

EMPIRE, PEASANTS, NATIONAL MOVEMENTS – GALICIAN POSTCOLONIAL TRIANGLE?

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the heuristic value of the possible application of postcolonial approaches to nineteenth-century Habsburg Galicia. It critically reviews some contemporary usages of “postcolonial” in Ukrainian historiography, and political and literary criticism. The article finds original postcolonial historical approaches to be of great heuristic value, especially for practitioners of social history. Using “postcolonial” tools, historical research may yield new insights into the history of nineteenth-century Galicia

KEYWORDS: Galicia, postcolonial, Habsburg Empire, peasants, history



Long after its triumphal march through European and North-American universities in the 1980-90's, having gained both opponents and admirers in literature and language departments, the wave of postcolonial theories has reached the so-called “continental” European empires of the nineteenth century in the first decades of the twentieth century – in particular those of the Romanovs and Habsburgs. Unfortunately, “postcolonialism” (as it was called by certain commentators, drawing analogies to postmodernism) differs in this context from the original postcolonial approaches as much as the old continental empires differed from their maritime equivalents.

The problems with the peculiar application of postcolonial approaches in Central-Eastern Europe can be reduced to two main points: first, a reduced or even distorted understanding of the nature of postcolonial theory and postcolonial critics; second, mechanical transfer of terminology and concepts from one imperial situation to another, without a critical rethinking of this approach and its adjustment to a different historical context.

It is a most remarkable fact that those two problems concern both followers and opponents of “postcoloniality” in Central Eastern Europe.¹

In the first part of this article, using mostly Ukrainian examples, I shall analyze the typical problems in the use and understanding of postcolonial approaches in the case of East Central Europe. In the second part, I shall draw attention to the historical dimension of postcolonial studies, often neglected in translations of those approaches to Central Eastern Europe. Using my own research experience, I will try to single out situations and moments in 19th-century Galicia to analyze and describe the methodological and theoretical instruments which, in my opinion, are heuristically valuable and can be used productively.

Dipesh Chakrabarty mentioned once that one vital mark of the postcolonial situation in historiography is the impossibility of ignoring the studies of European historians, whereas they are quite capable of neglecting the historiography of “the third world”.² From this point of view, “postcolonial” historiography, as a phenomenon impossible to discard, was a very successful project while Eastern Europe was and still is a postcolonial space. Very often, debates about East-European postcoloniality morph into discussions about the Europeanness (or lack of it) of the region precisely because the network of political relationships permeates not only the object of study, but also the present historiographic moment. This article is not an attempt to place Galicia among the colonies or within “Europe”. It is rather a statement of the fact that, regardless of its exceptionality, the Galicia of the 1879th century was an integral part of the modern world, with its universal claims and global relationships, as well as the global regime of manufacturing, supporting and exploiting differences that operated not just between “Europe” and the colonies, but also inside these ephemeral units.

Let us envisage the application of postcolonial theory in the region. Followers of postcolonial approaches see obvious parallels on the historical

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¹ First of all, I mean Steven Velychenko, whose articles I will later discuss in detail. He creates at first an object of criticism – a postcolonialism which is, in fact, a parody of postcolonial approaches, and then he criticizes it. Concerning “-isms”, postcolonial theory has never pretended to have the status of a movement or a politics, or of an intellectual fashion, any of which are usually meant by this suffix. The term “neocolonialism” as a policy of economic exploitation of colonies that continues the colonial tradition was broadly used in the 1960s and 70s. It was replaced in the 1980s and 1990s by “postcoloniality”, meaning societies and regimes impossible to understand without taking into account their colonial experience.

² D. Chakrabarty, *Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for “Indian” Pasts*, in: R. Guha (ed.), *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986–1995*, Minneapolis 1997, p. 264.

level between the multinational empires of the Habsburgs and Romanovs (or even the Soviet Union) and British and French colonial empires. On the other hand, as Markus Reisenleitner has shown, the methodological charm of postcolonial studies played an equally important role in the transposition of these approaches to the region: first, its interdisciplinarity, second, theoretical depth, and third, the option of operating in several ethnical-regional contexts.³ The criticism of Eurocentrism, present in postcolonial studies, has been of importance too, since the relationship between Eastern, and Western – “real” – Europe, has been always burdened with problems.

