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Author(s): Piotr Kuhiwczak

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Piotr Kuhiwczak
University of Warwick

How postcolonial is post-communist translation?

The expressions that have been used in relation to events in Eastern Europe after 1989 are noticeably opaque. Revolution is usually described as *velvet*, the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall are *collapsed*, the societies and economies of Eastern Europe are *in transition* while regional nationalisms are commonly described as *re-emerging*. The vagueness of these and many other expressions about Eastern Europe implies that an adequate conceptual framework for the changes which have occurred in Eastern Europe is yet to be worked out. Political scientists, utterly unprepared for the change, have tried to disguise the inadequacy of their theories in relation to the past and present by working out new models of the post - Cold War political order . Since 1989 we have had as many as three major theories: “the end of history”, “ culture wars”, and the total “globalization”. Samuel Huntington’s essay ‘The Clash of Civilizations’ written in 1993 has become particularly popular, because the author offered a simple definition of the world order based on the principle of an inevitable conflict between, what he called “non-West” and the West. Unfortunately, apart from generating a good deal of publicity, these models have not provided us with many new insights. What has been conspicuously missing from the discussion of the end of the Soviet empire is a comparison of the situation in the East with the disintegration of other empires in the past.

This absence has been due to the fact, that unlike the empires built by the Western powers, the decomposition of the Soviet empire has been relatively peaceful, with the wars in Yugoslavia and the conflicts in the Caucasus being exceptions rather than the

rule. But this would be a very superficial view. One suspects there are deeper reasons, which emerge from the contrast between discourses relating to the old empires and the communist world. In the decades following the World War II, the collapse of colonial domination in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific region was greeted in Europe with optimistic enthusiasm. The terms employed for the change were positive. Guerrillas were called “freedom fighters”, “liberation movements” and the “resistance”. The word *nationalism*, if used at all, had a positive meaning, and the newly established states were greeted with considerable optimism. Dictators were called “new leaders”, and the term “decolonization” was applied both to Idi Amin’s misrule in Uganda, and Fidel Castro’s ideological excesses in Cuba. The more recent developments in Eastern Europe were received with far less unconditional enthusiasm. In fact, anxieties were voiced even while the Berlin Wall was coming down. Many German intellectuals, including such distinguished writers as Gunter Grass and Christa Wolff, were keen to prolong the existence of East Germany as an independent state far beyond what the Soviets envisaged. The independence of the Baltic republics was seen by many as a dangerous development at the doorstep of the Soviet Union. On the whole, in contrast to the disintegration of European dominions in Africa in the 1960s, the separatist and nationalistic tendencies in the Soviet sphere of influence were considered more as a threat to stability than a passage to freedom. In the European context the notion of nationalism was not coupled with “liberation” but with ethnic conflict, anti-Semitism, and civil war.

The fact that similar postcolonial phenomena elicited quite different public responses was not accidental. The complex relations between the Western world and the Soviet Union over decades have led to a polarization of public opinion on the issue of communist domination in Eastern Europe. Until recently, it was unusual to see the Soviet Union described as an imperialist power, and the phrase “the evil empire” which

president Reagan coined in the 1980s was considered a gross exaggeration in the West. For decades colonial and postcolonial discourse developed with scanty regard for what was happening in the East, and thus, at present, when Russians themselves are defining the Soviet Union as a colonial power, many specialists in the field of postcolonial theory still find it difficult to adjust their perspective. There is no doubt that this difficulty is of a political nature. From the outset, postcolonial criticism has been the domain of politically committed critics, and although many of them seem less committed than they used to be, they have been slow to admit that perhaps the Soviet Union, with its hundred nations speaking over a hundred languages, yet ruled by one political party, may also have deserved the name of *empire* - even if in its early days it chose the more edifying name of *union*.

But politics is not the only factor which has prevented postcolonial studies from turning its eye towards the former Soviet Union. The other important factor is the immense complexity of colonial relations in Eastern Europe. Although the Soviet Union presented itself as the antithesis of Zarist Russia, its colonial expansion was a clear continuation of zarist policy, the difference being that after the October Revolution, the old Russian imperialism steeped in Byzantine and Slavophile traditions was replaced with Marxist dialectics and social determinism. Extending an historical perspective over the last seventy years makes the East European case even more complicated, since up to the end of the World War I, the Russian Empire had rivals competing for the same territories: Austro-Hungary, Prussia, and the Ottoman Empire in Europe, and China and Japan in Asia. Compared to Russia and the Soviet Union, the histories of French, British, or Spanish domination look relatively simple. Western empires succeeded in conquering and dominating overseas territories because, apart from military force, they used their economic, social, and technological advantages to extend their influence overseas. Equally unproblematic is the Western allocation of guilt and responsibility for the

colonial past. The history of the Western empires is usually presented as the crusade of the rich and cruel North against the poorer and weaker South. A straight line can be traced from the age of slave ships to the Vietnam war.

