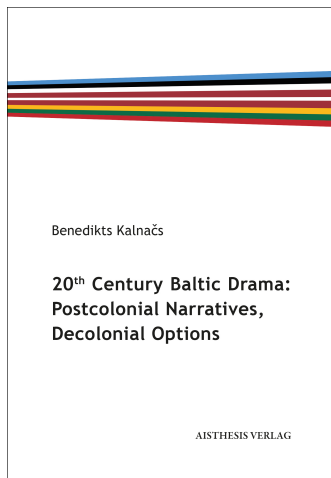


Leseprobe

Benedikts Kalnačs

20th Century Baltic Drama:
Postcolonial Narratives,
Decolonial Options



AISTHESIS VERLAG

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FONDS

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Table of Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements	7
Introduction: The Six Facets of 20th Century Baltic Drama through the Lens of Postcolonial Criticism	14
1 The National	62
2 The Philosophical	91
3 The Historical	108
4 The Contemporary	128
5 The Absurd	158
6 The Postcolonial	174
Afterword: Postcolonialism, Postcommunism and Textual Strategies of the 21st Century in the Baltic States	197
Bibliography	217
Index	230

Introduction: The Six Facets of 20th Century Baltic Drama through the Lens of Postcolonial Criticism

Baltic societies and cultures, long neglected as a part of the postcolonial field, in the early 21st century seem at last connected to current critical discourse. How firm this link will become and how it will change the perception of Baltic history and art depends on research contributions devoted to the area and undertaken in dialogue with the ongoing debates in contemporary theory. In order to provide a version of the Baltic colonial experience in historical and comparative perspective it is important to sketch in what ways Baltic societies and cultures are best related to theoretical discussions on postcolonial issues, and whether they might indeed be looked on in a more global context, both horizontally and vertically, or historically.

The main question posed by this book is whether and in what contexts we can see Baltic cultures as agencies of Europe's internal others and in what ways Baltic identity has been determined by historical processes of foreign settlement, occupation, and colonization of the territory of each respective country. As a literary scholar, my main research interests are related to the ways these processes have shaped the manifestations of identity in literary texts. However, the first task of a scholar engaged with postcolonial theory and working on Baltic issues is to clarify the specific features of Baltic historical experience which have determined the ways people understand and interpret the world around them. Therefore, it is also important to cover social and political problems relevant to a better understanding of cultural processes in postcolonial contexts.

The problem of Soviet colonialism, an issue until recently generally avoided by postcolonial theorists, is addressed here within the context of the historical experience of the Baltic peoples finding themselves at the crossroads between the West and the East. In this analysis, I am interested in both the Soviet period as well as the more general matrix of power² which has been influential in the Baltic area, including reasons why Soviet colonial power has not succeeded in reaching its long-term goals of economic and cultural superiority there. I propose that the self-evaluation of the Baltic

2 See Walter D. Mignolo: *Local Histories/Global Designs. Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2000; Walter D. Mignolo: *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham and London: Duke University Press 2011.

peoples tends towards much greater readiness to accept European values, along with stereotypes which to a considerable extent lie at the core of identity formation and the self-image of the respective nations, notwithstanding the fact that historical relationships with the West are also quite problematic.

In this Introduction, I first discuss the scholarly background of Baltic postcolonial studies, and then move on to research perspectives, paying special attention to world-systems theory and decoloniality. The Baltic historical experience is then dealt with in terms of anti-colonialism and the locus of enunciation. This part is followed by a discussion of Soviet colonialism and its aftermath in the context of East-Central European postcommunist and postcolonial studies. The Introduction comes to completion with a discussion of the historical timeline of 20th century Baltic drama and a theoretical inquiry into what I call its six different facets (the national, the philosophical, the historical, the contemporary, the absurd, and the postcolonial) which are then further elaborated in the subsequent chapters.

Baltic Societies in Global Context: Research Background

In his groundbreaking article, 'Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique', first published 2001, David Chioni Moore identified the omission of the Soviet sphere as one of the principal deficiencies of postcolonial thought. According to Moore, the scope of the theory by the early 20th century included almost the entire world except for the Soviet Union and its satellite countries. Thus he argued that in his article he "will propose that the term 'postcolonial' is a useful designation for yet another zone: the post-Soviet sphere – the Baltic states, Central and Eastern Europe (including both former Soviet republics and independent 'East Bloc' states), the Caucasus, and Central Asia. In my [Moore's] view, at least two features of this giant area are significant for this paper and its readers: first, how extraordinarily postcolonial the societies of the former Soviet regions are; and, second, how extraordinarily little attention is paid to this fact, at least in these terms."³ Without making an attempt to unify social conditions of the historically quite different societies living in this vast area, Moore stressed the mutual parallels as well as the general conditions of

3 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, p. 15.

