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**A THEORY'S TRAVELOGUE:
POST-COLONIAL THEORY IN
POST-SOCIALIST SPACE**

Abstract: *This essay examines theoretical arguments surrounding the use of post-colonial theory as a way to fill in the epistemological lacuna in the studies of post-socialism. It reviews the various streams of this theoretical development and employs Edward Said's notion of "traveling theory" to demonstrate that theoretical claims made by proponents and opponents of this particular comparative perspective are historically, socially, and geographically situated, although not fixed. Disciplinary, national, and institutional affiliations, instead of theoretical justifications, are identified as important factors in the propensity to accept or resist the introduction of post-colonial perspective on Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The essay concludes by acknowledging the potential usefulness as well as the limits of post-colonialism in the conceptualization of the post-socialist space.*

Keywords: *post-socialism; post-colonialism; traveling theory; comparative perspective*

**Zápisník z cest jedné teorie:
post-koloniální teorie v post-
-socialistickém prostoru**

Abstrakt: *Tato studie se zabývá teoretickými argumenty ohledně užití post-koloniální teorie jako způsobu, s jehož pomocí má být vyplněna epistemologická mezera v bádání o post-socialismu. Dále poskytuje přehled různých směrů tohoto teoretického vývoje a uplatňuje pojem Edwarda Saida "cestující teorie" k poukázání na to, že teoretická tvrzení vznášená zastánci i odpůrci této specifické komparativní perspektivy jsou historicky, sociálně a geograficky situovaná, ovšem nikoliv pevně ukotvená. Oborové, národní a institucionální příslušnosti jsou na rozdíl od teoretických zdůvodnění identifikovány jako důležité faktory pro tendenci přijímat, nebo bránit se zavedení post-koloniální perspektivy na střední a východní Evropu a země bývalého Sovětského svazu. Studie v závěru přiznává jak potenciální užitečnost, tak i omezení post-kolonialismu pro konceptualizaci post-socialistického prostoru.*

Klíčová slova: *post-socialismus; post-kolonialismus; cestující teorie; komparativní perspektiva*

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Introduction

Few historical events have affected social theory as much as the end of the Cold War. Almost overnight, an entire tradition of thought grounded in Marxism-Leninism, the official paradigm in the social sciences and the humanities in the state-socialist bloc, disappeared. The legitimacy of Marxism of various strands around the globe also suffered. Even less politically less politicized disciplines, from literature to economics, had to reevaluate their hitherto well-established concepts. The once politically supported and burgeoning Sovietology was converted from a political science into a historical discipline.

As part of this larger theoretical restructuring of the academic field in the wake of social change, there arose a need to produce knowledge relevant to the new realities of the former Second World. This essay traces one specific attempt to fulfill this need using post-colonial theory to conceptualize the post-socialist space, with a focus on Central and Eastern Europe. It begins with a critique of the initial concepts of transition and transformation and identifies post-socialism as a specific problem, the recognition and definition of which remains essential for a scholarly understanding of the aftermath of the Cold War. The urgency of the task inspired some scholars, on the grounds of the perceived epistemological affinity of the two “posts”, to utilize the well-established theory of post-colonialism to grasp the emergent concept of post-socialism. The kernel of the essay examines the various streams of this theoretical development. The guiding principle of the analysis rests on Edward Said’s notion of “traveling theory”, which conceives theory as a situated but not a fixed response to specific problems. To pursue the metaphor further, when we encounter post-colonial theory in the post-socialist space, we can ask what kind of traveler it is. It is a universalizing conquistador? A well-meaning missionary? A curious translator? A superficial tourist, who, despite being abroad, surrounds herself with familiar things and environments?

As there seems to be little consensus on the kind of propositions put forward by the advocates of the uses of post-colonial theory for cognitively mapping the post-socialist space, this essay reviews various theoretical

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arguments put forth in favor of this approach, as well as possible counter-claims. The perspective of traveling theory adopted in this article leads to the conclusion that, instead of arguing over epistemological adequacy, attention should shift to the benefits and pitfalls of the actual uses of post-colonialism in making sense of post-socialism.

Post-socialism: transcending the transition

Scholarly reflection on the historical rupture of 1989, the end of the protracted Cold War, and the demise of the Soviet power in Central and Eastern Europe and its weakening in Central Asia initially focused on transition and institutional reform. In the “satellite” countries, transition, in the broad sense, consisted of a program of “returning to Europe” and implementing profound economic and institutional reforms to state-socialist structures, the goal being to bring the suddenly post-socialist states closer to Western European models of the free market and political plurality. However, the framework of transitology¹ – the name given to the perspective that primarily supplanted the now defunct Sovietology – gradually came to be perceived as insufficient, especially as the actual, real-world transition from state socialism to private capitalism began to encounter numerous problems, such as producing unexpectedly marginalized communities and localities.

Later, students of post-socialist countries attempted to offer a more complex picture of post-socialism. According to Michael D. Kennedy, the process of leaving state socialism behind was not simply a technological or policy problem of “transition”; rather, it was sustained by the emergence of a whole new cultural formation, which he dubs “transition culture”. Kennedy criticized the prevailing orientation of studies of post-socialism to date, because they presented a tacit affirmation of neoliberalism and “accept more or less transition’s metanarrative: that the problem is to figure out how capi-

¹ Transitology is here understood broadly so as to encompass even some approaches that a narrow definition would compete with, such as the consolidationist or the institutionalist perspective, and to highlight the overarching and shared concern with social change; for a discussion of the concept and its place in the studies of post-socialist region, see Jordan GANS-MORSE, “Searching for Transitologists: Contemporary Theories of Post-Communist Transitions and the Myth of a Dominant Paradigm.” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 20, 2004, no. 4, pp. 320–349. The concept developed earlier in response to democratization processes in Southern Europe and South America. and without much following it has been applied also in the context of African decolonization; see, e.g. Patrick BOND. *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa*. London – Pietermaritzburg: Pluto Press – University of Natal Press 2000.

talism and/or democracy can be built.”² Kennedy instead proposes inquiring into “cultural formations”, that is, the non-institutionalized movements and tendencies in culture that yield considerably influential powers, especially in the emergent and changing post-socialist societies. This focus should fill in the gaps in knowledge that gave rise to a myopic perspective, in which “culture and history are not recognized to be things that envelop the work of transition itself.”³ Kennedy argues that “transition” is not a fatal trajectory, but a type of culture that asserted itself against other cultural formations in a conflict, a view that reinforces the notion that the establishment of post-socialist societies was an eventful occurrence and not devoid of alternatives.

In Kennedy’s and similar studies that look at the actual processes in post-socialist countries without measuring them up against a purported goal, “presentist history finds its counterpart here in futurist transitology.”⁴ The reorientation of the gaze from the future to the present highlights, as Stark and Bruszt have argued, the challenges of “transformations” (as opposed to “transition”), “in which the introduction of new elements takes place most typically in combination with adaptations, rearrangements, permutations, and reconfigurations of already existing institutional forms.”⁵ Yet one more positioning of the perspective in time is possible: the focus on the past. Such emphasis emerges with works such as Gil Eyal’s treatise on the breakup of Czechoslovakia, where he shows that the formation of the Czech and Slovak political field after 1989 “was also strongly determined by the inherited identities, tastes, and modes of reasoning of the political actors”.⁶ This is not a kind of historicism, explicating the current situation simply in terms of deterministic past factors; it is an approach that stresses the importance of past social trajectories and forms of knowledge in the “reconfigurations of already existing institutional forms” of the presentist approach. With the focus on the past, collective memory takes the center stage in many branches of research on the former state-socialist countries, where “memory and its appropriation have become central issues in societies emerging from the

² Michael D. KENNEDY, *Cultural Formations of Postcommunism: Emancipation, Transition, Nation and War*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2002, p. 22.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴ David STARK – László BRUSZT, *Postsocialist Pathways: Transforming Politics and Property in East Central Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.1998, p. 84.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Gil EYAL, *The Origins of Postcommunist Elites: From Prague Spring to the Breakup of Czechoslovakia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2003, p. 136.

erasure of public memory and the survival of counter-memories.”⁷ As more and more time passes since the collapse of state socialism, literature manifests not less, but more interest in the importance that the state-socialist past and durable cultural and knowledge formations holds for the post-socialist present. Not long before the transition's purported success in Central and Eastern Europe, epitomized by the accession of many countries in the region to the European Union in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, post-socialism has gradually come to be perceived as a subject of inquiry meriting attention.

