

Comparing Colonial Differences: Baltic Literatures as Agencies of Europe's Internal Others.

Abstract

In this paper I intend to focus on Soviet colonialism in historical and comparative perspective. I am interested in both the Soviet period as well as the more general matrix of power which has been influential in the Baltic area. It means that historical contextualization will be attempted along the discussion of specific characteristic of the Soviet colonialism.

The cultural history of the Baltic area has been influenced by foreign invasions from early times on. The period of the crusades in the late 12th and 13th centuries provides a parallel to similar developments in other parts of Europe and the world. These parallels are especially relevant if seen in connection with the later colonial moves of the European Empires from the Renaissance period onwards. It is in fact these European moves and their consequences that much later initiated the field of postcolonial studies where a lot of early contributions have come from scholars with, for example, Indian or Caribbean origin. Recently one of the most important theoretical moves has been provided by the activities of a group of Latin American scholars (partly adapting for their purposes the term 'subaltern' from their Asian colleagues). The theoretical platform of this group is especially well reflected in the publications of Walter Dignolo who has introduced the terms of border thinking and decolonial options to the scholarly field. One of the arguments provided by Dignolo and other Latin American scholars (Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Arturo Escobar, Enrique Dussel, among others) is linked to the obvious fact of underrepresentation of different social groups and different languages in the scholarly as well as social discourses. Following in the footsteps of well-established scholars (Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall et al.), the new dimension added by the Latin American contributions in the substantial enlargement of the understanding of the global character of colonial/anti-colonial moves. Involving Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory, the mentioned scholars link the European dominance on a global scale with the discovery of America followed by conquest and colonization. Of great importance in the field of Baltic studies are the historical parallels between the Latin American and Baltic history.

Recent research in comparative literature has also tended towards regional investigation. One of the best examples to date is the four-volume publication of *Literary Histories of East-Central Europe*, edited by John Neubauer and Marcel Cornis-Pope. In this book, the developments of the 19th and 20th century literary processes in the area are discussed, providing clear indications about the link of the 20th century developments to historical realities. Interestingly enough, another volume in the same series has been devoted to literary cultures in Latin America.

In my own contribution to JBS I intend to sketch a general overview of the historical developments in the Baltic area which provide the basis for more contemporary observations. I argue that the dynamics of the development of literary cultures from the late 16th century onwards 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. This later colonization was anachronistic in the sense that the barbarity met with at historically much earlier stage has been displayed again. For the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian cultures, well established

by the time of this late colonization, especially tragic were the consequences of the attempt of total destruction of all experience acquired by that time.

We could possibly describe this earlier state of development as a Europe-oriented hybridity (not forgetting the colonial nature of this experience) which introduces the question of Europe's internal others. However, the above mentioned double colonization (from the West as well as from the East), present at different periods of the Baltic history, provides one of the reasons for having an uneasy feelings at the current stage of historical development. Do we consider one form of colonization to be better than another? Is this due to the specific conditions of the Soviet colonialism, or its late position on the historical time-scale? How have we tried to position ourselves during one historical period or another, and what differences are there to observe? What traces has the Soviet colonialism left in our contemporary culture?