Most simplifications that one finds in East-European applications of postcolonial approaches derive directly from the historical and methodological parallels mentioned above. The most obvious and popular, and yet the most vulnerable, is the historical one. Although both continental and maritime empires eventuated from expansion, which is also the reason for their territorial and population heterogeneity, this may be their only resemblance. As the historian critics justly point out, Ukraine or the Kingdom of Poland as parts of the Russian Empire in the 19th century can hardly be called colonies, even in the broader meaning of this term. Neither in the Russian nor in the Habsburg Empire did race differences play such a role in culture, ideology and political practice as in Western European empires. The physical vicinity of the conquered territories to the imperial “centre”, as well as a single political-administrative and legal space, make “metropolitan” or “colonial” detachment impossible.

In the case of Ukraine, the most popular interpretations of “postcolonialism” in the local context appeared in the studies of Mykola Riabchiuk, who draws parallels between the mechanisms of cultural domination in the case of former European colonies and half-colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America on one side, and Ukraine on the other.⁴ In the absence of differences in skin colour and way of life, language becomes the main criterion of cultural difference, as well as the basis for “othering.” According to Riabchuk, the linguistic boundary turns into a border between the dominant and the subaltern, the higher and the lower cultures.

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³ M. Reisenleitner, *Central European Culture in Search of a Theory, or: the Lure of “Post/colonial Studies,”* “spacesofidentity.net”, 2 (2002): Bazaar Issue.

⁴ М. Рябчук, *Від Малоросії до України: парадокси запізнілого націє творення*, Київ 2000; *Ідем, Дві України: реальні межі, віртуальні ігри*, Київ 2003.

Eventually, the ideology of cultural inequality and inferiority penetrates with time into the whole of society; it is adopted by bearers of both “high” and “low” culture, and haunts the whole project of Ukrainian state-building.⁵

It is a remarkable fact that Galicia does not fit into such Ukrainian interpretations of the “postcolonial” situation. It could be said that here 19th-century Galicia implicitly appears as a non-colonized “normal” part of Ukrainian territory. Unlike western territories of the Russian Empire, especially in the second half of 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, there were no legal restrictions on the cultural activity of national movements here. To the contrary, for both Polish and Ukrainian national movements, Galicia became the Promised Land in matters of cultural production, political, and organizational activity. On the other hand, Marxist literature has always stated that in the 19th century Galicia had the status of “internal colony” in the Austrian (later Austro-Hungarian) Empire. According to some contemporaries, and later to some historians, the industrially developed western regions of the Empire economically exploited Galicia, using it as “an agrarian and raw material appendage,” artificially hindering its industrial development.⁶ The fact that this economic-materialistic explanation of Austrian Galicia’s coloniality has been completely ignored by contemporary adherents of postcolonial approaches in Ukraine is revealing.

The most popular cases of defining the Ukrainian situation as postcolonial from the point of view of politics essayists and literary studies justly become an easy target for criticism by historians. However, this criticism is based on the same simplified understanding of postcoloniality as the approaches being criticized. The most interesting critic of “postcolonialism” in Ukrainian historiography is Steven Velychenko. He tries to criticize not only attempts to transplant postcolonial approaches to Ukrainian soil, but postcolonial studies in general. Velychenko accuses all

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5 Some literary critics discuss the Ukrainian situation in a similar key albeit with greater sophistication. First of all Marko Pavlyshyn: M. Pavlyshyn, *Post-Colonial Features in Contemporary Ukrainian Culture*, "Australian Slavonic and East European Studies", 6.2 (1992), p. 41-55. For a recent attempt in literary criticism to treat the culture of both the Russian Empire and the soviet/postsoviet space as structured by colonial meetings and projects see: D. Chioni Moore, *Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique*, "PMLA", 116/1 (2001), p. 111-128.

6 Compare the analysis by early Galician Marxist with classics of soviet dogmatic-Marxist historiography of Galicia: Ю. Бачинський, *Україна irredenta (по поводу еміграції): суспільно-політичний скіц*, Львів 1895 and В. Осечинський, *Галичина під гнітом Австро-Угорщини в епоху імперіалізму*, Львів 1954.