Soviet colonialism influential for the entire region. Moore was quite right to point out the illogical nature of the ill-motivated omission of the Soviet sphere from the field of postcolonial studies, and he argued instead that the Soviet experience cannot be isolated as something ideologically neutral (which it definitely wasn't) or unique on the world scale.⁴ Even today “the grand Russian narrative of Russian history is being passed on in the educational system and distributed abroad in an unchanged form”⁵ while Western and East-Central European scholars working in the field are moving on to share the observation by Neil Lazarus that

[T]he significant role played by Russian colonialism in the history of eastern and central Europe as well as central Asia is a matter of record; and, though we might like to make any number of distinctions and qualifications, the identification of the Soviet Union – successor to the Russian imperium – as a specifically *colonial* power is also well attested.⁶

Understandably, there are historical and ideological reasons for the omission of the Soviet sphere. These motifs are also carefully addressed in the most elaborated and ambitious undertaking of Baltic scholars to-date, the collection of articles in *Baltic Postcolonialism*, inspired and edited by Violeta Kelertas and published in 2006. In her introduction, Professor Kelertas clearly stated the reasons for reprinting the article by David Chioni Moore in the collection as a contribution of international importance and an effort which put the Baltic countries, alongside with the post-Soviet sphere in general, in the context of contemporary debates. Recognizing a certain hesitance on the part of the Baltic societies to consider themselves a part of the postcolonial discourse at that point, Kelertas also brought up other problematic aspects, crucial among those being the psychological unwillingness of the Baltic communities to identify themselves with problems seemingly relevant, in the still present rhetoric of the Cold War period, mostly to the countries of the so-called Third World: “Preferring to think of themselves as superior to other colonized peoples [...], the Balts find being lumped together with the

4 See Epp Annus: The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics. In: *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 43/1 (2012), pp. 23-25.

5 Ewa Thompson: Postcolonial Russia. In: Prem Poddar, Rajeev Patke and Lars Jensen (eds.): *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures. Continental Europe and Its Empires*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2008, p. 417.

6 Neil Lazarus: Spectres haunting. Postcommunism and postcolonialism. In: *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48.2 (2012), p. 118. Emphasis in original.

rest of colonialized humanity unflattering, if not humiliating, and want to be with the 'civilized' part of the world.⁷

This explanation is most relevant when considered in the context of the 1990s, the first decade after the re-establishment of independence in the Baltic countries. There appear to be two main tendencies which dominated the public discourse at that time. Interpretation of history was led by the post-Soviet approach which concentrated on the social pressures created by communist rule, attempts at resistance, and individual testimonies. This predominantly took the form of collecting life stories that had been suppressed during the previous decades. In regard to artistic trends, the brand new concept of postmodernism seemed to make an overwhelming impact, and only gradually more discussions concerning the different nature of the Baltic experience as compared to Western contexts started to crop up in the critical consciousness.

During the last ten years the situation has changed considerably. To a certain extent the utilization of postcolonial can be viewed as a kind of synthesis between methodologies of post-Soviet studies and postmodernism. This critical approach facilitates analysis of both social and aesthetic fields, but before it could reach the point where it would bear fruit, a certain amount of time and new experience seem to have been required. Due to these developments, the fate of the Baltic peoples is now much better appreciated in the context of a shared historical experience with other regions/nations.⁸ The necessity of engaging with postcolonial theory in the context of the historical experience of the Baltic countries can be seen as especially motivated by several factors.

First, the tendency to position themselves along with experiences of other oppressed (and colonized) nations was present in the political rhetoric of the 1950s and 1960s and in the efforts of the Baltic exile community when trying to attract international attention and to address the issues of Soviet colonial conditions even before the heyday of postcolonial studies.

Second, the discussion of the specific conditions of Soviet colonialism has been further developed by Baltic scholars themselves. The political and ideological undertones of the colonial situation in the Baltic countries have

7 Violeta Kelertas: Introduction. *Baltic Postcolonialism and Its Critics*. In: Violeta Kelertas (ed.), *Postcolonialism* (note 3), p. 4.

8 Among the possible explanations we also find both the more global reach of postcolonial thought in the 21st century as well as the impact of the economic crisis which allows for better understanding of the interrelatedness of economic and political processes also on the level of everyday experience.

been thoroughly dealt with by Epp Annus, also reflecting on the impact of the Soviet occupation which gradually turned into colonial practices. Annus concludes that Soviet colonialism in the Baltic area formed a new layer on the historical experience of the Baltic peoples and provides a valuable comment concerning the importance of the application of postcolonial theory to the Soviet period:

Its central thesis claims that the Soviet regime was, in non-Russian areas of the Soviet Union, imposed from the outside; it was oppression by a foreign invader and needs to be analyzed as such. This analysis would not only focus on the macro level of demands, laws, rules and regulations, but also on the micro level of the practices of domination in the everyday life of an ordinary colonial subject.⁹

In fact, from the very beginning Soviet power established itself via a brutal destruction of the indigenous cultural heritage¹⁰ and a forced imposition of ideological mechanisms originating from the imperial center. “Characteristic of the Soviet colonial empire was physical and spiritual violence against all nationalities, but especially against those that were further from the ruling nationality in terms of distance, character, and development.”¹¹ Like other colonial powers Soviet colonialism provoked a search for freedom *against* instead of freedom *for* something in the colonized territories.¹²

The third motivation for the application of postcolonial studies to Baltic contexts is provided by the growing importance of regional studies which in the 21st century also tend to discuss the East-Central European experience not only in terms of postcommunist but also postcolonial criticism. One of the best examples which covers the cultural history of the region is the four-volume publication of *Literary Histories of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (2004–2010), edited

9 Annus, Soviet Colonialism (note 4), p. 38.

10 Cornelius Hasselblatt: *Geschichte der estnischen Literatur. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 2006, S. 522. Translations into English from other language sources are mine. I am grateful to Anna Reynolds who in some of the cases has looked over the translated parts in earlier versions of the text.

