

„Totalitarianism” after Totalitarianism

The article ponders over the possibility of applying postcolonial theory to study the contemporary literature of Central and Eastern Europe and in particular Ukrainian literature. Among the scholars who consider it reasonable to use postcolonial methodology while studying the literature of the former USSR or socialist camp countries there are Tamara Hundorova, Marko Pavlyshyn, Mykola Riabchuk, Ewa Thompson, Vitaly Chernetsky and others. Nevertheless, some researchers don't accept postcolonial studies as a relevant approach to the analysis of their countries' literatures, though they don't state it is impossible to use it in the post-Soviet states. This is true for example about such Polish researchers as Wojciech Malecki and Grażyna Borkowska who point to Anglo-Saxon and American sources of postcolonial theories which make them irrelevant to studying Polish literature. One more reason for rejecting them is that there is a difference between “continental imperialism” and the classical form of it.

Nevertheless, back in 1967 in “The Origins of Totalitarianism” Hannah Arendt was not excluding a possibility of an unexpected revival of imperialist policy and methods under completely different circumstances. She also noted that the initiative of continental expansion had shifted westwards (from England and Western Europe to the USA, and the USSR had monopolized initiative of the continental expansion which used to be the prerogative of the Central and Eastern Europe). After 9/11 the question of imperialism and its origins has arisen again. Ania Loobma, for instance, writes in her work “Colonialism/Postcolonialism” about the change in the approach to the postcolonialism which is nowadays closely coupled with globalization and, this time American, imperialism.

It is obvious that the postcolonial dimension in literary studies is connected with the realization of the “transitional” facet of the postcolonial cultures and writings. A deep analysis of the „transitional” condition in which contemporary Ukrainian writers and literature found themselves is given in the book by Tamara

Hundorova "Transit Culture. Symptoms of the Postcolonial Trauma". Some provocative and controversial observations which fueled this article are also given in the book "Zone of Transition: On the End of Post-Communism" by Boris Buden.

Moreover, the author of the article considers so called neocolonialism alongside with the paradoxes of the transition from totalitarian to post-totalitarian reality. It is quite possible to observe some "neocolonial" and "totalitarian" features within the democratic system which replaced the Soviet system. It is shown in the article how these paradoxes of the "transitional" state are reflected in the post-Soviet literature. At the same time, it is important to underline that the scholars affirm that today the notion of "neocolonialism" exists alongside with the concept "postcolonialism". According to Ania Loomba, one and the same country may be concurrently postcolonial (being de facto an independent state) and neocolonial (being economically and/or culturally dependent). Besides, such dependence may be not immediate, but economic, cultural and (to some extent) political. The above-mentioned book by Boris Buden shows how democratic system may become the source of neocolonialism affecting post-communist states. Thereupon the scholar points to the phenomena of "catching up revolutions", which are believed to initiate the turn to the best (i.e. democratic) way of development of the post-communist states; „cultural memory“; „historical amnesia“; „retro-utopia“ etc. which "develop" in the post-communist countries after the democratic changes took place.

Special attention is paid in the paper to the "construction" of the Eastern Europe by the Western Europe and vice versa (this process is thoroughly considered in Tamara Hundorova's work on "transit culture"). A similar procedure of creating (by western orientalists) an image of the East by rule of contraries with the West is described in "Orientalism" by Edward Said. The same negative images (which are often exaggerated) of the Soviet realia often appear in the writings by Ukrainian writer Irena Karpa.

Though it may seem paradoxical, but it is possible to apply the categories of totalitarianism and utopianism to democracy. Here one may resort to the reflections of Michael Foucault (on "biopolitics") and Giorgio Agamben (who has remarked that

“Today it is not the city but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West”), Jacques Derrida (on “the democracy to come” as a utopian promise of better future) So, as Leszek Koczanowicz puts it while analyzing the ideas of Agamben, it is obvious that the same mechanisms which power totalitarianism are also present within democracy, and they may be launched at any time. The features of “totalitarianism” (as a metaphor) are for example shown by Viktor Pelevin in his novel “Generation «P»”. The writer reflects on the society of consumption propaganda, i.e. advertising and its impact on the consumer.

The author of the article outlines a few versions of the interpretation of the contemporary Ukrainian writers’s (Juri Andrukhovych, Serhiy Zhadan, Irena Karpa, Jevhenia Kononenko, Viktor Pelevin) works dealing with post-communist reality, transition to democratic society, postcolonial trauma and the danger of emerging of “totalitarian” (even though just metaphorically) or/and neocolonial beginnings in democratic system. The conclusion is made that the writers deal with these questions quite differently. Some of them escape from reality to “retro-utopia” (Juri Andrukhovych); some try to aggressively reject and scorn the Soviet past (Irena Karpa). Serhiy Zhadan instead tries to overcome the “historical amnesia” and the imperfection of “cultural memory”, that is why he is not totally rejecting his Soviet past. Perhaps the most significant writing reflecting his views is “Voroshylivgrad” in which the idea of “transition” is clearly inscribed. As Tamara Hundorova has noted, Zhadan “invokes one to live within the frame of responsibility and memory of the past”. Special attention is paid in the paper to the analysis of the novel “Imitation” by Evgenia Kononenko. The writer has pointed to the problems with which the Ukrainian people encountered after the collapse of the USSR. Kononenko demonstrates the collision of the two worlds: one of the post-Soviet Ukraine and the other is of the democratic and free market-based Western world. It is shown in the novel how the two paradigms of values confront, and how that conflict affects the post-Soviet people, their world-view, attitude to money etc.