist reality were not, as transitologists claimed, direct consequences of socialism-induced inertia and mentality, but unintended consequences of local political and cultural contestation appearing in the fissures between the macro structures of state and economy, and the micro-world of everyday local realities (Burawoy and Verdery 1999, 1). Such “autonomous effects” challenged the prescriptive mode of transitology theories, whether in their revolutionary (shock therapy) or evolutionary formats (Burawoy and Verdery 1999, 4–6).

Transformation processes had to grapple with legacies of the past in order to cope with the exigencies of the present. Research on the transition period focused on tracing the new formats of identity for the region, and determining their influence on social narratives of change, on collective memory, on the uses of history and devising new historiographic reflection on the conflicting records of the past, as well as attending to the immediacy of change in the cultural and political landscape of the time. These showed the necessity to assess the socialist period beyond the somewhat hegemonic vision of an unflinching regime. For example, feminist discourses did exist in communist countries (even if mostly licensed by the state when convenient), and the ethos of women’s employment and social mobility went by and large unquestioned. Contrariwise, the post-1989 transition period brought about a regression to patriarchal values and helped naturalize conservative visions of a woman’s place in society. Women had been at the forefront of anti-communist activism and the backlash of the postcommunist transition period once again showed the precarious position of women when national imaginaries are at stake (Penn 2005; Koobak and Marling 2014). The process of transformation abounded in instances of ambivalence and equivocality that challenge any unilinear narrative of modernization and emancipation applied to that period.

## DEBATING A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE ON EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

The necessity to find a new language of critical reflection on the region that had shaken off what were considered imposed systems of rule and was busy developing new identities, revising its histories, and devising new polities, led to an interest in the conceptual repository offered by postcolonial studies. The possibility of applying categories of postcolonial studies gave a new impetus to identifying the particularity of this part of Europe. The changes in the “world in pieces,” as Clifford Geertz called the post-bipolar world (Geertz 2000, 218–263), concerned as much economy and politics as they did cultures and societies. Postcolonialism offered a way of reframing thinking about East Central Europe, in a broad historical context, as part of European empires, including the communist period, through structural parallels with coloniality. These included strategies of domination on the part of the power regimes that consisted in various forms of coercion; and, on the part of society, strategies of mimicry covering subversive agendas spanning a spectrum from open resistance to passive non-cooperation, as well as ways of accommodating oneself to the system. The post-World War II order as such should be seen from this perspective as the consequence of the coloniality of power engendered by European modernity. The postcommunist transition period, moreover, also showed affinities with the postcolonial situation due to a defunct economy. The deep rift dividing the rich Western Europe and the destitute, by comparison, postcommunist societies, triggered cultural imaginaries of inferiority, backwardness, and, in total, a relative “eastness” measuring the distance from the normative West. Finally, the discourse of modernization pedagogy that asserted its hegemony through the purported universalism of its applicability added to the apparatus of coloniality of power.

East Central Europe has its own, unique experience that could make an important contribution to postcolonial studies and broaden its comparative scope for the discussion of the imperialist grounds of European modernity and its legacies. Thus, a brief survey is requisite of the main lines of the debate on how postcolonial studies has been deployed in the past three decades in East Central European countries to revise their histories, including histories of dependence.

East Central Europe’s constitutive in-betweenness locates the region between the colonial and postcolonial. Kristin Kopp even argues that

the region could be considered as part of a colonial cartography that would belie the exclusively overseas definition of colony. In a comprehensive study of German colonial thought since the nineteenth century, *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space* (2012), Kopp argues that colonization of the east was inscribed in the project of German expansion (Kopp 2012, 2), and as such it was also of key importance for the consolidation of Germany as a nation in the second half of the nineteenth century (Kopp 2012, 30). Izabela Surynt located the grounds of German colonial aspirations in a specifically German brand of Eurocentrism premised on the category of cultural progress that, on the one hand, manifested German national expectations and, on the other, relied on an ethnically, culturally and nationally defined Other (Surynt 2007, 29). However, Ureña Valerio is right to stress that “although German rhetoric and policies against Poles were at times violent [...], the 1904 mass killings of colonial subjects occurred in German Southwest Africa and not in any of the Polish provinces” (2019, 3). Simultaneously, Polish delegates in the *Reichstag* were in a position to denounce anti-Polish policies.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire was a different case. In *The Habsburg Empire: A New History*, Pieter Judson (2017) argues that, until the Great War, the Empire as a state consisting of minorities succeeded in binding these minorities to itself in a *Rechtsstaat* (a state that functioned according to the rule of law), with ample room for cultural self-determination in the Austrian part. The state only disintegrated during World War I when the Austro-Hungarian generals went to war, not only against Serbia and Russia, but also against the Slavic populations in their own country. After the Empire's collapse, it was replaced by nation-states that, because of the sizeable minorities they contained, could be regarded as little empires. These nation-states demanded the assimilation of multi-ethnic populations and a subordination of the peripheries to the centre (cf. Ciancia 2020). Most of them soon developed into nationalist dictatorships: “to square the circle of populist democracy and ethnic nationhood” (Judson 2017, 451).<sup>3</sup>

Some critics read the in-betweenness of East Central Europe as proof of an appropriation by the West's Orientalising gaze, for example Maria Todorova in her seminal work *Imagining the Balkans* (1998) or Tomasz

<sup>3</sup> See also, among others: Feichtinger et al. (2003), Miller and Rieber (2004), Göttsche and Dunker (2014), and Ruthner et al. (2014).