Besides the choice of theoretical framework and the positioning of a research perspective in historical time, another issue that has troubled the study of post-socialism is the question of a comparative approach. At stake is not only the question whether post-socialist countries can be studied under one disciplinary umbrella, but also whether the research can draw upon methods, theories and concepts developed earlier and elsewhere. That is to say, can post-socialist countries be clustered in a meaningful category of sufficient breadth that would justify the notion of post-socialism as such? And if so, is the category a class of its own, or is it a species of a more abstract entity? In a debate that exemplifies the qualms surrounding the question of the (im) possibility of comparative approaches in transitology, Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl proposed studying democratization in Central and Eastern Europe through the lens of analogous processes in Southern Europe and Latin America.⁸ An area studies proponent, Valery Bunce, responded by casting doubts on the very premise of comparability between the two

⁷ William OUTHWAITE – Larry RAY, *Social Theory and Postcommunism*. Oxford: Blackwell 2005, p. 180. Irwin-Zarecka noted that “the future of what once was the Soviet empire may very well depend on the rules established there for dealing with the Communist past, the fact that whole region becomes a ‘laboratory’ for students of collective memory.” Iwona IRWIN-ZARECKA, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers 1994. The role of collective memory in post-socialism has, by now become an immense field of research. See, for example: Richard ESBENSHADE, “Remembering to Forget: Memory, History, National Identity in Postwar East-Central Europe.” *Representations*, vol. 1995, no. 49, pp. 72–96; Svetlana BOYM, *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books 2001. Gil EYAL, “Identity and Trauma: Two Forms of the Will to Memory.” *History and Memory*, vol. 16, 2004, no. 1, pp. 5–36; Beverly JAMES, *Imagining Postcommunism: Visual Narratives of Hungary's 1956 Revolution*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press 2005; Maria TODOROVA (ed.), *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation*. New York: Social Science Research Council 2010; etc.

⁸ Philippe C. SCHMITTER – Terry Lynn KARL, “The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go?” *Slavic Review*, vol. 53, 1994, no. 1, pp. 173–185.

examples offered and maintained resolutely that “the differences between postcommunism and the transition in the south are far more substantial than Schmitter and Karl’s discussion seems to imply.”⁹ Nonetheless, even Bunce, a defender of the specific nature of post-socialism, admits that it would be reasonable to engage at least in comparisons of democratization in Eastern and Southern Europe, because they would “alert us to fundamental problems in how transitologists have understood and analyzed transitions from authoritarian rule.”¹⁰ For the argument that will be made below, it is noteworthy that this debate in transitology was cast in metaphors of movement from one geographical location to another: Schmitter and Karl’s essay was called “The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go?”, whereas Bunce’s answer was entitled “Should Transitologists Be Grounded?” Once the concept of post-socialism, with the emphasis on culture and the state-socialist past, supplanted the research program of transition, concerns over the adequacy of comparative approaches, which transitology is uncomfortable with, were taken to a whole new level. The term “post-socialism” attempts to express an essential ambiguity, a combination of elements, past and present, that constitute the reality that the term aims to capture. Nonetheless, without a corresponding theory, post-socialism remains a vague concept and serves only as a descriptor, a naming of a problem area. It takes extensive empirical research to provide a basis for generalizations and theory. Future- or present-oriented approaches cannot provide the nuance required by the ambiguous nature of what is, so to speak, “neither socialism, nor something completely devoid of it”. An alternative way to conceptually grasp the reality of post-socialism would be to apply or borrow from already existing theories. As Chari and Verdery have noted, “postsocialist studies, a product of a rupture in academic careers, thus generated new interdisciplinary traffic in ideas.”¹¹ One serious candidate theory for furnishing the scholars of post-socialism with new conceptual tools has turned out to be the theory of post-colonialism. The rest of the article will examine this particular aspect of the emergent post-socialist studies.

⁹ Valerie Bunce, “Should Transitologists Be Grounded?” *Slavic Review*, vol. 54, 1995, no. 1, p. 119 (111–127).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹¹ Sharad CHARI – Katherine VERDERY, “Thinking Between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography After the Cold War.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vo. 51, 2009, no. 1, p. 10 (6–34).

Before this essay proceeds to survey this specific line of development in the studies of post-socialism, one general remark on the purpose of comparative approaches in the social sciences and the humanities is in order. The above described exchange on the comparability among democratization processes across time and space shows that even the relatively narrow framework of general transitology is not so constricted as to allow for unequivocal comparisons among its cases. It would follow that post-socialism and post-colonialism cannot be thought together at all, as they refer to quite different political, economic, and cultural experiences. In fact, it could be easily argued that socialism and colonialism are antithetical ideas and many an anti-colonial struggle has been led under a socialist banner. It would thus appear that making any connections between the two has little sense, especially for comparative purposes. Not to dismiss the debate from the outset in this manner, it is worth recalling a distinction made by William H. Sewell between “comparative method” and “comparative perspective”. The former “is a means of systematically gathering evidence to test the validity of our explanations,”¹² while the latter “reduces our biases by presenting us with alternative systems of value and world views, and by imparting to us a sense of the richness and variety of human experience; it provides us not with rules, but with insights.”¹³ While in the first case – and such were arguably the stakes in the transitology debate – solid basis is required in order to sustain a shared approach to the treatment of data, the second instance leaves more room for probabilistic and heuristic considerations and can benefit from identifying differences as well as similarities. At least with regards to the “comparative perspective”, there is an arguable justification to raising the topic of post-colonialism in the post-socialist context.

The affinity of the prefixes

One of the first bids to carry the post-colonial paradigm into the post-socialist space came from David Chioni Moore, who, in his now well-known article “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique”,¹⁴ made an explicit and quite broadly conceived ar-

¹² William H. SEWELL, “Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History.” *History and Theory*, vol. 6, 1967, no. 2, p. 209 (208–218).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

¹⁴ David Chioni MOORE, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique.” *PMLA*, vol. 116, 2001, no. 1, p. 111–128. As for the issue of priority, several studies with a similar theoretical pretext have appeared at around the same

gument for the relevance of post-colonialism. As is evident from the title of his article, primacy is attributed to the “post-colonial critique”, which is supposed to make the former Second World, and, in fact, the entire globe, its new territory. Moore explains the premise of this perspective as follows:

It is no doubt true that there is, on this planet, not a single square meter of inhabited land that has not been, at one time or another, colonized and then postcolonial. The result of all this movement, much of which has been arguably criminal, is that many cultural situations, past and present, can be said to bear the postcolonial stamp, often in ways only partly corresponding to current notions.¹⁵

It is not an overstatement to say that Moore tries to extend the explanatory reach of post-colonial theory to the point where post-socialism ultimately becomes no more than a variant of post-colonialism. Before this essay moves on to examine Moore’s and other congenial propositions in light of the concept of “traveling theory”, it is worth pausing for a moment and reflecting on a factor that brought post-socialism and post-colonialism together in the first place: as Moore’s article indicates in its very title, both designations share the same prefix – “post”. The following discussion should point out that there is more to this common feature than simply an obvious and superficial grammatical association of the two terms.

The prefix “post” is (ostensibly)¹⁶ the principal question for Moore. Although in general the “post” in post-socialism does not seem to invite much critical reflection and refers to a taken-for-granted historical periodization, for scholars interested in post-colonial theory it has been the subject of reflection on more than one occasion. Ella Shohat foregrounded an important nuance in the semantics of the prefix “post” as it occurs in “post-colonial-

time or even before this article (a coincidence that should lend some support to the outlined thesis of a search for a new paradigm in post-socialist studies). Moore’s importance derives from his making the question stand out as a central topic for theory. Nonetheless, one of the original (early 1990s) references in this respect is Marko PAVLYSHYN, “Post-Colonial Features in Contemporary Ukrainian Culture.” *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*, vol. 6, 1992, no. 2, pp. 41–55.

