

**SOVIET CULTURAL COLONIALISM:  
CULTURE AND POLITICAL DOMINATION  
IN THE LATE 1940s-EARLY 1950s ROMANIA**

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**Abstract:** The paper analyses the potential of a theoretical comparison between communism and colonialism, focusing on the cultural dimension of the Stalinization process in Eastern Europe. The paper applies this theoretical perspective to late 1940s-early 1950s Romanian culture in relation with the appropriation of culture by the communist regime within the late 1940s political and ideological shift in Eastern Europe. The approach uses as a background for its argumentation a theoretical debate which started 2001 and has continued until today (Moore 2001, Kovačević 2008), also reinterpreting on a series of theories developed during as well as at the end of the Cold War (Kulski 1959, Kolarz 1964, Horvath 1972, Katsenelinboigen 1990). The paper uses a series of conceptual tools such *cultural transfer*, *cultural dependences*, *cultural identity*, *cultural export*, which are applied for the first time to the Romanian culture.

**Keywords:** colonialism, imperialism, cultural colonialism, sovietising, cultural transfer, cultural dependences, cultural identity, cultural export

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**1. Introduction:  
colonialism, cultural contact, transfer or cultural dependence?**

The concept of *colonialism* is, together with *imperialism*, debatable and problematic when discussed at the cultural level and particularly in the context of analysing cultural inferences (and I would use here the concepts *transfers* and *dependence* which Even-Zohar has promoted, with respect to a different area, in a series of articles on cultural polysystem theory). That is why an attempt to connect the issue with the field of communist and post-communist studies (areas suggesting, at a first reading, no similitudes whatsoever) can appear even more problematic and maybe meaningless. However, such an attempt has been made

more than once, several times during the Cold War (Kulski 1959, Kolarz 1964, Horvath 1972) and also, although in isolated cases, after the fall of the Iron Curtain (Katsenelinboigen 1990, Chioni Moore 2001, Kovačević 2008). The topic was then approached within the post-communism, respectively in the context of post-colonialist academic debates. The general absence of a dialogue between the field of colonial and post-colonial studies and that of communism and post-communism (despite the mentioned cases, rather isolated and yet significant from the perspective of the present research), has been analysed by Moore, in his 2001 study “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?”<sup>1</sup>, while raising the question of what I consider the consequence of this lack of communication and that is, the approach towards communist and post- communist realities through the lenses of colonialism and respectively, post-colonialism.

*In view of these postcolonial-post-Soviet parallels, two silences are striking. The first is the silence of postcolonial studies today on the subject of the former Soviet sphere. And the second, mirrored silence is the failure of scholars specializing in the formerly Soviet-controlled lands to think of their regions in the useful if by no means perfect postcolonial terms (Moore 2001:115).*

Thus, the present analysis uses as a background for the argumentation precisely the series of theories developed during but also at the end of the Cold War, and restarted as a debate in 2001, with the post-communism, respectively post-colonialism dimensions (Moore 2001, Kovačević 2008 and in Romania, by a special issue, in 2001, of the *Echinox Journal* on Postcolonialism and Post-communism), approaching the generally ignored connection between the two areas and as a consequence of this connection, the reading through the colonial lenses of communism and in particular the process of cultural sovietisation of the Eastern European (‘satellite’) countries, Romania among them.

The main interrogation of this analysis is whether and if an approximation is possible at the conceptual level between the areas of colonialism and communism (focusing on the beginning of the Cold War period but discussing, in connection, the more recent theories on post-communism and post-colonialism) and if this approximation can be achieved, how could we approach in this context (and what motivates this approach) the case of the Romanian culture as subject to the sovietising process of culture (within the late 1940s ideological shift), read as a form of ‘cultural colonialism’. The thesis I consider is that, despite consistent counterarguments (based mainly on the distinct historical and ideological contexts), there are several features, mechanisms and processes related to the areas of

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<sup>1</sup> Moore explains this absence of a dialogue: “It is difficult to theorize a silence – that is, this lack of dialogue between current postcolonial critique and scholarship on Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. On the postcolonial side, a historical indebtedness to three-worlds theory is one cause of silence ... In the three-worlds theory, Western Europe and North America constitute the First, the socialist economies the Second, and all that remains- largely the world’s economically weakest states-by default becomes the Third. An enormous and honorable political commitment to the Third World has been central to much in three-worlds theorizing, the ancestor of postcolonial critique” ( Moore 2001:116–117).

the colonial and, respectively, communism studies that allow the interpretation of the Eastern European Cold War realities on the basis of concepts emerging from the colonial and post-colonial discourse. Thus, the paper analyses a series of concepts in correlation with the main one (*cultural colonialism*), concepts such as *cultural transfer*, *cultural dependence* (using as a support Itamar Even-Zohar's theory on *cultural interference*, but applying them for the first time to the Eastern European space) as well as the perspective on sovietising process as a phenomenon of *exporting culture*. The latter is applied in the Romanian case through a series of figures and coordinates associated with Soviet cultural 'colonialism', important both in quantity (massive translations) and quality (considering exporting and exported ideology).

