
**Silviu Miloiu**

The Romanian Association for Baltic and Nordic Studies & Valahia University of Târgoviște, E-mail: silviu.miloiu@valahia.ro

**Abstract**

The core approach of the work deals with postcolonial studies and the geographical reference area of “Western Borderlands”, which largely consists of Eastern and East Central Europe. However, the Baltic states stand at the focus of the analysis and as such they are devoted the largest share of the eight chapters of the book. Colonialism, coloniality, and post-colonial are insightfully analyzed in the monograph and the author blends them to concepts such as colonial subject positions and colonial ideology. How to behave properly, what one could speak or do in public and what one instantly felt was forbidden, what could be published and what was rather to be shelved established certain boundaries between the conceivable and the inconceivable. Everything was driven by the colonial ideology which Annus defines as “a system of beliefs and corresponding statements that motivate and guide colonial discourse”. Spotlighting both colonial subject positions and colonial ideology and further encompassing the notion of colonization in the meaning of “territorial acquisition” and “system of domination”, the book is clearly operating in an innovative conceptual framework which turns it into a vital contribution in colonial/postcolonial studies.

**Keywords**: Epp Annus; post-colonial research; Western borderlands; colonial subject positions; colonial ideology.

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“Russia’s aggressive geopolitical posture in the 2010’s has however reactivated questions after the Soviet colonial past and has restored some of the imaginary unity of the former Soviet Union through the facts and fears of Soviets new aggression. Much has changed, as a new era of tension has emerged in Eurasia, and yet the end of the Soviet postcolonial is nowhere to be seen” (Epp Annus, p. 242).

When in 1991 the Soviet Union had officially underwritten its political demise the role of the Baltic nations in the process of Soviet breakup was largely acknowledged. Newcomers in the headlines of the international press, Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians seemed like a neglected European heritage redeemed. The neophyte interest in the history of the Baltic nations has tended to acknowledge a sudden upsurge worldwide. The few authentic Baltic experts still maintaining their position in the Western university departments and chairs, and journalists operating in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, and the like had to inform an avid and unacquainted public with the causes of Baltic singing revolution and to give a meaning, a sort of historical perspective on these sudden occurrences that alongside with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the East European revolutions, and even prefacing them, were bedeviling the estimations of prominent scholars and politicians that the binarism of international relations was there to stay. The outburst of the Baltic spirit of
national revival steering up the collapse of the Soviet Union was then interpreted either through the lenses of *longue durée* recalling the 19th century nation-building process, the interwar independence, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, the foreign occupations and the early post-war resistance or regarded in the light of the larger Soviet dissident movement greatly expanded following the Helsinki Accords of 1975. Less conceptually inclined commentators detected its roots in the Glasnost and Perestroika policies of Mikhail Gorbachev, the search for better living standards, environmentalist sensitivities following the Chernobyl nuclear disaster or improved access to the decision-making process. While some Baltic emigres did conceive the Soviet occupation as a form of colonialism, their views were largely neglected or silenced. Especially amid the European left the concept of colonialism excluded any possible connection with Communism and the Soviet Union.

Epp Annus initiated this research some ten years after the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe while studying at Cornell University’s School of Criticism and Theory with Professor Benedict Anderson. The researcher felt further impulses in this regard while at the Department of Slavic and East European Studies of Ohio State University. Participation in several research clusters such as the “Heterologies of the Everyday”, “Cultural Theory Research Group” and “Formal and informal networks of literature” stipended by the Estonian Science Foundation instilled the investigation with fresh ideas and feedbacks coming from peer communities and set the research on track to the current monograph entitled “Soviet postcolonial studies. A view from the Western borderlands”.