The news from the East does not permit such clear configuration. Russia's domination was a result of military and political manipulation. The empire grew slowly but steadily, and the conquerors developed a vast range of techniques to subjugate the newly defeated nations, which in many cases were economically and socially more advanced than the conquering power. As a result the empire had to set up a much more complicated system of oppression in order to control subordinated populations than the one associated with Western European imperialism. A detailed analysis of the Russian and Soviet domination reveals yet another truth which postcolonial studies have not paid much attention to, namely, the unheroic story of collaboration,¹ and the issue of ideological propaganda. As a result, the de-colonization of the space between Vladivostok and the Baltic Sea cannot be presented as a clear-cut optimistic narrative. Both the social and national boundaries of the post-communist world are blurred: distinctions between the dominant and the dominated, or the rich colonizer and the former colony cannot be easily established. The ideological priorities of the Soviet Union and the endemic economic inefficiency of the communist system led to the distortion of the relation between the parts of the empire and the centre. As a result, the population living on the peripheries of the empire often enjoyed a better life and more freedom than the majority of the dominant, Russian population. No wonder then, that the map of the former Soviet empire does not conform to the clear-cut North-South divide characteristic of the Western European colonial legacy. It is equally difficult to establish how much of the former empire belongs to the "First World", and how much to the "Third", how much to Europe and how much to Asia.

It will probably take time before postcolonial scholarship adjusts its perspectives as a result of a thorough study of the post-Soviet world. Doubtless, translation studies scholars will also benefit from the analysis of communist and the post-communist translation in the framework of postcolonial studies. In the last few years postcolonial theorists have developed a keen interest in translation, which should be viewed as a positive development, because both postcolonial theory and translation studies are interested in the nature of intercultural exchanges. Postcolonial theory as applied to translation has produced interesting debates about the relationships between “dominant” and “dominated” cultures, “major” and “minor” languages, and cases of cultural appropriation and textual adaptation. Unfortunately, some of the ideological tangles of postcolonial theory have also been transplanted into translation studies, and the debate about translation in postcolonial context too often turns into a politically charged debate about economic inequalities. Let me quote a short passage from Richard Jaquemond which in my view is symptomatic of the marriage between postcolonial theory and translation:

As a result of colonial and postcolonial history, inequality is the main feature of the relationship between Western and Third World languages and cultures, a fact which is bound to carry many implications for North-South translation processes. Meanwhile, because translation theory (as well as literary theory in general) has developed on the almost exclusive basis of the European linguistic and cultural experience, it relies on the implicit postulate of an egalitarian relationship between different linguistic and cultural areas and has yet to integrate the recent results of the sociology of interculturality in the colonial and postcolonial context. (Jaquemond 1992:140)

This densely written passage contains a number of generalizations which should not go unchallenged. First of all, the author attempts to marry scholarly research with politics, in talking about linguistic inequality between “Western” and “Third World” languages and cultures and the inadequacy of European theories to deal with non-European problems. This is not the place to discuss the vast issue of equality of languages and cultures. What the author presumably means is not so much some essentialist inequality but probably power, which is attributed to widely used languages of global importance (e.g. English, French) while lack of power is associated with less widespread ones. Yet at no point in history have languages been “equal” in relation to power. What is particularly disappointing in this passage is the attempt to politicize the issue by means of juxtaposing the West and the Third World and south and north. One may ask whether literatures written in such languages as Finnish, Czech, Hungarian, Irish or Basque (all of them northern) do not have the same problems in being translated as the languages of the Third World countries? The criticism of Eurocentrism in translation and literary theories is similarly problematic. It is not the fault of theories conceived in Europe that they are, as Jaquemond says, ‘developed on the almost exclusive basis of the European linguistic and cultural experience’. It is natural that people who work in Europe should base their theories on the European context, which after all offers an astonishing variety of languages and cultures.

