Baltic Postcolonial Narratives
Baltic Postcolonial Narratives:

*Literature and Power*

By

Almantas Samalavičius

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Lithuanian Postcolonialism and Beyond
FOREWORD

This small book has been in the making for quite some time. In fact, I intended to write a book-length inquiry into Lithuanian prose writing from a postcolonial perspective almost a quarter of a century ago. This was an idea I cherished in a period of intellectual scarcity when some scholars (including myself) realized that Lithuanian literary criticism was badly lacking new and adequate intellectual tools to analyze some interesting and important fictional texts that were then rejected and labeled as popular fiction, or, worse, as mass culture or even pornographic literature. Accordingly, some of Lithuania’s best contemporary writers and their writings were either routinely bypassed or otherwise dismissed by literary scholars and critics writing book reviews and essays for daily papers, literary weeklies, and cultural magazines.

Coincidentally, this was also a time full of paradoxes. The literary culture of the first post-Soviet decade could be described in some aspects as booming like never before or, for that matter, any time later. Lithuania’s most popular daily papers contained regular book review sections, eagerly published informative overviews of literary developments, and interviewed the leading fiction writers on a regular basis. Writers even appeared on TV talk shows or even the news. Moreover, the leading Lithuanian dailies were competing with each other by launching their literary supplements and hiring well-known authors and/or critics to edit their cultural sections. Fortunately or unfortunately, these days are now over, and the national media these days is not much interested in literature or individuals who write fiction, except on rare occasions when they focus on some best-selling (primarily international) authors or overview large literary events like the annual Vilnius Book Fair.

I started contemplating the first version of this book, focusing on Lithuanian prose writing and its relationship with postcolonialism, after I came back from teaching Lithuanian culture and literature at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) during the Spring 1999 semester. However, after writing a draft of several chapters, I had to give this up for a while as I became involved in other ambitious intellectual projects. These developed into scholarly monographs that were eventually published both in Lithuania and in the USA.
Nevertheless, the idea of writing a book on Lithuanian prose from a postcolonial perspective continued to haunt my imagination. Moreover, two years before I went to Chicago, I was invited to teach a graduate course on Lithuanian contemporary literature and criticism at Vilnius University. At this time, I realized that students had been habitually indoctrinated to dislike and ignore some of the most interesting Lithuanian fiction writers, such as Ričardas Gavelis. This strange discovery revitalized my urge to apply postcolonial theory to Lithuanian (and Baltic) fiction.

The idea of a book eventually took shape in my mind and gradually began to take a more material and organized form. Embracing this self-inflicted writing project, I returned to UIC in the early spring of 2002 as a visiting scholar in the Department of Baltic Languages and Literatures. As I spent several busy months working on this research project focused on Lithuanian literary postcolonialism, I discovered that Irish scholars were also starting to apply postcolonialism to the study of their literature. This gave me confidence that my own pursuit was well-grounded.

Both stays in Chicago were extremely fruitful and beneficial as I was provisioned with a stimulating intellectual milieu and had (as it then seemed to me) almost unlimited access to the resources of UIC’s substantial academic library. Needless to say, library resources, especially in the field of culture and literary theory, were scarce in my home country. During that period, local academic libraries in Lithuania (and elsewhere in Eastern Europe) badly lacked funding and international networking; thus, borrowing the books I needed for my particular purpose was a regular headache.

During the years after my sojourn in Chicago, I drafted some chapters of the book and submitted a book proposal to several national funding agencies. However, to my dismay, the efforts to secure any further funding failed spectacularly. The reasons were quite obvious and not at all surprising; however, this did not provide me with much comfort. Postcolonial theory was then generally viewed as something that had nothing to do with either Eastern European or Baltic social and cultural realities and traditions. In local academia, it was not considered to apply to any serious study of the post-Soviet space. Ironically, the same applied to post-communist studies that were bypassed in Lithuanian academic culture at the time.

Thus, during the first two decades that followed Lithuania’s independence and the demise of the Soviet system, the idea of writing a serious academic book on Lithuanian postcolonialism was treated as an eccentric endeavor or, perhaps, even something worse than that. Most older
(and institutionally more influential) academic literary scholars viewed such efforts as a subversive revisionist activity.

Unable to secure any funding, I had no other option than to shelve the book in progress. With certain regrets, I chose to redirect my intellectual energy to other ideas that finally developed into a handful of scholarly books on architecture, urbanism, and higher education. At the same time, there were some other shifts in my professional and intellectual career. After almost two decades of writing regular literary criticism and book reviews for daily papers and literary weeklies and monthlies, I gradually retired from these activities. However, I continued to contribute academic essays and articles focused on various literary topics to mostly international books, anthologies, and journals.

Around 2008, in addition to my regular full-time academic duties as a professor at the School of Architecture at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, I received an invitation to teach postcolonialism, cultural, and media studies at Vilnius University as an adjunct professor. Accepting this generous invitation, I revived my long-term interest in Lithuanian postcolonialism that, in fact, had never disappeared; rather, it had been waiting for the right time to return. My graduate seminars in the Department of English at Vilnius University provided me with an excellent environment in which to rethink some of my early ideas critically while also urging me to return to the previously abandoned book project.

