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**Review of *East Central Europe  
Between the Colonial and  
the Postcolonial in the Twentieth  
Century*, ed. by Dorota Kołodziejczyk  
and Siegfried Huigen,  
Palgrave/Macmillan, 2023, 265 pp.  
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The book opens with a thorough and lucid critical introduction entitled “East Central Europe Between the Colonial and the Postcolonial,” written by its editors, Dorota Kołodziejczyk and Siegfried Huigen. This introduction outlines the historical, geographical, sociological, and mental “in-betweenness” of the region in which “insurrectionary” and “peripheral” nationalisms were constructed in synergy and friction with the “hegemonic,” “Western” nationalisms. The key notion that informs Kołodziejczyk’s and Huigen’s introduction is the question of to what extent and to what goals the tools developed by postcolonial discourse have been and applied to the problems of the region. The introduction ends with a call to “mobilize the vigilance of critical thought” (23) to such uses of postcolonial theory “that serve to mainstream and normalize anti-liberal forms of governance” (23).

Kołodziejczyk’s and Huigen’s introduction is followed by Claudia Kraft’s chapter “East Central Europe as a Historical and Conceptual Space: On the Production of Knowledge from a (Historical) Area Studies Perspective.” It offers a solid and clear historical overview of East Central Europe as a subject of ‘area studies.’ Having outlined the vital influential trends and theories in the period between the two world wars, and the periods between

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1945 and 1989 and after 1989, she argues persuasively “[w]hy we still need relational history in a postcolonial Vein.” (49)

Tomasz Zarycki’s chapter “Polish Stereotypes of the East: Old and New Mechanisms of Orientalisation in the Regional and Transnational Dimensions” contains a recapitulation of the complex and varied applications of post-colonial discourse in the context of the issues connected with “east” and “eastness” in Poland (and in its eastern neighbors), both on the trans-national and regional levels (Zarycki himself has been active in this debate for two decades, a fact confirmed by his five articles/chapters, and a book in the bibliography included at the end of “Polish Stereotypes of the East”). Following Stein Rokkan’s (1980) division of center-periphery relations into economic, political-state-legal, and cultural, Zarycki argues for their interdependence and shows how culturalist, psychological, and historical rhetoric has been used at various levels to support the stereotype of alleged eastern “backwardness.” Zarycki agrees with Larry Wolff’s claim made in *The Invention of Europe* (1994) that this negative Orientalist stereotype of Eastern Europe held in Western Europe was constructed in the period of the Enlightenment and has been reproduced ever since due to inertia but shows that these stereotypes have gone through ups and downs of reactivation or fading, the former connected with the periods of the region’s not faring well, the latter with (shorter) periods of the region’s condition improving. Zarycki summarizes the arguments and the implications of assumptions made by two main distinctive ways of conceptualizing Polish historical dependence on the West and the East, which may be branded as ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal,’ and shows that they blame each other for the region’s backwardness. Both are unwilling to recognize Western European subjects as agents in this process. In the second part of his chapter Zarycki first sketches the ambivalences connected with the self-promotion of three Polish cities which are located on the Polish post-1945 “Eastern Wall”: Białystok, Lublin and Rzeszów, and then shows how the new liberal, left-wing Polish discourse on the country’s eastern borderlands, created by cultural activists like Krzysztof Czyżewski or writers like Andrzej Stasiuk and Ziemowit Szczerek, is not devoid of hierarchization putting the West over the East, and of Orientalist valorizations.

After three general, ‘panoramic’ chapters, seven focus on more particular phenomena connected with East Central European twentieth-century history.

In “Colonial Ambivalence and Its Aftermath: Colonialism and Anti-Colonialism in Independent Poland and Ireland,” Róisín Healy manages to present and summarize the similarities as well as differences between Poland and Ireland as historically being exposed to processes of political, economic, and cultural dependence on a stronger neighbor, and the ambivalence connected with the application of the colonial discourse to analyze and compare the developments in these two countries/nations on two planes: in the long nineteenth century and over the last few decades where Irish, Polish as well as many other scholars have been applying tools of (post)colonial discourse, trying to account for these similarities

and differences. In the second part of her chapter, Róisín Healy argues convincingly that after Poland and Ireland (re)gained independence, respectively, at the end of the second and the beginning of the third decade of the twentieth century, their politicians and cultural elites chose different state policies: anti-colonial in Ireland and, after an unsteady start in the nineteen-twenties, colonialist in Poland in the nineteen-thirties. Healy concludes that both the anti-colonial identification of the Irish state and the pro-colonialist one of the Polish state had little impact on Europe's overseas colonies and people living there.

Raul Cârstocea's chapter entitled "The Unbearable Virtues of Backwardness: Mircea Eliade's Conceptualisation of Colonialism and His Attraction to Romania's Interwar Fascist Movement" is not so much an apology as an empathetic summary of Mircea Eliade's (whom Cârstocea calls in the opening paragraph "arguably the Romanian intellectual who is best known internationally" (113)) views and statements from the period of his stay in India (1928-1931), and his subsequent return to Romania and involvement in "the Legion of the Archangel Michael," the Romanian fascist movement. Cârstocea argues that the reasons accounting for Eliade's "gradual 'conversion' to legionary ideology [...] were partly conjunctural" (127). Analysing Eliade's novel *Bengali Nights*, fragments from his diaries, and religious and political articles written in this period, but also later, Cârstocea shows, on the one hand, the complexity of the situation in Romania in the second half of the 1930s, and the connections Eliade was making between his Indian and Romanian experiences. I am an East European scholar and am not amused but puzzled by the flippant play on *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