If the passage quoted above is a good example of how politicized postcolonial theory and translation studies may become, it should be easier to understand why the disintegrating Soviet empire has not been a welcome object of study for postcolonial theorists. However, if we look at the post-Soviet world as a case of a postcolonial development, we find a fascinating field of study. There are several factors which have had a profound influence on the way translation and cultural transfer have functioned in the imperial and post-imperial context in the East. First of all, the cultural policy of the

Soviet empire was a domain of the state, since Marxism perceived culture as a vital part of what was then called a social “superstructure”. In practice, this meant that culture had to be controlled and planned in the same way as industrial or agricultural production was. However, the degree of state control over culture fluctuated over time. The Soviet Union had more and less liberal periods in its history, and the “satellite” countries were given a certain degree of independence, or rather responsibility, for controlling their own cultural affairs. As a result, over several decades many parts of the empire evolved their own semi-independent models of cultural policy, and the difference between them could be measured by their tolerance for free expression and dissent. In some cases it led to conflicts, such as the Czech and East German anxieties about banned Czech and German writers being published in translation in Poland in the 1970s and 1980s, or the Polish censors’ suspicion about a sudden enthusiasm of publishers for Brecht’s antimilitarist poetry after the “Solidarity” movement was crushed in 1981.²

The Soviet empire had also a highly structured language policy which went through several changes, and that aspect is also conspicuously different from the linguistic policy of France and Britain towards their colonies. For instance, in the 1920s Moscow encouraged the development of national languages and cultures as a vital part of the communist policy to integrate “nationalist form with socialist content”. That brief period, however, was followed by a consistent and prolonged period of outright russification. Combined with massive deportations of whole ethnic groups under Stalin, it led to the establishment of the Russian language as the dominant one. The side effect of this process was what Homi Bhabha calls “hybridization”, except that in relation to the Soviet Union, it would be difficult to regard this phenomenon as “postmodern”. A high degree of hybridization had already existed in the Eastern and Central European borderlands due to the intense competition of the 19th C empires. Frequent shifts of borders and populations gave rise to complicated mixtures of languages and ethnicities. As a result in

the borderlands of Western Ukraine, Vojvodina, and Transylvania, many people living in rural areas still describe themselves as “locals” speaking a local dialect, and they resist the imposition of modern clear cut ethnicities and linguistic categories.³ The communist cultural policy, however, extended and deepened the process by means of rewriting and reshaping national histories and identities. Again, as in the case of censorship, the imperial policy depended on local circumstances. Although the satellite countries were allowed to retain their own languages as the official ones, and Russian was taught at school as the first foreign language, in the Soviet Union Russian was given a dominant position.

The position and role of translation was heavily influenced by the cultural and linguistic policies of the Soviet and “satellite” governments. Like other forms of social communication, translation was controlled by appropriate governmental bodies. Control was of paramount importance for two reasons. First of all, it was through translation that their subjects could absorb the potentially subversive ideas from the outside. Secondly, translated texts could generate intellectual debate within the empire, thus contributing to the creation of independent and unsupervised exchanges of opinion. This control over translation was carried out by state censorship agencies, which were responsible for the control of all printed texts, public performances, and the media. The system was of Byzantine proportions, and there were no explicit legal foundations for its functioning. In most cases the directives were meticulously prepared by high officials of the Communist Party, and the public was not supposed to be aware of the fact that censorship was operating at all. The vast scale of the operation came to light only in the 1980s when the Polish government bowed to public pressure and agreed that all cases of the censor’s interference had to be marked explicitly in the printed texts. For the first time, the previously invisible hand of the censor became conspicuous, and many press articles looked like half edited texts, with missing parts of sentences or bracketed paragraphs.

The significance of that change can be better understood only if we look at the more advanced forms of censorship the empire was trying to impose. The most desirable form was, of course, self censorship. It had already functioned well in the Soviet Union under Stalin, where government appointed heads of publishing houses knew themselves what was not supposed to appear in print. Later on, the communist regimes in the “satellite” countries tried to install censorship as a joint responsibility. Writers, publishers, and translators were set clear limits of what was permitted, and it was their responsibility to make sure those limits were not overstepped. The Hungarian critic, Miklosz Haraszti, characterized this phenomenon in the following way:

Censorship is no longer a matter of simple state intervention. A new aesthetic culture has emerged in which censors and artists alike are entangled in a mutual embrace. Nor is it as distasteful as traditional critics of censorship imagine. The state is able to domesticate the artist because the artist has already made the state his home. (Haraszti 1989: 5)

What interests us here is how translation functioned under such circumstances. This is a complex issue, and it is difficult to offer her a general overview because the different policies were applied in different parts of the empire. My research is informed primarily by the Polish context, but compared to post-1968 Czechoslovakia, or East Germany, Poland was relatively liberal and it would be wrong to use the Polish case as an absolute standard. Perhaps the best way forward is to start with what was totally banned throughout the empire. Not unlike the Roman Catholic church, the communist regimes had their own *Index* of books which were not supposed to be either translated or distributed in the original language. Some of these books were classics, by writers such as Orwell, Solzhenitsyn, Milosz, Kundera, Popper, and Hayek. The criteria for suppression were chiefly ideological, but the Marxist puritanism led also to the