The present academic and intellectual climate both in Lithuania and elsewhere in the Baltic, and, more generally, in Eastern Europe, is far more favorable for the pursuit of postcolonial studies than during the first two post-Soviet decades. As already mentioned, postcolonialism was then viewed with suspicion as an academic subject, and the very few scholars who attempted to analyze local culture through the lens of postcolonial studies felt isolated and marginalized. Luckily, this is no longer the case, and postcolonialism is now embraced more willingly not only by literary scholars but also by Lithuanian (and other Baltic) academics researching theater, film, and/or visual art studies, political science, and even, occasionally, history, a subject that, at least in Lithuania, was and is slow in accepting the postcolonial approach as a fully legitimate form of analytical discourse.

To cut a long story short, the current climate is thus far more favorable for such studies, and the circle of individuals interested in the perspectives of postcolonial studies and their application to Baltic societies and their cultures is slowly yet steadily growing. Current academic and public discussions on themes related to the development of postcolonial approaches to studying post-Soviet societies have become not only more frequent but
also more intellectually stimulating, engaging, and inclusive. Luckily, they have also become less confrontational. Last but not least, Baltic scholars have additionally started to critically question the methods and certainties of postcolonial studies rather than reject these studies out of intellectual prejudice. I hope all this will contribute to further considerations of the uses and misuses of postcolonialism, its potential, and, perhaps, its inevitable limits.

In any case, I hope this small book will contribute to these developments in some way by creating a more favorable intellectual atmosphere and enlarging the scope of academic interests while simultaneously providing some insights for further thinking and rethinking the past, present, and future of Baltic societies, their cultures, and their literatures.
I am indebted to several individuals who have, in one way or another, helped me to shape my ideas at different periods of my academic and intellectual career, even before I set out to write this particular book.

Professor Dr. Wolfgang Iser played an important part in shaping my interests in the realms of literary theory, aesthetics, and philosophy that, unbeknownst to him, finally led me to embrace postcolonial studies. My fellowship at the renowned Stuttgart Seminar in Cultural Studies in 1993 and Professor Iser’s guiding power encouraged me to maintain and pursue my interests in literary theory even during the somewhat darker periods when this engagement seemingly made little sense. Though, for several reasons, I could not accept Professor Iser’s generous invitation to join him as his teaching assistant at the University of California, Irvine, where he was teaching following his retirement from Konstanz University, I will always remain grateful for his intellectual support, goodwill, and mentorship early in my academic career.

My interest in postcolonial studies, which I had already been pursuing for a couple of years, was strengthened significantly by a meeting with Professor David Chioni Moore, who visited Vilnius in the first decade after the fall of the Soviet regime, and I remain grateful for this highly stimulating exchange. I am also indebted to my conversations with Professor Patrick Sheeran, who visited Vilnius University and engaged me in discussions focused on varieties of postcolonialism after reading my essay in *Partisan Review*. These gave me some new insights as well as an awareness that I was pursuing something more real than phantom.

I sincerely thank Professor Violeta Kelertas, with whom I worked on postcolonial Baltic issues in a parallel universe for several decades. I am greatly indebted to her for inviting me to teach at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1999 and accepting me as a visiting scholar at this institution a few years later. Violeta shared my interest in interpreting Ričardas Gavelis in a postcolonial key and published some of my essays in the journal she was then editing, and she urged me to contribute to her groundbreaking volume *Baltic Postcolonialism*.

My thanks are also due to Professor Regina Rudaitytė, who was a *spiritus movens* responsible for involving me with the English Department at Vilnius University, where I have been teaching graduate seminars for the
last fifteen years in addition to my primary duties at the School of Architecture at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University. The series of international conferences Regina organized at Vilnius University was exceptional in bringing together highly interesting and leading academics from different parts of Europe and the UK and provoking valuable and memorable intellectual discussions. I also thank Dr. Antanas Smetona, the former dean of the Faculty of Philology at Vilnius University, who was always supportive.

Finally, a brief note on the text of the present book. Though I have published academic articles on various aspects of Lithuanian postcolonialism in international journals and anthologies over the years, I opted not to include them in this book as I believe they are already in suitable contexts. However, I would like to thank the quarterly journal *Lituanus* for their permission to include “Revisiting Postcolonial Studies and the Baltics” (first published in *Lituanus* 69, no. 1, pp. 27–41) in this book in a slightly different and extended version as well as to reproduce my article “Beyond the Enigma of Power: Notes On The Last Novel by Rūdolfo Gavelis” (first published in *Lituanus* 65, no. 3, pp. 38–49).
INTRODUCTION

POSTCOLONIALISM TAKES COMMAND

During recent decades, a new field of research known as postcolonial theory, or more often (and possibly more accurately) as postcolonial studies, has gained currency in the shifting landscape of the humanities. After emerging during the 1970s and undergoing a rapid development and experiencing numerous re-adjustments, postcolonialism has finally established its academic and scholarly reputation, especially during the last three decades, and it has made its way into the teaching programs and research projects of many Western and non-Western universities alike. It was during this period that postcolonial studies acquired a global character as well as international academic support, becoming a booming and yet inexhaustible academic industry all over the globe. Postcolonial theorists and critics have raised a number of important theoretical and political issues and mapped out new trajectories for postcolonial critique and cultural analysis. Quite naturally, Europe and the West, as well as their discourses, have become the legitimate targets of postcolonial critique. Bearing in mind that it was European powers that engaged in colonizing the rest of the world after Columbus ‘discovered’ America, this focus is reasonable and understandable. However, this persistent focus curiously obscures the colonial activities of non-European or quasi-European powers. For example, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*’s entry on postcolonialism focuses exclusively on European and Western colonialism and emphasizes the European legacy rather than considering any other versions of colonialism and imperialism.