“postcolonialists” of singling out former colonies as a distinct and integral object of study; of reducing the variety of human experience to resistance and national identity only; of seeing in nationalism only a counterbalance to foreign rule; of creating new myths instead of critical and objective study of sources; of rejecting the importance of economic forces; of using incomprehensible and absurd jargon; and so on. He also claims that, in the Ukrainian case, postcolonial approaches are unlikely to bring any new discoveries. Historically, Velychenko classifies the Ukrainian case of the 19th-20th centuries as “dependence on the European periphery”—similar to the Irish or Greek, and totally different from the examples of “overseas” colonial dependency. As to the present, Velychenko also sees problems for Ukraine in the political programme of postcolonial studies. In his view, Ukrainians are unlikely to accept hybridity, miscegenation and chronic indeterminacy, of which postcolonial studies are so fond, as positive values. According to him, in contradistinction to the critique of Europe found in postcolonial contexts, in Ukraine we find rather an affirmation of Ukraine’s belonging to Europe.

Below we will scrutinize Velychenko’s theses discussing the possible application of postcolonial approaches to the Galician case. Ironically, Velychenko finishes his philippic against postcolonial theory by comparing it to Marxism. He believes that both “make universal generalizations” on the basis of several unrepresentative historical examples, both being “seriously flawed”.⁷ Whatever our attitude towards the ideology and political practice of Marxism, the very fact of its great heuristic contribution to historiography and social theory is undeniable. The situation of postcolonialism is similar. If you do not turn it into a single canon, similar to Stalinist “Marxism-Leninism” (and to do this with such a heterogeneous corpus of theory and criticism is possible only with the help of simplifications so gross that they render it unrecognizable, as happened in Velychenko’s case) we will have a theory more appropriate for analyzing certain problems than any other known to us.

Like most researchers before him, Velychenko pays attention only to the definition of Galicia as an economic colony, a market exploited by the German capital.⁸ In reality, parallels between Galicia and the

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7 S. Velychenko, *Post-Colonialism and Ukrainian History*, “Ab Imperio”, 1 (2004), pp. 391-404, *here*, p. 403.

8 S. Velychenko, *The Issue of Russian Colonialism in Ukrainian Thought. Dependency Identity and Development - 1*, “Ab Imperio”, 1 (2002), pp. 323-366, *here*, p. 341.

overseas colonies of Western European states are much more numerous. The first Galician postcolonial moment is the very creation of Austrian Galicia. Velychenko affirms that in contrast to the colonies, "prior to 1917 Ukrainian territories were integral parts of larger unified states ruled by centralized bureaucracies rather than distinct administrative units ruled by a separate bureaucracy."⁹ In fact, Galicia became a separate region (became "Galicia") only when it was annexed as a separate administrative unit by the Habsburg monarchy. Its regional and cultural identity became a direct consequence of a political action related to imperial expansion, which is why typologically its identity is similar to that of a number of colonial formations – from Mexico to India and Indochina.¹⁰

Although Galicia was not detached from the old Habsburg lands by the ocean, and its history, society and culture stayed in constant contact with the surrounding territories; from the very beginning Galicia had the status of a special case in the Austrian Empire. Annexed to the Monarchy in the midst of Theresian and Josephinian reforms, the province became a synonym for economic and cultural backwardness, lawlessness, feudal abuses, ignorance and social chaos. Just as in the case of the colonies of modern West European nations, Galicia simultaneously became both an object of reforming efforts, which were to prove their validity, and 'the other', against which the Vienna of the cameralist bureaucracy and the new-born bourgeoisie could contrast itself.

The claim that "Europe was made by its imperial projects as much as colonial encounters were shaped by conflicts within Europe itself,"¹¹ fits the Austrian Empire well. The relationship between Vienna and Galicia was nothing like relations between two self-sufficient states: people, ideas, things, texts and images circulated in both directions. The imperial dimension of the Habsburg state became especially salient with the annexation of Galicia, to which the "historical" rights of Habsburgs were rather chimerical. Galicia dragged the monarchy into a new field of

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9 Idem, *The Issue of Russian Colonialism in Ukrainian Thought. Dependency Identity and Development - 1*, "Ab Imperio", 1 (2002), p. 337.

