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THE ADAPTABILITY OF THEORY: POSTCOLONIALISM VS. POSTCOMMUNISM IN ROMANIAN LITERARY STUDIES

Poststructuralism, Postcolonialism,
and the Cultural Turn in Western Literary Studies

Over the past three decades, postcolonial theory has been one of the dominant modes of speculation upon literature and culture. Deeply connected to the strong core of poststructuralist thinking, postcolonialism is still a powerful theoretical approach today[1], that attracts those who attempt to establish a dialogue with the discursive communities of Western academia. There are multiple explanations for this dominance, which are connected to the geopolitical transformations that occurred on a global scale after World War II. The tensions inherent in this new geopolitical situation urged Western thinking to investigate the cultural rifts produced by the global fragmentation caused by imperial disintegration. The voices that epitomize "subaltern" identity[2], which up to that point held a marginal position, have begun, since the 1960s, to legitimize themselves as political voices which can channel not only the energies of marginal identities, but also the critical energies of the centre's elites. This two-pronged "process of catalysis" is connected mainly to the discourse of restructuring identities, initiated by the voices of the former "colonised"[3], but would have had no chance of success if it had not encountered an intellectual environment prepared to receive it. Therefore, I can state that the crystallization of poststructuralist thinking beginning with the 1970s represented a fertile ground for the intensification of the discursive manifestations (confessional, political, critical, theoretical, and creative) of a formerly marginal otherness. The conceptual core of postcolonial theory also emerged as part of this process, and was legitimized as a discourse of the "centre" by its adoption by

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[1] David Chioni Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique", in Violeta Kelertas (ed.), *Baltic Postcolonialism*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2006, pp. 11-43.

[2] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in Carry Nelson, Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and Interpretation of Culture*, London, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 271-313.

[3] See, for example, the influential militant voices of Franz Fanon (*Black Skin, White Masks,* 1952, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961) or Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart,* 1958, *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's* Heart of Darkness, 1975).

Western academia as a circumstantial (i.e., historically necessary) variation of the critical tradition[4] alive in Europe ever since the mid-nineteenth century.

A brief analysis of the evolution of literary studies since the advent of poststructuralism will provide a concrete example. Poststructuralism, which developed in successive stages along a path which leads from Nietzsche to Foucault and Derrida, and later concentrated around "deconstruction"[5] practices, was the catalyst of the "cultural turn" in literary studies, as well as the fertile ground on which cultural studies could develop[6] as a relevant disciplinary field within academia. Theorising the literary phenomenon as one that mirrors the power relation within the "discursive" manifestations of the socio-cultural imaginary, post-structuralism made possible "the questioning of already established meanings", which were seen as natural, by "revealing their culturally and historically 'constructed' character"[7]. At the same time, poststructuralism created a taste for the literature of alterity, educating the public, among other things, for the reception of "postcolonial literature" (Naipaul, Rushdie, etc.) and of the complex games of interaction among cultural models. Within this development, an identity-related appetite for the process of interpretation was gradually born. As J. Culler says, talking about the meaning of a text has meant, since the early 1980s, "to tell a story of reading" from the perspective of an "identity" (most of the time a formerly marginal one)[8]. Thus, in literary studies, the postcolonial perspective (i.e., reading practices) is transformed into a "hermeneutics of identity"[9] with militant and political connotations, which can be seen as a catalyst of the energies of a world that is undergoing a process of rapid transformations.

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[4] This is a critical tradition (Marx, Nietzsche, Freud), conceptually recuperated by poststructuralism in the process of its configuration and legitimation within academia (see, for example, Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx", in Michel Foucault, *Theatrum philosophicum. Studii, eseuri, interviuri (1963-1984)* [*Theatrum philosophicum. Studies, Essays, Interviews*]. Translated by Bogdan Ghiu, Ciprian Mihali, Emilian Cioc and Sebastian Blaga, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă, 2001, pp. 80-95; Paul Ricœur, *Conflictul interpretărilor* [*Le conflit des interprétations*]. Translation and afterword by Horia Lazăr, Cluj-Napoca, Echinox, 1999).

[5] Deconstruction is often characterized by historians of critical theory as an "applied poststructuralism" (Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory. An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Manchester University Press, 1995, p. 70).

[6] Dumitru Tucan, "Cultural Studies – Problems and Dilemmas in Romanian Higher Education and Academia", *The Annals of Ovidius University Constanţa, Romania – the Philology Series*, XXIV, 2013, 1, pp. 61-71.

[7] Dumitru Tucan, *Introducere în studiile literare* [*An Introduction to Literary Studies*], Iaşi, Institutul European, 2007, p. 111.