## 2. Cultural contact or colonialism?

"Colonization colonizes minds and emotions as well as bodies, land, and labor"

Brown 1993:663

The question posed in the title above (belonging to Stephen W. Silliman) shows, as a top of an iceberg, the difficulties and dilemmas related to *colonialism* when analysed from the cultural point of view (as well as, in the case of the studies on communism, important concepts such as *Sovietization* or *totalitarianism* also raise multiple problems). Taking into consideration the complexity and difficulty in themselves of the topics of colonialism and respectively cultural sovietisation (together with the related concepts), the challenge is to see, considering several theories starting with the 1950s and continuing until recently, whether we can speak of a Soviet imperialism and/or colonialism and particularly of their cultural manifestation (discussion applied – in the second part of the analysis - on the case of the late 1940s Romanian culture).

Although the difficulty of establishing a unique perspective on *colonialism* has been mentioned more than once, the use of the term and its application to the communist realities make necessary the recording, if not of an exhaustive definition, then at least of the canonical attempts to circumscribe it.

Ronald J. Horvath, whose theory on colonialism in relation to the Soviet power relations with the Eastern European societies (and, especially of interest here, their cultures) will make the subject of a more detailed analysis below, elaborates in his study, entitled *A Definition of Colonialism* (1972), a definition of colonialism based precisely on the concept of power and domination:

*Colonialism is a form of domination – the control by individuals and groups over the territory and/or behaviour of other individuals and groups. Colonialism has also been seen as a form of exploitation, with emphasis on economic variables, as in the Marxist-Leninist literature, and as a culture-change process, as in anthropology; these various points of departure need not conflict, however, and*

the choice of domination as a focus here will not exclude the culture-change dimension of the phenomenon [*emphasis added*]. *The idea of domination is closely related to the concept of power.* (Horvath 1972:46)

A second definition I consider necessary to mention is a classical definition by Edward W. Said which goes further, discussing (as most theories consider necessary) the concept of *colonialism* together with that of imperialism – “‘imperialism’ means the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory”; ‘colonialism’ which is almost always the consequence of imperialism, is the implementing of settlements on distant territory” (1994:9). Said mentions in relation to the concept of *imperialism* a previous description by Michael Doyle (1986), which can be easily connected to Horvath’s theory, which will be detailed below. Thus, as Doyle argues, “Empire is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social or *cultural dependence*. Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing and maintaining an empire” (1986: 45). The connection we suggested with Horvath’s theory is that the latter used the same vocabulary and perspective writing previously on formal and informal imperialism (the latter is relevant for the approach suggested on Soviet domination).

But before focusing more closely on this theory, there are, for the sake of chronology, some previous contributions to be taken into account regarding the potential reading of the methods and processes specific to the Soviet power system and cultural model implementation into Eastern Europe. Thus, the first intuitions on the permeability between the two perspectives and particularly the approach of the communist realities (still hidden behind the Iron Curtain at the time) appeared since the 1950s, with Kulski (1959) arguing – as others will also agree later - that while the Soviet anti-colonialist discourse was the visible and one of the most prominent propaganda weapons, the realities within the Soviet and Eastern European satellite countries (and cultures, as Kulski is also interested in this level) could however be compared at certain levels with the situation of colonised spaces: “Can one, however, imagine a worse type of colonialism than one which does not allow the subject nations to choose freely not only the themes but even the form of art?” (Kulski 1959:124).

A few years later, in 1964, Kolarz brings even closer together the two concepts in his book *Communism and Colonialism*, in which he argues that Soviet communism is a modern version of Russian colonialism, the USSR being a colonial empire itself in the manner of treating its national minorities and the satellite countries.

Essential in its complexity is – both in which the phenomenon of colonialism in general and the perspective which correlated the phenomenon with the Soviet case – as announced above, Ronald J. Horvath’s 1970s approach. Similarly to Said’s approach, two decades later, Horvath perceives the two concepts, *imperialism* and *colonialism* as closely connected and both as forms of what he calls *intergroup*

*domination* (Horvath 1972:47). Extremely interesting is the ground of separation he suggests between the two, ground which constitutes a distinction between his and Said's later perspective and makes Horvath's approach more open to the connection between colonialism and communism, is the latter's arguing that "the important difference between colonialism and imperialism appears in the presence or absence of significant numbers of permanent settlers in the colony from the colonizing power" (1972:47).

