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## POSTCOLONIAL METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMPARING POSTSOCIALIST NOSTALGIAS (CASES OF EAST GERMANY AND UKRAINE)

*The phenomena of nostalgias for the socialist past in Central and Eastern Europe with a number of their components are presented on the examples of East Germany and Ukraine. Possible ways of researching them within the postcolonial methodological framework are discussed. Research hypotheses and question for further comparative studies of (n) ostalgias are developed based on the assumptions of postcolonial theories.*

**Keywords:** ostalgie, postcolonial studies, post-socialist countries, GDR, post-soviet countries, soviet culture.

There are many different ways of looking at the post-soviet legacy in Central and Eastern Europe. Nowadays the social science is replete with research on the problems of dealing with it – from the studies on transition from authoritarian to democratic regimes to the studies on the shadow economics in the region and to the cultural investigation into the post-communist rationalities and cultural identities. However there are still many gaps in this realm of studies, both in terms of the subjects of scrutiny and in terms of the methodological approaches applied, which sometimes seems to be rather surprising. An example of the phenomenon that has not yet received enough attention of the social scientists is the nostalgia for the social past in the countries of the former “Eastern block”.

This phenomenon happens to have its own term – the German word *Ostalgie*, composed of the German words for *East* and *nostalgia* respectively. *Ostalgie* defines nostalgia for life under the socialist system in the GDR [4, p. 5]. This term is also sometimes used to denote the similar phenomenon of nostalgia in other former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In Germany this term is regarded as referring mostly to the material cultural and consumption of the East German products and trademarks etc. [4, p. 7]. The nostalgia for the soviet past in Ukraine, however, has clear social and political components like dissatisfaction with the contemporary political situation in

Ukraine and the discourse of an ongoing cyclic comparison of today’s life with the good old days of the Soviet past. Both in Germany and in Ukraine there is still a lot about *Ostalgie* that can be studied and researched.

Regarding the methodological approaches that have not yet been fully applied to the studies of the post-socialist countries today *postcolonialism* should be mentioned among the first. Literature and language studies have paid attention to the postcolonial literatures and language changes in the former soviet republics [8] but there have been only few attempts to apply the concept of *postcolonialism* by social scientist to study the societal and political processes and mechanisms in the post-socialist countries [2].

Putting together the two gaps in the studies of the post-socialist countries – the phenomenon of *Ostalgie* and the *postcolonialism* as a conceptual research framework – the goal of this article is to develop a research framework with specific research questions that would broaden the scope of comparative postsocialist nostalgias studies by applying the postcolonial approach to it. There are several *tasks* to be completed in order to reach this goal: a) to define the field of application for the *Ostalgie* phenomenon as a research tool; b) to describe the heuristic potential of the postcolonial methodological research to the studies of the post-socialist countries today; c) to suggest research hy-

potheses and research questions for further comparative studies of nostalgias. The main comparative cases throughout this article will be East Germany and Ukraine.

The *Ostalgie* phenomenon, as mentioned above, refers to the nostalgia for different aspects of everyday life under the socialist system in the GDR. This phenomenon is being actively dealt with by German researchers within the frameworks of different scientific disciplines. In contrast, in Ukraine there is a vivid lack of scientific research on the nostalgia for the Soviet past, its roots, mechanisms and consequences. Of course, the issues of how to deal with the soviet past is an extremely discussed and debated in Ukraine's political, social, and culture discourse. What is meant by the lack of scientific research is that the issue is heavily politicized which leads to a vivid absence of solid empirical studies on the topic of the soviet legacy. There is an even more striking gap in the studies of the *Ostalgie* in the minds of the new generation of Ukrainians.

One can expect that the new generations of East Germans and Ukrainians who have no life encounter of the socialist past would not feel the nostalgia for something they did not experience. However a positive and exaggeratedly idealized image of the socialist East German and Ukrainian past can be found in the discourses of the younger generation in the postsocialist countries. It is interesting to figure out how such a positive image was created and how this image was transmitted to the new generation. Inquires into this topic would require the studies of the underlying *mental mechanisms* of contrast-comparison of the "new life" with the "old life" i. e. contemporary (East) German society with the DDR society, transitional society of today's Ukraine with the Soviet society controlled by the communist party etc. The units of such study would be: a) the phenomenon of nostalgia for the socialist past itself and its components (especially those that constitute the attractiveness of the socialist past for the new generation); b) the mechanisms of *transmitting* this nostalgia from one generation to another and *preserving* it.