Postcolonial theorists and historians have been concerned with investigating the various trajectories of modernity as understood and experienced from a range of philosophical, cultural, and historical perspectives. They have been particularly concerned with engaging with the ambiguous legacy of the Enlightenment—as expressed in social, political, economic, scientific, legal, and cultural thought—beyond Europe itself. The legacy is ambiguous, according to postcolonial theorists, because the age of Enlightenment was also an age of empire, and the connection between those two historical epochs is more than incidental.¹
One of the features of this field of research and academic studies is its constant and ongoing search for identity, which led to the remapping of its territory and the marking of a lot of new targets. Drawing on various methodologies (Marxism, feminism, post-structuralism, etc.), postcolonial theorists have frequently crossed the usual disciplinary boundaries and ventured into territories beyond literary studies while embracing history, social psychology, anthropology, cultural studies, and the like.

The relatively high fluidity and openness of this field of research and approach was often criticized by older and thus more ‘legitimate’ academic disciplines; however, in the long run, its broad framework not only contributed to its growth as an academic enterprise but also brought a spectacular expansion of postcolonialism in geographical terms. As Edward Said emphasized quite early in the history of postcolonialism when the methods of postcolonial critique were being shaped: “the main strengths of postcolonial analysis is that it widens, instead of narrows, the interpretive perspective, which is another way of saying that it liberates instead of further constricting and colonising the mind.” The liberating force of postcolonial studies is now being witnessed in various geographic localities.

As postcolonial studies progressed, there were numerous attempts to provide a solid ground for further inquiry into political, social, and cultural issues related to a domain formerly described as the Third World. Thus, many assumptions were questioned, theoretical positions and attitudes were debated and even negated, and the possibilities of introducing a new paradigm of analyzing the colonial legacy and the realities of the postcolonial world were researched. Consequently, the boundaries of what could be considered colonial or postcolonial were constantly drawn and redrawn. The editors of *The Empire Writes Back*, a highly influential collective work on postcolonialism, went as far as describing almost each and every country that was, in one way or another, subjected to colonialism as postcolonial. According to them:

The literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka are all postcolonial literatures. The literature of the USA should also be placed in this category. Perhaps because of its current position of power, and the neo-colonizing role
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it has played, its post-colonial nature has not been generally recognized. But its relationship with the metropolitan centre as it evolved over the last two centuries has been paradigmatic for postcolonial literatures everywhere. What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctly postcolonial.

This list of societies labeled as postcolonial is, of course, incomplete, even in terms of English-speaking countries, not to mention the specific and often significant differences making these countries and societies difficult objects for comparison. Some scholars viewed these early attempts as questionable and highly problematic. As the interest in analyzing experiences of colonialism progressed, more and more authors realized that despite containing certain common features, the phenomenon of colonialism was far more complex than the authors of the above-mentioned anthology suggested. As Marion O’Callaghan emphasized while rethinking postcolonialism: “It varied over periods, it differed in the ways it operated, it differed in the ways political independence was achieved, granted or withheld.” Thus, understanding the complexities of colonialism and analyzing the different forms it took enabled postcolonial scholars to expand the boundaries of this phenomenon in order to outline its common features and the specific character of any of its forms. Eventually, a broad interpretation of colonialism and postcoloniality came into being. However, as Ela Shohat, for example, insisted, such a broad understanding of postcoloniality came with a price. As she insightfully remarked,
racist policies toward indigenous peoples not only before independence but also after the official break from the imperial center, while also de-emphasizing neocolonial global positionings of First World settler states. This criticism of the term ‘postcolonial’ is well-known and was the subject of numerous discussions inside and outside the communities of postcolonial scholars. Looking back at these discussions with a certain temporal distance (and a different geographical location), Shohat’s criticism of how the authors of The Empire Writes Back perceived the notion of postcoloniality can be considered in many ways accurate and just. However, it also contained certain contradictions as this kind of revisionism could effectively cause other scholars to avoid any generalizations of the term or reduce it to some very few cultures and societies, what is known today as ‘classical colonialism.’

To a certain extent, Shohat’s insistence on the limits of the term ‘postcolonial’ has played an ambiguous role in further inquiries into the conceptualization of postcolonialism as it encouraged researchers to concentrate on the specific experience of non-white and aboriginal communities in some countries colonized and dominated by the European powers and, at the same time, narrowed the applicability of the term. Thus, good intentions do not always produce the desired result but rather provide new grounds for new contradictions and ambiguities that are — and hopefully will continue to be — revisited, scrutinized, and contested.