Zarycki in *Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe* (2014). Others see it as an effect of the region's self-provincializing. Alexander Kiossev includes East Central Europe in his theory of "self-colonising cultures" (Kiossev 1999, 114–118) depending on Western Europe's normative models. Kiossev calls it a "hegemony without domination" paradigm—a reversal of Ranajit Guha's "domination without hegemony" pattern of the British rule in India (Kiossev 2011, n.p.). The hegemonic position of Western European models was challenged by attempts to reach back to local traditions and revive them in the name of lost or denied authenticity threatened (yet again) by the rampages of modernization. Not quite revivals of tradition, but reinforcements of traditionalism, these responses to the pressures of transformation and, more broadly, the new, brought about by a desired, but also feared, West and created an anti-utopian, conservative cultural wing (Czapliński 2015, 122–139). A warning that embracing in-betweenness may lead to capitalizing on self-Orientalisation is issued by Merje Kuus, who points at the dangers of East Central Europeans identifying with their assigned symbolic location on the European map bordering on a less developed space—by default signifying the East. In this way, Central Europe still frames itself "as marginal, a bridgehead, in a precarious borderland location [...] in a liminal space, neither developed nor underdeveloped, neither learned nor wholly ignorant, in the process of becoming European though not yet there" (Kuus 2007, 35). However, Dirk Uffelmann points out that reviving the concept of Central Europe was largely to demand an independent status for the region and marked the final stage of rejecting Soviet domination in the region right before the collapse of communism. It was a way of claiming a shared identity against the power regime directly identified as imperialist, premising it, however, on anti-Russian sentiments, as the author claims (Uffelmann 2020, 487, 505).

The return, since the 1980s, to the concept of "Central Europe" in place of "Eastern Europe" (denoting the "Eastern Bloc") reveals the need to reclaim the space within Europe as the rightful restitution of what was taken away by the Cold War bipolar order. David Chioni Moore, noting the new/old concept of "Central Europe" with some bemusement, was one of the earliest critics who advocated broadening the scope of postcolonial studies so that it would include the post-Soviet space. Listing similarities between the Russian-Soviet and British/French/Western imperialisms, he identified the postcommunist

societies' need to affirm their belonging to Europe as "a postcolonial desire, a headlong westward sprint from colonial Russia's ghost or grasp" (Moore 2001, 118). The subsequent postcolonially-inspired critique helped conceptualize Russia as an ambivalent empire, while targeting the lingering, tacit superiority of Western Europe towards new member states revealed in patronizing or reductive approaches to the "new Europe." It also helped to critically assess the position of East Central Europe during the period when Prussia/Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary ruled the region, as was indicated above. In sum, the in-betweenness of East Central Europe generated its own brand of what, in a broader global context, manifests itself as an affective and discursive complex akin to a postcolonial sensibility. It can be traced in the region's self-image, its historical and cultural consciousness, and resurfacing often rather surprisingly in post-transformation political discourses (Huigen and Kołodziejczyk 2021, 427–433).

Even a cursory survey of postcolonial approaches in studying East Central Europe shows that the debate cannot be reduced to the issue of whether the region should be considered a postcolonial space. As will be further discussed, rethinking East Central Europe has produced viable forms of translating postcolonial resources into locally sensitive categories. Studies on the region adopting a postcolonial perspective offer substantial material contributing to debates about agency, identity, peripherality, and development, to name the main ones, that overlap with postcolonial concerns. What is at stake here is how to create new epistemologies, rather than new ontologies of (post)coloniality, stimulating the comparative potential of postcolonial studies. Within the field of postcolonial studies, the heuristic value of analysing the difference of East Central Europe is to show that we are not looking for matrices to replicate, but for new patterns in comparative thought to which postcolonialism, world-system theory, decoloniality, and other studies grounded in comparison, effectively can contribute.

### POSTCOLONIALISM'S DÉSINTÉRESSMENT—A LEFT-WING COMMITMENT OR METROPOLITAN IGNORANCE?

An important question asked directly or implied in research regarding postcolonial theory concerns a visible absence of postcolonialism's interest in massive transformations in the Soviet-dominated Eastern and Central Europe from the 1980s until the system's dissolution. It needed a

comparative vision with which Edward Said concludes his *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), where he sums up the 1980s as “the decade of mass uprisings outside the Western metropolis” (Said 1993, 395). Noticing the active presence of Eastern Europe in this global impetus to change, Said highlights the powerful symbolic charge it carried. The dancing South African protesters and wall-traversing East Germans epitomized for Said the global carnival of peaceful revolutions (Said 1993, 396). Partisanship against communism bore so many analogies to anticolonial resistance that indeed it may look like postcolonialism’s puzzling omission not to comment on it. The phenomenon was not acknowledged beyond Said’s locating it as a part of the truly global unrest caused by the refusal of confinement after the “exhaustion of grand systems and total theories” (Said 1993, 398). David Chioni Moore’s plea for including the post-Soviet space in postcolonial studies on the basis of its structural similarity to the processes in postcolonial countries was an isolated attempt to think about the empire in a properly—territorially and comparatively—global way. He observed that the exclusion of the post-Soviet from the expanding scope of postcolonialism was caused by the special use of the “Second World” in much postcolonial writing as a horizon of hope for Third World nations—a use that bespoke of an instrumental ideological treatment of a vast space of the globe shaken by the urge of emancipation, without due recognition of this determination as decolonization (Moore 2001).