The mention of "absence of significant numbers of permanent settlers" is significant for the Soviet case, which Horvath explicitly places within colonialism, speaking of the colonial/ imperial features (initially not distinguished as separate) of China and the Soviet Union: "China and the Soviet Union condemn America for being an imperialistic power, and yet from one point of view both countries have been and are themselves colonial and imperial powers" (1972:45). Horvath's theory is that the exclusive use of the conceptual complex around colonialism within Western discourse regarding their domination upon what was called the Third World (1972:48), is restricted without support, while the phenomena are much more comprehensive and allow a complex classification. Thus, Horvath makes the distinction between "(1) formal colonialism, (2) informal colonialism, (3) formal (direct) imperialism (administrative imperialism), and (4) informal imperialism (Horvath 1972:49), the Soviet case, the author argues, being included in the last category, as

*Informal imperialism is synonymous with neo-colonialism, semi-colonialism, and economic imperialism and is a type of intergroup domination in which formal administrative controls are absent and power is channelled through a local elite [emphasis added]. Under this definition, the satellites of the Soviet Union and British-dominated territories such as Northern Nigeria fall into the same class, to be differentiated later on the basis of the relationship variable* (Horvath 1972:49).

The Soviet 'satellites' are also mentioned as such, as Horvath considers the concept as proper for this type of *imperialism*. However, while I agree with the Soviet Union's classification within this category, through the features enumerated by Horvath's definition, in which the terminology is concerned, I support the option for the concept of cultural *colonialism* in the case of the process of Sovietization (option detailed below, when *Sovietization* itself will be discussed), following Said's distinction between the imperialism as expressing the imperial theory and attitudes, while colonialism would be the implementation of the ideology. But I shall detail this option below, as in the presentation of Horvath's theory there is still one point which deserves attention, this time illustrating the features of 'culture' as part of a complex dynamic process. In his perspective, in all of the cases, the colonial power domination functions at cultural level as a phenomenon of *transfer* between a 'donor culture' and a 'host culture', "with a vast amount of cultural transfer going, as the name implies, from donor to host. (1972:47).

The concept of *cultural transfer* (which I consider particularly relevant when discussing the case of Romanian culture, due to its boarder or crossroad placement in Europe and thus its vulnerability to cultural interference and transfers) as part of the colonization process (and applicable to the Soviet case and its satellite cultures) allows a connection, as anticipated previously, with Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theories and his preoccupation for cultural transfer and interference. The connection can start from the conceptual similitude when referring to the same phenomenon of *cultural transfer*: If Horvath spoke about *donor* and *host cultures*, Even-Zohar coins the notions of *source* and respectively *target cultures*. Going one step further, the latter speaks of the resulting phenomenon of interference, defined as "a procedure emerging in the environment of contacts, one where transfer has taken place" (Even-Zohar 2010). Interested himself in extensive classifications, Even-Zohar speaks among several other categories of cultural transfer about the case in which power and dominance (again similar with Horvath's perspective) is the cause of the transfer from source to target: "A culture may be selected as a source culture when it is dominant due to extra-cultural conditions. Naturally, a dominant culture often has prestige, but the dominant position does not necessarily result from this prestige" (Even-Zohar 2010). Although the explicit reference Horvath made to the Soviet Union is absent in Even-Zohar's classification, the similarities between the two argumentations and use of concepts, as well as the comparison of the features described above and the case of the sovietising of the 'satellite' cultures allow us an extension of the category towards the applicability on the Soviet case and particularly the Romanian case. A point, however, which raises several questions regarding this type cultural 'colonialism' is the question of resistance to the cultural transfer achieved by political force: "Power dominance of the imperialistic kind thus forces contacts on a system and may therefore engender interference in spite of the system's *resistance*. Yet in cases when the target system is not yet established – *or in crisis* – it might not develop any rejecting mechanism" (Even-Zohar 2010). The problem raises questions when the category is confronted with the situation of the cultures in Eastern Europe and the reactions of the intellectuals when their culture becomes 'captive' of the "Soviet cultural homogeneity and monotony" (Rolf 2009: 601) and a closer view on the situation at the end of the 1940s in Romania (but not only there) the *lack of resistance* of these intellectuals speak indeed of a culture characterised by crisis as well as fear (as the repression phenomenon was extremely aggressive between 1948–1953).