It is no wonder that postcolonial theory has been criticized from both outside and inside the field. As Leela Gandhi recently observed while reviewing developments in this field,

While postcolonial theorists have attempted variously to defend the politics of their academic practice, recent critics of postcolonial theorizing have asserted the unsustainable distance between the self-reflexive preoccupations of the post-colonial academy, on the one hand, and the concerns arising from, and relevant to, postcolonial realities, on the other.

Some vigilant and self-critical postcolonial theorists agree that the academic labour of postcolonialism is often blind to its own socially deleterious effect. Among this group, Gayatri Spivak is salutary in her warning that recent concessions to marginality studies within the first-world metropolitan academy inadvertently serve to identify, confirm, and thereby exclude certain cultural formations as chronically marginal. The celebratory ‘third worldism’ of postcolonial studies, Spivak cautions, may well perpetuate real social and political oppressions which rely upon rigid distinctions between the ‘centre’ and the ‘margin.’
However, despite all the confusions and contradictions related to the problematic nature and character of postcolonialism, it can be concluded that the term can hardly be understood as mono-functional. Thus, it means different things in different contexts as well as in geographical, historical, and cultural realms.

Attempts have been made to distinguish between the two stages embedded in postcolonialism: a colonial period (or phase) during which the colonizers dominated, suppressing the culture, history, and memory of colonized people and imposing their institutions, and a postcolonial (post-independence) period during which the internalization of colonizers’ values are questioned and examined and the trauma of colonization is acknowledged. However, as Alfred J. Lopez has emphasized, the latter phase is far more complex as “the colonized culture’s previous complicities with the colonizer – and present acceptance and internalization of the colonizer’s cultural values and knowledge – come to light and are, again less successfully, suppressed.”

This period, which starts with regaining independence, is especially complicated and often lengthy, with no clearly foreseeable and/or forecastable end. It is also marked by internal contradictions as the values and experiences of different generations collide, memories of the past differ widely, and political and cultural ambitions conflict with realities and policies. This intermediate period is frequently described as decolonization, yet other categories like postcolonialism or postcoloniality are often applied instead, avoiding political implications inherent to (political) decolonization.

Nevertheless, some authors have insisted on the importance of decolonization, not only as a legitimate goal and practice of postcolonial political and social transformation but also as a practice related to the cultural and literary imagination. Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh have argued that

Since colonization was a highly complex process, decolonization lacks a clear focus and target. It may be easy to resent and attack foreign rulers or capital, but it is extremely difficult to identify what values, institutions and identities are foreign and part of colonial legacy. And if one succeeds in identifying some of them, they are sometimes too deeply intertwined with their endogenous analogues to be clearly separated from them. Even if one manages to isolate some of them, one is sometimes so deeply shaped and moulded by them as to be unable to reject them without rejecting parts of oneself. Even as colonialism did not involve the imposition of something entirely foreign, decolonization cannot consist in discarding what is deemed to be alien. Colonialism evolved a new consciousness out of a subtle mixture of the old and new; decolonization has to follow the same route. It requires not only the restoration of a historically continuous and allegedly pure
precolumbian heritage, but an imaginative creation of a new form of consciousness and way of life.8

Though some critics are inclined to dismiss suggestions of the continuity of decolonization and refuse to admit the open-endedness of this long-term and complex process in the same way as some social scientists have claimed that the transitory post-communist period terminated as soon as post-Soviet Eastern European societies joined the European Union, this kind of optimistic attitude poses inevitable risks. First and foremost, it can simplify a complex process and give way to a highly questionable linear perspective of looking at the past or, for that matter, the present. Moreover, we have already experienced the naïve and premature predictions of the ‘end of history,’ once glibly proposed by Francis Fukuyama, or even earlier concerns about ‘the end of ideology.’ Despite these premature claims, we have witnessed the end of neither history nor ideology. On the contrary, versions of history have proliferated in the same way as ideologies have multiplied.

Thus, when approaching such highly complex and closely intertwined issues as decolonization or postcoloniality, it is advisable to refrain from any hasty and ill-founded preliminary predictions because, as Leela Gandhi has rightly argued, “whenever postcolonialism identifies itself with the epochal ‘end’ of colonialism, it become falsely utopian or prematurely celebratory.”9 So far, proponents of these ‘end of’ concepts have not become eye-witnesses of the fulfillment of these grandiose prophecies.

Perhaps the same precaution applies to the geographical limits of postcolonialism. Though it is only natural that the emergence of postcolonial discourse was intricately related to the dismantling of colonial regimes after World War II and the socio-political processes that followed, these transitions have largely demonstrated the problematic nature as well as enormous complexity of postcolonial developments, not to mention the array of internal issues inherent to postcolonial theorizing that gradually matured, acquiring more introspection, self-reflection, and conscious and subconscious self-criticism.