While postcolonialism indeed was at a loss as to how to respond to the changes in Eastern and Central Europe after the dissolution of the communist regime, a range of comprehensive studies in how the West created the colonial difference of the region provided grounds for considering the region from a postcolonial perspective, linking modernity and coloniality as two interlocked forces at play in the region. Larry Wolff’s *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (1994) elaborated the ontology of Eastern Europe as an imaginary, and, thus, an ideological, construct of the Western European othering drive, while Maria Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans* (1997) rendered a theoretically daring and contextually urgent study of the Orientalist construction of the Balkans from a deep historical and comparative perspective. In 1996, Ariel Cohen analysed the collapse of the Soviet Union as the loss of informal imperial domination of Eastern Europe. Marko Pavlyshyn in the article: “Ukrainian Literature and the Erotics of Postcolonialism: Some Modest Propositions,” already in 1993 identified

postcolonial aspects of Ukrainian culture, as did Myroslav Shkandrij in his *Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times* (2001); and Ewa Thompson's *Imperial Knowledge* (2000) manifested a clear tone of the postcolonial insurrectionary mission in reading Russian literature as complicit in the imperial project. It was preceded by a very significant study on Russian nineteenth-century Orientalism by Sara Layton: *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (1994).

These beacons of postcolonizing Eastern and Central Europe were followed by a wide range of studies across the social sciences and humanities. Developing the concept of Russian serfdom as a form of internal colonization, Alexander Etkind, in *Internal Colonization. Russia's Imperial Experience* (2011), observed a visible trail of continuity in Russia's development as empire, despite the overall difficulty to prove direct legacies in historical duration, adding that the chief difference between the Western empires and the Russian one was the erasure of race from imperial discourse and legal practice (Etkind 2011, 252). Madina Tlostanova refuted Etkind's claim that the strategy of "nativization" of ethnic others in the Russian empire helped avoid racialism typical of the Western empires and called for acknowledging racial othering at work in the Russian and Soviet imperial practices. Objecting against Etkind's identification of the Soviet Union as a postcolonial space, Tlostanova (2005, 14), instead, branded Russia the "defeated empire," that is, reactivated in the (neo)imperial post-Soviet Russian state. Epp Annus, in her introduction to *Soviet Postcolonial Studies. A View from the Western Borderlands* (2017), regards "strategies of Soviet coloniality as inseparable from the ideals of Soviet modernity" (Annus 2017, 8), directly linking modernity and coloniality as two sides of the same process, and argues that the Soviet colonizing agenda premised on cultural paternalism and the discourse of the civilizing mission was challenged in the Baltics and the Soviet Bloc countries of East Central Europe by identification with the "West-oriented models of modernity" (Annus 2017, 9). These, in turn, allowed for the nurturing of national sentiments and dissident cosmopolitanism against the imposed model of Soviet internationalism.

The fact that anticolonial movements after World War II performed on the Cold War battlefields made it difficult to convince the postcolonial mainstream that the USSR domination in the Eastern Bloc had imperial underpinnings, especially since Marxism provided an important part of emancipation vocabularies in postcolonial studies. Some critics claim that

the interconnectedness between the dissolution of the communist system in the Soviet-dominated Europe, and such a ground-breaking decolonization event as the annulment of Apartheid—an established object of study in postcolonial criticism—went largely unnoticed in the rapidly developing area of postcolonial studies during the decade of emancipation struggles in communist Europe because of postcolonialism’s affinity with Marxism (Ștefănescu 2013, 18; Skórczewski 2020, 14). However, this omission was caused primarily by the relative territorialism and monolingualism of the field, and only secondarily by the unwritten consensus that the postcolonial cause needed socialism as a horizon of liberation. “Monolingualism” refers here not only to the language homogeneity that postcolonial studies had a tendency to overlook, privileging literatures written in English, but also to how postcolonialism understood a resistance agenda only within the context of Western empires. For example, Barbara Harlow, in her famous 1987 study *Resistance Literature*, ascribed this type of activism solely to the non-Western indigenous anti-imperialist struggle. Much in line with Fredric Jameson’s essay from 1986, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” Harlow foregrounds political involvement of these literatures as a form of actual creative labour linking political and social immediacy with literary and discursive response. Even though she underlines that resistance literature is always transnational in that it is a reaction to geopolitical situations, Harlow does not mention even in passing the teeming resistance literature which in fact defined the ethos of literary production in the Eastern Bloc at that time—suffice to mention only the most famous names: Iosif Brodsky, Vaclav Havel, Milan Kundera, Herta Müller, Czesław Miłosz, or Tomas Venclova.

The non-East Central European scholars who engaged in postcolonial studies, let’s call them “Western,” were rather equivocal about the postcolonial perspective on the region: they would acknowledge the paradigmatic coloniality of power in the region’s history, but, at the same time, they were used to looking at the USSR as the useful horizon of the critique of capitalism. Timothy Brennan in his *Wars of Position. The Cultural Politics of Left and Right* (2006) observes how in the US the perception of the post-Soviet changes in Eastern and Central Europe was based on subsuming them under one collective notion of “nationalism” (44), and in that way the whole region was set at a distance from the “post-nationalist” West. Brennan notices also a paradigmatic similarity

between postcolonial literatures (albeit he is careful to avoid the category of “postcolonial”) and anti-communist literatures, both sharing an inevitable allure of otherness which he calls the “mental space of the politic-exotic” (Brennan 2006, 62). He concludes: “To the North American reader weighing choices, Eastern Europe may not be fully Europe, but it is nevertheless much more like home than is Zimbabwe or Sri Lanka. At the same time, it can claim an attractive otherness for being a version of the colonies ‘at home’” (Brennan 2006, 62). Acknowledging the less radically othered position of the cultures from the “Eastern Bloc,” Brennan also implicitly critiques postcolonial studies for marketing the difference in the name of “global pluralism” (Brennan 2006, 63), but not in the name of formal or critical innovation, reserved strictly for the centre.