10 About India as an "artificial" creation of colonialism and global capitalistic system see an essay by Immanuel Wallerstein, *Does India Exist?* in: Idem, *Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms*, Philadelphia 2001, pp. 130-34.

11 A. L. Stoler and F. Cooper, *Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda*, in: Eadem (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1997, p. 1.

political and cultural struggle, which started between empires and national movements on the ruins and for the “legacy” of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Being one of the last annexed southern and eastern territories of the monarchy, Galicia was seen as unspoiled by civilization, a land of an exotic and nature-bound popular culture, which could be presented at international and European exhibitions as evidence of Austrian imperialism; Austrian participation in the universal march of European civilization.

Austrian Galicia was created not only by high politics and international relations. Nineteenth century Galicia, as we know it, was shaped by the social experiments of the Habsburg state. The seigniorial relations in Galicia were completely strange or incomprehensible to Austrian reformers and civil servants. In principle, they did not differ from those that existed in the villages of the rest of Central and Eastern Europe. In many other places across our planet, such as, for example, in Bengal, colonial states were interpreting complex and original local social-economic mechanisms in the light of European feudal experience, and, correspondingly, were breaking down those mechanisms and adjusting local social relationships to their own historical models.¹² At first glance, the situation in Galicia was completely different; here the state was breaking down feudal relations instead of imposing them. However, the outcome of the cameralist state’s intervention into Galician countryside was astonishingly similar to that produced by such interventions by colonial European states in Mexico or Java, wherein village community became one of the elements of the administrative and legal order in the triangle of peasants-landowners-state.¹³ In the overseas colonies of the 19th-20th centuries, as well as in Galicia, pure “feudalism” did not exist; in both cases the state converted the feudal relationship into one of the elements of the power hierarchy. Regulation of these feudal relationships went hand-in-hand with the establishment of the legal basis for capitalistic relations, with property relations playing an especially important role.¹⁴

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12 G. Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India*, Cambridge 1990.

13 The first researcher to pay attention to this role of colonial states and the global model according to which they functioned was Eric R. Wolf, in his *Pathways of Power: Building An Anthropology of the Modern World*, Berkeley 2001, pp. 193-288.

14 R. Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement*, Durham 1996.

Postcolonial studies in Central Eastern Europe bring associations with literary criticism and theory. In the historical context they are often reduced, as was done by Velychenko, to the study and problematization of the metropolis-colony pairs. As a matter of fact, the thematic range of postcolonial studies is much wider; in South-Eastern Asia the beginnings of postcolonial theory can be traced to the historians from the Subaltern Studies group. They had worked on one of the classic topics of social history – the history of lower or subaltern social groups. But in contrast with their European colleagues, partly due to the historical context and partly because of the particular moment in the present, they treated Marxism and the so called movements of national liberation with mistrust, both as ideologies and analytical approaches. The rejection of eurocentrism was an important element in these approaches; but eurocentrism in this case was interpreted as a belief in the universal applicability of theories and models developed on the basis of (western) European material.

The problematization of the traditional conceptual apparatus was accompanied by the pioneering application and critical rethinking of poststructuralist theory, especially the theory of power and the relationship between discursive/signifying and social practices, social, political and economic mechanisms in particular. Partha Chatterjee's conceptualization of modes of power (communal, feudal, bourgeois) as differing from (although closely tied to) the modes of production and the thesis on the possibility of coexistence between different modes of power in a single territory and within the same mode of production, allows a better understanding of "backward" societies, in which the use of modern "capillary" technologies of power, as described by Michel Foucault, is limited, and cruder methods are used to secure domination.¹⁵ Besides this, Partha Chatterjee's approach allows us to think about the historical context as an interaction between the plurality of heterogeneously acting forces, each of which influences the course and outcome of the historical change.

In the colonial context, the classical "bourgeois" mode of power is closely connected to the national movement. The national movement presents itself as an expression of the local population's interests, while its view of the local society and the world, and its institu

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¹⁵ P. Chatterjee, *More on Modes of Power and the Peasantry*, in: R. Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi 1983, pp. 311-349.

tional and discursive practices, are based on Western European models. Sociologically, the social strata connected to the new (European) institutions and production usually become the leaders of the national movement. Although these movements claim to be “our own” for peasants, women and other marginalized groups, in fact they suppress distinct voice in those groups as thoroughly as the colonial state.

