Introduction

Between “anti” and “post” — on Recognition of Resistance in Postcolonial Studies

Anti-communist resistance or dissidence, a huge archive of various forms of expression from subversive humor to open opposition, has not been an easy object of research in literary studies and theory, two fields which one would naturally, as it would seem, be inclined to investigate in this vast field of discursive activity. On the one hand, an insight into counter-discursive strategies emerged practically with the language of opposition. Zbigniew Herbert’s poem “Potęga smaku” (The Power of Taste) on the lack of aesthetic allure of communist ideology and propaganda grasps the core impulse of resistance, which develops from aesthetic displeasure to dissent against curbed freedoms, out of which freedom of expression, concerning always both content and form, is essential. On the other hand, monograph studies of resistance as language, rhetoric, imaginary and affect are still insufficiently represented in comprehensive, comparative studies cutting across languages, genres, and disciplines. The focus on language, genres, and rhetoric in articulations and practices of anti-communist resistance (which also includes resistance against the oppressive totalitarian state) is of utmost importance in developing grounds for a comprehensive understanding of cultures of resistance in Central and Eastern European countries under communist rule. Resistance and language awareness was definitely a trademark...
(for want of a better word) of opposition in the communist bloc. The phenomenon, however, still lacks a synoptic yet nuanced methodology for a critical comparative reading of its converging and diverging forms in the cultural and political geography of our region. Our volume sets out to bring together key intersecting dimensions of reflection on resistance as discourse, rhetoric, and imagination in a comparative perspective created by the regional scope and the mediation of postcolonial studies.

The focus of our volume is to test the potential of postcolonial perspective for reflecting on anti-communist resistance. The reason for this agenda is at least two-fold. First, over a decade and a half of research implementing postcolonial categories and methodologies to postcommunist contexts in Eastern and Central Europe has brought so far surprisingly little comparative reflection on the mechanisms of resistance discourses\(^1\). This is not necessarily anything negative; rather, it shows that in framing the region of the former Soviet bloc countries within postcolonial studies the focus has been more often than not on evidence of the region’s postcoloniality, thus on ontologies of subjection and their aftermath and less so on epistemologies of cognitive, affective, and imaginary responses to subjection, a task that is realized most effectively by postdependence studies, translationally applying some postcolonial concepts or tools to research on the effects of subjection. Second, postcolonial studies have been known to have a bit of a problem with conceptualizing resistance, especially anti-colonial movements. In fact, the divide into textualist, poststructuralism — and deconstruction-ridden postcolonial studies and its materialist critique charging postcolonialism with erasing the political urgency of Third World resistance to capitalism and substituting it with a belief that counter-discourse is a mechanical outcome of (oppressive) colonial discourse determined the effective lack of a dialog between those who investigated the resistance as discourse and language that has political agency and those who wanted to pay heed to “real” anti-colonial movements of political, often armed, struggle. Only recently a new approach to anti-colonial resistance can be noted, remarkably in an essay by Elleke Boehmer who directly, and seminally, links the rise of postcolonial studies in the 1980s with the overthrow of communism and with the fall of Apartheid in South Africa, thus, a critical reflection and methodology with political and social change:

*The Empire Writes Back* was exemplary of the spirit of that *annis mirabilis* 1989: of glasnost, the unfreezing of the Cold War, and the breaking down of barriers and walls in Berlin, eastern Europe as a whole, and soon, apartheid South Africa — developments reflected in the upbeat mode of the work, its celebration of worldwide and almost inevitable cultural syncretism and hybridity, and in the collaborative makeup of its writing team\(^2\).