While the theories presented above were designed during the Cold War, the perception of the Soviet Union as an empire and a colonial power continues after the fall of the Iron Curtain, starting with the period of political shift. In 1990, Katsenelinboigen characterised the USSR as an empire built on several circles or levels, Eastern Europe – including Romania, of course – being part of the third circle, that of countries which did not belong formally to the Soviet Union but were subordinated to it, particularly "since the latter's troops may suppress any attempt they make to extract themselves from the empire" (Katsenelinboigen

1990:93). The last detail, i.e. regarding the army, is significant for the theory of Soviet colonialism, as colonizing also involved, in the classical sense of the concept, a military occupation, as well as other characteristics which can be found as common in the case of the Soviet occupation of the Eastern bloc (political control and lack of political independence, domination and restrictions on all levels, from economy, education to culture and circulation of people and cultural products (books, periodicals etc.): “by most classic measures: lack of sovereign power, restrictions on travel, military occupation, lack of convertible specie, a domestic economy ruled by the dominating state, and forced education in the colonizer’s tongue-Central Europe’s nations were indeed under Russo-Soviet control from roughly 1948 to 1989 or 1991”, Moore 2001:121).

The evolution in parallel of the two disciplines (one focused on the colonial and postcolonial phenomena and the other on the study of communism and more recently, post-communism) was however interrupted, as it happened before with the few (yet significant) perspectives mentioned, in 2001, by Moore’s analysis of the possible connection between the postcolonial discourse and the post-Soviet one, while in Romania, in the same year, a special issue of the *Echinox Journal/ Cahiers de l’Echinox*, edited by Corin Braga and focused on the two phenomena (separated but also in dialogue) appeared in Cluj-Napoca. While several problems from the few (yet interesting) studies in the journal concerning the phenomena *in connection* also deserve attention, Moore’s study is essential not only for (re)opening an academic debate on the conceptual dialogue and extension between the two areas, but also through his innovative perspective on the sovietisation phenomenon. Thus, using the Western canonical colonialism for a reference, he speaks of the Soviet case as one of “reverse-cultural colonizations” (Moore 2001:121). By suggesting a possible application of the postcolonial theoretical framework on the post-Communist case, Moore can be a model to follow in his attempt to establish a theoretical and conceptual dialogue between two areas of – I would call them – ‘post-’traumatic experiences insisting however on the possible approximation between the two situations in the recent decades, of recovering territories and identities (on the same direction, Kovačević spoke later – in 2008 – about the Eastern-European *cultural ‘blackness’*, which is being ‘bleached’, 1–3). However, this is not the direction the present analysis is interested in, although the history of the conceptual approaches on a possible Eastern European ‘colonialism’ is of great interest for its argumentation. On the other hand, the scarce presence of such comparative approaches on the (post)colonial and (post)communist phenomena justifies the reference to studies which, although being interested in the contemporary recovery of the former communist spaces after the ‘postcolonial’ recovery model, are not, however, equally interested in the Soviet cultural ‘colonization’ itself, although they necessarily refer themselves to the historical background. Such an attempt to bring together (although the comparison remains a rather distant parallel throughout most of the studies present in the volume) is the previous announced initiative of the *Echinox Journal / Cahiers de l’Echinox* 2001 thematic issue on post-colonialism and post-communism, edited by Corin Braga.

If the attempt to establish the dialogue between the two areas is probably premature (although perfectly synchronised with, for instance, Moore's argumentation on the topic), as the majority of studies (preoccupied by post-colonialism *or* post-communism) show, there are however a few approaches which consider the application of the post-colonial theoretical and conceptual pattern on the post-communist case. The most important belongs to the theorist Ion Bogdan Lefter, who agrees that, despite the lack of *formal* affiliation to the Soviet Union, Romania as well as the other countries in the Eastern European bloc "have not been independent *de facto*. ... The presence of the Red Army on their territories – the author argues – played the role of a political pressure and coercion factor" (Lefter 2001). Despite the fact that the Red Army troops withdrew from Romania in 1958 (earlier than from other Soviet satellite countries), the political and cultural control remained, the sovietised Romania maintaining the characteristics imposed at all levels: the paternalist state, controlling all political, social, economical or cultural activities (similarly to the colonised countries, especially that in the Romanian case the Soviet control remained in the formula suggested above by Horvath when speaking about the imperial domination as being "*channelled through a local elite*" (Horvath 1972:49).

### **3. Implementing cultural colonialism and the colonised culture. The case of the Sovietization of late 1940s Romanian Culture**

"The empire tried in every way to impose its culture: Soviet propaganda, socialist realism, And Quiet Flows the Don and all the rest have been "exported" to us. In the 1950s, there was a specialised publishing house called Cartea Rusă [The Russian Book] and so on and so forth."

Lefter 2001

After examining the colonial facet and several attempts of applying its features to the communist studies, the next and final step in the analysis would be to justify the conceptual option for *colonialism* and verify its consistence in relation with the imposed terminology concerning *Sovietization* and furthermore, to study the option for *cultural colonialism*, by moving the argumentation in the field of culture.