The core approach of the work deals with postcolonial studies and the geographical reference area is “Western Borderlands”, which largely consists of Eastern and East Central Europe, or as the author explains “East Central Europe, the Baltic states, Moldova, and western Ukraine”. However, the Baltic states stand at the focus of the analysis and as such they are devoted the largest share of the eight chapters of the book. Colonialism, coloniality, and post-colonial are insightfully analyzed in the monograph and the author blends them to concepts such as colonial subject
positions and colonial ideology. How to behave properly, what one could speak or do in public and what one instantly felt was better to keep for oneself, what could be published and what was better to be shelved established certain boundaries between the conceivable and the inconceivable. Everything was driven by the colonial ideology, which Annus defines as “a system of beliefs and corresponding statements that motivate and guide colonial discourse”. Spotlighting both colonial subject positions and colonial ideology and further encompassing the notion of colonization in the meaning of “territorial acquisition” and “system of domination”, the book is clearly operating in an innovative conceptual framework which turns it into a vital contribution to colonial/postcolonial studies. And yet the merits of the book are not confined to decisively guiding the studies on Baltic nations in the (post)colonial cradle. It was the interrelation between coloniality and modernity that has obscured (or “camouflaged”, as Annus would put it) the perspective of previous scholars and the Western public alike when dealing with the Soviet Baltic republics and that allowed Soviet colonialism to remain largely undetected. Annus soundly reflects on cultural paternalism and enlightenment discourses along with the engagement with “pre-existing, Western-oriented models of modernity” and various forms of nostalgia.

This multidimensional approach is remarkably operated by critically interlocking Soviet power politics and cultural ambitions to historical research, heritage, everydayness, local resistances, and collaborations not counting the more meaningful acts of devotion or confrontation. Reflecting the complexity of its conceptual, theoretical, and methodological design, the book is not divided into strictly notional chapters and more empirical sections, but pertinently combines concepts and narratives and steadfastly avoids binarism.

The first two chapters are however the spinal column of the entire monograph, approaching the balance between the experiences of individuals and the collective, colonial, imperial discourses in addition to the research strategies of tackling them. To explore these complex relations Annus brings forth the concept of “affective thinking” and concludes that any failure to foster affective bonds between the endeavors of common
imperial subjects and the imperial grand designs and discourses results in discord, social unrest and strife. By employing the conceptual apparatus of postcolonial studies, the author would not set aside the notion of Soviet occupation, but instead it subtly delineates it chronologically: the Soviet presence in the Baltic commenced as a foreign occupation and evolved in a colonial rule. Chapters 4 and 5 dovetail modernity and colonialism and unveil one of the main breakthroughs of the book, the unique combination of seniority and subsidiarity in the Soviet relation with the Western borderlands of the empire. The Baltic song festivals of the latter part of the 19th century and the decolonization process of late 1980s are appropriately approached from this angle. In a Benedict Andersonian conclusion of chapter 5, Annus approaches the recalling of the “earlier layers of (de)colonial history” as a “postcolonial imperative”, “an unavoidable part of the critical agenda of both decolonial activists and postcolonial scholars”.

Truthful to the intention of transgressing the binary interpretation of the Cold War, in chapter 6 entitled “From colonial fear to colonial lough”, Annus tackles the cases of migrants and settlers of the Soviet era in the Baltic states and how this process affected the alterity perspectives incurred during the Soviet occupation. Concepts borrowed from colonial imagery (extending in the extremes to the stereotype of vampirism), colonial matrix, Orientalism are dissected and tested in order to account for the decades separating the early fear-based domination pattern from the later scorning and mocking of the Soviet colonial machinery, not the least of the Soviet retired officer employed as military trainer of local teenagers.

Highly innovative is also chapter 7, most likely refined within the “Heterologies of the Everyday” research group. Intimacy of private space was of course not a pattern of Soviet rule, but nevertheless some sense of concealment of one’s own values and thoughts could be found even in the tiny Soviet flats not to mention the village houses. Perhaps the best synthesis of the conclusions of this book can be borrowed from the last phrase of the introductory chapter pointing out to “the singular plural dynamics of the Soviet borderlands’s societies, where individual lives both disrupted and affirmed the dominant discursive structures of these societies”.

Displaying genuine writing adroitness, Annus astutely combines purely theoretical analyses with what some authors term as academic prose. For instance, the scenery of the song festivals is remarkably recounted insisting on notions such as national pedagogy and national intimacy, and the concept of affective nation-building. The Cioranian like semantic paradox allows the author to go beyond state-of-the-art and explore new avenues of interpretations of post-colonialism, thus finding the rationalities while also revealing the perplexity, preposterousness, and sarcasm of the age.

To conclude, with “Soviet Postcolonial Studies. A view from the Western borderlands” Annus takes the scholarship to an entirely new and fertile theoretical altitude and opens new directions to post-colonial scholarship not solely in Europe but globally as well. Post-colonial methodology is not any longer restricted to post-imperial spaces and times and bound to conservatism but is a perceptive tool of understanding the modus operandi of colonial discourses during and after foreign occupation regimes in modernization ideological settings as well.