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Boehmer observes the coincidence of publishing the first comprehensive classification of postcolonial literature, *The Empire Writes Back* by Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, in 1989, as literature of active abrogation of colonial discourse and creative takeover of English for (post)colonial creation of literature on terms autonomous from the empire’s authority, and the collapse of communism, and, a bit later, the dismantling of the Apartheid state. These events, or, rather, processes, are connected by a concerted political, social and creative agency of resistance at work in communist regimes and vestiges of empire. She advocates in her essay an approach that would pay more heed to the history of anticolonial struggle as an antecedent of postcolonial studies. It would have a chance of bridging the observable gap between postcolonial studies eager to see in colonial discourse the grounds for counter-discourse, and the Marxist critique of that approach as a textualist over-writing of political agendas and anti-colonial struggles. Boehmer, like Timothy Brennan before her, reaches to Edward Said for a vision of criticism that responds to the gravity of history:

resistance culture as massive as imperial culture in Europe: in the overseas imperium there was a massive political, economic, and military resistance that was itself carried forward and informed by an actively provocative and challenging culture of resistance. It has been the substantial achievement of all of the intellectuals, and of course of the movements they worked with, by their historical interpretive, and analytic efforts to have identified the culture of resistance as a cultural enterprise possessing a long tradition of integrity and power in its own right, one not simply grasped as a belated reactive response to Western imperialism.

The Saidian stress on the necessity to recognize an event in the complexity of its contexts is especially important for conceptualizing anti-colonial resistance — it needs both a concrete, local historical positioning and a broader historical framework. This is how Said as one of few at that time was able to link the collapse of communism with anti-colonial liberation movements in *Culture and Imperialism* in 1993.

The task of a critic today is to theorize resistance as intellectual labor that always has political ends to it. Or political effects, even if it does not always contain a political intention. If resistance is an act of abrogation and rejection of an oppressive political situation, then, in a way irrespectively of the intensity of oppression, any counter-discursive move is at least potential resistance. In this way the discursive/textualist-materialist gap in assessing resistance in postcolonial studies seems to be yet another futile war of positions in academic debates, while indeed the (counter-) discursive and political always depart from the same moment — the moment of dissent. Josif Brodski, who frightened the Soviet totalitarian system with nothing less political than simple but imperative artistic autonomy, was persecuted not so much for his political action but for the potential of political action that was incipient in his writing. Like in Orwell’s *1984*, the mere looking away from the omnipresent gaze of Big Brother and spotting a forgotten notebook becomes the definitive moment of lit-

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erally writing oneself out of the system. So, dissidence starts with desiring autonomy — speaking for oneself that carves out its own territory in the dominant discourse, or diverges from its roadmaps. Even if it is only a flash of realization, it is a political act in its own right, and thus, always dangerous.

In a comparative study of anti-communist resistance it is important to attempt a reflection on the ethos of resistance — is it a mission, is it a historical/ethical imperative, how does oppression evoke dissent? What is the mechanism of synchronizing a disarray of contingent reactions to current events into a systematic counter-discourse developing its own political agenda? How to theorize the link, or the lack thereof, between the resistance of pathos — the open, declarative struggle for, e.g., the national cause, and the resistance in the mode of irony — developing as a language game, through strategies of subversion employing the ostensible reinforcement of sly civility and mimicry? What is the main force of resistance in challenging the authoritarian regime? Is it not its rhetoric of guerrilla war within the system, its hybridizing and mongrelizing takeovers and its polyphonic alternatives to the regime’s monolithic ideology? All in all, it is worth thinking of resistance as an episteme in its own right that emerges from a mobilization to a (counter-) discursive action and agency. Such an episteme comprises events that together produce a discursive space for articulating resistance, or, resistance as articulation. In this sense, the anti-communist resistance was an episteme — or, in other words, the episteme of anti-communist resistance as powerful geopolitics of knowledge was that which dismantled communism most effectively.