In Galicia, national movements appear as a new element differing from/opposing the absolutist state. Once the latter turned into a constitutional state, the national movement used newly opened opportunities to organize, mobilize, indoctrinate and achieve political power without being identified with the state. At the same time, the constitutional empire recognized the national movements’ legitimacy and rejected attempts to create a supranational imperial community. Relations between national movements and peasants, who, according to national ideology, are the nation itself, continue to be problematic. Once again, the parallels with colonial contexts are evident. As long as the empire, a legitimate political body with its apparatus of enforcement, conviction and arbitration, exists, citizens are able to avoid both direct identification with the nation and involvement in the structures of national movements. Again, analogies with colonial contexts are evident.

The whole project of Subaltern Studies was, to a large extent, a project of the generation disappointed with the ideals and idols of their predecessors. The national state and national independence were among the most important of these. According to Ranajit Guha, one of the consequences of the turbulent 1970s in India “was to bring the impact of the twenty-year-old nation-state’s crisis to bear on a settled and in many respects codified understanding of the colonial past. A body of knowledge and interpretation relating to that past, which had been taken for granted and authorized academically as well as politically (the extreme politicization of academic work in history under the aegis of the Government of India – officialization, for short – being one of the principal features of education during this period), was now subjected to doubt in such a way as to lose its certainties.”¹⁶ In a certain segment of Ukrainian historiography, such disillusionment with the national project and critical attitudes

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16 R. Guha, “Introduction,” in Idem, (ed.), *A Subaltern Studies Reader: 1986-1995*, Minneapolis 1997, p. XIII.

towards it had already become observable at the end of 1990s. By now this trend has affected a substantial part of the “Ukrainian” academic community of historians, which became as transnational as the community of postcolonial historians in “India”.¹⁷

It is not an accident that one of the first Ukrainian historians who paid attention to the heuristic potential of postcolonial studies was Serhy Yekelchuk, who himself could be called a product of migrations, translation and operation in several academic contexts.¹⁸ He had accentuated another thematic moment of tension, being worked on productively by postcolonial theory and historiography, namely national movements or projects and national identity. As Yekelchuk states, “far from solidifying the notions of a ‘colonizer’ and ‘colonized’ (so dear to the hearts of Ukrainian nationalists), modern postcolonial theory problematized this dichotomy by showing how the two could not exist without each other and how resistance to colonialism borrowed cultural forms from the metropolis.”¹⁹

Besides the national meta-narrative related to the national state, another great meta-narration that Subaltern Studies representatives were criticizing and wrestling with was Marxism. The problematization of rule and subordination allowed researchers to reach beyond the problematic issue of compulsion and exploitation. Foucault’s ideas about power always being a relationship, or power being productive and working on both sides of power relations, allowed historians to speak about subordinated groups without imposing any “identity” on them, homogenizing them or dramatizing their resistance. The historians’ task was not a reconstruction of repressed or lost identities, but the critique of elitism and elitist versions which have monopolized depictions of the subordinated.

In the case of Galicia, the use of such approaches allows a rethinking of the question of peasants and peasant resistance. Scholars have usually uncritically described the peasantry as a class of the feudal epoch with characteristics ascribed in advance which allegedly explain the limitations of class solidarity and actions, and the reactive and local nature of peasant resistance. Postcolonial approaches enable consideration of dramatic

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¹⁷ Miscellanea by G. Kasianov and P. Ther, eds., could serve as proof: *A Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography*, Budapest 2009.

¹⁸ S. Yekelchuk, *The Location of Nation: Postcolonial Perspectives on Ukrainian Historical Debates*, "Australian Slavonic and East European Studies", vol. 11, 1/2 (1997), pp. 161-184.

¹⁹ S. Yekelchuk, *On Transcontinental Travel and Postcolonial Imagination: A Look Back from 2006 on "The Body and National Myth"*, "Ab Imperio", 3 (2006), pp. 55-58.

changes in both peasants' action and vision, and allow us to speak about the peasants as agents of historical process, one that interacted with the discourses and practices of both the state and the national movements.