[8] Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 35.

[9] Dumitru Tucan, *Introducere*, p. 119.

Postcolonialism – a "Theory of the (Academic) Centre" which penetrates (Academic) Peripheries

Over time, the postcolonial perspective has succeeded not only in creating this openness towards the theoretical and creative voices of otherness, but also in processing the cultural tensions of the latter half of the 20th century. Paradoxically, the former centre has not only attempted to understand a world full of contradictions, but also to exhibit in its critical discourse the remorse generated by the history of oppression in its relation with the "periphery". The theorists and scholars belonging to the strong core of this theoretical perspective seem to agree, not always explicitly, upon the fact that their interest in post-colonial cultural spaces is generated by a need to understand the "tensions between the desire for autonomy and a history of dependence, between the desire for autochthony and the fact of hybrid, part-colonial origin, between resistance and complicity, and between imitation (or mimicry) and originality"[10]. Behind this otherwise legitimate interest are at least the anxieties regarding the dis-integrating and destabilizing potential of these tensions. This is why postcolonial theory is more than a method of analysing cultural phenomena (including literature), and represents a field of academic interests which nourishes itself and derives its legitimacy from the very need of understanding the paradoxes of the contemporary world. Its disciplinary prestige, its connection with phenomena in progress which need to be understood, as well as the fact that it functions as a theoretical bridge between networks of international academic communication, have enabled it to reproduce in diverse academic environments, even in those in which the phenomena it concerns are less obvious[11]. From this point of view, postcolonial theory is a theory of the centre which travels towards the periphery, a theory with a high capacity of penetrating peripheral academic communities. A practical discussion of the ways in which a theory of the centre (in our case, postcolonial theory) travels towards the periphery can be relevant in measuring not only the adaptability of the "theory", but also the mechanisms of this process of adaptation. In what follows, I will discuss this process referring directly to the relation between postcolonialism and postcommunism in Romanian literary studies.

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[10] David Chioni Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?", p. 12.
[11] Sheng Anfeng, "Traveling Theory, or Transforming Theory: Metamorphosis of Postcolonialism in China", *Neohelicon*, XXXIV, 2007, 2, pp. 115-136.

Postcolonialism in Romanian Literary Studies: the Mimetic Version

The presence of studies written in a postcolonial vein in Romanian literary studies can be noticed after 1990, when the ideological and especially institutional barriers within local academic communities disappeared. Direct academic contacts (study trips, conference presentations, etc.), as well as indirect ones (greater access to the core texts of international discursive communities) between the Romanian and the Western world were subsequently facilitated by instruments of online communication, which permitted, especially after the year 2000, the synchronization of some Romanian academic communities with similar ones in the West. This synchronization evidently occurred at the level of discursive communities which, by the nature of their interests, were closer to the theoretical, methodological and practical dominants of the "centre" (i.e., English and/or American studies departments[12]).

One illustrative example is the *Romanian Journal of English Studies* (RJES[13]), which publishes mainly papers presented at the BAS Conference organised by the West University of Timişoara[14], whose first issue (2004) featured a "literature" section in which the (rather eclectic) contributions had a timid "identity" component (including a postcolonial one), in studies focusing on authors such as Toni Morrison or Nadine Gordimer. Starting with the second issue, the literature section was renamed and became "Literature and Cultural Studies", thus covering a wider range of "cultural" readings of the literary phenomenon, readings in which one can notice instruments and theoretical elements derived from the great names of postcolonialism (such as Spivak[15]), disguised, however, behind the label of "postmodernism". Beginning with the third issue (2006), "Cultural studies" became an independent section which included part of the "postcolonial" readings that focused not only on literary phenomena, but also on cultural phenomena in general. At the same time, the literature sections (split in the third issue between American Literature and British Literature) also include studies connected to the postcolonial paradigm. These studies subsequently multiply, with the number of studies written in a postcolonial vein peaking in the 2011 issue. This example suggests not only a disciplinary restructuring of interests (under the umbrella of cultural studies), but also the postcolonial perspective's capacity of penetration,

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[12] Cf. Liviu Andreescu, "Are We All Postcolonialists Now? Postcolonialism and Postcommunism in Central and Eastern Europe", in Monica Bottez et alii. (eds.), *Postcolonialism/ Postcommunism. Intersections and Overlaps*, Bucureşti, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 2011, p. 71.

[13] The journal appears under the aegis of the Romanian Society for English and American Studies.

[14] The participants are coming mainly from Romania and Central and Eastern Europe.