Critical of postcolonialism from a Marxist vantage point, Neil Lazarus, maintains that the postcommunist societies’ return to Europe, as a manner of speaking, via the claim to postcoloniality, would be ill-advised. Lazarus regards postcolonialism as a culturalist occlusion of the real power relations which are less about the West and the postcolonial world, and more about capitalism at the (diffuse) core and uneven development at the peripheries. He perceives the postcolonial framing of postcommunist studies as “paradoxical” on account of an assumption that the Soviet Union was a decolonizing force. He admits, though, the imperialist grounds of Russian modernity: “it is necessary to recognize that the Russian imperium and the Soviet order that succeeded it were clearly colonial in character” (Lazarus 2012, 117). Apprehensive of using the postcolonial framework for discussing the post-Soviet or postcommunist situation, Lazarus raises two questions: is renaming the “post-Soviet” as “postcolonial” aimed to turn the actualities of that space into a postcolonial case, or is it a proposition to capitalize on the authority of postcolonialism—thus, to improve the visibility of these literatures and cultures? These questions preclude a possibility of a productive application of postcolonial theory to East Central Europe because they are based on a premise that either way, the effect will be that of a “reactionary ploy” or another case study from the peripheries adhering to what he calls “orthodoxies of postcolonial theory” (Lazarus 2012, 117). Critiquing both the theory and the initiative to take it over and adjust it to a non-Western coloniality of power, Lazarus assumes an undesired effect of reinforcing capitalist domination under the cover of Eurocentrism. That a postcolonial perspective can serve a double-edged critique, seems to escape the Marxist critic.

## TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE SYSTEM—POSTCOLONIZING THE POSTCOMMUNIST EUROPE

We propose a postcolonial perspective that is inherently comparative (Kołodziejczyk 2009, 2010). It is only through the exposure to difference understood as: (1) relationality through analogy, (2) partial similarity, and (3) a challenge to the established theoretical or literary canons perpetuating their monolingualism that postcolonial studies can look beyond its established theoretical grounds of the binary metropolis/(post)colony. In the process of such a transfer, it can open itself up to a translation that does not homogenize and exclude what is beyond homogenization (Menon 2016, 145).

Postcolonizing the postcommunist Europe has created new areas of comparison beyond the usual paradigms of division premised on metropolis/former colony relations, which showed the potential of bringing together such seemingly remote processes as the unbanning of the African National Congress in 1990 in South Africa and the collapse of the communist monopoly rule in East Central Europe in 1989; and India's transition to market economy in the 1990s with postcommunist transformations in the same period. Indeed, the value of the postcolonial perspective lies in the way in which it opens a global perspective of interconnections and develops new ways for tracking, analysing, and understanding the nature of changes after the dismantling of the bipolar world order, rather than in proving the postcolonial status to East Central Europe. The recent phenomenon in populist politics in Hungary and Poland which claim postcoloniality in order to stir anti-EU sentiments and create a narrative of national decolonization from the alleged throngs of the European Union proves how easily academic paradigms can be co-opted to legitimate politics.<sup>4</sup> A similar case is India, with Narendra Modi's

<sup>4</sup> Hungary under Viktor Orbán and Poland under Jarosław Kaczyński have gained notoriety for setting up the relations with the European Union on the principle of decolonization, charging the EU directly with continued colonizing politics towards its East Central European members or implying the persisting coloniality of power on the part of the EU and Western Europe. Orbán's eviction of the Central European University from Hungary in 2018 (which subsequently moved to Vienna in 2019) on the grounds of not succumbing to Hungarian law, preceded by a defamation campaign against George Soros, was a culmination of the anti-colonial discourse covering up a nationalist and anti-democratic agenda (cf. Taylor 2012). In Poland, Jarosław Kaczyński, the Law and Justice leader and a Eurosceptic, called Poland in 2010 a "Russian-German condominium" in an interview for *Gazeta Polska* on September 3, 2010, and reconfirmed the anti-colonial

upholding of Hindu cultural nationalism (Khair 2015, 404). Both cases, premised on the same paradigm of sovereignty through anti-colonialist rationale, challenge postcolonial studies' implicit victimism of the post-colonial subject, and, subsequently, the empowerment through identity as a desired outcome of decolonial emancipation. When the "postcolonial condition" is adopted by the modern right, it turns into a powerful political weapon used to mobilize ethnic and national integralism in the name of emancipation from anti-hegemonic pressures, disguising the turn to illiberal democracy as the politics of decolonisation.

As the above example shows, it is not the claim to the postcolonial condition but a possibility to trace related processes in a global perspective that enables the comparative potential of postcolonial studies. Likewise, a postcolonial perspective in translation to local conditions helps promulgate knowledge about the unique experience of these intra-European forms of dependence and how they bear on the present in global contexts. Therefore, it is the translation metaphor that should become the guiding principle of deploying postcolonial tools. As this volume sets out to show, this is also a palpable critical practice: it is a way to establish analogies as well as untranslatables in a process that yields new paradigms of comparison responding to global pressures. The history of the postcolonial debate in the region shows the interaction between two diverging tendencies to use the "postcolonial" as a way to relate the postcommunist transition and Eastern and Central European countries to the global (post)colonial modernity. The first approach identifies postcommunist states as postcolonial on the grounds that they were subjected

stance ten years later, in another interview for *Gazeta Polska*, stating that "Deciding to enter the EU, Poles did not agree to be anybody's colony, and such a subordination would make us and others precisely a colony of the so-called most influential EU players" (Gójska and Sakiewicz 2021). The 2015 elections campaign, victorious for Law and Justice, was premised on an anti-immigration programme and a direct or indirect agenda of "decolonization" through "repolonization" of the media and the politics of "rising from the knees." The ruling camp has continued this anti-colonial framework of reference whenever the EU institutions issue concerns about the rule of law in Poland. Some politicians directly accuse the EU of colonizing policies, see, for example, the nationalist EU MP Patryk Jaki's speech for the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs (Jaki 2021). The 2020 presidential elections, founded on the anti-LGBT campaign refusing to recognize people in the LGBTQ+ communities and calling them followers of an "ideology" or a "dictatorship," was also harnessed to the anti-colonial discourse of the right (see, e.g., Wiejak 2021).