Together with the conceptualization of related intellectual tools and categories, such as center-periphery, dependency, mimicry, hybridity, otherness, etc., postcolonial discourse has expanded beyond its original premises and limits of consciousness. The geographical expansion of postcolonialism is also instructive. The successor to what has previously been understood as the Third World, postcolonialism has since embraced some of the territories previously attributed to the (now extinct) Second World and even the First World itself.
The spectacular development of Irish postcolonialism is perhaps the most telling transformation of postcolonial critique. The relatively late arrival of Irish postcolonial studies demonstrated that there were curious cases of Europe or the West practicing no more and no less than the colonization of itself when such European superpowers as England subjugated and dominated its closest neighboring country for a number of centuries. However, the road of Irish studies toward a postcolonial perspective has not been easy. This has been noted by various Irish scholars, who have discussed the factors that prevented the formation of Irish postcolonial studies for a long time. A couple of decades ago, C. L. Innes questioned the state of the art as well as the prospects for Irish studies when encountering postcolonialism:

Does the inclusion of Ireland lead one to modify our thinking about the nature of colonial and postcolonial relationships, histories and cultures? And why have discussions of the ‘postcolonial’ made relatively little relevance to Ireland? Although Irish literary critics have begun to invoke Said, Fanon and others, and to see them as providing a useful perspective from which to view the relationship between Irish and British cultural history, the major theorists in the postcolonial arena have generally ignored Ireland.10

Since this evaluation was given in 2000, many things have changed. As early as 1998, there were scholars who acknowledged the undeniable importance of a postcolonial attitude to the study of Irish literature, arguing that ‘colonialism’ remains a valid and promising category while studying Irish culture and literature.11 The reluctance that persisted for some time finally gave way to rethinking the framework of postcolonial studies. Since then, there has been significant progress in Irish studies toward using and accepting the postcolonial agenda and shaping its own tools of inquiry. Despite initially being met with skepticism and ignorance, Irish postcolonial studies gradually expanded their focus on the postcolonial perspective. By now, a significant amount of important scholarly work has been produced in this field, contributing to the awareness of the multifaced nature of this process.12 As Eoin Flannery remarked in his introduction to the issue of Postcolonial Text devoted to Irish postcolonialism,

The impact of theory, or specifically the advent of an Irish franchise of postcolonial studies, has produced a contentious, as well as progressive, commerce of ideas and theoretical paradigms within the broader discourse of Irish studies. Despite the poststructuralist murkiness, paradigmatic vanity, and indulgent verbosity of some international postcolonial theory, the resources of postcolonial literary theory and historiography provide singly-enabling mechanisms for Irish cultural inquiry. Indeed such critical importation
became, and remains, what might be nominated a postcolonial cathexis within Irish studies. [...] Postcolonial studies is manifestly concerned with foregrounding exigent historical and contemporary experiences and legacies of all forms of imperialism. By facilitating discussions of imperial and anti-imperial experience across borders and within a protracted historical continuum, theoretical readings strive to, indeed must contribute to, ethical readings of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and postcolonialism.13

Irish studies was not the only field that embraced postcolonialism after realizing its potential to analyze various aspects of society and culture colonized and dominated by a foreign power. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the re-establishment of independence in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – the three countries colonized by the USSR in 1940 (and, much earlier, by Imperial Russia) – as well as the emerging post-Soviet space in Eastern Europe and processes of political liberation in areas of Central Asia formerly dominated by Moscow were all soon subjects for post-communist studies. When scholars in Eastern Europe and those studying the regional transformations in North America sought a new theoretical basis for sociocultural and political analysis, postcolonialism seemed to offer prospective intellectual tools and research agenda. Of course, the uncritical application of postcolonialism to Eastern Europe had its own risks. Thus, researchers of the post-communist space faced a challenge – how to apply the categories and conceptualizations of postcolonialism to local studies while getting rid of the excessive dominance of ideological mono-culture that had dominated social analysis in the post-war era until the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Students of Eastern Europe adopting postcolonial methods were initially not greeted particularly warmly, to say the least – and sometimes with considerable caution, skepticism, and even open hostility by scholars practicing postcolonial studies in the West. This undisguised distrust and hostility was also related to other differences between Western and East European scholars. After the collapse of the communist system, the asymmetry between Eastern European and Western scholarship focusing on the region was clearly visible. Local scholars in Eastern Europe lacked adequate institutional infrastructure, substantial funding resources, and timely support from state research policies. The relationships and forms of cooperation between the privileged scholars from North America and their ‘junior brothers and sisters’ in Eastern Europe were not always successful and often lacked mutual understanding, sometimes leading to unequal competition or even new forms of dominance – especially in the powerful dominance of Western discourse.
During the first decade after the fall of the Iron Curtain, post-communist studies were supposed to replace the compromised (and largely vulgarised) Marxist ideology that dominated during the period of communism. Accordingly, as in the case of Irish studies, postcolonialism in Baltic societies was considered not to fit the agenda of post-communist studies. Likewise, racial categories in the Baltic milieu and context were considered as ‘given’ without attempting to rethink their emergence and boundaries or to view them as social constructs that were socially engineered at a certain time. Few attempts (if any) were made to analyze how the regimes of Tsarist Russia and, later, the Soviet Union treated people from the societies they conquered and exploited.