[15] "Quoting Daniel Defoe's *The History of the Devil* as a motto, *The Satanic Verses* locates Satan in the air, in an ambiguous space that postmodern critics, such as Gayatri C. Spivak, often associate with the space of the signifier" (*RJES*, 2005, 2, p. 37).

which can be analysed on three levels: *theoretical* (the level of notional instruments and bibliographic references), *thematic* (the interest in certain specific themes: hybridity, displacement, exile, revolt, the postcolonial subject, etc.), and that of the *fundamental texts/ the material analysed* (the most popular names in postcolonial literature – V.S. Naipaul, S. Rushdie, etc., the phenomenon of immigration, identity representations in the media etc.).

Without elaborating upon the originality and relevance of the above-mentioned approaches, we can say that the close connection among these three levels reflects the thematic, theoretical and material configuration of the postcolonial approaches in the "discursive communities" of origin. From this point of view, these connections between the postcolonial approaches in Romanian academia and those in the international (particularly Anglo-Saxon) world can be characterised as *mimetic*. This is in fact one of the primary relations of contact between the discursive communities of two different cultural spaces, of which one is central (due to its prestige/ popularity/ communication platforms/ capacity to influence other communities) and one is "peripheral" (by its position within the dynamics of academic relations/ not popular/ lacking effective communication platforms/ open to change in relation with other spaces): a relation of conceptual, thematic and material mirroring of the "centre" by the "periphery".

Adaptation vs. Adaptability. Postcolonialism and Postcommunism

The postcolonial perspective could not have penetrated Romanian academia without this opening, mimetic or not. This "penetration" resulted in three phenomena. Firstly, it allowed the cultivation of a taste for the literary texts and authors of the "postcolonial" wave and, at the same time, provided several instruments for understanding the tensions of the context in which they appeared. Secondly, it popularized certain figures belonging to international theoretical movements which, being connected in their original context to the whole history of 20th century critical theory, permitted the reconstruction in Romania of a coherent image of the evolution of recent theoretical thinking. Last but not least, this opening allowed a methodological discussion of the conditions in which a theoretical framework with no apparent connection with local phenomena can function. Perhaps this is why, around the year 2000, starting from the same discursive communities which adopted the postcolonial perspective, the need of an adaptation to local cultural and historical experiences was felt.

Inevitably, the most natural use of postcolonialism in the Romanian cultural space was that of employing its critical propositions in the analysis of the phenomena generated by Romanian communism during its existence, but especially after its fall. Soon enough, the dyad postcolonialism – postcommunism became a problematic coordinate of an epistemological discussion of the ways in which borrowed analytical instruments can be used in order to analyse local

phenomena. In fact, if the *mimetic adoption* of postcolonialism represented a coincidence between the *theoretical armature of the centre* and the *subjects of the centre*, the *adoption of postcolonialism* generated two types of processes. The first of these is one of *practical adaptation*, more precisely one of taking over its critical instruments and using them more or less freely in the analysis of local phenomena. The second is one of *conceptual and theoretical adaptation*, which led especially to a problematizing discussion of the possibilities of adaptation.

In fact, the temptation of this comparison between postcolonialism and postcommunism in Romanian academia resembles similar comparisons in the rest of Central and Eastern Europe and was fostered by theorists who were looking for their niche at the centre of the discipline. David Chioni Moore, American Africanist, published in 2001 the study *Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique*[16], in which the focus was rather on expanding the boundaries of the phenomena which could be analysed using the theoretical lens of postcolonialism. Moore analysed the phenomenon of colonisation and connected it to the implications of its expansion in the Soviet Union's influence towards its geographical margins, being interested mainly in extending the coverage area of the term "postcolonial" to a wider spectrum of phenomena of cultural and identity interaction, including those in postcommunist societies. It is therefore not surprising that Moore's study subsequently became a compulsory reference for those who intervened in discussions upon the links between postcolonialism and postcommunism[17], including Romanian scholars.

A discussion of the problematic relationship between postcolonialism and postcommunism in the Romanian cultural space began in a seemingly concerted manner in the early 2000s. In 2001, the Cluj magazine *Caietele Echinox* (1/2001) published, in a thematic issue entitled "Postcolonialism & Postcommunism," a series of studies[18] that succeeded for the first time in drawing attention upon this dyad, which had already taken a relatively clear shape in the West. An analysis of the volume is relevant in the context, particularly if we look at the way in which the topics of the studies partly contradict the expectations raised by their titles. Although the thematic unity is sustained by the fact that the subjects approached

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[16] First published in *PMLA* [*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*], 116, 2001, 1, special issue on Globalizing Literary Studies (January), pp. 111-128.