to the USSR domination as Soviet republics or as officially independent but practically subordinated satellite states. This claim also applies to the period of post-Enlightenment intra-European imperialism. Within this framework, the “postcolonial” provides the grounds for claiming the status of the oppressed and promoting national identity reconstructions as a necessary process of shedding the burden of coloniality. The second approach, while acknowledging that East Central Europe was subject to the intra-European coloniality of power throughout modernity, seeks, rather, to adopt the postcolonial perspective as a critical force aimed at revising history, memory, and identity. While the two trends often converge in critical approaches represented below, they also yield mutually contradictory results, the former focusing on postcolonialism as a way to reinforce a national discourse, the latter seeing postcolonialism as a critique of national discourse and a way to open up its ambiguities or reticence for appraisal.

In *Postcommunism/Postcolonialism. Siblings in Subalternity* (2013), Bogdan Ștefănescu traces parallels between postcolonialism and postcommunism, the main ones being: the political (and cultural) situation of “redressing through rupture” from domination, processes of “retrospective revaluation,” “projection of strategies for identity reconstruction,” and “recovering from traumas inflicted by imperial oppressors” (Ștefănescu 2013, 40–41). These structural parallels are brought together to show, despite the contextual differences between postcommunist and postcolonial situations, the similarity of the generic historical situation (Ștefănescu 2013, 80). What needs to be foregrounded here is the acknowledgement that colonialism is a recurrent category that does not pertain to the capitalist system only, but to the shared logic of modernity beneath the structural parallels of colonialism and communism (Ștefănescu 2013, 79). In a similar vein, in *Postcolonial Theory, the Decolonial Option and Postsocialist Writing*, Madina Tlostanova identifies the same rooting for socialism and capitalism: “[t]he socialist world was a stray outgrowth of Western modernity that retained such features as progressivism, developmentalism, the rhetoric of salvation, the fixity on newness, Orientalism, Eurocentrism, and various forms of enforced modernization” (Tlostanova 2015, 29). Tlostanova highlights the mechanics of the imperial domination and suppression in the Soviet world especially in relation to racialized Others (Tlostanova 2015, 29). Despite drawing on paradigmatic similarities, she warns against conflating postsocialism/postcommunism with postcolonialism for two

main reasons. The first is the untranslatability of local processes and histories, and here is where postdependence, the field of studies launched in Poland to create a comparative adjacency with postcolonialism, is a more comprehensive and comparative term. The second reason for refuting the treatment of postcommunist space as postcolonial is that postsocialism—an especially ambiguous space of “a poorly representable semi-alterity”—carries its own potential for decolonial involvement (Tlostanova 2015, 29–30).

Challenges of translatability include negotiating the grounds of comparison, drawing the lines of similarity and difference, or, more importantly, mapping the dynamic border between convergence and divergence (Kołodziejczyk and Şandru 2012, 113–116) and the hegemonic relations between various sites of knowledge production and transfer. In “Irritating Europe” (2013), Frank Engler-Schulze notices favourably the comparative potential of research framing postcommunist countries within the postcolonial perspective. He does ask, though, a valid question: will not qualifying these spaces as “postcolonial” result in the fading of postcommunist studies and taking away its autonomy, since these two are distinct autonomous fields? (Engler-Schulze 2013). But the issue goes far beyond considering disciplinary borders. What is at stake is not to occlude the difference in the task of “translating” East Central Europe with the use of the postcolonial discourse. Cristina Şandru in *Worlds Apart? A Postcolonial Reading of post-1945 East-Central European Culture* (2012) examines aesthetic and rhetorical parallels between much anti-communist and postcolonial literature. Şandru’s study, as an instance of comparative model-building, prompts a context-sensitive, translational reading whose task is to retain the political, historical, and cultural uniqueness, yet with a plea to see it as a manifestation of a broader emancipatory process within the postcolonial scope of interest. In an edited volume *Postcolonial Europe? Essays on Post-Communist Literatures and Cultures* (2015) by Dobrota Pucherová and Róbert Gáfrik, the eponymous cluster “postcolonial Europe” is accompanied by a cautious question mark. “Postcolonial” becomes here as much a tool of comparison in the hermeneutics of postcommunist cultural spaces, as it is an object of revision aimed at consolidating a transnational regional project that draws a map of unique topographies of the region and its multidirectional network of connections with the world. There is an adjacent body of work that deploys postcolonial research—especially on hybridization, uprooting, displacement and migration, or subaltern

groups. This research investigates the post-World War II mass population resettlements enforced by border shifts, deportations of the Germans, and communist politics of a mono-ethnic state with the ensuing marginalization or oppression of minorities, particularly unsettling for the region in which the polities were multi-ethnic before World War II.<sup>5</sup> Since a vital part of the Eastern Bloc ideology was communism's anti-imperialist thrust, studies tackling the connections between the Second and Third World highlight the alternative globalization circuits developing during the Cold War (cf. Mark et al. 2020).