disqualification of books which were considered “immoral”. Pornography was used as an umbrella category which covered cheap romance as well as V. Nabokov and D.H. Lawrence, since the censors found it too complicated to deal with subtle distinctions between artistic representations of sexuality and commercial exploitation of the human body. Western avant-garde authors were also viewed with suspicion. Changes in the political climate and international relations led to the alterations in the lists. For instance, the “thaw” following Stalin’s death in 1953 meant that many writers previously banned could be translated. In the late 1950s East Europeans were allowed to read Beckett, Ionesco, Sartre, and Camus. But the opening to the West did not coincide with the opening to the East. Although Solzhenitsyn’s One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch was published officially in the Soviet Union in 1962, the regimes in the satellite countries preferred to keep revelations about the gulags out of the public view.

Apart from total bans, the censors implemented other policies. The commonest form of censorship was the removal of unacceptable passages from translated texts. Publishers were obliged to submit manuscripts to the censor’s office, and the adjustments were made over the heads of translators. The reasons varied. A good example is the translation of Gunter Grass’s novel The Tin Drum into Polish in 1980s. The pages the state censor decided to remove from the Polish translation described the Soviet army entering the city of Danzig in 1945. Grass portrayed the Soviets attempting to conquer the city because from his point of view they were the invaders. The censor removed the description, because the official position was that the Red Army never conquered, but always “liberated”. Because of Grass’s international reputation, the case was hotly disputed by the opposition intelligentsia, and gained quite a lot of semi-official publicity. Another strategy frequently deployed by the state was a restriction on the number of copies of books to be printed, or the distribution of books by means of subscription. Donald Rayfield describes how the process worked in the Soviet Union in relation to the pre-

Revolutionary classics, but similar methods were used in relation to translated texts. (Rayfield 1994: 19-33) Libraries which happened to stock foreign books on the *index*, had to place them in special, closed collections. In Poland they were called euphemistically '*prohibita*'.

If foreign books were so well guarded, one might conclude that translation was a marginal activity in the Soviet empire. This was, however, not the case: even in the darkest days of Stalinism translations did not cease to be published. In her remarkable memoir Hope Against Hope, Nadezhda Mandelstam gives an unexpected insight into the function of translation in the 1930s:

At first we were materially better off in Voronezh than we had every been before. Impressed by the 'miracle', the State Publishing House gave us translation work. As my brother Evgeni put it, Moscow looked better after it burned down. I hastily translated some ghastly novel or other, and was immediately given a second contract. But in the winter of 1934-5 the persons responsible were evidently reprimanded for their kindness. I was summoned to Moscow for a talk about my 'method of translation'.
(Mandelstam 1975:162)

From the 1930s to the very end of the Soviet empire, translation was to some extent a life line for the writers and dissidents banned from publishing their own work. In some cases the authorities tolerated this situation, but sometimes the contract had to be signed by a third person so there was no evidence that the *persona non grata* was commissioned by a state publishing house to produce a translation.

In her memoir Mandelstam remarks that she was translating a ghastly novel entitled Nest of Simple Folk (Mandelstam 1975:163). That was by no means an unusual case. The Soviet and East European publishing houses were searching for specific categories

of texts to disseminate. First of all, the book had to be politically and ideologically acceptable. Another important factor was the cost of copyright, since the autarchic communist economies were not willing to spend hard currency on translation rights. The only exceptions were writers of a left-wing and pro-Soviet persuasion. As a result, the Soviet world built up a completely distorted view of Western literature: Steinbeck, London, and Dreiser were its most important American writers. But Western literatures were not the only ones to be manipulated. All the non-Russian speaking provinces of the empire had to translate the classics of the Soviet era. Ideological factors overrode the economic side of publishing, so the print runs of Marx and Lenin went into thousands of copies, although sales were minimal. Up to the end of the 1950s, many books were distributed either free or for very little money among factory workers, to prove that there was a genuine demand for socialist realist literature.

Another type of book which was translated was what we tend to call the “world classic” - Shakespeare, Goethe, Mann, for example plus the “national” writers of various peoples incorporated into the Soviet Union. In the case of those “world classics”, the empire made sure that the publishers selected the least controversial texts for translation. A good example here is Dickens, whose Hard Times was published more often than his other novels. Drama, however, was more difficult to handle, particularly if the plays were to be staged in theatres. In Shakespeare Our Contemporary Jan Kott writes eloquently about the political significance of Shakespeare’s plays under communism. Indeed, live theatre was much more difficult to control than printed texts, because control had to extend over the director’s interpretation of the text and the response of the audience. It is not surprising, then, that the censors not only read the scripts, but attended dress rehearsals. In some cases they even attended the first couple of shows to find out if viewers’ reactions indicated some previously unnoticed political allusions. And here, I think, we touch another crucial element of the communist control of translation - the

interpretation of a translated text. As if total control over cultural production were not sufficient, the Soviet empire aimed at ensuring that even the interpretation of literary texts went along official lines. This was achieved through the system of education, which was as closely controlled as all the cultural activities. It was here, in the classroom, that the empire supplied the correct interpretation of texts from Aristotle to Gorky and that learners were rewarded for the faithful reproduction of what they read in government approved textbooks. No wonder, then, that “world classics” did not pose an interpretive threat to the established opinions.⁴