It is, nevertheless, well-known that despite its critical discourse about colonialism, fascism, and other ‘Western-generated’ ideologies, the Soviet Union pursued a policy of colonization in its immediate neighborhood. Accordingly, its non-Russian population was viewed as inferior in many aspects. People from the colonized lands (the Baltic and Central Asia) were never treated as equals. Though all nations and ethnic groups were officially declared equal under Soviet legislation, the reality was very different. This inferiority of other nations and ethnic communities is evidenced by the fact that the Moscow authorities never trusted even the most subservient communists in the colonized countries that became Soviet ‘republics.’ The position of the ‘second secretary’ of the Communist Party in each and every republic was meant to be filled by a Russian, who was selected and appointed to this post by Moscow. In fact, these ‘second’ secretaries had more power than the first secretary, traditionally elected from among local nationalists and whose status was reminiscent of the one enjoyed by governors-general during Russia’s imperial era.

These inevitable collisions between scholars attempting to study the Baltic societies through the lens of postcolonial theory and postcolonial theorists who embraced Marxism and fell into the orthodoxy of racial categorization and the lack of common language had their own impact on the development and quality of post-Soviet studies. For a long period, these differences in ideological attitudes and the identification of scholarly communities preserved mental and institutional barriers that excluded the post-Soviet space from the ‘legitimate’ interest of postcolonial studies.

Although most of the institutional barriers have been dismantled more or less successfully over several decades, some of the mental barriers still exist. However, today, the conceptualization of postcolonialism and its application to the post-Soviet space are no longer considered eccentric activities but are gradually becoming more or less routine research activities that challenge and overcome established difficulties. A growing awareness
of the complexity of postcolonial studies and ongoing examinations of the development of postcolonial discourse have resulted in its potential as well as its limitations being realized. The initial enthusiasm of some early postcolonial critics of the Baltic cultures has also now become more self-reflective and self-critical.

Instead of submitting uncritically to the agenda of postcolonial studies, local scholars are trying to sort out which concepts and research strategies can and cannot be applied to the history and present realities of Baltic societies. In this sense, the awareness of local postcolonial critiques is undergoing significant changes. At the same time, Baltic postcolonial scholars have freed themselves from the image of ‘exoticism’ inflicted upon them during the early years of the post-Soviet era. Today, I believe more scholars than ever would agree with the observation of Arif Dirlik, who claimed that ‘“Postcoloniality’ represents a response to a genuine need: the need to overcome a crisis of understanding produced by the inability of old categories to account for the world.”

Some of the challenges of postcolonialism for Baltic scholarship and Eastern European studies are examined in the next chapter.

Notes

3 Ashcroft et al., eds., The Empire Writes Back, 2.
4 O’Callaghan, “Continuities in Imagination,” 22.
7 Lopez, “Post and Past,” 86.
11 Smith, Decolonization and Criticism, 35.
12 On Irish postcolonialism, see Lloyd, Anomalous States; Hooper and Graham, eds., Irish and Postcolonial Theory; Carroll and King, Ireland and Postcolonial Theory; Flannery, Ireland and Postcolonial Studies; Davis, Music, Postcolonialism, and Gender; Pine, The Disappointed Bridge, etc.
15 Dirlik, Postcolonial Aura, 73.
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It is well-known that in the early stage of its development, the concept of postcolonialism was primarily applied to ‘classical’ or ‘historical’ colonies, i.e., African or Asian countries and lands colonized by mostly European (super)powers in one historical period or another. As soon as these studies evolved, however, some scholars interested in colonialism and its cultural, political, and social effects soon became dissatisfied with the prevalent understanding and especially the ‘geography’ of colonialism and postcolonialism. They set out to question the early certainties of this research field and offered views that contained well-grounded criticism concerning ambiguities in (post)colonial discourse.

Edward W. Said was one of the first scholars in the Western hemisphere who realized that colonialism could not be contained within the then-reigning paradigm, which limited this discourse exclusively to African and Asian conquests by the European powers. Being an insightful scholar and an extremely nuanced cultural and literary critic, Said observed that there were non-European powers that were equally as colonialist as their Western counterparts. He realized that one such non-European or semi-European political entity was Imperial Russia, which was and remained a colonial enterprise to no less a degree than the Western European powers that sought to colonize Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Its involvement in colonial activities in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and large parts of Eastern Europe made Russia a colonial power *par excellence* despite the fact that it never went so far as to gain lands in other continents or far-away territories. Instead of reaching into other geographical realms, Russia focused on its immediate neighbors. As Said noted in his influential and highly acclaimed book *Culture and Imperialism*, colonialism was not purely and exclusively a European activity, and he went on to emphasize that there are several empires that I do not discuss: the Austro-Hungarian, the Russian, the Ottoman, and the Spanish and Portuguese. These omissions, however, are not at all meant to suggest that Russia’s domination of Central
Asia and Eastern Europe, Istanbul’s rule over the Arab world, Portugal’s over what are today’s Angola and Mozambique, and Spain’s domination in both the Pacific and Latin America have been either benign (and hence approved of) or any less imperialist.¹

Even if he did not explicitly analyze the character and effects of Ottoman or Russian colonization and chose other targets than Imperial Russia, Said nevertheless made an acute remark on Imperial Russia that has a lasting importance for all students of (post)colonialism in suggesting that Russia, under the rule of its tsars,

acquired its imperial territories almost exclusively by adjacency. Unlike Britain or France, which jumped thousands of miles beyond their own borders to other continents, Russia moved to swallow whatever land or peoples stood next to its borders, which in the process kept moving further and further east and south.²