In political and social sciences, the “postcolonial” attribute is used to inscribe East Central Europe within the framework of world-systems theory and to delineate its position on the (semi)periphery in the processes of combined and uneven development. The “postcolonial” interrogates here the (im)possibility of carving out a space of autonomy within the horizon of dependence that can be either a plea for “provincializing Europe” (Chakrabarty 2000), and/or inaugurating an alternative to it. For Viacheslav Morozov and Tomasz Zarycki, the two authors who, each in his own way, analyse the post-Soviet polities and cultures as part of the world-system, the key question to pursue is agency in/beyond/despite the complex network of dependence, and its political substance and potential. Developing the problem further in this volume, Tomasz Zarycki, in *Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe* (2015), examines the centre-periphery paradigm in which dependence on the Western core coordinates signification practices around a set of “prevalent normative ideological frameworks” (Zarycki 2014, 225). The region of East Central Europe, whose position in relation to the Western core, as the author posits, is rather low, produces discourses of eastness that Orientalize the East (Russia and the Soviet Union) and confirm the region's dependence on the West. This is a rather reverse result of mobilizing, through the discourses of eastness, a fantasy of autonomy. Viacheslav Morozov puts forth in his *Russia's Postcolonial Identity. Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World* (2015) a somewhat provocative thesis that Russia is a subaltern empire—a paradoxical outcome of dependence from the economic capitalist core: “Russia has successfully colonized itself on behalf of Europe but has been unable to assimilate” (Morozov 2015,

<sup>5</sup> For detailed statistics see: Rothschild (1974).

3, 5)—which would be perhaps another “hegemony without domination” instance posited by Kiossev (Kiossev 1999). Navigating between its postcolonial identity emerging from the process of internal colonization, combined with self-colonization within the world-system (Morozov 2015, 30–32), and its imperial legacy, Russia is locked in a dialectics that produces “ontological insecurity, resulting from a failure to maintain a consistent self-concept as a European nation” (Morozov 2015, 103–104). The question Morozov pursues is how to challenge the specific product of Russia’s subalternity—the post-imperial resentment. It manifests itself in the drive to “nationalise” social and political space in order to cover up the crushing of liberal forces identified as “alien.” The effect of the “post-imperial” policy—and, neo-imperial, as 2014 annexation of Crimea and parts of Donbas and the subsequent war waged by Russia against Ukraine in 2022 prove—is the replacement of the people with the “sovereign” and disavowal of politics as a form of (popular) agency (Morozov 2015, 149).

The methodological autonomy able to sustain the comparative perspective remains the main concern in research seeking to explain history and cultures of East Central Europe by framing it within the postcolonial perspective. What links these studies is the awareness that no locality remains outside the reach of major geopolitical processes; rather, more often than not, the very peripherality is the product of these processes. Thus, it is not the similarity to postcolonial paradigms (they are all too easy to find), but difference within the space of correspondence that makes these enquiries valuable. The need to negotiate the geo-specific consequences of colonial modernity is what links studies on East Central Europe with postcolonialism. The postcolonial perspective works here as part of a more heterogeneous comparative formula geared to reflecting on the short- and long-term impact of dependence on societies and on how they construct their self-image and their world-image in a confrontation with these legacies.

### CONCLUSION: POSTCOLONIAL SENSIBILITY AS CRITICAL THOUGHT

The discussion on the postcolonial transfer on East Central Europe delineated above shows that there is a clear division into two types of attitudes in the use of postcolonial categories. The first type comprises researchers who use postcolonial categories mainly for claiming the postcolonial status for postcommunist societies as a form of rectification of historical wrongs

and their long-reaching consequences in economy, politics, culture, and social life. Within this type, the ontological claim to postcoloniality dominates, accentuating the continuing condition of either lack or insufficiency of agency for postcommunist societies which not only were subjected by the USSR, and previously Tsarist Russia, the Habsburg Empire, and Imperial Germany, but which still remain in a situation of dependence because of having to succumb to the West's hegemonizing influence. The second type of transferring of postcolonial thought onto the region which acknowledges the undeniable coloniality of power that befell East Central European societies seeks to develop a space of critical thought in which the postcolonial is less a feature describing a society, but, rather, a diffuse structure for interrogating power relations in cultural, social, and political fields in a range of historical moments as well as in the present.

The key difference between the two approaches is that the first, identity-oriented type of postcolonial investment in East Central and Eastern Europe, develops a kind of national pedagogy whose goal is to raise the self-esteem of the formerly "colonized" and rebuild their collective mentality in the process of recovering their identity (Skórczewski 2011, 312), while the second type uses the postcolonial perspective primarily to revise national historiographies and their underpinning myths in political and cultural discourses to open them up to their own ambiguities, oppressions and hindrances. Ultimately, the second direction, which includes postdependence studies and related critical approaches, works to provide the discursive space for a critical revision of historical, political, and cultural processes which are consequences of dependence. Such an investment is not only to propose a revision of the past, but, primarily, to provide an analytical toolbox for investigating how various forms of the past are structuring and determining the present. What we want to foreground in the discussion on the state of knowledge is that research examining the consequences and legacies of dependencies in East Central Europe should not really devise a new identity for the region. We see the "postcolonial" as less a qualifier referring to a collectivity or identity, and more as a dialogic perspective enabling comparison in the mode of Saidian contrapuntal reading of "intertwined and overlapping histories" (Said 1993, 19). In fact, branding the region "postcolonial" will always ring a false bell or iterate discussions on the inevitability of dependence in the world-system and evoke accusations of derivativeness.