With so much energy going into the production of desirable texts, there was a large number of people taking part in the process of translating and interpretation. The ideological “transmission belt” for disseminating ideologically approved ideas, had well defined institutional forms, like writers’ and translators’ unions, publishers’ associations, literary critics, and thousands of teachers. Not all of them were committed to the cause, though some believed that a “faithful” translation of a literary text was more important than all these external factors, and made political conformism worthwhile.

The power relation between the colonizers and the subjugated people is at the centre of postcolonial criticism. The starting point for theorizing, as it has been done to date, is the assumption that the colonizing power deliberately creates a notion of cultural inequality between the colonizer and the colonized. The colonizers are civilized, while the colonized are primitive. This categorization extends to culture and language. As a result, de-colonization is viewed as project which aims at demolishing this construct and redressing the unequal balance. Although this model can be successfully applied to the relation between some European empires and their overseas colonies, it is of much less use in the Soviet context. First of all, the official discourse of the Soviet empire denied the existence of any colonial relationship. The principle of equality and the brotherhood of nations masked the expansionist ambitions of the Soviet Union. The Soviet

propaganda achieved a considerable success in representing communism as an ideology of liberation. Annexation of new territories was always represented as a justified attempt to free “the people” from the imperialist domination. Behind the skillful rhetoric, terror and repression were used as the instruments of government both in relation to the imperial nation, the Russians, and the colonized people.⁵ In fact, the number of Russians who lost their lives at the hand of “red commissars” may be as high as the losses in non-Russian parts of the empire, and Russian culture was subject to the same harsh measures as other cultures remaining in the Soviet sphere of influence.

Since both the empire and its colonies had to be constantly supervised, the method the Soviets found most useful was the old principle of “divide and conquer”. This principle was used by the French and the British as well, but the sheer linguistic and cultural variety of the Soviet empire gave a greater scope for manipulation which sometimes took drastic form, such as the dissemination of negative stereotypes, or the revival of old prejudices. As far as translation policies were concerned, the Soviets introduced a tacit rule that a book written in a language other than Russian had to be translated into Russian before it could be translated into other languages, since a direct contact of minority cultures with the West could lead to independent cultural initiatives. Gradually the Russian language became an instrument of control over non-Russian language texts. This policy coupled with the enforcement of Russian as the language of education, created a situation in which, for instance, many educated Ukrainians or Azeris preferred to read their national writers in translation rather than in the original. The powerful position which the Russian language was given in the empire encouraged some writers to abandon their native languages, since the use of a local language meant a limited readership and difficulty in being translated into other languages.

The power relations within an empire lead naturally to the question of resistance. This issue has received a lot of attention from postcolonial critics. In translation studies, the

question of resistance has been discussed in the context of India by Niranjana Tejaswini, and Elsa Veira discussed this issue in the context of the colonial relations of Europe to Latin America. There is no doubt that some of the models are applicable to the Soviet context, especially in the period following the collapse of the Soviet empire. However, there are significant differences between Western domination and the Soviet empire. The first difference concerns the language policy. The British or Portuguese imposition of their language on their respective colonies was much more effective than anything the Russians and Soviets managed to achieve, mainly because of the length of the colonial domination. While Portuguese became the national language in Brazil, and the position of English in India is still of considerable significance, Russian domination in many parts of the empire simply did not last long enough to eradicate the indigenous cultures and languages. This allowed subjugated nations to preserve their languages, which served as a shield against total cultural domination. In countries like Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia the cultivation of the local language was a major form of resistance. This also meant that these nations put as much effort as they could into publishing in their own languages. In the “satellite” countries, where the national languages were the official language of education, linguistic resistance was not as relevant. Thus the response to the Soviet language policy produced many forms of resistance, and many forms of linguistic hybridity. Without systematic case studies it would be premature to guess which of the models of cultural resistance in the West may have parallels in the post-Soviet context.