¹⁵ MOORE, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?” p. 112.

¹⁶ While Moore, in reference to Appiah (see below), titled his essay “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?”, he does not investigate the meaning of the prefix in depth; instead, he focuses on the main nouns. his central question could thus be more appropriately rephrased as “Is the Soviet the same as the colonial?”

ism”, where, on the one hand, it marks an intellectual innovation and, on the other hand, it evokes a type of periodization:

The prefix “post,” then, aligns “post-colonialism” with a series of other “posts”; “post-structuralism”, “post-modernism”, “post-marxism”, “post-marxism”, “post-feminism”, “post-deconstructionism” – all sharing the notion of a movement beyond. Yet while these “posts” refer largely to the supersession of outmoded philosophical, aesthetic and political theories, the “post-colonial” implies both going beyond anti-colonial nationalist theory as well as a movement beyond a specific point in history, that of colonialism and Third World nationalist struggles. In that sense the prefix “post” aligns the “post-colonial” with another genre of “posts” – “post-war,” “post-cold war”, “post-independence”, “post-revolution” – all of which underline a passage into a new period and a closure of a certain historical event or age, officially stamped with dates.¹⁷

Shohat voices the concern that the temporal aspect of the prefix “post” feeds into the narrative of progress, of surmounting the colonial legacy, and thus obscures the lingering effects of the extended period of subjection of non-European societies (a critique evoking that of the “transition” concept). Her worries have resonated with theoreticians of post-colonialism and an effort has been made to redefine post-colonialism as precisely an account of sedimented colonial subjectivities.¹⁸ This emphasis links the prefix more closely to its other, epistemological aspect. Here, post-colonial thought adjoins post-structuralist and post-modernist notions.¹⁹ It builds on similar assumptions and deconstructs such binaries of colonialism, as metropole and colony, native language and *lingua franca*, subject and citizen. The ar-

¹⁷ Ella SHOHAT, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial’.” *Social Text*, vol. 1992, no. 31–32, p. 101 (99–113).

¹⁸ Stuart Hall responded by the following clarification: “It is possible to argue that the tension between the epistemological and the chronological is not disabling but productive. ‘After’ means in the moment which follows that moment (the colonial) in which the colonial relation was dominant. It does not mean, as we tried to show earlier, that what we have called the ‘after-effects’ of colonial rule have somehow been suspended. It certainly does not mean that we have passed from a regime of power-knowledge into some powerless and conflict-free time zone. Nevertheless, it does also stake its claim in terms of the fact that some other, related but as yet ‘emergent’ new configurations of power-knowledge relations are beginning to exert their distinctive and specific effects.” Stuart HALL, “When Was ‘the Post-Colonial’? Thinking at the Limit.” In: CHAMBERS, I. – CURTI, L. (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*. London: Routledge 1996, p. 252 (242–260).

¹⁹ Kwame Anthony APPIAH, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, 1991, no. 2, pp. 336–357.

ticulation of fragmented and decentered identities and spaces requires new conceptualizations, such as “hybridity”.²⁰

While post-colonial theory has scrutinized both tendencies suggested by the prefix “post”, the ambivalence of the prefix tends to vanish once it is put in front of “socialism”. In post-socialism, the temporal aspect is far more prominent, perhaps owing to the influence of transitology. In Central Europe in particular, an entire mythology has been erected around the year 1989 as a historical rupture. Terms such as the “return to Europe” or “transition” and “transformation”, which permeated much of the politics and scholarship in/on the post-socialist space in Europe in the 1990s, indicate that the experience of “socialism” was a deviation from the course of history. Although the condition of post-socialism has occasionally been discussed in relation to post-modernism, the periodization aspect of the prefix prevails over intellectual affinities. According to Larry Ray,

good grounds for regarding postmodernity and post-communism as a part of a common process [...] could be true only in so far as postmodernism is understood as a trend or process that renders some social arrangements, in this case centralized and autarkic systems, less viable than other, more decentralized and globally integrated ones.²¹

Here postmodernism figures as a historical epoch from which the state-socialist countries had been shielded for a while, but which they had hurried to “reach” after the collapse of their dictatorial regimes.

This rough analysis of the prefix “post” and of the ways in which it has been treated in both scholarly domains indicates that the “post” in post-colonialism is not quite the same as the “post” in post-socialism. To reiterate, the “post” in post-colonialism contains a fundamental ambivalence, which has been reflected and used to refine the theory, whereas the “post” in post-socialism tends to operate in a rather unequivocal manner as a temporal signifier. Whether post-socialism needs to acquire a similar kind of ambivalence or even to adopt the ambivalence of post-colonialism, remains an open question. Since post-socialism has so far failed to develop as a distinct “thought style”, the import of post-colonialism can perhaps best be understood as the introduction of a surrogate theory, which aims to fill in the epistemological void in research on the post-socialist condition. The

²⁰ See Homi K. BHABHA, *The Location of Culture*. London – New York: Routledge 1994.

²¹ Larry J. RAY, “Post-Communism: Postmodernity or Modernity Revisited?” *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 48, 1997, no. 4, pp. 543–560.

potential use of post-colonialism in the post-socialist space would entail greater subtlety in the study of post-socialism beyond simple periodization and lead to the exploration of the other ramifications of the prefix “post”. In any case, an identical prefix is not enough to merge the two academic fields. The topic requires more thorough consideration of the question of whether the “socialism” in post-socialism is the “colonialism” in post-colonialism. This essay, however, will remain more modest in scope and focus solely on the theoretical arguments put forth in favor of the post-colonial approach in post-socialist circumstances in the hope that such an exercise will itself illuminate what is at stakes in this project.

Traveling theory

Moving a theory between contexts is not a straightforward process. The practitioners of post-colonial studies may be well aware of this, as the issue was addressed by one of the discipline’s founding figures, Edward Said, in the essay “Traveling Theory”,²² where he states that “theories travel – from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another. [...] It necessarily involves processes of representation and institutionalization different than from those at the point of origin.”²³ Said’s metaphorical²⁴ concept of “traveling theory” presents us with a suitable analytical tool with which to elucidate the problems associated with fitting post-socialism into the post-colonial agenda. Casting the issue in Said’s terms shifts the emphasis to concerns other than either the purported universality of post-colonial theory or the comparability of state-socialist and colonial conditions (and the resulting adequacy of the theory to a new set of circumstances – as the issue stood in the above-mentioned transitology debate).

As Janet Wolff has noted, the metaphor of travel is current in metatheoretical considerations in two ways: firstly, there is the notion that “there is

²² Edward W. SAID, “Traveling Theory.” In: *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1983, pp. 226–247.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

²⁴ The reason for insisting on “traveling theory” as a metaphor is, obviously, that a theory never travels – only theoreticians do. The term should therefore not obfuscate the fact that the movement of theory does not take place in the realm of ideas, but in socially concrete environments (such as academic departments staffed by individual faculty members) through specific communication vehicles (such as journals, conferences, or books). The metaphor, however, is justified in the sense that theory is a discursive object that no single person controls.

something mobile in the nature of theory.”²⁵ In this case, the point is that theoretical thought requires a detachment from empirical data, bridging distances between concepts, etc. In Said’s case – which, as Wolff remarks, has often been misread as an instance of the previous meaning – the concern is rather more straightforwardly with “what happens with theory”²⁶ when it is adopted by new people in a new place or time. By employing this perspective, the epistemology of either post-colonialism or post-socialism ceases to be treated as something external to the theory, but rather begins to be comprehended historically and discursively as a feature nested in the theory itself.