[17] See, for instance, the volume *Baltic Postcolonialism* (edited by Violeta Kelertas), where Moore's study is reprinted at the very start of the volume, serving as a theoretical frame of the analysis of postcommunist phenomena in the Baltic States. Another example of discussion regarding the postcolonial status of the countries in the former Soviet sphere of influence is the Polish journal *Postcolonial Europe* (http://www.postcolonial-europe.eu/index.php).

[18] Most of them revisions of papers presented at the ALGCR Annual Conference (31 March – 1 April 2001, Cluj) on "Postcolonialism and Interculturalism".

are connected to postcolonialism in the canonic sense of the word[19], to postcommunism, or to the defining elements connected to the history of the communization and decommunization of Eastern Europe, the only text which explicitly attempts to analyse the relation between postcolonialism and postcommunism is authored by Ion Bogdan Lefter, *Poate fi considerat postcomunismul un post-colonialism*? [*Can Postcommunism be Considered a Postcolonialism?*][20]. I. B. Lefter's text is significant not only because it succeeds in pinpointing several problems of this juxtaposition in the Romanian context[21], but also because it defines this juxtaposition as a problematic one which needs to be explored in detail[22].

The 2001 thematic issue of *Caietele Echinox* shows that, at that stage, Romanian academia (at least in the field of comparative studies) was relatively familiar with postcolonial theory, but related to it in various different ways. There are, in this volume as well, studies in which one can see a mostly mimetic adoption of the theoretical core of the centre[23], but most texts enter a free dialogue with the elements of postcolonial theory[24]. I.B. Lefter's paper is the only one that attempts a methodological discussion upon the juxtaposition of postcolonialism and postcommunism.

The next moment that marks a serious problematization of the relationship between postcolonialism and postcommunism is the 2005 thematic issue of *Euresis* journal, entitled *(Post)communism and (Post)colonialism*. The studies included in this volume are characterized by coherent and substantial discussions of the congruence between postcolonial theory and the phenomena of Central and Eastern European/ Romanian communism/ postcommunism. Most of the texts concern themselves directly with assessing, on several different levels, the connections between postcolonial and post-communist phenomena. In the issue's

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[19] For example, M. Martin (*Caietele Echinox*, 2001, 1, pp. 105-109) on the connection between postcolonialism and the phenomenon of de-canonization, in a study on Harold Bloom. However, the study's admiring tone towards Bloom reveals an ironic perspective upon the postcolonial theory.

[20] I.B. Lefter, "Poate fi considerat postcomunismul un post-colonialism?", *Caietele Echinox*, 2001, 1, pp. 117-119.

[21] The process of Sovietisation was not a true colonization process, since identity consciousness was preserved and the local populations resisted cultural colonization.

[22] At the same time, the study implicitly suggests the limits of the corpus of phenomena in the analysis of which the postcolonial perspective can enhance the understanding of postcommunist developments (transformations in mentalities, the culture of transition).

[23] M. Frunză ("Postcolonialism şi feminism. O paralelă conceptuală şi tematică", *Caietele Echinox*, 2001, 1, pp. 110-116) on feminism and postcolonialism as militant versions of poststructuralism (postmodernism, according to the author).

[24] For instance, M. Spiridon ("«Ochii suverani» şi problema zonei de frontieră", *Caietele Echinox*, 2001, 1, pp. 201-206) analyses the issue of Romanian protochronism, which resorts in a loose manner to the scenario of colonisation/ decolonisation; see also Corin Braga's study (pp. 83-92) upon the classical and medieval sources of the colonial and Eurocentric imaginary.

opening article, Mircea Martin[25] discusses the relationship between colonialism and communism and traces the history of the Soviet ideological oppression in Romania, the main coordinates of which were "the destructive campaign against the [Romanian] national culture and collective mind", "the assault upon memory and cultural identity"[26], de-nationalization and de-Europeanization[27]. As a result of this reconstruction of the traumatic events in recent Romanian history, the conclusion seems natural: "le communisme soviétique s'avère même avoir été encore plus colonialiste que le colonialisme occidental"[28]. Anca Băicoianu's study[29] holds a somewhat opposite position, moving the discussion about the coloniality of European countries into the epistemological register, in order to argue that the relation between postcolonialism and postcommunism is detrimental to both notions. The arguments suggested are connected less to the incompatibility of their specific theoretical constructions as to differences of a contextual nature: "To sum up, although both postcolonialism and postcommunism are derivative discourses enacting a drama of liminality, their particular contexts are far too different to be conflated"[30].