However, it would be a mistake to claim that the imposition of the Russian language and culture was the main aim of the Soviet empire. Had that been the case, Moscow would have ordered each village in the empire to have a Russian *banya* (communal bath), in the same way that the British ordered the building of public libraries. As we know, however, the symbol of the Soviet presence was not a *banya* but an ugly building called “a palace of culture”, because the empire’s main aim was to organize the whole empire

along the same ideological lines. This meant, in the first place, the disruption of locally-developed social bonds, the imposition of new concepts of ownership, and the insistence that collective norms had a precedence over individual rights. As Czeslaw Milosz explained in The Captive Mind, communism was a phenomenon that stood in total opposition to the traditional ways of European societies. Because the change was so radical, the empire had to apply the most extraordinary measures to prevent any form of resistance, since resistance in itself was a phenomenon which belonged to the “old”, pre-Soviet world, and as such had no right to exist under communism. The story of resistance in the Soviet empire is a very complex one, but perhaps the most important thing we have learnt from it is that the very existence of an empire generates resistance and that no measure of terror can suppress the urge to think independently.

Cultural resistance took different forms, and its intensity and effectiveness depended on local traditions and circumstances. In some “satellite” countries, like Poland, underground publishing had a tradition centuries long, and in the 1980s it became a vital part of Polish civil society. Equally important for keeping independent thought alive in Russia was *samizdat*, and *Charter 77* played a similar role in Czechoslovakia. All these initiatives were very much helped by emigre organizations which set up publishing ventures in Western Europe and North America.⁶

Translation, of course, was a vital part of cultural resistance. The initial aim of many unofficial ventures was to translate and distribute precisely those Western texts the communist system did not tolerate. George Orwell’s 1984 and Animal Farm were perhaps the icons of that period, but the clandestine publishers managed to disseminate an impressive number of titles including fiction, philosophical works, and texts from social studies and economics. But translation also meant the transfer and circulation of works written by authors living within the empire’s borders. For instance, from the Polish Antologia wolnej literatury rosyjskiej (*Anthology of Free Russian Literature*) we learn

that in the 1970s and 1980s the works of more than twenty Russian writers banned in the Soviet Union were published by Polish clandestine presses. In the same way, the Russians and Czechs tried to keep in touch with banned Polish writing . The cultural effect of these undertakings was very visible. In official and semi-official publication allusions were made to texts which were available only from clandestine presses. Gradually, even the official critical discourse tacitly acknowledged the fact that there was a vast body of texts and ideas which was not legally recognized and as such had no right to exist, yet which circulated and were widely known.

Thus translation eventually contributed to the establishment of a public discourse which functioned quite independently of the discourse controlled by the empire. It would be difficult to prove that the civil society created in some parts of the Soviet empire had a direct impact on the later transition from totalitarianism to economic and social emancipation in Eastern Europe. However, if we contrast countries like Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic with East Germany, we may well ask why East German economic and cultural transition has been so much less effective, despite the fact that the East Germans had easy access to Western models via West German television, and have been showered with financial hand outs since 1990. Perhaps the difference is that by constructing a civil society even on a small scale, the former countries painstakingly learned the rules which would apply after the empire's demise, while those who merely watched the Western world did not have a chance to develop appropriate habits.

This last observation brings us to the most recent, and perhaps the most truly postcolonial phase of the Soviet empire. Popular representations of Eastern Europe since 1989 have created an impression that all parts of the post Soviet world are similar, and the wars in Yugoslavia and the Caucasus have given rise to a claim that the break up of the Soviet Union inevitably means the rise of nationalism. The fact that most of the former parts of the empire have managed to handle the issues of nationalism well so far

has remained sadly unnoticed. Perhaps the economists were best prepared to come to terms with the logical fact that the disintegration of such a vast and culturally diverse empire was bound to create more diversity than similarity. It is the economic perspective which helps to make sense of what has happened to publishing and translation in the post-Soviet world, or at least in Central Europe and in Russia itself. First of all, with the disappearance of state censorship and the state monopoly in publishing, the whole publishing world went through a period of dramatic change. A myriad of small publishing companies filled the gap left by bankrupt state publishers. The opening up of the economies allowed publishers to negotiate copyrights with foreign publishers, but the acute shortage of funds meant that immediate profit meant more to the publishers more than the quality of what was translated and published. This economic liberalism coincided with a profound social change. The state relinquished its right to shape and control readers' tastes, and what readers wanted to read were books previously banned and disapproved. In practice this meant that from 1990 to approximately 1995, Eastern Europe witnessed the unprecedented popularity of Anglo-American pulp fiction translated very badly and at great speed by cash-strapped students of English. Many members of the intelligentsia and some previously sympathetic overseas commentators did not conceal their deep disappointment at what was happening. Yesterday's revolutionaries turned into consumers of fast food and cheap paperbacks, which in Poland are covered by a common name *ludlums*, coined from the surname of a prolific British author of popular fiction. Since 1995, however, the market has again changed. Quality publishing has made a comeback, and the reading public has begun to diversify along the same lines as elsewhere in Europe.