In Said’s understanding, theory is a malleable type of knowledge, at least as far as cultural inquiry is concerned. This is especially so because of two intertwined, yet potentially opposite reasons: “Fields like literature or the history of ideas have no intrinsically enclosing limits, and [...] no one methodology is imposable upon what is an essentially heterogeneous and open activity – the writing and interpretation of texts.”²⁷ The necessary fluidity of cultural theories makes them susceptible to external influences, through which they acquire concrete shape and orientation.²⁸ Said therefore advocates a decidedly historical approach to metatheoretical analysis of how “[theory] as a result of specific historical circumstances [...] arises. What happens to it when, in different circumstances and for new reasons, it is used [...]?”²⁹

Despite the historical particularism of theoretical movement, Said says that there is a discernible pattern to the four steps through which such a movement passes. These are 1) the point of origin, 2) the distance traveled,

²⁵ Janet WOLFF, “On the Road Again: Metaphors of Travel in Cultural Criticism.” *Cultural Studies*, vol. 7, 1993, no. 2, p. 226 (224–239). See also James CLIFFORD, “Notes on Travel and Theory,” [online]. *Inscriptions*, vol. 5, 1989. Available at: <http://www2.ucsc.edu/culturalstudies/PUBS/Inscriptions/vol_5/clifford.html> [cit. 11. 12. 2011]. Clifford, in a reflection on Said and the metaphor of travel, actually argues that the figurative denominator of travel is a good fit for theory: “‘Theory’ is a product of displacement, comparison, a certain distance. To theorize, one leaves home.” *Ibid.*

²⁶ WOLFF, “On the Road Again,” p. 226.

²⁷ SAID, “Traveling Theory,” p. 230.

²⁸ To see that the issue of travel can be extended to knowledge in natural sciences, cf. Steven SHAPIN, “Placing the View from Nowhere: Historical and Sociological Problems in the Location of Science.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 23, 1998, no. 1, pp. 5–12. For the purposes of this essay, however, it suffices to limit the claim to social sciences and the humanities.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

in another words, the impact of new contexts, 3) the conditions of either the acceptance or the resistance with which the theory is met, 4) the transformation of the theory as it now operates under novel circumstances.³⁰ Said's concept of traveling theory thus comes equipped with a method for tracing the movement by means of a description of these four moments; and this method will guide our analysis here. The intention is to make us entertain the idea that the first question about a theory on the move should not be whether the movement is desirable, permissible, or appropriate, but what kind of changes the theory undergoes along its travels.

The point(s) of origin

Post-colonial theory does not have precise coordinates, such as a single founding figure, a manifesto, or an academic department. Rather, post-colonial studies emerged as a patchwork of various influences in various places. Post-colonialism has several ties to the French intellectual milieu of the 1970s – the work of Frantz Fanon is part of its canon – but perhaps more importantly it draws upon post-structuralist thinkers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Other sources are found in Great Britain, especially in the Marxist-oriented cultural studies represented by such scholars as Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall. Yet it was universities in the United States that provided the platform in which post-colonialism took the strongest root and where it was promoted most notably by such figures as Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri C. Spivak. Post-colonial theory acquired a strong institutional base mainly in the United States and Great Britain – although its success has not led to the establishment of independent departments. In institutional terms, post-colonial studies usually fall under departments of English language and literature. The professional identity of post-colonial scholars, however, profits from various cross-departmental centers, professional associations, and several journals (e.g. *Postcolonial Studies*, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*). Several dozen universities explicitly offer graduate programs in post-colonial studies.

Some of the central ideas of post-colonial studies have already been expounded above in the section on the prefix “post”.³¹ Here I would like to add

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 226–227.

³¹ For a theoretical overview of the discipline, the essential reference is Bill ASHCROFT – Gareth GRIFFITHS – Helen TIFFIN, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-*

that the theoretical as well as the geographical space of post-colonial studies is disconnected, especially since the linguistic turn, but it is sustained by powerful networks – conceptual and biographical. Parry describes institutionalized post-colonial theory as “a project in which poststructuralists vie with Marxists, culturalists with materialists, textualists with realists.”³² Nonetheless, it is also subject to significant centripetal forces and “post-colonial criticism has come to be identified as postmodernist in its orientation – an alignment promoted more or less actively by prominent critics in the field.”³³

The decentered space of post-colonialism seems to be doubly reflected; besides the equivalent theoretical notions, the biographies of some of the discipline’s most influential authors exhibit a parallel pattern. Many post-colonial thinkers followed a similar path of moving from origins in a former colony to education and a career at a prestigious Western scholarly institution.³⁴ Their life trajectories thus encapsulate the dilemma often associated with post-colonial scholarship – how to transcend knowledge inherited from former colonial superpowers without resorting to the conceptual tools offered by that very same system of knowledge?³⁵

Yet another reason for the patchwork in post-colonial theory comes from the fragmented nature of its object. From the very inception of post-colonial studies in the 1970s it has been apparent that the history of coloni-

Colonial Literatures. London – New York: Routledge 1989. See also Robert C. YOUNG, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 2001. Classic works include: Frantz FANON, *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press 1968. Edward W. SAID, *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books 1978; Paul GILROY, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1993; Gayatri CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK, “Can the Subaltern Speak.” In: NELSON, C. – GROSSBERG, L. (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1988, pp. 271–313; Dipesh CHAKRABARTY, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2000.

³² Benita PARRY, “The Institutionalization of Postcolonial Studies.” In: LAZARUS, N. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004, p. 66 (66–80).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ “When exactly ... does the ‘post-colonial’ begin?’ [...] When Third World intellectuals have arrived in First World academe.” Arif DIRLICK, “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 20, 1994, no. 2, pp. 328–356 (328–356).

³⁵ Veesser illustrates some of these conflicting loyalties on the case of Said’s public exchanges with Palestinian liberation movements. H. Aram VEESER, “The Postcolonial Godfather.” In: HERMAN, P. C. (ed.), *Historicizing Theory*. Albany: SUNY Press 2004, pp. 255–275.

alism, even in its traditional understanding, is full of particularism. There have been several overseas empires and within each empire almost as many colonial arrangements as there were colonies. If post-colonial studies were to embrace this diversity, it had to leave enough room for a corresponding variety of concepts. The eclectic rise of post-colonialism has prevented it, since the beginning, from developing firm theoretical contours.

Its malleable conceptual core makes post-colonialism prone to extension beyond its original concerns. This flexibility cannot be infinite, otherwise it could not be called a “theory”, which requires that some methodological, conceptual – and perhaps even political – coherence be retained. For current considerations about the utility of post-colonial criticism in post-socialist studies, the apt conclusion is that the theory travels from a decentered point, which makes it both an adaptable and unpredictable traveler.

The distance travelled

The other dimension of traveling theory – the “distance travelled” – relates to the central issue of comparability between the post-colonial and the post-socialist condition. The impact of new contexts, which Said takes for an indicator of the space traversed by a theory on the move, is something that the proponents of the comparability of post-socialism and post-colonialism tend to downplay. The main thrust of the thesis is that both contexts are actually quite similar, if not identical. In other words, in the extreme form of the argument the distance travelled is assumed to be very short. This model of theoretical argument perfectly suits the prevailing notion of epistemologically stationary theory, under which specific cases are to be – justifiably – subsumed. In the traveling theory perspective, distance is to be explored, not explained away.

The nexus between the two contexts appears to be formed, for example, by the following shared features: Post-socialist countries, just like their post-colonial counterparts, have experienced a heightening of national consciousness³⁶ in the course of socio-political change. Both contexts are marked by a sense of an incomplete rupture of the cultural and economic ties that bound the peripheries to metropolises. And in both instances, at some

³⁶ See William OUTHWAITE – Larry J. RAY., *Social Theory and Postcommunism*. Oxford: Blackwell 2005. See also KENNEDY, *Cultural Formations of Postcommunism*, who argues that the preoccupation of post-socialist countries with the transition to political pluralism and competitive markets is essentially antithetical to nationalism, yet in order to succeed transition must be articulated in national terms.

point popular movements were faced with militarized governments that had to be dismantled either by armed struggle or by negotiations backed up by widespread civil disobedience. In addition, in terms of intellectual currents, the (briefly) perceived “end of history” in the early 1990s reinvigorated the notion of postmodernism and affiliated theories, such as post-structuralism, feminism, or deconstruction (that is to say, of course, that these theories have also travelled).³⁷ Post-colonialism, however, did not reach the post-socialist space until a decade later, when the transition paradigm has been exhausted.³⁸

Just as there are some features that make post-colonialism and post-socialism mutually compatible, there are also others that complicate the idea of a short distance between them. Consider, for example, that whereas liberation struggles were formative of local nationalisms in traditional colonies, the nationalisms in post-socialist states were often forged prior to the emergence of the state-socialist regimes. Consequently, the anti-Russian backlash witnessed in post-Soviet European countries bears little resemblance to the troubled identity of a post-colonial subject fascinated with its former colonizers. To account for this discrepancy, Moore introduced the concept of “reverse colonialism” into his typology of colonial domination:

The standard Western story about colonization is that it is always accompanied by orientalizing, in which the colonized are seen as passive, ahistorical, feminine, or barbaric. However, in Russian – Central European colonization this relation is reversed, because for several centuries at least Russia has, again, been saddled with the fear or at times belief that it was culturally inferior to the West. Mittel-European capitals such as Budapest, Berlin, and Prague were therefore seen in Russia, at least by some, as prizes rather than as burdens needing civilizing from their occupiers. In return, the Central Europeans often saw the colonizing Russo-Soviets as Asiatics.