Recently in Russian historiography, the so-called "new imperial history" has become a popular alternative to postcolonial approaches. It could be considered as part of a more global rethinking of empires (not only colonial) and appeals to a comprehensive historicization of discussions on colonialism.²⁰ The "new imperial history" propagated by a group of talented Russian historians can be seen as an answer to oversimplified attempts to use "postcolonial" approaches, an answer coming from the former "centre" of an atypical (Russian) empire. That empire itself has been an object of "orientalization", imagined as Asian and barbarian; its very existence was considered a challenge to the ideals of the Enlightenment and a negation of liberal values.²¹ "New imperial history" criticizes postcolonial approaches for ignoring relations between structures inside the empire and neglecting empires as specific political formations, while analyzing the power relations and cultural practices formed by those relations.²²

This criticism does not look sufficiently justified. It is precisely the colonial state, its vision, possibilities, and functioning, that have been the core research questions in postcolonial studies. Historians of this group problematized not only subaltern groups, but also the colonial state, taking a stance against "monistic" approaches that treat the state as something monolithic. The colonial state in the colony was different from the colonial state in the metropolis. It applied different mechanisms of ruling – the faces of its functionaries as well as its laws were different.²³ Besides, the metropolis was able to distance itself from the actions of its agents in the colonies, criticize them, play the part of an arbiter, elaborate its own ideals and principles, using its own colonial practices as a negative example.²⁴ Again, parallels with the Habsburg Empire appear to be apposite. In Galicia, the bureaucracy was more corrupt, the enforcement

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 20 See F. Cooper and A. L. Stoler, eds., *Tensions of empire: Colonial Cultures in A Bourgeois World*, Berkeley 1997.

21 I. Gerasimov, S. Glebov, A. Kaplunovskii, M. Mogilner, A. Semyenov, *In Search of New Imperial History*, "Ab Imperio", 1 (2005), pp. 34-35.

22 *Ibid*, p. 43.

23 R. Guha, *op. cit.*.

24 N. B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain*, Cambridge 2006.

apparatus acted more crudely, executive power impudently manipulated the elections, and until the very end of the Empire Galicia was a constant source of scandals. Those scandals, in turn, were presented in the parliament by representatives of socialist movements and minorities seeking understanding and help against the domination of the “Polish gentry”.

The question of the non-Foucaultian political power of the state has also been among the core subject matters of Subaltern Studies. Antonio Gramsci was here the main theoretical inspiration. It was from Gramsci that the Subaltern Studies borrowed the term “subaltern”. “Hegemony”, the most popular concept in Gramsci’s heritage, was equally important to this group. As in the case of Eastern Europe, the hegemony of the capitalist state did not work out in the colonies. To describe the mechanisms of the colonial state, Ranajit Guha coined the term “dominance without hegemony”, or “dominance in which the movement of persuasion outweighed that of coercion without, however, eliminating it altogether.”²⁵ “Dominance without hegemony”, in my opinion, describes Galicia’s situation well, applying to the second half of the nineteenth century even better than to the first, when it comes to the political system and its sustenance. The dominance of Polish landowners, who controlled the state apparatus and represented the province in the centre, was the same rule without hegemony which would eventually be forced to yield to the national movements/projects.

The contribution of postcolonial historiography to the analysis of nationalism and the non-European national state can hardly be overestimated. Deconstructing the nation as a problematic and artificial formation created according to the European pattern and absolutizing the equally artificial and singular state and society, Partha Chatterjee drew our attention to the contradictions and conflicts between the “nation” and “its” communities – peasants, women, marginals.²⁶ For my analysis of the Ukrainian national movement in Galicia, even more important was another variation on Gramsci’s theme, proposed by Guha and ignored by the historians of Central-Eastern Europe. Even before obtaining a national state, the agenda of national movements included not only liberation from

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25 R. Guha, “Introduction,” in Ranajit Guha, (ed.), *A Subaltern Studies Reader*, p. XVIII.