Agnieszka Sadecka, in "Reportage from the (Post-)Contact Zone: Polish Travellers to Decolonised India (1950–1980)," analyses eight books of travel reportage written by Polish journalists and writers who visited India in the three decades between 1950 and 1980 as either reporters of Polish press agencies or members of Polish official delegations. Sadecka states that their publications, to be published, "had to pass through the Central Office for the Control of the Press, Publications and Performance" (144). Still, she does not differentiate the extent of the censorship into the period before 1956 and after it, nor does she speculate about the extent of both (self) censorship and official censorship that readings of these texts suggest. Sadecka juxtaposes the two texts: one, the earliest chronologically by Jerzy Ros (1957) and the latest by Jerzy Chociłowski (1977), to argue that the intensity of the critique of imperialism present in the texts under her scrutiny decreased with time, which she claimed reflected "the change in propaganda newspeak" (146). But otherwise, she homogenizes the eight texts under scrutiny. An interesting point made in this chapter, albeit only in passing, is that these texts "in some way anticipated the appearance of postcolonial critique, in a Marxist spirit" (148). I believe that this sentence could serve as an excellent starting point for research on 'socialist discourse' on the 'Third World' developed in East Europe in the period 1945-1989 as a pre-Saidian discourse.

Jagoda Wierzejska's chapter entitled "An East Central European 'Sahib' in a Former Colony: Andrzej Bobkowski in Guatemala (1948–1961)" analyses ambivalences, ambiguities, and contradictions in, on the one hand, Andrzej Bobkowski's works of fiction and non-fiction and, on the other, in his private correspondence. Using the essential tools of postcolonial discourse, Wierzejska unfolds vital elements and moments in Bobkowski's biography, concentrating on his decision to leave France for Guatemala in 1948, where Bobkowski lived with his wife manufacturing and selling model airplanes till his death in 1961. Wierzejska convincingly argues that Bobkowski's decision to leave France, and in more general terms, Western Europe in 1948, was the result of his staunch anti-communism, the lack of energy and will of Western societies to oppose Soviet expansionist politics, as well as his feeling that in France he was treated as a pariah, a dirty foreigner. Having presented the love/hate relationship of Bobkowski towards Guatemala, Wierzejska concludes that his self-construction as a white 'Sahib' living with people he considered inferior in the cultural sense was a form of compensation for "his complex of being regarded as a second-class European." (177)

In the first part of "Regained Landscapes: The Transfer of Power and Tradition in Polish Discourse of the Regained Territories," Kinga Siewior introduces Przemysław Czapliński's concept of 'the shift' used to describe the magnitude of changes Poland went through after World War II and states that she is going to analyse one (out of four) key aspect of this shift; namely the territorial changes Poland underwent as the result of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences in 1945: the loss (to the Soviet Union) of Poland's former 'wschodnie kresy' [Eastern borderlands] and the incorporation into Poland of territories which before 1945 had belonged to Germany: Silesia, Lower Silesia, the Lubusz Land, Pomerania and the southern part of East Prussia. These territories were labeled 'Ziemie Odzyskane' [the Regained Territories] by Polish (communist) authorities. Using elements of postcolonial discourse, Siewior presents the extent of the manipulation and construction of the new Polish identity and shows the tropes Polish communist authorities, as well as Polish writers and artists, relied upon to represent the Regained Territories. In the second part of her chapter Siewior focuses on the ways selected Polish writers used the notion of landscape in the 1970s and 1980s and explains how through Jan Bułhak, a Polish photographer who had introduced the theoretical concept of 'fotografia ojczyzna' [translated here as 'Fatherland Photography program] before World War II, and how Bułhak's pro-Polish colonialist photos of the Polish Eastern Borderlands merged smoothly with post-War II Polish communist propaganda.

Emilia Kledzik's chapter "Between Pedagogy and Self-Articulation: Roma Necessary Fictions in East Central Europe" approaches three novels and a short story written by East Europeans, both Roma and non-Roma, about the life of Roma communities and Roma characters set in different periods between the 1920s and the present in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. First, Kledzik proposes to use Homi Bhabha's notion of 'necessary

fictions' to approach her four texts. Then, she presents the differences in the situation of Roma communities on the one hand in the countries of Western Europe, like Britain, France, or Germany, and on the other, in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania. In the second part of her chapter, she critically summarizes and assesses her four texts and then proposes a table reminiscent of late 1960s structuralism, using the two criteria of the narrator and the narrative strategy. She offers to term this table "necessary fictions," and I would love to read a more thorough explanation of the connections between Bhabha's mostly ironic notion and East European Roma narratives.

Miriam Finkelstein, in "Soviet Colonialism Reloaded: Encounters Between Russians and East Central Europeans in Contemporary Literature," focuses on Berlin as a place in which Russian, Russian-Jewish, as well as East European writers, live, and explains – by analyzing novels, short stories and autobiographical essays – why the former write about the latter (and vice versa) rarely, and when they decide to do so, why they usually display a lack of understanding, reluctance and ignorance. She concludes that for both groups, this results from being at different ends of "Soviet colonialism reloaded."

I am convinced that *East Central Europe Between the Colonial and the Postcolonial in the Twentieth Century*, particularly Kołodziejczyk's and Huigen's "Critical Introduction" and the two 'overview' chapters by Claudia Kraft and Tomasz Zarycki, will become indispensable texts for all scholars approaching East Central European issues regardless of whether they consider their approach (post)colonial, (post)dependence, (post)communist, or something else.

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