³⁷ For a congenial discussion of the West-East travels of feminist theory, see Allaine CERWONKA, “Traveling Feminist Thought: Difference and Transculturation in Central and Eastern European Feminism.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 33, 2008, no. 4, pp. 809–832.

³⁸ Consider this anecdotal observation: “A 1990 conference [...] proved in some respects premature; eastern European scholars were not yet ready to perceive a genuine comparability between the states involuntarily enclosed within Soviet imperial space, whose point of reference was ‘normal’ states in western Europe, and the states of Africa.” Mark BEISSINGER – Crawford YOUNG, “Comparing State Crises Across Two Continents.” In: BEISSINGER, M. – YOUNG, C. (eds.), *Beyond State Crisis?: Post-Colonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia in Comparative Perspective*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press 2002, p. 3 (3–18).

It is remarkable that even Moore's universalizing project for post-colonialism cannot dispense with a specific rubric for the study of the particular dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized in Eastern Europe.

Even if nationalism could still work as a *bona fide* conceptual shortcut, the issue of race looms as a formidable obstacle on the theory's road. Needless to say, the history of state-socialism is enmeshed with instances of brutal racialized policies, notably in the Stalinist era, and post-socialist countries to this day have had to deal with ethnic conflicts at various levels of intensity. However, it has yet to be shown that race has in some way been central to Soviet imperialism as a key mode of subjection, especially in Central and Southern Europe, where the satellite states were run by indigenous elites, which sometimes attempted to shake off Soviet control.³⁹

In a rare attempt to account for race, Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery's espousal of a post-Cold War perspective that would unify post-colonialism and post-socialism confronted the problem.⁴⁰ One of their central tenets is, therefore, the notion of "state racisms", and the authors call for a "strong body of historical and ethnographic research to think in comparative and interconnected ways about how colonialism, socialism, and their aftermaths constructed 'race' and 'enemy,' employing racial technologies and expertise to differentiate spaces and populations through their contrasting propensities to life and death."⁴¹ While they include the example of Crimean Tatars forcibly relocated and branded as "enemies" under Stalin's reign, this case remains an isolated one, compared to the much more extensive list of instances of racial "othering" in traditional colonies. Thus, Chari and Verdery also make room for some qualifications by enlarging the notion of race to include "state-sanctioned racisms that rely not necessarily on biological conceptions of race but on institutional and biopolitical mechanisms, which differentiate populations into subgroups".⁴² With this move, however, they also dispense with the fatality of color line and the inscription of colonial

³⁹ Tito's Yugoslavia could be a success story in this regard, while Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 represent failed attempts.

⁴⁰ Sharad CHARI – Katherine VERDERY, "Thinking Between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography After the Cold War." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 51, 2009, no. 1, pp. 6–34.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

knowledge onto the surface of the colonized body. Can a Party membership card truly function in the same manner as white skin?⁴³

In a possible counterclaim, despite the obvious Russification pressures within its domains, the Soviet Union seems to differ from other empires in that it enabled individuals of various ethnicities and nationalities to participate in the top echelons of administration on the periphery, and occasionally even in the metropole. While Stalin's Georgian origins could be considered as an almost absurd exception, further indices suggest that nationality, race, or ethnicity were indeed not the ultimate factor in the distribution of power under the Soviet system. In what, at first glance, looks like an example to the contrary, Lane and Ross, in their survey of the ethnic composition of four generations of the Soviet Politburo,⁴⁴ showed that the pre-1980 Politburo still included 14 non-Russian members out of its total of 33, and despite the subsequent drop in numbers, there were still always around 7 non-Russians out of roughly the same total over the 1980s. Lane and Ross concluded that "in an ethnic and national sense, the Politburo had not been a representative body; members having a regional affiliation were linked to institutions operating in the area."⁴⁵ As long as it applies to the marginalization and underrepresentation of non-Russian minorities in the Soviet Union, Lane and Ross's argument retains substantial force. However, when their observations are applied to the issue of the presumed colonial shaping of Soviet governmental institutions, it reveals the permeability of the periphery/metropole borderline for career trajectories and creates a serious challenge for finding an analogous example in other imperial administrations.

The similarity or dissimilarity of post-colonial and post-socialist contexts seems to depend more on the perspective and the level of abstraction adopted by a theoretician than on the substantive identity of social, political,

⁴³ See also Janusz KOREK, „Central and Eastern Europe from a Postcolonial Perspective.“ *Postcolonial Europe* [online]. 2009. Available at: <<http://www.postcolonial-europe.eu/index.php/en/essays/60--central-and-eastern-europe-from-a-postcolonial-perspective>> [cit 16. 11. 2011]. Korek proposes “national chauvinism” as a surrogate concept for racism under state-socialism: “But is racial chauvinism not comparable to national chauvinism? Obviously there exists a fundamental difference, since group or individual identity can be shaped and variously constructed, whereas racial affiliation cannot be changed... Racism and national chauvinism, however, discriminate against the individual in a similar way, collectivising him or her and writing him or her into some greater community, which is then regarded, for various reasons, as less valuable or indeed completely worthless.”

⁴⁴, David Stuart LANE – Cameron ROSS, *The Transition from Communism to Capitalism: Ruling Elites from Gorbachev to Yeltsin*. Palgrave Macmillan 1999.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 35.

or cultural elements. For the transitologists of the 1990s, the distance from one post-socialist country to another appeared too great to be crossed. The preoccupation of area studies with particularities contrasts with the generalities and giant leaps of post-colonialism. If, however, we admit that a theory can travel and therefore move from one particular place and historical constellation to another, the differences are no longer insurmountable nor something to be minimized. In fact, it is precisely the more or less nuanced difference between the two contexts that needs to be foregrounded and used analytically in order to provide innovative insights.

Acceptance and resistance

Chari and Verdery note that the “question [of ‘thinking between the posts’] has been posed primarily, if not only, by scholars of socialism and postsocialism.”⁴⁶ What, then, should we make of the silence from “proper” post-colonial scholars on the subject? Is it a sign of approval or of doubt? The reason why post-colonial theorists do not want to “travel” to post-socialist regions is open to debate. There are some exceptions,⁴⁷ including the seminal article by Moore,⁴⁸ who could be cast as a scholar of post-colonialism. However, it is reasonable to speculate that since post-colonial studies have achieved a considerable level of institutionalization and their subject is already quite vast, the incentives to move to a new and epistemologically uncertain territory remain low. Post-socialist studies offer a somewhat different picture, since post-socialism has never become the kind of buzzword that could raise funds and faculty positions at the same rate as post-colonialism. Therefore, post-socialist scholars feel more inclined to attach themselves to post-colonialism than vice versa. The situation also differs depending on disciplinary affiliations.

Departments of Slavic languages and literatures have been firmly entrenched in both Central and Eastern European and Western universities

⁴⁶ CHARI – VERDERY, “Thinking Between the Posts,” p. 9.

⁴⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty SPIVAK, “Are You Postcolonial? To the Teachers of Slavic and Eastern European Literatures.” *PMLA*, vol. 121, 2006, no. 3, pp. 828–829. See also Alison RICE, “Francophone Postcolonialism from Eastern Europe.” *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 10, 2007, no. 3, pp. 313–328.