11 Heinrihs Strods: *PSRS politiskā cenzūra Latvijā 1940–1990*. Rīga: Jumava 2010, p. 44.

12 Piret Peiker: *Postcolonial Change. Power, Peru and Estonian Literature*. In: Kelertas, *Postcolonialism* (note 3), p. 128.

by John Neubauer and Marcel Cornis-Pope.¹³ The editors of this book find recognizable parallels within economic and cultural development in the region and propose a division of the development of all cultures of East-Central Europe during the last two centuries into three basic periods: 1) 1800–1890, the national awakenings and the institutionalization of literature, 2) 1890–1945, the literary institutions of modernism, 3) 1945–1989, the radical reform of the existing institutions under the communist regimes.¹⁴ In a more recent article, Marcel Cornis-Pope has elaborated the parallels among different East-Central European literatures and cultures demonstrating the fusion of discourses¹⁵ and setting these literatures in postcolonial contexts:

The postcolonial framework is relevant in another way: it can help a number of eastern European cultures, located at the intersection of three empires (Ottoman, Habsburg, and Tsarist/Soviet), to understand the postcommunist phase as a ‘decolonization’, an attempt at liberating them not only from Soviet domination but also from older colonial vestiges.¹⁶

Scholars working from the perspective of different parts of the former Soviet empire are trying to establish the specific characteristics of each particular situation, and indeed the policies of the Soviet regime differed in, for example, the Asian and the Baltic territories of the empire.¹⁷ However, there was a certain pattern of mutual understanding among various parts of the Soviet

13 Interestingly enough, another volume in the same series has been devoted to literary cultures of Latin America, an area subjected to intense postcolonial readings in recent years. See: Mario J. Valdés, Djelal Kadir (eds.): *Literary Cultures of Latin America. A Comparative History*. 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004.

14 Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (eds.): *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Vol. III. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company 2007, p. 1.

15 Karl Jirgens discovers a similar fusion of postmodern and postcolonial discourses in the Baltic context. See Karl Jirgens: *Fusions of Discourse: Postcolonial/Postmodern Horizons in Baltic Culture*. In: *Kelertas, Postcolonialism* (note 3), pp. 45-82.

16 Marcel Cornis-Pope: *Local and global frames in recent eastern European literatures: Postcommunism, postmodernism, and postcoloniality*. In: *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48.2 (2012), p. 146.

17 Areas where substantial research has already been carried out are especially former Soviet Asian territories and Ukraine. Of special importance are the works

Union that resembles attempts at co-operation among the oppressed peoples of other empires, as documented, for example, by Elleke Boehmer in the case of the British Empire. Boehmer reminds us of the concept of alterity, in which “the other – here, the brother or sister nation elsewhere in the empire – is simultaneously recognized as being distant and unknowable, yet as an entity pre-eminently to be taken into account, to be signalled towards”.¹⁸

This observation leads us to yet another feature of postcolonial criticism of the early 21st century which attempts an analysis of colonialism as a global issue. In his innovative history of the 19th century, Jürgen Osterhammel points to that fact that colonialism has been a principal factor which not only determined life in the peripheries, but also had a reverse impact on the centers and the history of colonialism and thus forms a substantial part of any attempt at understanding the global world order.¹⁹ The editors and authors of the volume *Coloniality at Large* also consider modernity and coloniality as mutually dependent phenomena, co-produced at a moment of Western history linked to the Atlantic commercial circuit and the transformation of capitalism into a global phenomenon with Europe as the center.²⁰ It is from this broad perspective that we now try to discuss the research perspectives of postcolonial and decolonial thinking.

Research Perspectives: World-Systems Theory and Decoloniality

The initial steps in the development of postcolonial theory proper during the final quarter of the 20th century were linked to a discussion of the British and French colonial experience and its aftermath. In his studies, which stand at the crossroads of contemporary trends within the discipline, Edward Said dealt with the discourses important for the creation of colonial dominance in the 18th and 19th century world as well as the ideological implications

of Madina Tlostanova and Vitaly Chernetsky, among others. The research on the former Soviet-bloc countries, dealt with later, belongs to a similar category.

- 18 Elleke Boehmer: *Empire, the National and the Postcolonial 1890–1920: Resistance in Interaction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005, p. 19.
- 19 Jürgen Osterhammel: *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*. München: Beck 2009, p. 16.
- 20 Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel and Carlos A. Jáurequi (eds.): *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*. Durham: Duke University Press 2008, p. 28.

of the European (and again predominantly British and French) texts and cultural artifacts in shaping the modern world order “beyond the level of economic laws and political decisions”.²¹ The importance of British colonial models has since been at the center of most investigations, a prominent place among those occupied by discussions of British rule in India in the works of Homi Bhabha, among others. The use of different *englishes* as an opposition to the dominating power of the English language²² has been another crucial aspect of discussion in the postcolonial field. However, already before Said’s interference, there was a massive body of anti-colonial writings in French; indeed, “many of the texts that have become central points of reference in postcolonial criticism – works by key anti-colonial authors such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Albert Memmi – were originally published in France in the 1950s and 1960s.”²³ Research during this period was focused on certain important areas of investigation and concentrated on several specific colonial models.