In postcolonial studies, which as if naturally should be attuned to the histories of resistance, the veneration for the prophets of anti-colonial revolution like Amilcar Cabral or Franz Fanon does not translate into a systematic study of resistance as action, agency, and, concomitantly, discourse. This is for some reason that one of the major glossaries of postcolonial terminology by classics of postcolonial studies: Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, Key Concepts in Post–Colonial Studies (Routledge, 2001) does not even have a separate entry for “resistance” (granted, it does have an entry “anti-colonialism”, which acknowledges the role of anti-colonial struggle in freedom fighting, but also, symptomatically, limits it by and large to political action in one historical moment solely). Notably, Postcolonialism/Postcommunism — a Dictionary of Key Cultural Terms by Bottez, Alexandru, Rădulescu, Ștefănescu, Visan (Bucharest, 2011), lists “resistance” as an autonomous entry, and the core link between anti-colonial and anti-communist movements. Barbara Harlow’s seminal study Resistance Literature (1987), focusing on Third World revolutionary literary writing, lacks, also symptomatically, even a scant reference to the then teeming revolutionary and resistance literatures in Central and Eastern Europe. This overlooking of resistance as a geopolitical process comprising many local cultures and politics of dissent going on for several decades makes a rather pessimistic prognostics for the task of a comparative, inclusive and accountable critical reflection. Marxist critics accusing postcolonial critics of shunning the historical importance of resistance (Benita Parry, Neil
Lazarus, Timothy Brennan); Eastern and Central European critics accusing postcolonial studies of lack of interest in dependence from European empires within Europe as a defining experience of modernity for the region; postcolonial critics, for a change, expanding their space of cultural interest globally in a gesture of all-inclusive limitlessness at the loss of analytical precision and accountability — these mutual omissions, and many others, necessitate thinking how to develop and consolidate a new, connective methodology for a comparative study on resistance and its fascinating agency in language, culture, and politics.

Despite a vast body of research, resistance more often than not disappears as a determinate event under a superstructure of contextual reservations and deconstructive undoings of its discourse, as intentional, target-oriented, subjective (of the subject, that is to say) to the effect of rendering it as unintentional, derivative of the dominant power discourse, even symbiotically entwined with it, and quite disoriented as to its purposes (liberation disappears from the horizon). Our conviction is, however, that we would commit a profound methodological error in subordinating resistance studies to the postcolonial context in toto. It does not mean that by investigating anticommunist resistance we cannot look for its similarities with anticolonial resistance. These affinities (and differences) would be a fascinating field of comparative exploration. What we think is done in many, indeed, too many cases of reassessing anticommmunist dissidence with postcolonial tools, is a reversal of causative chain and a loss of the essential core of the object of study — the power of commitment, of fear, of hope. The affective aspect of dissidence is, we believe, powerfully transformational, but it could be so only because it was action and agency. Counter-discourse, we are convinced, is never mechanistic and always subjective, no matter what its genre, rhetoric, and politics. Some postcolonial accounts of resistance, like Homi Bhabha’s otherwise insightful reading of Fanon, seem to treat resistance rhetoric more as a function of the colonial regime discourse than a space claimed by those who articulate dissent. In both cases resistance is counter-discourse, but the conceptualization and measurement of agency is what makes them totally different. Bhabha notoriously disassociates this visionary of anticolonial struggle as definitive opposition until the final either/or result from this finality and determination and wants to recover him for the liminal space of indetermination of identity. Thus saving, seemingly, Fanon from a dichotomy of the white colonizer and the narcissistic negritude, Bhabha equalizes identity constructions of white colonizer and insurgent black anticolonial as the same (almost the same) errors in thinking.

In the Polish context in particular and in the Eastern-Central European context in a broader scope, postcolonizing the space of resistance has effectively led to overwriting it with a relativizing axiology, if I may allow myself a little bit of a paradox. It does not mean that we want to negate the rich archive of research confronting postcommunism and postcolonialism we have all been doing here for the last decade