First, the terminological issue: can be *Sovietization* (in the formula 'cultural Sovietization' at least partially be associated with the suggested concept of cultural 'colonialism'? As already anticipated, *Sovietization* is an essential concept to take into consideration when analysing the processes and phenomena taking place in the Eastern European (the Romanian case included) societies and cultures starting with the late 1940s. After the Second World War, Romanian realities were the "product of two simultaneous processes: *Sovietization* and *satellitization*. The 'Iron Curtain' was mainly the result of the alternation of what Caroline Kennedy-Pipe called "strategies of occupation and consolidation"" (Tismăneanu 2009:5). Moreover, the concept of *Sovietization* is essential for a discussion on the Soviet

strategies of imposing and generalising its control, domination discourses, strategies and mechanisms to be considered when establishing a dialogue with the features of the colonial discourse and practices. To define *Sovietization* involves a vast consideration of processes and mechanisms and therefore involves separate studies. However, its main features need to be mentioned in order to achieve the comparison with those of cultural (informal) *imperialism* mentioned previously or *colonialism*, as suggested here. Thus, Rupnik's definition (1989) gathers the features of the concept of *Sovietization* around the idea of control, arguing that "the *Sovietization* of East-Central Europe meant total *control* of society by each country's Communist Party, but also total Soviet control of the Communist Parties themselves" (qtd.in Connelly 1999:295). This definition corresponds to Horvath's classification, in which *informal imperialism* (synonymous with neo-colonialism, semi-colonialism, and economic imperialism) means the exercise of power through the local (political) elite, in this case the Communist Party leaders. This mediate exercise of domination (specific to this type of informal imperialism but, as proven, to the fundamental Soviet attitude as well) has been defined by Connelly as *self-Sovietization*, as the "Soviet security concern kept the channels of information to Eastern Europe narrow and left Communists there no choice but to discover and implement the Soviet system themselves" (Connelly 1999:55).

The term is accurate when we examine the fact closer and accept that while at surface (and at the level of propaganda) it was 'voluntary' or *self-Sovietization*, actually the entire process was controlled closely by the Soviet centre. However, there are opinions, such as Tismaneanu's (2009), who claim the process included the voluntary participation and not only an imposed control but in some cases the *self-Sovietization* (in Connelly's terms):

*The Stalinist blueprint for Eastern Europe was based on a unique strategy of transforming national political cultures into carbon copies of the USSR. The leaders of the local communist parties and the growing administrative and secret police apparatuses enthusiastically implemented this blueprint, transplanting and even enhancing the characteristics of the Soviet type of totalitarian system [emphasis added]* (Connelly 1999:107).

There is an entire specialised field of research to decide between the two or establish the precise limits between control and repression on the one hand, and the voluntary following of the model, the separation which is not the object of this study, on the other. What is really of interest here is the the generalization of the model, therefore of control and particularly the functioning of the concept when applied to culture. Thus, in culture Sovietization functioned as a principle identical to all other fields ("Soviet literature and the arts exist *to serve political ends* and must spurn the Western notion of 'art for art's sake' [emphasis added]" (Bolsover 170), although the practice and rules were specific. The label Soviet "regimenting of intellectual life and culture" (Tismaneanu 2003:109) is currently in the literature on the situation of Romanian culture, probably because it suggests the unnatural way – for a culture – of becoming uniform and obedient under the rule of the party-state apparatus, "a powerful agent when it came to Sovietizing culture" (Rolf

2009:628), a process that many, among whom Malte Rolf (in a study on “Sovietizing Culture under Stalinism”), do not see as a voluntary or enthusiastic acceptance. However, while the latter may have been possible in some cases due to the privileges offered to those showing such an enthusiasm, it is probably the case of individuals rather than of ‘cultures’. The process is thus defined – in Rolf’s terms - as a “long road to a fixed set of Soviet cultural references” controlled by a “wide variety of institutions, agents, pressure groups, and cultural activists participating in shaping the Soviet cosmos” (Rolf 2009:601).

The uniformity resulting from obedience to a model (“Soviet culture produced and reproduced itself by repeatedly referring to a cluster of symbols and rituals defined as ‘Soviet’.”, Rolf 2009:604), can be explained in terms of standardization and carbon copies (as shown before), as the language (the famous ‘wooden language’ of the time), themes and perspectives were unified almost until reaching the Orwellian dystopian vision of culture.