But this general trend does not tell the whole story of the change translation has undergone in the post-Soviet world. The transition to models similar to Western ones is characteristic of those parts of the empire which managed to retain their own languages

and pre-Soviet cultural characteristics. For these countries, which include the whole of Central Europe, the Baltic States and some other parts of the former Soviet Union, the transition to modernity has been a matter of recovering the more useful elements of the pre-Soviet past and adapting them to post-communist context. This also includes the rediscovery of the cultural and linguistic diversity of their regions, which the Soviets disguised by imposing the class-based Marxist model. But the demise of the Soviet empire has left a number of communities for whom a recovery of their communal memory and historical roots is much more difficult than in the countries mentioned above. The intensive sovietization and russification of some areas of the empire have created problems comparable to those with which the former French or British colonies have had to come to terms. In all these cases translation may play an important role in the formation of a future cultural identity, although it is too early to say whether there is going to be any consistency in the way translation operates as a cultural force. So at this early stage of postcolonial and post-Soviet development one can only examine only particular case studies and hoping that a sufficient number of such studies will lead to fruitful generalization.

The first case study comes from Azerbaijan, a country which for a long time remained under pressure from its more powerful neighbors: Russia and Iran. In 1991, following the break up with the Soviet Union, the Azeri State Publishing House published the collected works of Nizami of Ganja, a twelfth-century poet who is regarded as one of the most important of all Persian poets.⁷ The Azerbaijan editors of Nizami's poetry themselves claim that this is a major edition of their national poet. But the edition is a translation of the original poem into Russian, and the original text written in Pharsi is not included. The extensive introduction to the translation does not mention this paradox, as it fails to mention anything else about the process of translating. In contemporary translation studies, there is a strong tendency to view such cases as

either “manipulation” or “rewriting”, but a closer look at Azerbaijan’s complex cultural and linguistic heritage shows that this theoretical framework, though useful, may be not sufficient.

After over a hundred years of Russian and Soviet domination the Azeris were anxious to establish themselves as an independent nation.⁸ During the long period of colonization the Russians succeeded in marginalizing the Azeri language to the point that it has been reduced to the language of uneducated masses. Being a Turkic language, Azeri was written in Arabic script until Russia ordered the replacement of Arabic with Cyrillic. In the early 1990s the country debated about going back to Arabic, or following the Turkish language reform and accepting Latin script. The supporters of the Turkish style reform were in a majority, and as a result now Azeris use Latin script. However, Russian still remains the language of the educated stratum of Azeri society, and it will take time before Azeri language begins to function at all levels of communication.⁹ If the aim of the editors of Nizami’s poetry was to establish his reputation as a national poet, then they had to convey the idea in the language used by the cultural elite. i.e. in Russian. It is very likely that a new edition in Pharsi will follow, but for a time being the Azeri national poet will be read in Russian.

A second case study comes from Belarus, at the other end of the Soviet empire. One of the most important cultural events since the end of the Soviet Union has been the publication of James Joyce’s Ulysses in a translation by Jan Maksymiuk, who lives in Poland.¹⁰ Maksymiuk’s spoken language is Belorussian, the language in which he learned to write was Old Church Slavonic. He began to learn Polish only at the age of seven when he went to the state school. When Maksymiuk sent the first nine episodes of his Belarussian Ulysses to the academics in Minsk, he caused a sensation. First of all, a Russian translation of the book did not yet exist-it was published in 1993. Secondly, in a country where polonization- and more recently and more decisively, russification-have

relegated Belarussian to the status of a language used principally by rural communities, the appearance of Joyce's work in Belarussian bordered on the miraculous. The political and cultural situation in Belarus is so fragile that it is impossible to make any predictions of the results. Some hope that the country will go through a cultural revival, similar to the the Czechs revival of the early nineteenth century. Others are deeply pessimistic, and see the present political alliance of the country with Russia as the end of Belarussian cultural and political identity. The only place where the Belarussian language and culture remain alive is North-Eastern Poland, where Maksymiuk lives, but the language of that community could not cope with the universe of Joyce's work. Therefore, the translation of Ulysses into Belarussian was more than a simple literary translation; it was an attempt to recover the potential which the Belarussian language has lost. Maksymiuk describes the process in the following way:

I used old dictionaries of Belarussian dialect in order to be able to find credible equivalents for neologisms used by Joyce, and for the same reason I was screening many fifteenth century and other old Belarussianan documents. When there was no equivalent, I was either inventing one or creating a word out of several existing ones in different dialects. When I came across useful words that had been forgotten, I tried to bring them back to modern usage, and these new words could be used instead of recent Russian borrowings. My knowledge of Church Slavonic came in very useful, and so did the knowledge of the old Belarussian.