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or so. We do not propose to suddenly strike a note of pathos and reorient our work toward commemoration, nation-building and the pathos of sovereignty (although of course these political articulations are essential to resistance action), but to think if removing the study of resistance from such landmarks of postcolonialism as hybridity, third space, ambivalence, the subaltern cannot speak, and so on, will not clear some discursive space for less dependent, more assertive methodologies of reading that do not reverse cause and effect — e.g. ambiguity or even ambivalence of dissidence with its primary grounds — disagreement with the denial of agency and rights to individuals and collectivities under communist rule. A sense of guilt and embarrassment permeates postcolonialism-inflected studies that happen to include resistance discourses as their object of study — as if the choice was only between the nationalist pathos and the deconstructive undoing of resistance as a system of meanings. The reasons why postcolonial studies has been very cautious about theorizing anticolonial resistance are complex and multiple. Perhaps the main reason was not ideological but situational — postcolonial studies as it developed and solidified in the 1980s to mid-1990s sought legitimacy in poststructuralist thought. Focusing on colonial discourse analysis gave spectacular results of subversion. As a result of this initial pull to deconstruct stable binaries of colonial divisions into ambiguous and ambivalent spaces of indeterminacy, the return to such alleged essentials as liberation struggle and resistance was hardly possible outside of the textualist deconstructive framework that did allow crucial openings in our understanding of textual, symbolic and discursive encounters of the colonizer and the colonized, but was guilty of some omissions and evasions on the way.

An entry “Commonwealth Literature” in Bill Ashcroft’s *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* points out that the theory-driven stream of postcolonialism parted with Commonwealth postcolonial literature studies precisely alongside the attitude toward anti-colonial traditions in Commonwealth writing:

Commonwealth post-colonialism remains primarily committed to the literary text [...] and it has remained, following the Leeds Conference, both predominantly nation-based and determinedly comparative in its practice. [...] Such anti-colonialist arguments were necessarily accompanied by calls for the institutional introduction of national or regional literatures. [...] The more broadly post-structuralist or colonial discourse theory stream, by contrast, with its basis in European philosophy and politics has generally been less interested in contemporary writing by the formerly colonized and the politics of anti-colonial pedagogies within the academies. [...] it has rejected the national as a king of “false consciousness”; thereby bringing it into conflict with the Commonwealth Literature stream, much of whose important early anti-colonial work was necessarily grounded in the national as a decolonizing counter to both pre- and post-independence Anglo-interpellation5.

This foundational split, not devoid of inconsistencies (nation as “false consciousness” vis-à-vis the postcolonial embracing of Benedict Anderson’s idea of a discursive formation of the nation), seems to be grounded in a totally unnecessary

division into essentialists (the anti-colonialist element) and deconstructivists, whose fundamental omission was that of accounting for the emergence and development of a subjective articulation of political and cultural agenda and agency as the grounds of resistance. Benita Parry expresses this omission most succinctly in her article “Resistance Theory/Theorizing Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism”:

An agenda which disdains the objective of restoring the colonized as the subject of its own history does so on the grounds that a simple inversion perpetuates the colonizer/colonized opposition within the terms defined by colonial discourse, remaining complicit with its assumptions by retaining undifferentiated identity categories, and failing to contest the conventions of that system of knowledge it supposedly challenges.

The question for a comparative reading of anti-communist resistance which seeks affinities with postcolonial (anticolonial) contexts and methodologies, the question remains how to borrow without too much interest to return. Our claim is that we need not treat postcolonial theory as emancipatory and thus as a tool for an effective, or exhaustive, hermeneutics of anti-communist resistance. A brief selection of very sketchy readings from scholars in postcommunist studies shot through with postcolonial studies prove that where they touch the area of resistance, they hit the wall of untranslatability.

Bogdan Ştefănescu in his seminal book Postcommunism/Postcoloniaism. Siblings of Subalternity (2013) does not directly address the topic of resistance as a separate field of study, but signals the utmost importance of that aspect of the experience of communism in his study of trauma and in his theory of identity construction in East-Central Europe. And this “tropology of identity” which Ştefănescu derives from Hayden White and reworks into a set of “master tropes” allowing to trace the developments of “post-traumatic identity” in the context of postcommunist society, is the promise for resistance studies. But, significantly, it does not seem to owe much, if anything, to postcolonial theory. In reconstructing the history of anti-communist dissidence as a history of ideas, Cristina Şandru in her Worlds Apart? (2012) underscores the absolutely essential ethical foundation of dissident acts of non-participation in the communist falsehood — and this is the core of the semantics of dissidence: the attempt to draw a clear line between the false (communist ideology) and true (liberal individualism). I think we should treat this foundational ethical essentialism of dissidence, no matter what form it would take in the end, what generic and rhetoric devices it would employ, what tone it would take on and what effect it would reveal, as the singular phenomenon, or event. What does it mean in practice? That, although dissident discourses can be read as negotiable, perhaps even as effects of the logic of the hegemonic discourse of power, they are founded on the desire, or longing, for an absolute non-participation or separateness from the ongoing coercion perpetrated by the state. Dissidence is an absolutist action even if