*This monad-like unity resulted in the widespread standardization and dull monotony of the cultural landscape. [...] Soviet cultural homogeneity and monotony have often been explained as the result of the levelling and oppressive effects of totalitarian censorship. [...] No doubt, official guidelines and censorship played a crucial role in shaping culture in the totalitarian dictatorship. [...] They all took part in this lengthy process of Sovietizing culture and establishing the symbolic landscape of the union’s territories. [...] Sovietizing culture was a work in progress, and various experts of cultural production had an influential voice when it came to defining an adequate “Soviet style” (Rolf 2009:601).*

This complex process labelled as *Stalinization*, involving the radical cultural reshaping or mutation towards the carbon-copy of the model, with its implantation and transplantation of characteristics of the Soviet model, with the help of a large variety of tools (from privileges for “those who had learned to speak Soviet” to repression mechanism whose victims were “those who were reluctant to join in” 628) justifies therefore a conceptual association with *colonialism* (as defined by Said) rather than with *imperialism* (in his own formula), in the formula suggested here, *cultural colonialism*. The option is justified by the fact that *imperialism* (perceived as the theory or complex of attitudes), although existing in its informal, unrecognised form in the Soviet case, the latter’s politics was not, however, restricted to this, but was, as previously shown, ‘implemented’ – applied and enhanced – in the satellite countries.

Further on, I shall try to summarize what constituted the implementation of this ‘cultural colonialism’ starting in the late 1940s Romania, together with the entire Eastern European bloc. The cultural colonisation had two levels, the first, consisting of a generalized transmission of the ideological ‘canon’ represented the first level, which was materialised by the second level, the vast, quantitative cultural ‘export’.

In its ‘colonizing’ process, the Soviet centre found essential to promote its ideological message for culture (extremely monotonous, as described before, and

yet extremely persistent and ubiquitous within propaganda) and request imitation from the cultures which were meant to become satellites and mere imitators of the ‘homo Sovieticus’ pattern – in both life and culture. This Stalinization principle presents similarities with the colonization mentality, as it was based on the idea that the colonized (or Stalinized) culture *benefits* from a positive, civilising or freeing influence from a superior culture. The ideological texts starting with the late 1940s in Romanian press never cease to express this principle, in praising the priceless Soviet help and model. However, the ‘model’ was more than a figure of speech, as the Soviet canon – Zhdanov’s and socialist realist principles - had to be obeyed (in the ‘regimenting’ style described above), a process which accepts comparison with classical colonialism, also implying “*a canon that depends on discursive criteria established in the metropolitan center*” (Mignolo 1993:125). Furthermore, the obedience required by the superior centre (in reshaping the former, degenerate – again the colonial discourse is easily recognisable – bourgeois culture into the robust ‘new’ manner) did not take place merely at the discourse level, as legal measures appear to regulate cultural production and reproduction, such as the Decree for Book Editing and Dissemination from January, 14, 1949 (reproduced and praised in articles published by *Flacăra*, the official cultural periodical, as a “New instrument for stimulating literary creation”). The decree mirrors the cultural policies specific to cultural Sovietization: nationalisation and centralisation of publishing houses and all printing, control over the copyright, control over all cultural publications and reproductions etc. The process of imposing the ‘metropolitan’ canon is complex and well organised, balancing ‘stimulating’ instruments – a complex system of awards and subventions – with repression:

*First, a series of writers are accused of collaboration [with the enemy], then of ideological errors and pacts with the German fascist, which creates panic and confusion among writers, who fear massive retaliation and as a consequence enter the Communist Party or respond to immediate political orders, writing frantically about translations of Soviet literature. [...] In bookstores, publishing houses and libraries the purge of older books is radical. [...] Many private or public libraries were burned, tens of thousands of books were thrown away, transported in dark basements and cellars, some of the most important archives were set to fire (M. Popa 2001).*

However, the dark face of repression (including the phenomenon of purge) is a different matter, while what interests the present study is how within this cultural ‘colonialism’, the Soviet model was exported in the phenomenon of acquiring and generalising its control through the local political elites.

*The circulation of a socialist realist literature, already produced under strong heteronomous conditions, was politically subordinated to its double hypostasis, the export and the import. The context of the start of the Cold War, characterized by extreme bipolarization of political and literary issues, is precisely the context in which the “expanding” ability of socialist realism could have been maximal or on the contrary, show its limits (I. Popa 2003:261).*

This circulation and expansion (in other words the *cultural transfer* process presented above) of the culture of the centre had two embodiments: what we can call the *direct* transfer – through a massive export of literature (process detailed below), translated or not – and the *indirect* transfer, resulting from the local literature, produced as a consequence of the ‘colonial’ model exposure. While a further comment will be made on the direct cultural export or transfer, a few excerpts (repetitive themselves and yet just a small part of the massive production of similar texts of the time) from the ideological texts – translations or local productions – invading the Romanian 1948-1949 press and volumes can offer a clear image of the ideological level of the Soviet cultural ‘colonization’:

*I have mentioned the role of educators that writers had to play in relation to their readers. But, first of all, they were themselves being “re-educated” through Soviet theoretical materials (reflecting and strengthening the new socialist order, Soviet art and literature teach all working people to assimilate genuine human ethics, the Communist ethics (Trofimov 1951:20).*