Possibly one of the most characteristic features of postcolonial criticism in the early 21st century is the considerable widening of the field which tackles colonial practices more globally as well as involves a discussion about internal European colonialism. In this process, there are different strands of scholarly contributions relevant to the argument of this book. One of those strands is provided by theories which have predominantly originated in Latin America, while another one focuses on East-Central European contexts.

Among the most important contributions in the former line of thought are those of Latin American scholars who pay attention to the processes of decolonization and decoloniality as opposed to the dominance of superimposed narratives of progress. At the bottom of these investigations lies the idea of the construction of the modern/colonial world system from the 16th to the 20th century which, along with technological advantages and religious and ideological designs, created the basis for European dominance on a global scale. In the words of the leading exponent of this trend of thought, Walter

21 Edward W. Said: *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books 1993, p. 12.

22 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin: *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London, New York: Routledge 2002, p. 38.

23 Charles Forsdick and David Murphy: Introduction. *Situating Francophone Postcolonial Thought*. In: Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (eds.): *Postcolonial Thought in the French-speaking World*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2009, p. 11.

D. Mignolo, “the rhetoric of modernity is a rhetoric of salvation (by conversion yesterday, by development today), but in order to implement what the rhetoric preaches, it is necessary to marginalize or destroy whatever gets in the way of modernity.”²⁴ Instead of the eurocentric world order, this scholarship tends toward a multi-centered research perspective with decoloniality and the decolonial option providing crucial concepts in this process. The concept of decoloniality is introduced next to that of postcoloniality, identifying different sources in each respective case. Instead of relying on Western dominance, there is a proposal to rely on an individual locus of enunciation, the idea “that you constitute yourself (‘I am’) in the place you think.”²⁵ This approach takes into account the specificity of each particular historical experience. It is not looked at from a eurocentric perspective and thus provides the possibility of a more diverse interpretation of the contemporary world.

The arguments advanced by Mignolo and other scholars with a Latin American background (Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Arturo Escobar, Enrique Dussel, among others) take as their starting point the importance of the geographical discoveries and political moves for the construction of European identity under the banner of the Christianizing mission from the early 16th century on. It is in fact these (and subsequent) European moves and their consequences that much later initiated the field of postcolonial studies. One of the arguments provided by Mignolo and other Latin American scholars is linked to the obvious fact of underrepresentation of different social groups and different languages in scholarly as well as social discourses. Following in the footsteps of well-established scholars (Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall et al.), the new dimension added by Latin American contributors is the substantial enlargement of the understanding of the global character of colonial/anti-colonial/decolonial moves. “[T]he solution is not to eliminate the difference but to decolonize the logic of coloniality that translated differences into values.”²⁶

The theoretical background for this line of argument has to a considerable extent been provided by Immanuel Wallerstein’s investigations of the relationships among what he calls core, semi-periphery and periphery states, resulting in his world-systems theory.²⁷ Wallerstein’s idea is that, without tak-

24 Mignolo, *Darker Side* (note 2), pp. xxiv-xxv.

25 Mignolo, *Darker Side* (note 2), p. 16.

26 Mignolo, *Darker Side* (note 2), p. xxii.

27 Immanuel Wallerstein: *World-Systems Analysis. An Introduction*. Durham: Duke University Press 2006, pp. 28-30.

ing into account the specific level of development in each particular country, in the capitalist economy these countries still form a part of the global economic world-system which relies on such inequalities in order for the whole mechanism to function. These considerations serve as a background for the development of the decolonial option and present a clear understanding of the role the colonial empires played and continue to play in the economic, political, and cultural divisions within the colonial and postcolonial world.

This research also seems to provide the foundation for positioning the Baltic littoral in the perspective of global changes originating in European expansion, the initial step being provided by the medieval Crusades. The social and cultural history of the Baltic area has been shaped by foreign invasions from early times; and the period of the Crusades in the late 12th and 13th centuries reveals a parallel to similar developments in other parts of Europe and the world. These parallels are especially relevant if seen in connection to the later colonial moves of the European empires, starting with the period of the Renaissance.²⁸ During this later time, the consequences of adapting to historical developments (improvements and changes simultaneous with the advance of European feudalism and later capitalist economies) created a system of serfdom characteristic of the Baltic provinces and comparable to the economic management of other colonized parts of the world.²⁹

Locus of Enunciation: The Baltic Experience

The textually documented history of the Baltic lands takes one of its beginnings in the medieval chronicle of Henry of Livonia in the early 13th century. Clearly, the perspective represented in this text belongs to the Crusaders from the German territories acting in unison with the representatives of the Catholic Church including the legate of the Pope who repeatedly visited the distant shores. Simultaneously, the mentioned chronicle provides a text typical of the rhetoric of the Middle Ages, displaying at once the logic of church language³⁰

28 Edward Said argues that “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self”. Edward W. Said: *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books 1978, p. 3.

29 Parallels between slavery and serfdom as a form of enforced labor become obvious, for example, in the pattern of economic and social development as both forms of exploitation were gradually abandoned during the 19th century.