⁴⁸ Moore’s work does not figure in Chari’s and Verdery’s bibliography, nor do other humanities references that deal with the same topic. This absence can perhaps be attributed to the authors’ focus on anthropological and sociological ethnography. Since post-colonialism has a strong presence in comparative literature, this omission is a bit unfortunate one.

for many decades, and although their position weakened with the end of Cold War, they are in no dire need of seeking out novel approaches as long as the old ones seem to work satisfactorily. Still, some of the most convincing attempts to date to use the post-colonial framework to think about post-socialist cultures have emerged in the study of literature at Slavic departments.⁴⁹ The main strength of these and similar literary interpretations rests in their grounding of contemporary works in traditions of creative writing that have historically far-reaching origins, stretching back to Russia's undeniably colonialist expansion into Central and Eastern Asia before 1917. As the authors guide readers from, for example, Lermontov's colonialist fascination with the exotified Caucasus to hybrid elements in contemporary Ukrainian fiction, post-colonial theory every attempt is made to demonstrate post-colonial theory's utility in the post-socialist context. Yet, while Ewa Thompson argues that the fall of state socialism obscured the fundamentally colonial character of Russian domination within the Soviet Union, Myroslav Shkandrij admits that the post-colonial interpretative prism must be applied with caution to post-socialist writing:

The more relaxed, 'postcolonial' attitude can take root only when the threat of engulfment or apostasy has receded. Culturally enforced assimilation or brutally enforced hybridity entail very different relations to ambiguity than the playful artistic use of ambiguity. As Anne McClintock has pointed out, 'the lyrical glamor cast by postcolonial theorists over ambivalence and hybridity is not always historically warranted.' This having been said, however, endlessly rehearsing the narrative of national liberation or victimization is also stultifying.⁵⁰

Apart from literary science, which have mediated the introduction of post-socialist scholarship into post-socialist studies rather seamlessly, calls for a new paradigm have come also from disciplines more directly concerned with the nature and effects of social change in or around 1989, such as sociology, anthropology, and area studies. These fields were among those most impacted by the "end of transition paradigm".⁵¹ As has become

⁴⁹ Cf. Myroslav SHKANDRIJ, *Russia and Ukraine: Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press 2001; and Ewa M. THOMPSON, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*. Westport: Greenwood Press 2000.

⁵⁰ SHKANDRIJ, *Russia and Ukraine*, p. 274.

⁵¹ Thomas CAROTHERS, "The End of the Transition Paradigm." *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, 2002, no. 1, 5-21.

increasingly evident, at least since the turn of the millennium, teleological narratives treating the state-socialist history as a temporary deviation *en route* to Western-style modernization and democracy were insufficient to account for all the vicissitudes of post-socialist development. Despite their need for fresh theoretical frameworks, these – unlike literary science – empirically oriented disciplines have placed more emphasis on topics where the putative resemblance of the two contexts is questionable.⁵²

An important factor in the acceptance or resistance to the post-colonial perspective on post-socialism appears to be not a researcher's field but his/her national affiliation and/or geographical focus. With respect to regional specialization, there may be objective reasons that warrant the adoption of a post-colonial stance. The case of Russia's former internal colonies lends itself more easily to a post-colonial perspective than do the Soviet Union's European satellite countries. Carey and Raciborski, for example, used democratization indexes to test the "post-colonial hypothesis" and assess the performance of post-socialist states in comparison to post-colonial ones. They concluded that on the human rights record "the experience in the former Sovietized states and Yugoslavia has shown many similarities with other colonies, both those traits common to all former colonies and those reflecting the particular types of colonialism."⁵³ They also found, however, a significant clustering that distinguishes the former Soviet republics in Asia from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Other studies also suggest that the region of Central Asia makes the best candidate for post-colonial denomination.⁵⁴ Even so, the newly independent states and Russian Federation republics in Central Asia do not square fully with either of the hitherto recognized models of colonization practiced by Western European empires, as Kandyoti concludes:

⁵² Besides literary scholars, anthropologists of post-socialism (see references to Verdery and Kandyoti) are among the most likely to be attracted to post-colonial theory. Stenning and Hörschelmann document the more reserved attitude of social theory; cf. Alison STENNING – Kathrin HÖRSCHELMANN, "History, Geography and Difference in the Post-socialist World: Or, Do We Still Need Post-Socialism." *Antipode*, vol. 40, 2008, pp. 312–335.

⁵³ Henry F. CAREY – Rafal RACIBORSKI, "Postcolonialism: A Valid Paradigm for the Former Sovietized States and Yugoslavia?" *East European Politics & Societies*, vol. 18, 2004, no. 2, p. 231 (191–235).

⁵⁴ See Deniz KANDYIOTI, "How Far Do Analyses of Postsocialism Travel? The Case of Central Asia." In: M. HANN, C. M. (ed.), *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Practices in Eurasia*. London – New York: Routledge 2002, pp. 238–257; Adeb KHALID, "Locating the (Post-) Colonial in Soviet History." *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 26, 2007, no. 4, pp. 465–473.

It would [...] be unnecessarily sterile to pitch comparisons at such a high level of abstraction and merely add the case of Central Asia to a growing body of post-colonial scholarship that concerns itself principally with a critique of Western modernity. That would not only fail to capture the specificities of the Soviet case, with its distinctive approach to the institutionalization of ethnonational difference as the basis for the distribution of social rewards and its consequent implications for post-independence nationalisms; it would also limit more open-ended explorations into the possible meanings of post-coloniality itself.⁵⁵

In light of this “resistance” that the case of Central Asia puts up to its inclusion in the post-colonial framework, it may seem quite surprising that so far the majority of post-colonial/-socialist literature centers on the Soviet Union’s purported European colonies. The former Soviet republics in the Baltics and Ukraine, alongside Poland, have drawn the most attention. Two edited collective monographs document this regional bias: Janusz Korek’s *From Sovietology to Postcoloniality: Poland and Ukraine from a Postcolonial Perspective*⁵⁶ and Violeta Kelertas’s *Baltic Postcolonialism*,⁵⁷ both of which assemble a good number of contributions from scholars – mostly literary – from the said countries.

Of the aforementioned authors, Korek and Thompson have a Polish background, and Kelertas is of Lithuanian and Shkandrij of Ukrainian descent. These and other authors who advocate the post-colonial perspective for Central and Eastern Europe bear a striking resemblance to the original theorists of post-colonialism in that they too are diasporic scholars at Western universities. The academic community of the Central and Eastern European diaspora seems to be the milieu in which traveling post-colonial theory is met with the greatest acceptance. The journal *Postcolonial Europe*⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Deniz KANDYIOTI, “Post-Colonialism Compared: Potentials and Limitations in the Middle East and Central Asia.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 34, 2002, no. 2, p. 294 (279–297).

⁵⁶ Janusz KOREK, *From Sovietology to Postcoloniality: Poland and Ukraine from a Postcolonial Perspective*. Huddinge: Södertörns högskola 2007. For the case of Poland, see also Clare CAVANAGH, “Postcolonial Poland.” *Common Knowledge*, vol. 10, 2004, no. 1, pp. 82–92.

⁵⁷ Violeta KELERTAS, *Baltic Postcolonialism*. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi 2006. See also Epp ANNUS, “The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics.” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. 43, 2011, no. 1, pp. 21–45.

⁵⁸ In the “Note of Intent”, the editors state: “Our special concern will be identity-forming processes as they affect individuals, social groups, ethnic minorities and nations of Central and Eastern Europe from the perspectives provided by postcolonial theory.” *Postcolonial Europe* [online]. Available at: <<http://www.postcolonial-europe.eu/>> [cit. 11. 12. 2011].

was established in 2009 (at Stockholm University) to provide a publication platform on which to debate further research and theoretical issues relating to the post-colonial status of Central and Eastern Europe. Several conferences on the subject have also been held.