Although they focus less upon the equivalence between communism and colonialism, the other studies that attempt to problematize the possibility of theoretical and conceptual adaptation of the postcolonial perspective also underline the specific character of Eastern European countries as compared to the colonial status[31], despite the fact that the majority recognize the ability of the postcolonial theoretical framework to function as a background for the analysis of (post)communist phenomena. On the other hand, all authors seem to believe that the postcolonial perspective is useful in the analysis of phenomena characterized by cultural hybridization and liminality[32], or that the study of postcommunist phenomena "can join in the theorization of (epistemic) violence, political or cultural strategies of domination"[33].

In fact, all the authors who, in the above-mentioned volume, reflect upon the possibility of adapting postcolonial theory are attentive to nuances, even when its applicability seems obvious to them (cf. Martin, Zirra). Their theoretical

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[25] Mircea Martin. "Le Communisme Comme Colonialisme", *Euresis*, 2005, 1, pp. 3-26.

[26] *Ibidem*, p. 12.

[27] *Ibidem*, p. 14.

[28] *Ibidem*, p. 20.

[29] Anca Băicoianu, "Top Hat and Fur Cap: Postcolonialism, Postcommunism and their discontent", *Euresis*, 2005, 1, pp. 48-53.

[30] *Ibidem*, p. 51.

[31] Cristina Şandru, "Reconfiguring Contemporary 'Posts'", *Euresis*, 2005, 1, p. 35.

[32] Rodica Mihăilă, "Atypical Postcolonial Spaces: American Studies and the Postcommunist Context", *Euresis*, 2005, 1, pp. 132-146.

[33] Ioana Zirra, "Where Does Postcolonialism (As Postcommunism) Stand? And Where Could It Be Wished to Stand?", *Euresis*, 2005, 1, p. 112.

enthusiasm is tempered by the critical evaluations of the particularities of local phenomena, which reveals an interesting *liminal positioning* of the researchers themselves in the empty space generated by the pressure of the central theoretical model and the reflection upon the specific historical and cultural conditionings of phenomena which are related, but still independent[34].

Interestingly, in this issue we also encounter the other two dimensions of the practice of the postcolonial approach in the local academic context. The mimetic dimension is present in two texts which analyse phenomena of the postcolonial literature (culture) in the manner of the "centre"[35]. Another three studies articulate models for the practical adaptation of postcolonial instruments to local Romanian phenomena[36] or Eastern European ones[37].

Another important moment in the discussions upon the relationship between postcolonialism and postcommunism in Romanian literary studies concentrated around a research project which channelled problematizing energies coming almost exclusively from the area of English and American studies, namely the *Postcolonialism/ Postcommunism: A Dictionary of Key Cultural Concepts* project. The project has had several direct[38] and indirect[39] results which constitute an interesting and extensive critical discussion of the possibility of engaging the postcolonial perspective in the study of postcommunist realities, seconded by a direct dialogue between theorists of the centre (e.g. John Thieme) and their local counterparts. For example, one of the direct results is the volume *Postcolonialism/ Postcommunism: Intersections and Overlaps*, in which one can notice the disappearance of the mimetic dimension in the manifestation of the postcolonial perspective in relation with postcommunism. Even though it includes several studies which seem to be mainly concerned with the anthropology of post-totalitarian culture and claim no major connections with postcolonialism, these are outnumbered by studies of a problematizing nature and by some which adapt the

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[34] Cf. Anca Băicoianu, "Top Hat and Fur Cap", p. 52.

[35] Daniela Rogobete, "Mapping Alternative Spaces", *Euresis*, 2005, 1, pp. 121-126; Elena Butoescu, "What Isn't Postcolonial Writing", *Euresis*, 2005, 1, pp. 48-53.

[36] Carmen Andraş, "Literary Representation of Central and Eastern Europe Viewed from the West. Postcolonial and Postcommunist Approaches", *Euresis*, 2005, 1, pp. 66-75; Radu Surdulescu, "Identity-Raping Practices: Semicolonialism, Communist Reeducation, and Peer Torture", *Euresis*, 2005, 1, pp. 54-65.

[37] Marcel Cornis-Pope, "Literary and Cultural Reconstructions after 1989: Postmodernism, Postcommunism, Postcoloniality", *Euresis*, 2005, 1, pp. 76-85.

[38] The proceedings of the 2010 conference organized within the project, edited by Monica Bottez, Maria Sabina Draga Alexandru and Bogdan Ştefănescu, *Postcolonialism/ Postcommunism: Intersections and Overlaps* (Bucureşti, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 2011); the dictionary itself: *Postcolonialism/ Postcommunism: A Dictionary of Key Cultural Concepts* (Bucureşti, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 2011).