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the dissenting subject does not realize that or, when told, would fervently deny. This is the inevitable and necessary counter-effect of the totalitarian urge to have everything under control — a paranoia of power that has no other choice but to discover it was right in the end. Cristina Şandru’s book proposes a model of classification for anti-communist resistance periodically, generically and politically-strategically. But she also makes a reservation — that her readings and the books she reads do not comprise a unitary tradition of resistance, because each of them is an example of an individual attempt to carve out a space of (artistic/discursive) freedom “to carve out a space of difference within a monolithic public discourse. […] whatever thematic affinities one may detect among these narratives, they usually emerge as a result of different modes of employment of the same experiential situation in different cultures and political discourses”\(^7\). However, it needs to be spelled out that this “space of difference” is precisely the act of resistance, even if there is no political intention in it, at least in the beginning.

The key theoretician of postdependence discourses, Hanna Gosk, makes an interesting observation that leads us to the final question of the legacy of anti-communist resistance. She claims that the power of the oppressed realized via counter-discourse reveals, after some excavation of the ultimate sense, the power of the oppressing discourse:

> At first glance we can have an impression that in the People’s Republic the discourse imposed by the eastern empire was contested from the start, hence the rich repository of counter-discursive forms and genres, and, after the 1989 transformation — of postdependence discourse. But at a deeper analysis they reveal the real power of the imperial discourse/power discourse, immune to the attacks of counter-discourse and accustomed somehow to it, thanks to a long, symbiotic co-existence with counter-discourse fed mainly on the variously represented image of the enemy/other/primitive Asiatic/blunt politruk and neglecting more difficult critical tasks targeting various forms of compliance with the system\(^8\).

However, it is not perhaps immunity, but the protean perseverance of power discourse that makes it so durable. In this sense the agency of resistance and dissidence has a clear target — the overthrow of the system, not the endless discursive combat. Comprehensive comparative studies should then comprise all aspects of dissident articulations, including their ambivalent complicity with the discourse of power, if this is what happens, as it does, on the way to developing a dissenting subject. The legacy of such resistance and of such complex hermeneutics of resistance would be to prevent the appropriations of anti-communist struggle by one political wing and one political vision of history. It would also, connectedly but more importantly, point out at the inherent cosmopolitanism of both anticolonial and anti-communist resistance. These movements, cultures, and politics could succeed only because

\(^7\) C. Şandru, op. cit., p. 100.

they were able to combine (mostly) national ethos with a cosmopolitan vision of transnational interconnectedness for the common purpose. Specifically in the case of anticommunist resistance, cosmopolitanism performed as nostalgia for Europe, as Svetlana Boym observes, constituted the core spirit of dissidence:

Europe was a transnational idea based on a civic ideal of the association of free cities. Sarajevo-Lubljana-Budapest-Belgrade-Zagreb-Plovdiv-Timisoara-Bucharest-Prague-Krakow-Lvov/Lviv-Vilnius-Tallinn-Leningrad/Petersburg-Gdansk/Danzig, the list can go on. Alternative-thinking urban-dwellers in these cities could find more in common among themselves than with their own countries. In the countries of the former Soviet bloc and Yugoslavia, nostalgia for Europe was a way of resisting the Soviet or Tito-style version of official internationalism as well as nationalism.

It is important to bring back this cosmopolitan ethos of Central and Eastern Europe, developed in opposition to the nationalist discourse of communist parties, to the pan-Slavic undercurrent of communist, Soviet [read Russian]-centered transnationalism, and, in fact, to the history of pre-war teeming nationalism.