The Soviet materials were strengthened by their local carbon-copy imitations - articles or books copying the ideas and wooden language of the ‘metropolitan’ centre:

*There is no doubt that by constantly learning from the works of the classics of Marxism-Leninism and their great followers, being inspired by the example of Soviet literature [...] and fighting until the end against any outburst of the rotten bourgeois ideology, our writers will have increasing successes on the way of developing literary creation, filled of the spirit of the Party, a weapon of mass struggles” (“Probleme actuale...” 1951:212).*

The writer had not only to be familiar with this doctrine but also to actually master its intimate mechanisms in order to make it the basis of their work and, moreover, to be able to convince and educate others according to it. Cultural elites had to become

*Fighters of the front of building socialism, and not simple witnesses, the writers are connected to the people’s work. [...] from the same feeling of brotherhood between the poet and the worker, both in the same class position, emerges, of course, the depiction in our literature of the Plan [...] which became a comrade of the working men [emphasis added]. [...] Workers work [...], peasants work [...] and progressive intellectuals work and the same do the writers, animated by their great mission to contribute to the education of working people in the spirit of socialism, to depict the new reality in valuable artistic achievements, the working class struggle, the victories of the people, the moral beauty of the free man. [...] Assimilating the Marxist-Leninist learning is a task given to the writers. Enlarging their theoretical knowledge, which will help them observe life in its essence, working with a gardener’s passion to perfecting their artistic craft, our writers will create the great work people are expecting from them. To create the sincere work [...] expressing through literature the essential things in life: the truth of class struggle, the fight against exploiters, and the fight for socialism, for the new man (Popescu 1950:217, 219, 232).*

The ideological message was therefore aggressively disseminated and promoted and its assimilation by the culture (now reduced to the status of a satellite) was imperative and immediate. The standardised discourse was ubiquitous not only through its repetitiveness but also through the impressive quantity – the cultural transfer is not only monotonous and unidirectional (from centre to the ‘colonised’ periphery) but also massive. The quantity was both exported (through the monopoly of publishing and translations and the impressive number of copies of ‘canonical’ writings) and requested (the local writers being asked to produce as much as possible, actually to [re]produce the model, but for local use and not for export).

At the first level, i.e. of the massive ‘export’ of Soviet literature, through translations, a paradox was characterising the period. While in the interwar period the Romanian book market was invaded by Western literature and the most recent French or British literature constituted the model due to its innovations (culture becoming donor or source through their prestige, in Even-Zohar’s terms) during the Soviet cultural ‘colonization’ the target or host culture needs to accept a massive cultural transfer imposed by extra cultural grounds, political domination. One of the arguments in rejecting the conceptual framework of colonialism in the case of the Communist studies was the absence of a language imposed to the satellite countries. It was in return, a ‘colonization by translations’ (through the massiveness of the process), although the language issue itself is not that simple: on the one hand, the Soviet anti-colonialist message was explicitly rejecting imperial strategies (promoting in return a ‘voluntary’ union and alignment or ‘regimenting’, in Tismaneanu’s terms) and on the other hand there were, as Lefter emphasises, tendencies to implement Russian in a form or another, especially at the beginning of the Sovietization process. Regarding translations, the export was impressive, both in quantity and in procedures:

*In 1949, the writers considered emblematical for the Soviet socialist realism, such as Gorki, Ostrovski, Sholokhov, Fadeiev, Simonov, Ehrenburg and so on, are massively translated in Romania. In 1953, as results from a balance of the first years of functioning of the Russian Book publishing house (which was part of the infrastructure organised in Romania so as to make possible this intensive literary transfer), this publishing house only had published so far 1650 titles in 22 550 000 copies (I. Popa 2003:262–263).*

The impressive quantity (15 000 copies for a regular book, around 40 000 for a ‘bestseller’, published in as many as 6 to 8 editions each), a truly intensive cultural ‘colonization’ needs, because of its proportions, to be justified and explained by those in charge with the vast infrastructure as the result of an enthusiastic, large-scale publishing zeal, resulting from a local “thirst for knowing the experience and achievements of the liberating friendly country” (M. Popa). The representatives of the Russian Book publishing house (part of a larger association for the Soviet-Romanian connections, ARLUS) admit (or claim, as it could be a simple propaganda statement, while censorship was ubiquitous) as a form of openness their lack of criteria of selection of themes or value (quantity was the only one

requested), again in a radical opposition from the complex publishing house plannings from the Romanian interwar period.

Despite the fact that the translation ‘enthusiasm’ was directed only from the Soviet centre to the satellites (in comparison with thousands of Soviet titles, only a few Eastern-European writers are translated into Russian – four in 1950, six in 1951, and only one contemporary writer), the local writers are requested, as shown above, to produce (actually reproduce) large quantities themselves. “The metamorphosis of the intellectuals into ‘workers with the mind’ [...] served to demonstrate that they were not in fact different from the masses. [...] Entering the general production process, he has, *as any worker, an amount of work to achieve*” (Osman 2004:50).