30 Jaan Undusk: *Sacred History, Profane History. Uses of the Bible in the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*. In: Marek Tamm, Linda Kaljundi and Carsten Selch

and showing the impact of the foreign discourse in the Baltic lands. Joep Leerssen has described medieval relationships while acquiring new territories in terms of the opposition of civilization versus wilderness, and demonstrated in detail how this also applies to the English conquest of Ireland.³¹ In comparison, the author adds that “[o]ne early case within European history involves the expansion of the Teutonic Order into the non-Christian, heathen areas of the Baltic, where native tribes like the Old Prussians were either enslaved and forcibly converted to Christianity, or else exterminated.”³²

The role of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, the impact of the 16th and 17th century missionaries as well as the efforts of the educated social class to provide the local people with religious and (from the late 18th century onwards) secular texts can also be interpreted in the context of the global Christian mission³³, first dealing with Christianity as *the* religion that fulfills the humanitarian mission of mankind and later providing a secular discourse of economic emancipation that not only tried to educate people, but was also intended to bring their self-assessment in accordance with the prescriptions of the ruling class. On the other hand, in the very process of being delivered the colonial aspirations “are diluted and hybridised, so that the fixed identities that colonialism seeks to impose on both the masters and the slaves are in fact rendered unstable.”³⁴

The period of the Enlightenment and *Volksaufklärung*, on the one hand, provided theories which constructed the superiority of the European nations on a global scale, but on the other, kept expectations addressed towards peripheral European territories and especially internal colonial subjects at a much more modest level. The processes of *Volksaufklärung* were echoed in early literary texts published in Estonian and Latvian mostly in order to provide the possibility of mimicking the lifestyles of the upper classes of the colonial masters, attempting in this process to construct the identity of an ideal peasant aspiring toward economic prosperity, but never challenging

Jensen (eds.): *Crusading and Chronicle Writing on the Medieval Baltic Frontier. A Companion of the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*. Farnham: Ashgate 2011, pp. 45-76.

31 Joep Leerssen: *National Thought in Europe. A Cultural History*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2006, pp. 28-35.

32 Leerssen, *National* (note 31), p. 28.

33 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin: *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*. London and New York: Routledge 2007, p. 188.

34 Ania Loomba: *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London and New York: Routledge 2005, p. 232.

the societal order and colonial nature of the relationships between the Western European settlers and the local population. It was a world of stereotypes envisioned by the German-speaking creators of 18th century literature in Estonian and Latvian, even if the importance of these texts cannot be underestimated next to the impact of direct contacts of the German pastors with the predominantly rural native people. In a number of cases these pastors were living among the local population since their childhood and so mastered the indigenous languages reasonably well. Moreover, the development of secular texts considerably widened the horizon of the reception of the world by the local people; on the other hand, there was a clearly observable trend of not letting the indigenous population acquire too much knowledge, but rather to educate them to a certain extent in order to improve their life conditions and especially their productivity. The masses of people, however, should never be made conscious enough to challenge the basic premises of the existing political and economic order. "Secular racism came to be based on the ego-politics of knowledge; but it so happened that the agents and institutions that embodied secular ego-politics of knowledge were, like those who embodied theo-politics of knowledge, mostly white European males. So, the struggle between *theologism* [...] and *secularism* was a family feud."³⁵ The unwillingness of the landowners to provide reasonable living conditions for the peasants becomes especially striking, when these processes in the Baltic countries are compared to similar reforms in Germany.³⁶

The efforts of the early 19th century Baltic ethnic authors might in this context be interpreted as a submission to the hegemony of the colonial power in terms of representation.³⁷ The movement of national awakening in the Baltic countries took over ideas of the European Enlightenment, and the 19th century rhetoric resembled the views expressed by German humanists, the most prominent among them being Johann Gottfried Herder, about a century earlier.³⁸ During the late 19th century, the poetics of individualism and change gradually entered the literary scene. The turn of the century period can be

35 Mignolo, Darker Side (note 2), p. 9. Emphasis in the original.

36 Kersti Lust: The Impact of the Baltic Emancipation Reforms on Peasant-Landlord Relations. A Historiographical Survey. In: Journal of Baltic Studies 44/1 (2013), pp. 13-15.

37 Ashcroft, Key Concepts (note 33), pp. 106-107.

38 Dace Bula: Johans Gotfrīds Herders un tautas dzejas interpretācijas Latvijā. In: Ilze Ščegoljina (Hg.): Herders Rīgā. Herder in Riga. Rīga: Vēstures un kuģniecības muzejs 2005, p. 14.

considered to be one of the most fruitful in the history of Baltic (especially Estonian and Latvian) literatures, one of the reasons being the diversity of creative impulses important for the cultural development at this point. The opening up towards the variety of experience provided by different European literatures was not imposed politically (or otherwise) as the move was not put in place by (Russian) imperial state policies.³⁹ The political dependency of the area, however, remained, as was clearly demonstrated by the violent suppression of several uprisings within the Russian Empire (notably those of 1863 and 1905).

The cultural life of the three post-1918 independent Baltic States endorsed the possibility of engaging with every kind of cultural practice, while to a certain extent (and especially under the autocratic regimes of the 1930s) it also echoed the tendency toward self-isolation relevant for the policies of most nation states around Europe during this historical period. The possibilities of regional cooperation again increased during the late 1930s⁴⁰, but shortly afterwards the three states became the victims of Soviet military, political, and ideological invasion.