Despite these timely and largely accurate observations, Said’s voice remained lonely for at least a couple of decades. Few pioneers in the newly emerging field of postcolonial studies were eager to respond to his challenge and engage in redrawing the field’s borders and reconsidering the most widespread notions of (post)colonialism and imperialism. Occasionally, there were opinions among postcolonial researchers that supported and extended Said’s insights. For example, while researching decolonization issues, Muriel E. Chamberlain adroitly noticed that during the Soviet period, Russians had a significant “ethnic, cultural as well as political impact upon Soviet republics.” Moreover, she drew attention to the fact that this was a conscious and deliberate policy directed at some of them, especially the Baltic states, that was consolidated and strengthened by relocating their inhabitants to other parts of the Soviet Union.³ In fact, during the post-war deportations, a lot of Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians were deported to Siberia and other parts of the Soviet Union, where many perished because of the unbearable living conditions.

Other early postcolonial scholars, however, were far more interested in the forms of ‘classical’ colonialism than engaging in uncertain, turbulent, and risky debates about any other interpretative versions of the colonial enterprise, especially those that were hardly seen as legitimate from the viewpoint of postcolonial studies during that early period. Accordingly, the colonialist policies of imperial powers such as Russia and the Soviet Union (or, for that matter, other non-European powers) safely escaped any further scrutiny. Meanwhile, concerns about the applicability of postcolonial studies to the analysis of the post-Soviet and post-communist realm were
Scholars of Baltic descent residing in the USA and Canada, as well as younger researchers living in the post-communist realm, were setting their eyes on postcolonial theory as a possible (and promising) intellectual tool for scrutinizing the legacy of Soviet domination over Eastern Europe. Immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, some scholars in the Baltic states and other Eastern European countries started to search for a new methodological framework for analyzing their societies, as the available intellectual tools were seen as inadequate. One of these new intellectual agendas that offered a fresh perspective for serious scholarly inquiry was postcolonialism.

The American literary scholar David Chioni Moore was one of the first internationally renowned authors who voiced the need to broaden the scope of postcolonial studies to embrace many other nations, but he remained reluctant to incorporate the post-Soviet realm. He argued for applying the postcolonial approach to post-Soviet cultures, emphasizing their diversity and differences, and that, in this sense, these studies’ geographic expansion would correspond to the diversity that existed in the postcolonial realm. It was suggested that “the term ‘postcolonial,’ and everything that goes with it – language, economy, politics, resistance, liberation and its hangover – might reasonably be applied to the formerly Russo- and Soviet-controlled regions post-1989 and -1991, just as it has been applied to South Asia post-1947 or Africa post-1958.” However, Moore observed certain obstacles that prevented post-Soviet societies from being approached from the perspective of postcolonial studies, and he set out to explain this strange inadequacy.

In view of these postcolonial/post-Soviet parallels, two silences are striking. The first is the silence of western postcolonial studies today on the subject of the former Soviet sphere. And the second, mirrored silence is the failure of many scholars (other than those appearing in this volume) specializing in the formerly Soviet-controlled lands to think of their region in the useful postcolonial terms developed by scholars of, say, Indonesia and Gibon. South does not speak east, and east not South. In detailing these two silences, let me turn first to Western postcolonial studies. In notable synoptic articles on postcolonial studies and in recent major classroom-use anthologies (such as those by Williams and Christman, or by Ashcroft et al.), the broadest range of nations is generally mentioned, both colonial and colonized, except for those of the former Soviet sphere. Ella Shohat’s fine 1992 article “Notes on the Post-Colonial” – which today is a classical postcolonial-studies-reference – is an excellent example of this silence on the post-Soviet.

His attempts to relocate postcolonialism to the post-Soviet space were not only timely but also played an important part in encouraging Baltic scholars
to apply this theoretical framework to the study of their cultures and literatures. Unlike some of his colleagues born in the Baltic states before making their way to the US, Canada, or other countries, Moore was seen as primarily an American scholar and thus considered less biased than his colleagues embedded in their Baltic genealogies and consequently not fully reliable. It might be added that émigré scholars who found themselves in the US and other parts of the Western world as fugitives of World War II were treated with a certain distrust by their peers, who occasionally suspected that they were somewhat biased in their judgments toward the USSR. Luckily, this was not the case with Moore and his insights. Moore’s thought-provoking article, published in the influential journal *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*, contributed to paving the way for Baltic postcolonialism. However, it took quite a long time for Baltic postcolonialism to define and defend its territory in the broader field of postcolonial studies and theory.

**Postcolonial Studies and the Post-Communist/Post-Socialist/Post-Soviet Space**

As I have already emphasized, postcolonial studies continued to be rather reluctant to embrace Eastern European societies and, more generally, the post-Soviet space for quite a long time for various reasons. During the three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, German unification, the re-establishment of independence in Lithuania and then its close neighbors Latvia and Estonia, and, eventually, the dissolution of the USSR, Eastern Europe as well as other geographical regions that were formerly colonized and dominated by the Soviet regime underwent complex, complicated, often quite painful, yet unavoidable epochal transformations. Many things occurred during these significant socio-political shifts. However, as this book is focused on the region’s literary discourse rather than societal transformations, I do not intend to take an inventory of the social changes.