The foundational ambiguity of East Central Europe is grounded in the ambivalence of its self-image within the framework of Europe as

the “core” of social and political hegemonic signifying practices. This in-betweenness determines its equivocal self-perception as both inherently European and different, or, perhaps, made different by historical and geopolitical circumstances. The postcolonially-inflected insights have enriched this sense of close otherness (or distant familiarity) of that part of Europe with a new possibility of responding to power structures, institutions, and discourses which contributed to or took advantage of its location on the semi-periphery of European modernity. The deployment of postcolonial concepts helped also to formulate the agenda of critical self-scrutiny necessitated by the radical change after communism. It provided the necessary appendage to the discourses of dissident struggle for democracy and liberation in the Eastern Bloc whose *ethos* had been grounded in universal humanism, precisely by redirecting the focus from universals to the concrete problems of dependence and its consequences triggered by transition. The postcolonial perspective also highlighted the shortcomings of transitology discourses by prompting a critical revision of histories and legacies of the specific colonial modernity befalling that part of Europe. The revisions attuned to the critical thought of postcolonial studies bring to light various modes of ambiguity and ambivalence in processes of identity negotiations, of memory work and politics, and of defining one’s position within larger entities of political co-existence as the European Union that still holds the power of the mobilizing and peripheralizing metropolis (i.e. the West).

The postcolonial perspective on the region raises fundamental questions about how the countries and societies in the region construct their self-image, what legacies they are proud of or burdened with, and how they grapple with their sense of inferiority in the process of system transformation and accessing the European community. However, postcolonial paradigms, designed to deconstruct the imperial power-system and its aftermath, may have an unexpected effect of a “postcolonial backlash” (Kołodziejczyk 2017), proving how vulnerable an academic discourse may be to political takeovers. As we argued in *New Nationalisms: Sources, Agendas, Languages. An Introduction* (Huigen and Kołodziejczyk 2021), postcolonial concepts have become in some cases tools legitimating right-wing populist politics, providing the vocabularies of decolonisation, of a national insurgency against the hostile hegemony of the West, of the deprivation of national agency resulting in a domination by hegemonic states within the EU. A major challenge today, as this volume proposes, is how to re-activate the position and ethos of counter-discourse that would

mobilize the vigilance of critical thought to such hostile takeovers that serve to mainstream and normalize anti-liberal forms of governance.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

*East Central Europe Between the Colonial and the Postcolonial in the Twentieth Century* is a collection examining how East Central European countries and cultures fared as a border space between the former European empires (Russia/the Soviet Union, the Habsburg Empire, Prussia/Imperial Germany) and how they endured, internalized but, also, contested their joint status of (Western) Europe's close Other since the onset of modernity. We claim in this volume that postcolonial tools help develop a critical reflection on national traditions, historical narratives, cultural contrast and what in general makes up the regional difference, especially vis-à-vis Western Europe that has throughout modernity been both a model to emulate and aspire to, and a contested hegemonic force. Moreover, considering the looming power of the Russian empire in the region, the same postcolonially-inflected apparatus is useful to analyse cultural and political discourses engendered in the region in response to this imperial power. Regarding the post-World War II period, the essays collected in the volume engage in a debate on how to adequately describe the forms of governance and legacies thereof after the collapse of communism between 1989–1991. The postcolonial perspective helps refocus the discussions away from the transformation/modernization model dominant in the social sciences and determining research on the region. Our purpose is to work out a more nuanced model of scholarly inquiry into the cultural, literary, and historical imaginaries that have created a complex identity of East Central Europe. Our intention has been to take care of a cross-disciplinary span of research on the region.

Part I: *Locating East Central Europe Through Comparative Methodologies* opens an inquiry into a comparative potential of combining research on the region with theoretical and methodological repository of postcolonial thought, among others. Claudia Kraft's and Tomasz Zarycki's chapters discuss conceptualizations of space. Claudia Kraft takes a historical look at the development of the concept of East Central Europe. For this purpose, she combines the analysis of East Central Europe's in-betweenness characteristic of the region since the early modern period with a reflection on how political and academic discourses have been

constructing the region. She acknowledges the productive use of post-colonial studies' conceptual repository in reformulating and reinvigorating area studies in relation to East Central Europe. Tomasz Zarycki classifies the fundamental types and features of stereotypical images of the "East" in contemporary Polish identity discourses. They are analysed in relation to postcolonial theory and the cultural/discursive problem of Orientalization. The author differentiates between two basic types of Orientalism which he subsequently links with two ideological orientations: the conservative and liberal one. The conservative Orientalism is a continuation of traditional Polish Eastern Borderlands (*Kresy*) discourse in which the object of Orientalization is Ukrainians as the "others" in the Polish state. The chapter attempts to link the development mechanisms of stereotypical imaginaries of the "East" in contemporary Poland with so-called structural conditions, which means, dependencies of an economic and geopolitical kind.

Part II: *Appraising the Empire from European Peripheries* contains essays discussing one of the most pertinent and sensitive problems engendered by the in-between position of East Central Europe, and one of the least discussed in research on the region espousing a postcolonial approach, namely, the equivocal attitude of East Central European actors towards European empires and their colonies. Róisín Healy sets out to read comparatively the attitudes towards colonialism in Poland and Ireland before and after the achievement of independence in the wake of World War I. Healy argues that Poland's and Ireland's status of objects of colonial oppression in the long nineteenth century had an effect of endorsing moral rather than political authority to assert itself in the early stages of independence and thus embrace anticolonialism. After independence, however, Ireland and Poland developed opposite attitudes to colonialism. Ireland embraced an anticolonial stance, while Poland claimed entitlement to colonies on a par with other European states, as a form of redressing historical wrongs.