Soviet Colonialism as Mimicry of Global Coloniality

The dynamics of the political and ideological developments from the late 16th century on provides a structure which has been to a great extent repeated after the Soviet occupation and colonization of the Baltic countries in the mid-20th century, undertaken in the context of the global race for power between two mutually conflicting economic systems, capitalism and socialism. For the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian cultures, well established by the time of the occupation, the consequences of the attempt at total

39 On the other hand, the counterbalance for the presumable processes of self-Europeanization as self-colonization, which at times (then and later) has been raised as an issue, was provided by a vital dialogue with the Russian cultural sphere important for many early 20th century modernist writers in the Baltic area. See Tiit Hennoste: *Europeanization as Self-Colonization in Estonian Literature at the Beginning of the 20th Century: the Case of the Young Estonia Movement*. In: *Letonica* 28 (2014), pp. 11-24.

40 Jaan Undusk: *The Problem of Baltic Unity: Opening Address*. In: Anneli Mihkelev and Benedikts Kalnačs (eds.): *We Have Something in Common: The Baltic Memory*. Tallinn: The Under and Tuglas Literature Centre of the Estonian Academy of Sciences 2007, p. 17.

destruction of all experience acquired by that time were especially tragic.⁴¹ It is in this sense that the reverse-cultural colonization, in the formulation of David Chioni Moore, becomes important for the positioning of inner regenerative attempts of Baltic literatures during the Soviet colonial period.⁴²

In the context of the interrelatedness of postcommunist and postcolonial issues, first it is important to position Soviet colonialism within global coloniality. An apt formulation is provided here by Madina Tlostanova:

[W]e should remember that modernity in the 20th century was implemented in two forms – the liberal/capitalist and the socialist/statist one. Each of them had a sunny side and a darker side, each of them had its own form of coloniality. In the darker colonial side of Soviet modernity a second-rate type of Soviet citizen was constructed in spite of the proclaimed internationalist slogans and the overt goal of racial mixing in order to create a future Soviet Mestizo/a with an erased ethnic element brought up on Russian culture and on Soviet ideology.⁴³

Participating in the formation of the global coloniality of power, “the communist imposition in east-central Europe [w]as a particular historical embodiment of a persistent and widespread imperial drive which has characterized the behavior of stronger states towards territories perceived as providing opportunities for economic, political or ideological expansion”.⁴⁴

In the history of colonial moves, similar trends have often taken place at different times but with seemingly unexpected overlaps. Dealing with the history of the Russian empire, we note that the first application of imperial power which indicated a change of policy and direct occupation of another territory was provided by the annexation of the Kazan and Astrakhan lands

41 According to Latvian exile literary historian Andrejs Johansons, a similar devastation was caused by the Russian invasion in the early 18th century. Andrejs Johansons: *Latviešu literātūra*. Stokholma: Trīs Zvaigznes 1953, pp. 29-30.

42 David Chioni Moore: *Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique*. In *Kelertas, Postcolonialism* (note 3), p. 26.

43 Madina Tlostanova: *Postsocialist ≠ Postcolonial? On Post-Soviet Imaginary and Global Coloniality*. In: *Special issue. On Colonialism, Communism and East-Central Europe*. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48.2 (2012), p. 137.

44 Dorota Kołodziejczyk and Cristina Șandru: *Introduction*. In: *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48.2 (2012) (note 43), p. 115.

in the 16th century.⁴⁵ This undertaking was then followed by further eastward expansion of the Russian empire, reaching the Pacific within a relatively short period of time; and then turning southwards in search for possibilities of acquiring territories adjacent to important waterways (at that point – the Black and Caspian Sea). On a historical timeline, these moves overlap with the expansion of Western European empires into the American continent. To a certain extent, we notice here the birth of two competing global dominators, Western and Eastern European powers (even if at times they seem to act in mutual isolation); they have been instrumental in a number of inter-European conflicts and became juxtaposed as major political forces during the Cold War era.

The scramble for the Baltic lands thus resembles more global moves in miniature. Initially these territories became the object of interest for Western (maritime) settlers, whose presence in the area was arguably different in scale in the case of present-day Estonia and Latvia on the one hand and Lithuania, on the other; but by the end of the 18th century all of the respective lands fell prey to the westward expansion of the Russian empire. The Baltic countries shared the fate of other colonized territories as well as participated in anti-colonial struggles which, for example, in the Caribbean originated already in the early 19th century. Political independence became a reality for the Baltic countries by the end of the First World War; and the same fate was experienced by the colonies of Western empires at the end of the World War II, at which time the colonial clock in the Baltic area was already turning backwards again. The decolonization of the Soviet sphere at the end of the 20th century occurred at a time when many other former colonies were already undergoing a period of neo-colonial crisis.

This rough sketch of an asymmetrical historical timeline seems important in order to grasp the extent to which Soviet occupational and colonial policies followed the path earlier established by other imperial powers (including the Russian empire) despite the claims of political uniqueness posed by the ideology of the Soviet empire.

The similarities can also be extended towards the cultural response to Soviet conditions. We can distinguish among several different forms here, those of mimicking, critical appropriation, deconstruction and inversion, each of them being more present at specific historical periods, but at times also overlapping with others.