26 P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton 1993. Works by Partha Chatterjee became the main postcolonial inspiration for the critical historical analysis of nationalism made by S. Yekelchuk, starting with his *The Location of Nation: Postcolonial Perspectives on Ukrainian Historical Debates*, “Australian Slavonic and East European Studies”, Vol. 11, 1/2 (1997), pp. 161-184.

rule, but also securing and keeping the power in the name of the nation, the ideal incarnation of which was to be the national state. The national state by definition is a hegemonic structure; its power is based not on coercion but on recognition and solidarity overriding social divisions. From this point of view, national movements in imperial formations were movements of projected hegemony²⁷ – movements expecting to eventually obtain a national state, a structure in which real hegemony would be actualized. In the meantime, the imperial state and competing national movements impeded the achievement of complete hegemony. On the other hand, for those who found themselves involved in the activity of the national movements, the hegemony of the national projects was very real. And in the constitutional Austrian half of the monarchy, tolerant to national movements, involvement in the structures and discourses of national movements was vast.

One particular instance of how this hegemony worked was the usurpation of the subaltern groups' voice, which from now on were defined as integral parts of the nation, whose interests and aspirations were expressed within the bounds of the national movement. One of the central tasks of the whole project of Subaltern Studies was the recognition/renewal of the autonomous voice of all those marginalized, subaltern groups. This voice was muffled and absorbed by both the colonial state and national or Marxist projects of emancipation and modernization. Ultimately, the grand question of the whole project became, whether recovering and hearing the silenced voices was possible at all. The methodological innovations of postcolonial historians are connected with this project: new ways of reading text when primary attention is paid not only to the way they are structured by power relations, but how they serve the preservation of these relations, how subject and subjectivity are formed through the textual representations and not regarded as something self-evident or existing outside of representation.²⁸

As Spivak has shown, even though the participants of the project tried to present their work using conventional historical categories, their main achievement was in relinquishing them. In this sense some representatives of Subaltern Studies made first attempts at post-structuralist

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²⁷ For the description see R. Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Cambridge, MA, London 1997.

²⁸ The classic text in this sense was an article by R. Guha, *The Prose of Counter-Insurgency*, in: R. Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II: Writing on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi 1983, pp. 1-42.

historical writing. Their studies proved “that the concept-metaphor of the ‘social text’ is not the reduction of real life to the page of a book.” Leaving the boundaries of structuralist textual analysis, the works by Subaltern Studies historians were able to include conscious actions by the subaltern groups, actions connected with the possibility of change, which stands for the “dynamics of the disruption of this object, the breaking and relinking of the [continuous sign-]chain”. In this way, postcolonial historiography offered its own theory of change, the theory justifying the application of deconstruction as a method of reading texts: “A theory of change as the site of the displacement of function between sign-systems – which is what they oblige me to read in them – is a theory of reading in the strongest possible general sense.”²⁹

When transplantations of postcolonial approaches to East-Central Europe often reify either the “colonial” or “dominant” subjectivity, postcolonial historiography, in fact, enables explanation of the metamorphoses of both national and social identities. The same techniques could be applied to analysis of any other research field. Although postcolonial historians are often accused of neglecting economics and “objective” elements of economic exchange, they have paid and continue to pay attention to the way economic systems are created on the basis of conceptual and ideological apparatus, how economic mechanisms are destroyed and then engrafted because of the particular understanding of this vision of the economy. The problem is that many critics of postcolonial studies still see the economy as something that exists on the basis of objective laws independent of political and cultural context. Postcolonial theory pays attention to the fact that, to a great extent, the economy depends on the notions and representations of economic activity. An objective economic “backwardness” does not exist, it is always determined by the coordinates of examples chosen for comparison, by the aspects compared, and by who chooses them and how. Territorial involvement in imperial colonial context has always been accompanied by the destruction of old economic relations and of the economic structure which remained obscure to the colonial state. The metropolis automatically became a background against which a colony’s backwardness was discussed.

Although Galicia was an integral component of the Austrian part of the Empire without any borders to slow people, goods and capital down,

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29 All references in this paragraph are taken from G. Ch. Spivak, *Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography*, in: *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, Methuen 1987, p. 198.