Raul Cârstocea continues the historical perspective on East Central Europe's ambiguous positioning in relation to the imperial venture of European powers, and equally ambiguous consequences of that relation. The author argues that the Romanian author, historian, and philosopher Mircea Eliade's scholarly episode in India in the years 1928–1931 was crucial for shaping his views on colonialism, turning him into an advocate of cultural pluralism highly appreciative of non-European cultures and a staunch critic of colonization. Cârstocea suggests that Eliade's political



affinity with the Romanian fascist movement may have been motivated by an emancipatory impulse which he drew from his scholarly pursuits—a way to wriggle away from Western European hegemony (despite the fact that the Romanian fascist movement actively took part in mainstream European fascism) by way of seeking common grounds between the authentically mystic peasants, and Europe’s Other, India.

Agnieszka Sadecka explores accounts by Poles travelling to India in the first decades of India’s independence. Colonial domination had officially come to an end, although manifestations of British rule were still visible. Commenting on these conditions, Polish reporters, visiting India in 1950s and early 1960s, often condemned the consequences of colonialism in social organization and hierarchies, as well as in Indian culture. However, their task of praising India’s socialist economy seems rather perfunctory. Its role was to set the grounds for the overall critique of “American imperialism” and thus inscribe the socialist alliance of India in the Cold War rivalry between East and West.

Jagoda Wierzejska further develops in a case study what Cârstocea brands in a previous chapter as the “in-between epistemology” of East Central European subjects in their ambiguous relation to the Western imperial project, and Healy probes as the puzzling ambiguity of the nation after the experience of oppression developing colonial ambitions. Wierzejska examines the case of the contradictory nature of East Central European subjects oppressed by foreign powers (in a long historical perspective and during war occupation by German and Soviet states), but themselves often assuming privileged or even supremacist attitudes in colonies and semi-independent states where they would seek refuge from the war and the post-war system overhaul. The chapter focuses on the case of a Polish economist, intellectual and writer, Andrzej Bobkowska, who emigrated to Guatemala in 1948. Disappointed with what he saw as the political and cultural weakness of Western Europe after it had yielded to pressures from the Soviet Union and abandoned East Central Europe, in Guatemala Bobkowski took on the persona of a white colonialist in exile.

Part Three: *Emigres, Exiles, Settlers—Framing Displaced Identities* contains discussions of how socialist states organized their post-World War II politics of mass (re)settlements quite visibly borrowing from colonial ideologies, while, as the previous section proves, condemning Western imperialism. The collapse of the Soviet empire and the Eastern Bloc brought about further significant displacements in identity and cultural

locations, laying bare the lingering contentious relations between nations and ethnicities along the imperial/national axis as part of the post-socialist and post-Soviet legacies and transformations. The last three chapters discuss the complex population shifts in the wake of World War II and in the wake of the Soviet empire. Kinga Siewior investigates discourses of resettlement whose role after World War II border shifts was to legitimize the fact of Poland's loss of territories to the USSR and the gain of the so-far German territories as not only historical justice, but also as a rightful return of these territories to their native realm. Focusing on photography and fiction, Kinga Siewior claims that strategies underlying landscape representations of the "Regained Territories" (former German territories that were annexed by Poland in 1945), in the art and literature of the Polish People's Republic in many ways duplicated colonial policies of appropriating alien landscape and turning it into a familiar one.

Emilia Kledzik draws a comprehensive picture of the Roma self-representation in literature from East Central Europe in the several decades of post-war policing of minorities in the communist state. The author examines how the assimilation programmes of the communist state, continued after the system change to liberal democracy, produced a mixture of resentment and internalized self-corrective projections in Roma literature in East Central European countries. The chapter shows an evolution of the Roma self-representation under pressure from the majority (state and society). The assimilationist coercion typical of socialist states transformed after system change into a discourse of multiculturalism, albeit not devoid of ambiguities, especially where the apparent recognition of the Roma in the new discourse of cultural diversity is not accompanied by broadening the space of social inclusion for the Roma in the social realm.

Miriam Finkelstein analyses reciprocal representations of migrants from Russia and different Eastern and East Central European states in contemporary literature. This chapter seeks to answer the following question: what happens when former nationals of the Soviet Union and individuals from former socialist East Central European states who perceive the USSR as the colonizing power, meet outside their respective home countries? This chapter traces these surprisingly ambiguous attitudes engendered by these overlapping antagonisms. The most ironical outcome of the benign paternalism of the West, epitomized by Germany, is that writers, prompted by funding host institutions into mutual conviviality, act out their post-socialist rivalries, and together manifest a derisive attitude

towards the amicable, yet visibly coercive programme that smacks too much of the familiar pedagogy of socialist writers' meetings.

Foregrounding these multiple zones of productive ambiguity, *East Central Europe Between the Colonial and the Postcolonial in the Twentieth Century* accentuates a convergence with postcolonial studies in an examination of East Central European societies, without, however, constructing a straightforward analogy. Our volume shifts the focus of interest from the prevailing tendency to prove the postcolonial status of the region to an analysis of the culturally and politically resourceful ambiguity of the East Central European location at the intersection of the colonial and the postcolonial. Instead of pitting authenticity against derivation, which has so far prevaricated much of the postcolonially-inflected debate on postdependence cultures in the region, we aspire to a much more decisively postcolonial gesture. The goal of this volume is to turn the east/west binary as, respectively, a recipient and producer of knowledge paradigms, into another border zone where borrowing, appropriation and hybridization processes challenge the centre/periphery division.

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