(Niczyporowicz 1997: 79)¹¹

For Maksymiuk this translation is entirely a personal affair : 'For Joyce it was important to be able to write in English, the language of the occupying country, because he did not have Irish. For me it was important that Belarussian culture and language created a unique opportunity for me'. (Niczyporowicz 1997: 79) Obviously, once the translated

text is printed, the translator loses control over its function, and we have still to see what is the significance of Ulysses for Belarus. However, the fact that the Belorussian cultural elites have now a proof that the Belorussian language is capable of mediating such a complicated modernist text as Ulysses, may help them to strengthen their belief in the possibility of a linguistic and cultural revival.

These two recent instances of postcolonial translation in the post-Soviet world suggest that despite substantial differences between the cultural histories of different empires, it is possible to uncover certain parallels between the role of translation in postcolonial worlds. But it would be premature to assume that there are more parallels than differences. The fact that the buoyant development of postcolonial studies in the last decades has mainly been in Europe and North America suggests that an appropriate temporal distance helps to sharpen the critical faculties. The end of the Soviet empire has created a new postcolonial space, which remains unpredictable and unexplored. The fact that in the East colonialism was coupled with communism, makes the process of decolonization much more complex than it was the case in the West. The linguistic diversity of the former empire poses an additional difficulty for postcolonial studies, which have developed on the comfortable assumption that empires leave behind a vast space dominated by one colonial language, and that the former colonies strive to challenge this linguistic legacy. It remains to be seen whether translation studies in association with the postcolonial theory will rise to this multicultural challenge.¹²

Notes

¹ Czeslaw Milosz's The Captive Mind still remains the best account of how the intellectuals collaborated with the communists in Eastern Europe in 1940s and 1950s. The account of the Western fascination with

communism can be found in David Caute's The Fellow Travellers. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988 (revised edition).

² Only very recently, the state archives in Eastern Europe have been made available to the researchers, and a full account of the censorship in the Soviet empire is yet to be written. A partial account can be found in Herman Ermolaev's Censorship in Russia 1917-1991. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1996.

³ A good account of this phenomenon can be found in Anne Applebaum's Between East and West. New York: Pantheon Books, 1994.

⁴ Felicity Rosslyn's article 'Dulness and General Jaruzelski', The Cambridge Quarterly 2 (1987):95-110 contains a good analysis of liberal education under communism.

⁵ Good insights into the totalitarian control over the use of language can be found in John Wesley Young's comparative study of language control in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union Totalitarian Language. The University Press of Virginia, 1991.

⁶ Debates about "socialism with a human face" and "the third way" were very much alive within the communist and socialist parties in Eastern and Western Europe in 1970s and 1980s. Even more liberal left in the West suggested that the resistance in the East was directed only against the distortions of the Marxist ideas, and not against Marxism and communism itself. The revolutions of 1989 and 1990 showed that for a majority of population in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union the distinction was irrelevant. For all Central European countries and for many Soviet republics, the removal of communism was synonymous with the removal of the occupying Red Army.

⁷ In 1996 Oxford University Press published Nizami's romance Haft Paykar in Julie Meisami's translation. The poet is introduced as a Persian author, and this seems to be a prevailing view outside Azerbaijan. However, in the preface to the Azeri edition, R.M Aliiev is strongly arguing against this view. It is up to specialists in Turkic and Persian literatures to assess this revisionist critique.

⁸ It seems that the strong nationalist tendency was at the bottom of the territorial dispute and the subsequent war with Armenia in the early 1990s.

⁹ Several Azeri academics were suggesting to me in 1992 that the best solution for Azerbaijan would be to adopt English as a national language, and they were convinced then that the US presence would increase considerably in the region. So far half of this prophecy has been confirmed: the United States have invested heavily in the Caspian oil fields, and the American presence in this small country is very conspicuous.

¹⁰ Despite enormous population shifts after 1945, Poland retained a small but active Belarussian minority concentrated in North East Poland. An interesting account of the language issues in Belarus can be found in Sven Gustavsson, 'Belarus: A Multilingual State in Eastern Europe', Uppsala Multiethnic Papers 34 (1994/5). 39-75.

¹¹ This and subsequent translations from Polish are mine.

¹² The new volume of essays on postcolonial translation Postcolonial Translation. Theory and Practice. Ed. S. Bassnett and H. Trivedi. London: Routledge, 1999 completely ignores the post-communist world as a postcolonial space, which shows that the mental adjustment of many academics working in this field may take longer than the economic transformation of eastern Europe.

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