[39] B. Ştefănescu, *Postcolonialism/ Postcommunism: Siblings of Subalternity* (Bucureşti, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 2013).

postcolonial theoretical instruments to local realities. Like in the 2005 thematic issue of *Euresis*, the volume dramatizes the tension between the arguments for and those against the possibility of equating postcolonialism with postcommunism. The skeptical position is represented by Liviu Andreescu's study, which warns, in a rather categorical manner, against conceptual incompatibilities and against the lack of a coherent research hypothesis on the postcolonial perspective in Eastern European cultures[40]. Even if the favourable positions are nuanced and highlight the usefulness of postcolonial reading practices and implicit thematizations (i.e., mimicry, liminality, ambiguity and textual ambivalence, the effects of cultural or ideological hegemony, overlapping and conflicting identities, etc.[41]), as the editors of the volume note, most of the studies "raise questions rather than giving answers, suggesting that the discipline under debate had not yet come of age enough to develop its own independent theoretical discourse"[42].

Postcolonialism/ Postcommunism. Dictionary of Key Cultural Terms (Bottez et al.) is the second visible and important result of the above-mentioned project. The dictionary is a useful instrument in the field of Romanian literary studies for several reasons. Firstly, it attempts to familiarize the academically educated reader with the key notions of postcolonial and postcommunist theory by using *double references* (i.e. connected both to the centrality of postcolonial theory and of the fundamental texts on (post)communism, and to the theoretical and problematizing works originating in the Central and Eastern European/ Romanian context)[43]. Secondly, the insistence upon the possibility of adapting the notions from the sphere of postcolonialism to the (post)communist phenomena acquires a central position, and the *semi-colonial status* of the countries within the Soviet sphere of influence is explicitly asserted on several occasions[44]. Last but not least, there are several elements that underline useful directions for possible future research: the relation between memory and totalitarian repression, the study of the coercive means of remodelling the individual as a subject of ideological power, the study of collective identity trauma, etc. By its nature, but especially due to these elements,

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[40] Liviu Andreescu, "Are We All Postcolonialists Now?", p. 67.

[41] Cf. Cristina Şandru, "Textual Resistance? «Over-coding» and Ambiguity in (Post)colonial and (Post)communist Texts", in M. Bottez et alii, *Postcolonialism/ Postcommunism*, pp. 39-56; Monica Colț, *The Dynamics of Cultural Values in Postcolonialism and Postcommunism*, in M. Bottez et alii, *Postcolonialism/ Postcommunism*, pp. 219-234.

[42] M. Bottez et alii, *Postcolonialism/ Postcommunism*, p. 8.

[43] The *Caietele Echinox* and *Euresis* issues analyzed above are often cited as points of reference in the discussions.

[44] M. Bottez et alii, *Postcolonialism/ Postcommunism: A Dictionary of Key Cultural Concepts*, p. 11, p. 70. This status is also recognized in other articles by the editors: Monica Bottez, "Postcolonialism/ Postcommunism: Similarities and Differences: the Romanian Case", *University of Bucharest Review*, I, 2011, 1, pp. 89-99; Bogdan Ştefănescu, "Reluctant Siblings: Methodological Musings on the Complicated Relationship between Postcolonialism and Postcommunism", *Word and Text. A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics*, II, 2012, 1, pp. 13-26.

the dictionary represents what we may call an attempt at adaptation. Interestingly, this adaptation seems to take on mainly the mission of compensating what seems to be a lack of unity in postcommunist studies. The entry on *Postcommunism* underlines both this lack of unity and the uneven distribution of the disciplinary areas which lay claim over postcommunist phenomena: economics, sociology, political science, history, discourse analysis, cultural and literary studies[45].

Among the indirect results of the above-mentioned project is the research undertaken by Bogdan Ștefănescu, an English studies scholar with a strong interest in the relations between (post)colonialism and (post)communism. In a very interesting 2012 article, in which he undertakes an analysis of epistemic embarrassment in the discussions regarding the coloniality of the former Soviet republics and the Soviet satellites, he maintains his own discourse in the area of a problematizing discussion, bringing arguments in favour of the anamorphic character of the notion of colonialism and, consequently, of the ambiguities and uncertainties of the (post)coloniality of Romania/ Eastern Europe[46]. The article's most important contribution is, in fact, that of clarifying the meaning of the notion of colonial status. Starting from the distinction between the practical register of the notion (the military, political and economic subordination) and the symbolic one (cultural and ideological subordination), B. Ștefănescu suggests the usefulness of a general ("all-inclusive") significance of colonialism, which would also be suitable in a discussion of the effects of the complex cultural and political relations in the Central and Eastern European and the ex-Soviet space[47].