Nevertheless, a number of authors have emphasized and outlined the parallels between the postcolonial and post-socialist/post-communist conditions. The anthropologist Catherine Verdery was one of the first scholars in her field to insist on the importance and validity of these correspondences. She believed that the agenda and methods of postcolonial studies could be used appropriately in the study of post-socialist societies and their cultural contexts because dichotomies between the self and the other – being key categories in postcolonial discourse and applied to the realities of the Third World – could be located in the Second World, where they survived as dichotomies of East versus West in the post-socialist
Moreover, she saw considerable prospects for the post-Soviet space to be applied to post-Cold War studies, thus being able to integrate and bridge postcolonialism and post-socialism.

There were, of course, more authors who claimed that postcolonial studies could be meaningfully applied to historical and cultural studies of Eastern Europe – especially to countries like Poland that fell prey to the colonial power of Imperial Russia and were eventually taken over by Soviet communism after World War II. Janusz Korek – a founding editor of the online journal *Postcolonial Europe* who insisted on the applicability of postcolonialism to the Eastern and Central European domain – argued that there was an inherent bias in postcolonial studies that caused Central Europe to be ignored in postcolonial debates. This discourse originated during the Cold War era and was developed by scholars on the Left who were associated with Marxism. Furthermore, countries like Poland, in different parts of their history, were first colonizers and then colonized; thus, their status in the eyes of postcolonial scholars was at least ambiguous.

Researchers continued to disagree as to whether Eastern and Central Europe, as well as some former republics of the Soviet Union, could be described as truly postcolonial societies. There was consensus regarding the republics of Central Asia – it was eventually agreed that several Islamic countries were colonized first by Tsarist Russia and then by the Soviet Union – yet debates on Eastern and Central Europe divided postcolonial scholars into supporters and opponents as to their (post)colonial status. In a lengthy article published in *East European Politics and Societies*, Henry F. Carey and Rafal Raciborski provided a well-argued opinion that the post-socialist countries of Eastern and Central Europe were suitable candidates for the status of postcolonial societies. According to them, Russian and Soviet colonialism took a different form to other colonial regimes:

> While Lenin may have obfuscated the distinction between imperialism and colonialism, we can assert that imperialism is a global system of domination that does not necessarily require colonies (the United States being a case in point). Many colonial empires were not global and are imperial under this rubric. Even the Soviet Empire was not imperial, according to this view, because it was too weak to penetrate foreign economies, despite its worldwide aspirations. Colonialism is the more narrow system of domination, based on acquisition of territory in a colony. While we are apt to associate a colony with the overseas territories of the British and the French, the second largest empire, the Russian/Soviet Empire had colonies around its periphery and within it. It could be argued that its western borderlands did not constitute colonies because of their common Orthodox Christian civilization and the small numbers of Russians exported to maintain control. However,
these colonies had the colonial characteristic of local administration subordinated to the metropolitan power, as well as constant resistance to Russian control. Orthodox Christian Romania and Bulgaria were subdued by Soviet troops and, despite their common civilizations with Russia, were semicolonized through communist measures.9

Harvard sociologist Laura L. Adams has further argued that despite the lack of general agreement on the character of the Soviet Union as an empire and colonial power, certain parallels between the colonial powers and the Soviet Union can be drawn. Focusing on Central Eurasia, Soviet modernity, its notion of progress, the hierarchy of cultural differences privileging Russian superiority, and the creation of national elites, she emphasized that this region might fall into the category of (post)colonial. Adams concluded her insights by suggesting that,

In short, the Soviet Union was like an empire in that it crafted political domination over a geographically diverse territory and it imposed a hierarchical culture (with Moscow at its center) over its ethnically diverse citizens. But the Soviet Union was unlike other European empires in a number of ways, the most significant of which was its emphasis on the modernization and political mobilization of the periphery. In this, the Soviet state was much more aggressive than other colonial powers in its attack on the inner, spiritual realm that Central Asians sought to defend.10

This kind of attitude is more or less fully supported by authors like Madina Tlostanova, who argues that postcolonialism has been applied to the study of former colonies during the Cold War period. Tlostanova insists that postcolonialism and postcommunism have a lot in common: “Both postcolonial and postcommunist discourses are products of modernity/coloniality, emphasizing different elements, yet having a common source … and a shared birthmark in the rhetoric of modernity (the mission of progress, development, civilization, and so on) acting as a tool to justify the continuing colonization of time and space, of lives and futures.”11 She draws attention to the fact that both the Imperial Russian and Soviet empires attempted to introduce and pursue their own versions of globality or modernity; however, as Russian/Soviet modernity had to be adjusted to the European form, the result was often mimicry.12

In his introduction to a special issue of the Central Asian Survey focusing on post-Soviet/postcolonial Central Asia, Adeeb Khalid discussed several important aspects closely related to the status of the USSR and its imperial/colonial policies throughout the last century. He rightly observed that there are difficulties with a “straightforward comparison” between the Soviet Union and other colonial powers that we could call ‘classical’ (he