This volume of *Miscellanea Posttotalitaria Wratislaviensia* is monographic in nature and showcases a variety of thought-provoking approaches to postcolonialism, totalitarianism, and resistance. In “The Joke Is on You: Humor, Resistance through Culture, and Paradoxical Forms of Dissent in Communist Romania” Bogdan Ţeţănescu demonstrates that we can look at resistance through culture as a complex and enigmatic sociopolitical issue. Cultural discourse analysis, he argues, may offer a precise and unbiased moral assessment of resistance through culture as a phenomenon characteristic of totalitarian cultural politics. Oleksandr Pronkevich’s “Is Don Quixote a Symbol of Resistance or of Totalitarianism?” pays attention to visual representations of Don Quixote in movies produced during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in Central and Eastern Europe. He focuses on Vlado Kristl’s *Don Kihote* (1961), Viktor Shenderovich’s *Don Quixote and His Bodyguard* (1995), and Vasilij Livonov’s *Don Quixote Returns* (1997). Using trauma theory, Pronkevich treats the cultural image of Don Quixote as a cultural myth and a symbol of resistance and totalitarianism. Dobrota Pucherová’s “Cabaret Theatre in Communist Czechoslovakia (1960s–1980s) as Political Resistance: The Case of Milan Lasica and Július Satinsky” proposes to read the cabaret theatre in socialist Czechoslovakia as a form of resistance against the communist totalitarianism of the 1960s–1980s. She convincingly argues that Lasica’s and Satinsky’s texts destabilized the political discourse and exposed falseness of the official discourse using sophisticated linguistic games. In “Narrating Resistance: Ludmilla Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg’s *The Thaw Generation* (1990)” Christina Jüttner and Mirja Lecke focus on memoirs and life writing. They make a case for the need of investigating argumentative structures and stylistic figures in *The Thaw Generation* in the context of making it reliable for both Russian and American readers. Benedikts Kalnačs’ “Latvian Writers’ Strategies of Resistance during De-Stalinization: The Case of Gunārs Priede” demonstrates the

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absurdity of communist rule. He studies aspects of social organization under Soviet rule and the attempts to overcome the limits of expression, and then he concentrates on the works of Gunārs Priede.

While the above-mentioned contributions deal with resistance in different socio-political backgrounds, authors of the subsequent four essays focus exclusively on Poland. In “Trauma of the Polish March” Katarzyna Chmielewska and Tomasz Žukowski pay attention to the political, social, and cultural significance of the events of the Polish 1968 political crisis. They offer an insightful analysis of the trauma discourse on March 1968 after 1989. Hanna Gosk’s “The Literary ‘No’ to the Politically Tabooed Topics during the Polish People’s Republic. The Case of Tadeusz Konwicki’s Prose Writing” is an English version of an essay recently published in Polish. Gosk discusses literary ways of talking about political taboos in the Polish People’s Republic. By focusing on Tadeusz Konwicki’s works she demonstrates that literary resistance made the writer an agent of collective memory. Elżbieta Klimek-Dominiak’s “Resisting (In)visible Women of Solidarity: Gender in American and Polish Oral History, Life Writing, Visual Arts and Film” addresses the lack of representation of women in the stereotypical perception of Solidarity. She questions not only this image of Solidarity, but also gender stereotypes and ultranationalist narratives in Poland. Due to its length, the essay had to be divided into two parts. The second one will appear in the next volume of Miscellanea Posttotalitariaiana Wratislaviensia. The last essay, Agnieszka Czyżak’s “At the Border of History and (Auto)Biography — Portraying Lech Wałęsa through Text and Experience” consists of an analysis of Janusz Głowacki’s works written in different historical conditions but each offering an ironical critique of national stereotypes and myths. Czyżak focuses on Głowacki’s script for the film on Lech Wałęsa and shows changes in the perception of Poland’s most recent history, as well as the consequent transformation of collective and individual identities.

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