45 Thompson, *Postcolonial Russia* (note 5), p. 412.

Already from the 16th century on the development of vernacular written culture in the Baltic lands was linked with mimicry of foreign examples. Nevertheless, at that time, and until the rise of a national movement inspired by intellectual leaders of the previously non-dominant ethnic groups, this process provided a timely procedure of cultural transfer which filled gaps in the cultural development of emerging nations. In the observation of Marko Juvan,

[w]hen the comparison with the potential source shows a lack, then the need for importation arises, and strategies of transfer take shape – from dealing with the defense mechanisms of the receiving environment through processes of appropriation, creative transformation and the adaptation of the imported models to new functions and meanings to explicit commentary and evaluation of the foreign element in the target society. The process of cultural transfer frequently leads to the naturalization of the foreign element, which then becomes perceived as autochthonous structure.⁴⁶

The crucial difference in the period of the 1940s and early 1950s was marked by the fact that, if in earlier cases the outcome of the cultural transfer involved the appearance of more complex cultural forms, the Soviet policies worked in the opposite direction. The ideology of so-called 'socialist realism' led to an extreme oversimplification of creative practices and excluded almost any possibility of self-expression. At least the early careers of those young Baltic authors, who entered the literary scene after the war and made their first steps in the climate of Stalin's and Zhdanov's cultural dictate, were effectively destroyed by the imposed necessity to follow patterns of Soviet literature of the 1930s and 1940s.⁴⁷

Critical appropriation, as the first attempt of aesthetic recovery, was closely linked with the impact of realism marking a return to more concrete description of the daily lives of the Baltic communities; i.e., a poetic strategy

46 Marko Juvan: *World Literature in Carniola. Transfer of Romantic Cosmopolitanism and the Making of National Literature*. In: *Interlitteraria* 17 (2012), p. 36.

47 Latvian literary historian Raimonds Briedis writes that "[t]he task of socialist realism was of an ideological nature – the authors had to legitimise the new reality with the potentially limited means at their disposal." Raimonds Briedis: *Socialist Realism: the Baltic Model*. In: Eva Eglāja-Kristšone and Benedikts Kalnačs (eds.): *Back to Baltic Memory: Lost and Found in Literature 1940–1968*. Rīga: LU LFMI 2008, p. 38.

which, while formally coinciding with the official ideological and aesthetic demands of the Soviet state, gradually acquired the potential of, in Immanuel Wallerstein's terms, an anti-systemic movement.

The even more crucial move towards deconstruction and inversion of the existing patterns was provided by attempts at modernist poetics, which became present towards the late 1960s (poetry by Artur Alliksaar, Paul-Eerik Rummo and Imants Ziedonis, plays by Juozas Grušas), as well as by the step towards history and mythology as sources of different, pre-Soviet or non-Soviet experience, at the same time providing continuation of the tradition of the 19th century's anti-colonial and nation-building processes, supported in literary works by Jaan Kross and Justinas Marcinkevičius. Even the realist mode changed considerably during the late 1960s and 1970s, and the scrupulous depiction of day-to-day reality, which in the late 1950s formed an initial challenge to socialist realism, served to reintroduce modernist poetic devices such as irony, the grotesque, ambiguity, and subjectivity about a decade later, and produced complex literary works like short stories by Arvo Valton, novels by Enn Vetemaa and Alberts Bels, plays by Kazys Saja.⁴⁸ In addition, historical and mythological plots involving potentially symbolic stories and images, forming a hidden layer of communication with perceptive audiences, were often used.

Dealing with the consequences of the Soviet colonial period, it is possible to argue that the processes described unintentionally pressed the Baltic peoples toward an earlier state of development which could be characterized as a Europe-oriented hybridity. The ideological and literary discourses of the 1990s had a great number of links which pointed back to the earlier independence period of the 1920s and 1930s (often existing alongside early manifestations of the postmodern cultural condition), and similar restorative trends dominated the politics of the exile Baltic communities. However, it also would be incorrect to forget about the colonial nature of the early European impact in the area.

48 Benedikts Kalnačs: Models of Critical Appropriation, Deconstruction, and Inversion. Undermining the Socialist Realist Canon. In: Elena Baliutyte and Donata Mitaitė (eds.): *Baltic Memory: Processes of Modernization in Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian Literature of the Soviet Period*. Vilnius: LLTI 2011, p. 26.

The Post-/Neo-colonial Aftermath

The historical experience of both conquest and colonization as well as adaptation of the modernity/coloniality paradigm to suit the aims of the ruling classes of the region from the 16th century on includes the problematical question of Baltic tribes as representatives of Europe's internal others who (un)consciously have put much of this experience into the foundation of their own nation- and identity-building processes. This dependency which also permeates many of the current relationships with the European Union and the Western world in general provides one of the reasons for the feelings of insecurity of the Baltic peoples at their current stage of historical development.