In light of these efforts, the silences that have nothing to do with lack of interest among traditional post-colonial scholars, mentioned by Chari and Verdery, are noteworthy. For one thing, some countries that emerged from Soviet control or influence do not figure in the post-colonial accounts to the extent that Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania do. What does the absence of Hungary, the Czech Republic, or Slovakia mean? Why is post-colonial theory more popular in the Romanian⁵⁹ than the Bulgarian context? Yet, the most disquieting silence hovers over Russian academia. Vitaly Chernetsky (an American scholar of Ukrainian descent) noted that “throughout the 1990s, postcolonialism was perhaps the only major contemporary theoretical discourse persistently ignored by Russian academics.”⁶⁰ Although the comparison between post-colonialism and post-socialism is no longer “ignored or ridiculed”, Russian academia continues to resist it. While this resistance finds its best expression in silence, occasionally it is voiced, albeit in passing. Thus, in the work of Alexei Yurchak, a Russian diasporic scholar in the United States, a single footnote can be found that indicates serious reservations:

Drawing any parallels between socialism and colonialism, which is a growing trend, must be done with extreme caution to avoid equating one with the other at the expense of the profound political, ethical, and aesthetic differences between these projects.⁶¹

The discrepancy between Russian resistance to the post-colonial paradigm and its acceptance by scholars of/from Central or Eastern Europe is

⁵⁹ See Adrian OTOIU, “An Exercise in Fictional Liminality: The Postcolonial, the Postcommunist, and Romania’s Threshold Generation.” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 23, 2003, no. 1–2, pp. 87–105; see also Monica POPESCU “Translations: Lenin’s Statues, Post-communism and Post-apartheid.” *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 16, 2003, no. 2, p. 406–423.

⁶⁰ Vitaly CHERNETSKY, “On Some Post-Soviet Postcolonialisms.” *PMLA*, vol. 121, 2006, no. 3, p. 834 (833–836). See also Annus’s claim that “Post-Soviet Russia is a unique postcolonial (and arguably still colonial) oppressor that refuses to acknowledge its colonial past.” ANNUS, “The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics,” p. 24.

⁶¹ Alexei YURCHAK, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2006, p. 9.

often overlooked. However, it demonstrates that post-colonial theory possesses a political charge that needs to be accounted for. One of the most significant achievements of post-colonial studies in the West has been its contribution to raising awareness in former imperial metropolises of, in the terms of Janna Thompson,⁶² their historical obligations to their former colonies. In the case of Russia and its Soviet past matters are more complicated.

At the core of these political, economic, but also ethical and epistemological claims lies the attribution of victim status. Thus, for example, when Račevskis claims that “there are indeed excellent reasons why the Baltic countries should be and always should have been seen as the victims of colonization,”⁶³ it is also worthwhile recalling Todorov, who argues that appropriation of victimhood may actually be quite desirable in certain respects:

To have been victim gives you the right to complain, to protest, and to make demands. [...] It is more advantageous to stay in the role of a victim than to obtain reparation for the suffered offence. [...] Instead of momentary satisfaction, one keeps a permanent privilege, and the attention, and thus, the recognition from others is assured.⁶⁴

It must be recognized that Russia has its own stake in claiming victim status:⁶⁵ regardless of the putative advantages they derived from belonging to the ruling nation, “Russian subjects were [...] deprived of the same rights denied to subalterns”⁶⁶ – and, we may add, subjugated as citizens to the same oppressive measures of an authoritarian state-socialist government as their civic counterparts in other state-socialist regions. The concept of “reverse colonization” implies, moreover, that Russians were in turn also the object of orientalizing knowledge, which after 1989 occasionally assumed

⁶² Janna THOMPSON, *Taking Responsibility for the Past: Reparation and Historical Injustice*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers – Polity 2002.

⁶³ Kārlis RAČEVSKIS, “Toward a Postcolonial Perspective on the Baltic States.” In: KELERTAS, V. (ed.), *Baltic Postcolonialism*. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi 2006.

⁶⁴ Tzvetan TODOROV, *Les Abus De La Mémoire*. Paris: Arléa 1995, p. 56 [my translation].

⁶⁵ Kujundzic, makes a claim for post-colonial reading of Russian identity based on a “self-colonial impulse in Russian history”, epitomized most notably by the Petrine reforms; an argument that should not be taken lightly by the proponents of post-colonial perspective on Eastern Europe. Cf. Dragan KUJUNDZIC, “‘After’: Russian Post-Colonial Identity.” *MLN*, vol. 115, 2000, no. 5, pp. 892–908.

⁶⁶ Julie A. BUCKLER, 2009. “What Comes After ‘Post-Soviet’ in Russian Studies?” *PMLA*, vol. 124, 2009, no. 1, p. 255 (251–263).

the form of an anti-Russian backlash.⁶⁷ If, as Condee points out, in Central and Eastern Europe “a descriptor more familiar than Soviet colonialism [...] has been Soviet occupation,”⁶⁸ it should also be stressed that this seemingly minor distinction activates very different registers and discourses, which help shape the identity of the colonized and occupied peoples.⁶⁹ Amidst this competition of moral claims, acceptance and resistance to post-colonialism in the former Second World begs, above all, the question of a reflexive theorization of a theorist's position – as the theoretician's back seems to provide the best vehicle for a traveling theory.⁷⁰

The theory's transformations

For a traveling theory to be transformed, the distance it has traveled should be properly acknowledged. As this essay has indicated, the case for post-colonial theory tends to be argued in the opposite manner: it aims to postulate the essential identity of both historical conditions. In a pure sense, this goal is unattainable – besides considerable similarities, one also finds significant differences that no scholar can overlook. Examples of specific features that complicate the assimilation of post-colonialism and post-socialism include the following: the contiguous expansion of the Russian empire, the concept of “reverse colonization”, or distinct conceptualizations of dominance by a foreign power, i.e. colonization vis-à-vis occupation, or the engagement of the Soviet Union in anti-colonial struggles. Despite Moore's explicit call for the universalization of the post-colonial paradigm⁷¹ to the point where post-socialism ultimately becomes no more than a variant of post-colonialism,

⁶⁷ Annus, on the other hand, argues, mostly on the grounds of the linguistic privilege accorded to Russian, against the “flattening of differences between the unhappy experience of Russians and of those populations subjected by Communist Russia.” ANNUS, “The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics,” p. 25.

⁶⁸ Nancy CONDEE, “The Anti-imperialist Empire and After: In Dialogue with Gayatri Spivak's ‘Are You Postcolonial?’” *PMLA*, vol. 121, 2006, no. 3, p. 830 (829–831).

⁶⁹ Annus is exceptional in explicitly alerting her readers to the fact that this distinction had immense impact on the treatment of different region under international law (ANNUS, “The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics,” p. 28). In general, Annus's article does a good job of attending to the arguments that might work against the presence of post-colonial theory in the post-socialist space, although she herself eventually concludes that the use of post-colonial theory is relevant, precisely because occupation, according to her, develops into colonization.

⁷⁰ For the sake of argument, it should be noted that the author of this essay is a Czech sociologist.

⁷¹ “As for universalizing the postcolonial condition, I close by supporting such a move.” MOORE, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?” p. 123.

post-colonial critique cannot be simply superimposed on the post-socialist space without further adjustments. The multilayered experience of state-socialism needs to be attended to and, in effect, the theory has to undergo a transformation.

Acceptance or resistance to post-colonialism's travel informs the importance that is then accorded to the issues specific to post-socialism, i.e. whether they get interpreted as merely circumstantial or as more or less defining features. Consequently, different demands are placed on transforming the theory. At one extreme, the theory itself has to change very little; instead, our perception of post-socialism needs to transform and acknowledge its fundamentally post-colonial character. Thompson, for instance, tends to represent this line of thought, and although she admits some distinct features of post-socialism, according to her, they only "mitigate the perception of Russia as a colonial power".⁷² At the other end of the spectrum, the theory needs not to transform either, as the substantial difference precludes anything but tentative comparisons. Alison Stenning and Kathrin Hörschelmann suggest that post-socialism as a concept remains relevant, even after the inclusion of Eastern European countries into Western European structures and the post-colonial inspiration has been useful in helping to understand the difficulties that accompany "extrication" from the oppressive past of state-socialist history and geography. Nonetheless, the authors argue for a specific treatment of the post-socialist world and state their position clearly in this respect: "We do not see post-socialism as a variant of post-colonialism (though acknowledge that others do so), but instead seek to use post-colonial approaches as heuristic tools for exploring post-socialism."⁷³ Other scholars, especially those from Western universities with no national ties to the post-socialist region, stake out their positions in between these two conceivable extremes.