B. Ștefănescu's analytical explorations of the relationship between postcolonialism and postcommunism are extensively elaborated on in his 2013 book *Postcommunism/ Postcolonialism: Siblings of Subalternity*. As early as the preface, the author confesses to an academic liminality positioned between the East and the West, centre and periphery, which determines him to reconsider (post)coloniality outside the traditional Western patterns[48]. His main concern throughout the book is the rejection of the Westcentric picture of coloniality, in order to argue precisely the coloniality of the communist experience. As these arguments develop, colonialism becomes a paradigm of collective subordination, which has an impact upon discourse, upon institutions and social behaviours, and thus upon the socio-cultural imaginary. These methodological considerations enable the author to undertake, in the last part of the volume, his analyses of the variations in postcommunist Romanian intellectual discourse and its traumatic reverberations. Remarkable in this volume are the analytical skepticism in relation to the theory of the centre, the attention to nuances, and the attempt to

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[45] M. Bottez et alii, *Postcolonialism/ Postcommunism: A Dictionary*, p. 256.
[46] Bogdan Ștefănescu, "Reluctant Siblings", p. 23.
[47] *Ibidem*, p. 19-21.
[48] "Traditional Westcentric schematics" (B. Ștefănescu, *Postcommunism/ Postcolonialism: Siblings of Subalternity*, p. 10).

problematize the complex relations between (post)colonialism and (post)communism, leading not to an adaptation of postcolonialism, but rather to its paradigmatic reduction, followed by its practical development in new directions.

Mimicry, practical adaptation and epistemological concerns

The above description of the main modes of interaction between postcolonial theory and the rather complex and amorphous body of phenomena generated by the communist experience suggests that in Romanian literary studies the most important dimension is that of the exploration of the ambiguities of these relationships. The premises of this comparison are evident. Firstly, there is a certain degree of similarity of the historical experiences they arise from. Colonization and Sovietisation, even when they are not equated, are analysed as phenomena capable of producing patterns of transformation in the cultural configurations of the spaces they interfere with. The most important of these patterns is connected, in the first place, to the *liminality* and *hybridity* of the postcommunist subject, characteristics which are easily placed in analogy with the liminal and hybrid character of the postcolonial subject, as it is theorized by the theoretical "centre" (e.g. H. Bhabha)[49]. In this sense, the possibility of connecting with the wider area of the investigation of the effects of communism in the countries affected by it – *postcommunism*[50] – is evident, both from the perspective of the similarity in the cultural and ideological interactions which took place during colonization and Sovietisation (subalternization, demonization, the denial of the previous identity and the projection of a new one), and from the perspective of their long-term effects. Similarly to the colonial experience, the experience of Sovietisation also generated long transitional periods characterised by identitary violence. When it did not lead to wars, or at least to inter-ethnic violence, this identitary violence triggered a resurrection of a nationalist drive which revived attitudes, stereotypes, and rhetorical formulas the effects of which led to cultural fragmentation and discursive violence in the public space. All of these have prevented (and there is still the risk that they may continue to do so in the future) any efforts towards institutional reconstruction. From this perspective, we can understand both the importance of the investigations of the paradoxes generated by

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[49] "The liminality and hybridity that Bhabha finds characteristic of the postcolonial subject who hovers in a space between colonial discourse and a new «non colonial» identity also perfectly illustrates the situation in postcommunist states where the long-term effects of communism could not be eradicated over the night and the new European identity has taken, or is still taking, various spans of time to materialize in admission to NATO (2005 in the case of Romania), to the European Union (2007 for Romania) or to other European organisms and institutions." (Monica Bottez, "Postcolonialism/ Postcommunism: Similarities and Differences", p. 90).

[50] See Leslie Holmes, *Postcommunism. An Introduction*, Durham, Duke UP, 1997.

the postcommunist transition, and the intellectual need to find a theoretical formula which may help in this exploration.