Each major historical period also creates a new political configuration and a new world order. The current political rhetoric is characterized by the constant discussion of global security issues, often associated with the rise of 21st century terrorism as well as presumable confrontation, or even, in Samuel Huntington's phrase, the clash of different civilizations, confrontational strategies thus providing a persistent component of the political discourse.⁴⁹ *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Graham Huggan and published in 2013, presents a good survey of recent trends in postcolonial scholarship as well as an insight into the current restructuring of the political and economic balance of power.⁵⁰ Reasonably enough, this investigation devotes its opening part to a retrospective of 'the imperial past'; this part is, however, immediately followed by an even more burning discussion of 'the colonial present', a phrase coined by the human geographer Derek Gregory and also used in the title of one of his most important contributions to the field.⁵¹ The authors of the respective chapters on 'the colonial present' in the *Oxford Handbook* mostly expose the political ambitions of the USA to become a new global superpower, and in this context they also discuss the systematic abuse of human rights on a global scale, linked to, among other modalities, the concept of 'bare life', as proposed by the philosopher Giorgio Agamben and referring to those people who are limited in their access to

49 See Samuel Huntington: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon and Schuster 1996.

50 See Graham Huggan (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013.

51 See Derek Gregory: *The Colonial Present. Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq*. Oxford: Blackwell 2004.

only the most basic needs of human existence.⁵² Characteristically, in this passionate discussion of the abuses against humanity in the contemporary world there is no place for the colonial present of the Russian empire, which, as recent events clearly demonstrate, also has great aspirations to reconfigure and revitalize itself as a global player.⁵³ The discussion of postcolonial Europe, ‘an awkward term’, as stated in the volume,⁵⁴ is reserved for the very last pages of the book where East-Central European contexts with their history of internal colonialism are mentioned only in passing, even though they are principally linked to the common prospects of Europeanization.

The place of Baltic societies and cultures and their future in the framework of potentially rising new regionalism is far from being established and safe. The inhabitants of the respective countries are again confronted with their already familiar experience of being situated in the sphere of tension between major powers, as Baltic societies still find themselves in a place – both physically and mentally – between ‘civilizations’. Here also lies the paradox of their ‘colonial present’.

Current attempts of Baltic scholars to integrate their efforts into the field of postcolonial studies can be seen as an attempt to contribute to this painful search for identity. In the context of Elleke Boehmer’s concept of alterity, which looks for parallels in other parts of the world, a telling example is provided by a recent article co-authored by Dace Dzenovska and Iván Arenas, who pay attention to the similarities in postcolonial border experiences linked to the social protests expressed by building barricades in Latvia and Mexico, the events taking place in 1991 and 2006, respectively. In their discussion we might also notice the important connection between East-Central European and Latin American experience.

In the case of Dzenovska and Arenas’s contribution, they also link their analysis to a discussion of protest movements in Egypt in 2011 during the so-called ‘Arab spring’, thus making their perspective even broader and more complicated as well as avoiding the stereotyping descriptions of the events

52 See Giorgio Agamben: *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1998.

53 It is possible to see a continuation of Soviet colonial practices here. As Carlos Fuentes has put it, “[c]apitalism has flourished on relentless self-criticism. Soviet socialism fossilized because it suppressed such criticism.” Carlos Fuentes: *The End of Ideologies*. In: *Transition* 51 (1991), p. 27.

54 Frank Schulze-Engler: *Irritating Europe*. In: Huggan, *Handbook* (note 50), pp. 669-691.

in terms of a “teleological narrative leading from oppression to liberation”.⁵⁵ The value of such comparisons is indeed best demonstrated not by forcing the point of their sameness, but rather carefully scrutinizing the commensurability of such events which point toward shared colonial difference.

There is also a growing solidarity among scholars working within the field of post-Soviet studies, even if this trend is complemented by an anxiety concerning the fact that these studies are generally not well recognized by Western practitioners of postcolonial studies.⁵⁶ The discussions of Russian/Soviet colonial legacies, in whatever contexts they might be undertaken,⁵⁷ mostly remain on the sidelines of research and do not attract the genuine interest of postcolonial studies more generally. The larger aim of the rising efforts of the Baltic postcolonial scholarly community is thus to gain better integration into Europe as well as to discuss the colonial difference of these countries in more complex historical and global discourses.

55 Dace Dzenovska and Iván Arenas: Don't Fence Me In: Barricade Sociality and Political Struggles in Mexico and Latvia. In: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 54/3 (2012), p. 645.

56 A good example of such reservations is provided by the insightful investigation of the Romanian scholar Bogdan Ștefănescu: *Postcommunism/Postcolonialism: Siblings of Subalternity*. București: Editura Universității din București 2013. On the other hand, there are also examples of excellent scholarly co-operation, such as the volume co-authored by Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo: *Learning to Unlearn. Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press 2012. This book pays attention to the decolonial moves in Latin America and former Soviet Asian republics. An issue of *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing* in 2012, edited by Cristina Șandru and Dorota Kołodziejczyk, was devoted to post-socialist cultures. Two recent scholarly meetings on East-Central European postcolonialism, organized by Dorota Kołodziejczyk at the University of Wrocław in 2013, and by Dobrota Pucherová and Róbert Gáfrík at the Institute of World Literature in Bratislava in 2014, respectively, also deserve to be mentioned. However, these are still rather isolated instances looking for possibilities to develop a more fruitful co-operation on a wider international scale.

57 See, for example, Gerhard Simon: *Waren die Republiken der Sowjetunion Kolonien?* In: Guido Hausmann und Angela Rustemeyer (Hg.): *Imperienvergleich. Beispiele und Ansätze aus Osteuropäischer Perspektive*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2009, S. 105-122. This volume has been included in the series of investigations on the history of Eastern Europe published by the Institute of Eastern European Studies at the Free University in Berlin.