Galicians perfectly understood their civilizational “inferiority” compared with the western parts of the Monarchy. The imperial centre delivered models of material culture, behaviour, technology, and intellectual and artistic fashion. Adoptions were not reduced to “imperial” trends only; the Czech national movement was an example for the Ukrainian one; Czech farming and Czech cooperatives played the same role for Ukrainian agricultural societies. Just like the leaders of national movements in European colonies, as well as their education in the metropolis, were receiving finished examples for their emancipation projects, the leaders of the Ukrainian national movement, starting in its earliest stages, as a rule had experience of studying, living or working in the western part of the Empire.

Admiration did not rule out indignation, and the latter did not preclude expectations of arbitration. Both the Ukrainian national movement and the Polish social-democrats in Vienna stressed the fact that Galicia was an abnormal part of the Empire, a part where constitutional rights and free-speech were severely violated, where the administration rigged elections and intervened in the electoral process. Similarly, as for the intellectuals from the colonies, the centre was not an enemy for the Galician opposition, but rather a model for reorganizing their own province, the epitome of modernity and civilization. Only the politics of the centre in the colony/province was judged negatively, although the main object of critique in the Galician case was the province’s own social-political backwardness and its own traditions.

In conclusion, postcolonial studies relieve Eastern Europe from being diagnosed as an “abnormality” or “deviation,” a situation created by constant comparison to its successful neighbours from Western Europe. They allow us to see it as a part of the world’s historical process. Postcolonial approaches attract those of us who see social history not only as an academic project, but also as a critical-emancipatory one, as an intervention in favour of exploited and marginalized strata, at the same time allowing a sceptical attitude to all kinds of traditional emancipation meta-narratives, be they Marxist, nationalist or feminist.

Apparently, postcolonial projects resonate stronger with the Ukrainian situation than with the Polish one, precisely because the situation regarding the national state is more complicated here than in the Polish case. In this sense, the Ukrainian example would be typical for countries where, according to Ranajit Guha, the “historic failure of the nation to come to its

own” determines the central problem of historiography.³⁰ As the relations between Ukraine and Europe are also much more complicated than in the Polish case, history which discovers the “hypocrisy of Europe’s claims to provide models of democratic politics, efficient economic systems and a rational approach to understanding and changing the world”³¹ has a greater chance of success here.

Finally, it should be mentioned that in the twentieth century Galicia was the territory where one of the cruellest colonial projects in the history of humankind were implemented. I have in mind the Nazi occupation: the radical ‘othering’ and destruction of certain groups according to racial criteria, colonization projects, dominance without even a pretence to hegemony.³² Although this experience goes beyond the chronological framework of “Austrian Galicia”, it is worth remembering that the saddest page in this region’s past was written on the ruins of nineteenth-century empires and was closely connected with their histories.

Translated from Ukrainian by Iaroslava Kravchenko

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30 F. E. Mallon, *The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History*, in: A. Dirlik, V. Bahl, P. Gran, eds., *History After The Three Worlds*, Lanham 2000, p. 194.

31 F. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, Berkeley 2005, p. 3.

32 On the colonial dimension of national-socialist politics in Eastern Europe see W. Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, Chapel Hill 2005.

SUMMARY

The transplantation of postcolonial criticism to East-Central Europe has been fraught with serious misinterpretations. These misinterpretations abound on both sides, among both defenders and critics of “postcolonialism.” One of the widespread flaws in understanding “postcolonial” has been its alleged ties with some “standard” model of colonial rule. Instead, “postcolonial” approaches should be understood both as a response to the particular situation of imperial rule imbued with the ideas and techniques of “modernity,” and a response created in a particular political and intellectual context – the crisis of the newly created nation-state and poststructuralist framework in social science. Moreover, historians ought to pay particular attention to the insights of the historical part of the “postcolonial project.” Historical projects have dealt with the particular situation of an imperial space where modern liberal modes of power and the society modelled on it had to co-exist and deploy more archaic forms of rule. The hegemony of “modern” “Western” ideas here never achieved the completeness and thoroughness visible in the metropolis. Together with the flows of ideas, symbols, goods and people inside the imperial space, this has resulted in a heterogeneity not unlike the one observable in the imperial spaces of nineteenth-century East-Central Europe. Galicia, as part of such a space, can benefit from retooling its histories with postcolonial approaches.