In Romania, this intellectual need came from within several "discursive communities" connected to the various disciplinary fields interested in the (post)communist phenomena. Over the past twenty years, cultural history, cultural anthropology, political science or economic studies approaches have explored, on various levels, the impact of recent history upon the Romanian space (institutional culture, the sociology of identity stereotypes, interethnic relations, traumatic memory, the dynamics of economic evolutions, etc.). Most of these approaches, however, had no connection whatsoever with the postcolonial perspective, due to methodological and disciplinary incompatibilities. This connection could arise only in an area where it previously existed, that is, literary studies, which were about to absorb the cultural atmosphere that had emerged several decades earlier in Western academia. Postcolonial theory, an influential speculative and conceptual bond in Western literary and cultural studies, was first adopted *mimetically* within the discursive communities that were the most closely connected to the instruments and topics of the Western ones. Subsequently, a process of practical adaptation of the postcolonial instruments to the (post)communist realities began. Some of these approaches can be seen in the pages of the volumes and journals analysed above, but there are probably very many other examples[51]. This process of *practical adaptation* probably represented a personal research strategy, more precisely an attempt to penetrate the discursive communities of the centre by the construction of a *specific research space*, simultaneously connected to the theoretical core of the centre and to the reality of local phenomena in which the competence of the Romanian researchers could manifest itself freely in its dialogue with the central core of the theory. This was the decisive step in moving beyond a subaltern status in academia and, at the same time, the decisive step in questioning the hegemonic pressure of the theory of the centre[52]. This is also the reason why, in most cases, Romanian discussions related to the postcolonialism – postcommunism dyad have always had an epistemological component. This component, a necessary one in fact, has suspended the terminological precision and the capacity for abstraction of the centre's perspective, and placed the Romanian researcher in a liminal position whose potential I see as fertile especially from the perspective of the academic dialogue that can build bridges between connected, but still different academic spaces.

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[51] For example, Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, *Building Socialism, Constructing People: Identity Patterns and Stereotypes in Late 1940s and 1950s Romanian Cultural Press*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014.

[52] On the hegemonic pressure of the Western academic models in relation to the wider field of comparative studies, see Bogdan Ştefănescu, "Why Compare? What's to Compare? The Practice of Comparative Literature in a Postcolonial/ Postcommunist Context. A Response to David Damrosch", *University of Bucharest Review*, I, 2011, 1, pp. 21-28.

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THE ADAPTABILITY OF THEORY: POSTCOLONIALISM VS. POSTCOMMUNISM IN ROMANIAN LITERARY STUDIES
(*Abstract*)

For the last two decades, the postcolonial theory has become one of the most dominant perspectives in the study of literature and culture in the Western Academia. Together with its increasingly more authoritarian voice, the postcolonial theory has also become able to influence peripheral scholar communities, including those coming from cultures with no direct link with the historical phenomenon of colonialisation. This influence seems to be of two distinct types. The first one is a *mimetic* one (i.e. unintermediated by local experiences) which has generated an imitative postcolonial discourse in local academia, mostly used by members of English language departments. The second one, which I can call *particularizing* (i.e. intermediated by local cultural experiences), has tried to adapt (to various degrees of intensity) the postcolonial perspective to local conditions. This second type of influence can be seen, for example, in the adaptation of the postcolonial theory to the analysis of the postcommunist cultural phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe. The same thing has happened in Romanian literary studies, although at a low degree of intensity. In this paper, I will try to analyze the impact of postcolonial theoretic speculation on the Romanian literary studies of the last two decades.

Keywords: postcolonialism, postcommunism, travelling theory, adaptability of theories.
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ADAPTABILITATEA TEORIEI: POSTCOLONIALISM ŞI POSTCOMUNISM ÎN STUDIILE LITERARE ROMÂNEŞTI
(*Rezumat*)

Una dintre paradigmele dominante în studiile literare occidentale din ultimele două decenii este vizibil conectată la o perspectivă postcolonială. Inevitabil, aceasta a influenţat şi spaţiile academice „periferice", inclusiv pe acelea fără legătură directă cu colonizarea propriu-zisă. Această influenţă pare a fi avut două variante. Prima dintre ele (*mimetică*) ar fi cea neintermediată de experienţele „locale" (care a generat o practică postcolonială imitativă, mai ales în spaţiul departamentelor de anglistică şi americanistică). Cea de-a doua (*particularistă*) este cea intermediată de elemente specifice locale, generând o modificare a perspectivei „centrului". Aceasta poate fi observată în spaţiul central şi est-european în problematizările privind adaptarea teoriei postcoloniale la analiza fenomenelor culturale postcomuniste. Acelaşi lucru s-a întâmplat şi în spaţiul studiilor literare româneşti, chiar dacă la o intensitate redusă. În prezentarea de faţă îmi propun să analizez impactul speculaţiilor teoretice postcoloniale în interiorul studiilor literare româneşti din ultimele două decenii.

Cuvinte-cheie: postcomunism, postcolonialism, localizarea teoriei, adaptabilitatea teoriei.