Their personal *projects* disappear and are replaced by massive, common *plans*, parts of the State Plan. Especially during the first economic plan (1949), cultural press witnesses a national obsession for this idea of being part of the *Plan*. The following ones are samples in this respect from interviews with artists published in the 1949 Romanian cultural press:

*“It is wonderful to say out loud: Yes, comrade Party, I am ready to receive comrade Plan “(Gică Luteş). “Previously, the writer had projects. Now, following the example given by the working class led by its party, our party, he has a plan. [...] My plan? Four books. It’s not much. But socialist competitions shall also start within literature. I’ll try to exceed my plan and exceed myself. [...] The field activity, in the living core of things, in plants, mines, building sites, in villages will be of course one of the main preoccupations of the Writers’ Association<sup>2</sup> in the Popular Republic of Romania” (Eugen Jebeleanu). “This year I’ll try, through efforts, to improve my craft” (Lucian Bratu). “I also plan at least four works on the subject of the work of conscious peasants (sic) ... who clearly perceive their duties and rights” (Gh.Vida)” (Selejan 2007:19–21).*

As the amount of work precedes the quality (but not the ideological ‘quality’), the number of books or poems, etc. becomes more important and each of them promises (actually the discourse is of ‘engaging’) to produce four or six books/poetry volumes/plays for the year to come, and shows a necessary ‘modesty’ regarding the number of the already produced volumes. This rhetoric of the ‘workers with the mind’ has been maintained for decades, Ceaușescu himself being confronted with figures showing the amount of ‘production’ of the ‘workers with the mind’ as an argument for the Writers’ Union requiring extra funding<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the materialisation of Sovietization consisted in what can be defined, at different levels and in certain degrees, as massive *cultural transfer, export* or *colonialism*, a quantitative and ideological were organised cultural domination.

<sup>2</sup> In Romanian “Societății Scriitorilor din R.P.R.”

<sup>3</sup> “Comrade George Macovescu: ‘Our activity is being performed according to the indications you gave us. [...] Our production, the writers’ production, comrade general secretary, is the book, the book we produce, the book that reaches the hands of our readers. [...] We have to add that the number is good and we can state that we keep up with the material production, according to the state plan in our country” (Macrea-Toma 2009:147).

#### 4. Conclusions

The question whether there is a possible common ground for two parallel academic approaches remains debatable, as arguments are both in favour and against such an connection of theoretical frameworks. However, more than one theorist has found as challenging the application of the colonialist theoretical and conceptual pattern to communist and post-communist realities and their analyses have proven the permeability of the object to such a perspective. The main problem, the absence of dialogue or silence (in Moore's terms) of the two areas of studies, can be surpassed, as at least a few features of *sovietisation* can be associated to colonialism. On the issue of establishing a dialogue and defining a common vocabulary, despite the fact, as Lefter argues, that "the specific differences are important, but the examining the promixous gender can be useful." More than that, I consider that several features of the colonial phenomenon *can* be applied to the communist case (*the military occupation, the control at all political, social, economic and cultural levels, the paternalist ideological discourse* – which in colonialism was justifying 'colonization' also through "a smokescreen of civilizing 'task' and paternalistic 'development' and 'aid'." (Ashcroft et al. 2006: 47). The gap between the official discourse and the practiced politics (exemplified before in the classical colonialism case) is even more radical in the Soviet case, when comparing its anti-colonialism ideology with its expansionism and aggressive sovietisation.

*By all accounts, the Soviet Union attempted something very different from the Russian Empire it succeeded: instead of declaring itself an empire, it proposed a multilayered "voluntary" union of republics. Though according to the strictest Marxist-Leninist approach, national identities would eventually dissolve into homo Sovieticus (Moore 2001:122–123).*

If the concepts are still problematic and a theoretical dialogue needs a more extensive articulation, there is at least a point in which all researchers of the topic agree and which becomes apparent when analysing closely and comparing the two phenomena and that is the imperialist behaviour with a colonial or semi-colonial implementation of its system (Lefter 2001), while the contemporary realities of the Eastern European former communist bloc and the Romanian space as an "interstitial [Bhabha 1990a, 1990b] [...], borderland" space can be explained easier within the "post-imperial syndrome" or framework (Spiridon 2001).

At the cultural level, the massive and well-organised mechanism and infrastructure of implementing (at a large scale) the Soviet 'blueprint' or model justifies the association between this complex process of domination (in its mechanisms of acquiring and generalising control over culture and all other social areas) and a process of specific cultural (informal) colonization.

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