The notion of a transformed theory – or, rather, a demand on its transformation – stems mainly from an awareness of the interplay between similarities and differences, in which neither part of the equation gains the upper hand. Adeb Khalid, for example, argues that considering Central Asian post-Soviet republics as former colonies requires a reflection on some of the tenets of post-colonial studies. Many of the crucial elements – the his-

⁷² THOMPSON, *Imperial Knowledge*, p. 15. See also Ewa M. THOMPSON. "Postcolonial Russia." In: PODDAR, P. – PATKE, R. – JENSEN, L. (eds.), *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures: Continental Europe and Its Empires*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2008, pp. 412–417.

⁷³ STENNING – HÖRSCHELMANN, "History, Geography and Difference in the Post-socialist World," p. 313.

tory of this region under the rule of Tzarist Russia, its considerable ethnic, linguistic, and religious distance from the Russian metropole – combine in a mode of subjection that closely resembles the typical colonial arrangement. Khalid reminds us, however, that even the Asian post-socialist geography defies annexation to the post-colonial world in several key respects, the reflection of which can serve to challenge some taken-for-granted aspects of post-colonial theory itself:

The Soviet Union cannot simply be measured up against static definitions of empire or colonialism, nor will the mechanical 'application' of postcolonial theory developed elsewhere lead to fruitful insights. [...] Soviet history can broaden the horizons of postcolonial studies by introducing a vast array of historical and cultural encounters little known to the field, but the Soviet case can also inject new caveats and perhaps a new scepticism toward generalizations built on the basis of the experience of mainly bourgeois, western European overseas empires.⁷⁴

Another example of a proposition to re-think post-colonial studies comes from Monica Popescu, a scholar of Romanian origin. According to Popescu, the key feature that distinguishes post-colonialism and post-socialism is the politics implied in the respective theories. Although she sees their relationship as “reciprocal” and does not attempt to subsume the post-socialist world completely under the post-colonial perspective, she supports this conceptual encounter and concludes that post-colonial studies need to establish a critique of its Marxist origins:

Post-colonial discourse lends its Eastern European counterpart critical tools for discussing relations of power between center (Moscow) and periphery, as well as issues of migration, dislocation, hybridized communities, and hegemonic discourses. Post-communism offers the Marxism indebted wings of post-colonialism the necessary check of reality: the crumbling of the systems based on Marxist utopia and the failure of their revolutionary projects cannot be ignored.⁷⁵

The merit of Said's concept of traveling theory rests in its abdication of orthodoxy and its assertion that a theory does not become epistemologically flawed simply on the grounds of its situatedness. In a later essay on the

⁷⁴ KHALID, “Locating the (Post-) Colonial in Soviet History,” p. 471.

⁷⁵ POPESCU “Translations: Lenin's Statues, Post-communism and Post-apartheid,” p. 417–418.

subject of traveling theory, Said clarifies his earlier notions and points out that a contextualization of theory in a new setting can stimulate not merely new insights, but also a better meta-theoretical understanding:

To speak here only of borrowing and adaptation is not adequate. [...] As a way of getting seriously past the weightlessness of one theory after another, the remorseless indignations of orthodoxy, and the expressions of tired advocacy to which we are often submitted, the exercise involved in figuring out where the theory went and how in getting there its fiery core was reignited is invigorating.⁷⁶

However, he also hints at what, with these considerations in mind, could be a criterion of the integrity of traveling theory: “an intellectual, and perhaps moral, community of a remarkable kind, affiliation in the deepest and most interesting sense of the word.”⁷⁷ If this theoretical “community” should be the glue that holds a transformed theory together, then such an association obviously lacks in the case of post-colonial theory in the post-socialist space. As I argued in the preceding section, acceptance of and resistance to post-colonialism have a marked distribution along disciplinary, geographical, and national lines. Fragmentation better describes the state of the theory than transformation. To truly exploit the advantages of a traveling theory – in a metaphorical sense, to turn the travel into an exploratory voyage and, at the same time, resist the temptations of conquest as well as of disinterested tourism – new interdisciplinary and cross-national alliances need to be forged.

Conclusion

This essay presented some observations on the transposition of post-colonial theory to the post-socialist space. It does not claim to offer a complete itinerary; rather, it takes the form of a travelogue – a collection of impressions from the theory’s journey. On the one hand, the form of sketches itself shows the manifold obstacles on the road that the theory has to follow and that is by no means straight and clear. On the other hand, the perspective of traveling

⁷⁶ Edward W. SAID, “Traveling Theory Reconsidered.” In: *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2000, p. 452 (436–452).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* In this respect, one must concur with the statement that “the role of the Baltic scholar in this context should not be just the application of thoughts and terms applied elsewhere, but an active and creative participation in the global field of postcolonial studies.” ANNUS, “The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics,” p. 38.

theory, which eschews the judgmental attitude of “right or wrong”, makes it possible to appreciate the warm welcome with which some post-socialist scholars have received post-colonialism.

The idea that post-colonial theory could conquer the whole world rightly draws skepticism. At the same time, the application of post-colonial theory to problems of post-socialist provenance is no longer a speculative question. Although this essay has focused primarily on theory, it has also demonstrated that numerous empirical and conceptual studies have been carried out that make the post-colonial approach to post-socialism a *fait accompli*. At stake, then, is no longer merely the possibility of fusion or comparative perspective on post-socialism and post-colonialism, but the actual advances in the understanding of post-socialist phenomena that the amalgamated approach will furnish. These knowledge gains will also determine whether the imported paradigm will ever leave the sidelines of research on post-socialism, to which it has been – despite many deserving efforts – relegated thus far. Post-colonial theory, for its part, can benefit from this exchange by being required to rethink its own purposes and affiliations, but also simply by strengthening its institutional position through its new agenda and audience. For the study of the post-socialist space, the alliance promises a chance to improve its relatively marginalized status.

As a double-edged sword, however, post-colonial theory also consigns the students of post-socialism to a state of dependency on what is seemingly a Southern endeavor, but what, in reality, expresses yet again the North-Atlantic hegemony in the academe. Likewise, the political uses of post-colonialism by post-socialist scholars can support their cause in important socio-political campaigns to redress past wrongs or foster empowered identities. However, political engagement of the imported theory also leaves it vulnerable to attacks on its academic and epistemological integrity. In short, besides being of considerable heuristic value, the merger of the “posts” amplifies the uncertainties that surround the notion of post-colonialism and, in addition, raises some of its own.

Perhaps, in the end, it will not be so much the theory that will be transformed, but rather the place to which it has travelled. Unlike in the East, in the West the relevance of post-colonialism for understanding current societies has been more readily apparent. Former imperial metropolises, like Belgium, France, or the United Kingdom, are post-colonial by definition, although the meaning of their post-colonial condition bears little resemblance to their former colonies. The post-colonial agenda has been reintroduced to the European continent by another geopolitical development, EU enlargement

and the accompanying process of newly conceived “Europeanization”.⁷⁸ Curiously, the colonialist conceptualization of Europeanization brings together the two modes of imperial control that seem to be difficult to reconcile in the theory reviewed herein: the neocolonial domination of overseas countries and territories and the contiguous expansion through annexation of marginalized locations and borderlands. Gurinder Bhambra alerts us to the need of recognizing that “the relationship of Europe to non-Europe (the ‘non-Europe’ within, as well as outside, ‘Europe’) is a relationship that is largely unacknowledged, even if it is regarded as integral.”⁷⁹ Eventually, post-colonial theory may perhaps become important not only for the analysis of the dependence of post-socialist countries on their past in the Soviet periphery, but also of their current and future dependencies after shifting into the margins of the West.

⁷⁸ See Peo HANSEN, “European Integration, European Identity and the Colonial Connection.” *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 5, 2002, no. 4, pp. 483–498; Enrica RIGO, “Citizenship at Europe’s Borders: Some Reflections on the Post-Colonial Condition of Europe in the Context of EU Enlargement.” *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 9, 2005, no. 1, pp. 3–22.

⁷⁹ Gurinder K. BHAMBRA, “Postcolonial Europe, or Understanding Europe in Times of the Postcolonial.” In: RUMFORD, C. (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of European Studies*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE 2009, p. 69 (69–85).