Studies of such phenomena as group nostalgia, positive false memory, emotional attachment to the past and so on would imply application of *the sociology of emotions* which is another topic and will not be discussed here further. What should be discussed here is the consideration for the remnants of the socialist past as the *products of the soviet culture*, and not only material culture, but also political culture of attitudes and ideological considerations. It can be claimed that the transmission of social and cultural memory from one generation to another is

only a part of a more general (or more "abstract") phenomenon of cultural codes and forms of rationality that originated in the GDR as part of the soviet civilisation. In this respect it could be claimed that there is an *ethos of the soviet culture* which still lives on and mutates into new forms, even on the "outskirts" of the former Soviet Empire – the case of the East Germany today. This consideration of the problem allows us to move from the study of the *Ostalgie* phenomenon onto a more general level of the social construction of contemporary post-soviet culture and its ethos, to proceed with an investigation into the values, norms, beliefs, mindsets or "structures of thoughts" (German *Denkstrukturen*), and special behavioral patterns by the people, who lived in the Soviet Union and the socialist Central and Eastern Europe.

Several terms are used to describe the special case of human being as a product of the soviet system. The neutral in terms of its connotations in Russian and in the major European languages is the term "*the soviet people*" [1]. This term had been officially used in the Soviet Union to describe a new social and cultural formation of people that, and this is an important point, were engineered by the soviet government by means of education, propaganda, social and demographic projects etc. Another term is *homo sovieticus*, a pseudo-Latin term which has been used as a form of sarcastic description of people with common cognitive and behavioral patterns allegedly indoctrinated by the communist government [1]. The most widespread term with a really wide range of uses in different semantic forms is *sovok*. A generically derived adjective *sovkovyi* is used to describe not the person, but the style or the manner of behavior, as well as simply tasteless objects of different kind (i. e. furniture or clothes) thought to be of the soviet origin. It is worth noting that all of these terms exceed both spatially and temporally the Soviet Union itself. The Soviet cultural zone – in the Soviet Union and the countries in the Central and Easter Europe under its influence – really managed to produce a particular type of mindset and a system of individual norms, beliefs, and values, plus a behavioral pattern, in originally diverse cultures, e. g. in East Germany and in Russia or Ukraine. It is surprisingly how these elements survived until now in East Germany and how similar the sentiments for the socialist past are to that of the people in Russia and Ukraine.

It is possible to study the behavioral patterns, mindsets, values and beliefs through a comparative case-study that shall comprise three cases: contemporary Russia as the core of the post-soviet culture, Ukraine and the type I Periphery in the immediate

vicinity to the core (i. e. Russia) and type II periphery – East Germany, which can be considered the furthest from the core. These cases are presented in the table below.

**Table. Comparative case-study of soviet core and its peripheries**

	<i>Periphery II</i>	<i>Periphery I</i>	<i>The Core</i>
Countries	East Germany	Ukraine	Russia
Russian cultural influence	Weak	Strong	(Very strong)
Westernizing modernization	Successful	Hampered	Opposed
Western democratic model	Established	Not established	Disputed

This case selection is based on the comparison of different criteria that characterize the case from a very basic perspective. Ukraine has been strongly influenced by the Russian and, consequently, the Soviet culture in general, whereas Germany has received less of that influence. The westernizing modernization took totally different forms in the GDR after its unification with the FRG, it all in all it can be claimed to be generally successful. The Westernized modernization in Ukraine is hampered but it is not that much opposed or questioned when compared to Russia. The acceptance of the Western democratic model was successful in the East Germany as a part of the nowadays FRG, Ukraine experiences a truncated transition or even flashbacks in the process of establishing viable democratic institutions (to a great extent also due to the influence of the Russian mode of development and political processes there) but, again, there are considerably less incentives in Ukraine to dispute the Western democratic model or, even less so, to suggest something analogous to the Eurasian model. Despite all of these differences (and similarities, of course) these cases show some similar content in their (n) ostalgias. The components of those (n) ostalgias can be studied within the broader framework of postcolonial studies.

Postcolonial theory is not a single school of thought. It is a complex and in some instances very diffused field of theories, strongly dominated by cultural and literature studies [5, p. 1]. What unites them and holds this field together is the deconstruction of essentialisms and a critical inquiry, a critical position to the dominant concepts of modernity and attempts at developing alternative positions to them [9, p. 11]. The common postcolonial research presupposition is that no category, no meaning is self evident, none is compulsory. There is no such thing or category that is *obvious*, like there is no obvious oppositions “East – West” or “modern – traditional” [9, p. 16]. The research process in postcolonial paradigm is a process of con-

stant contextualization of meanings [9, p. 16–17]: every phenomenon, every object according to the basic assumption of the postcolonial theory, exists only in a relationship to a power-knowledge-structure [9, p. 18]. Even more interesting is the term “postcolonial” itself [5, p. 2]. The prefix “post” in it should be read neither as a state after colonialism, because postcolonialism also criticizes the chronological understanding of human history, nor as an expression of a polarity between different societal and political conditions. “The term “postcolonial” should be understood as a politically motivated analytical category for studies of the sustainable imprint and influence of the global situation caused by the colonialism, decolonization and the neo-colonial tendencies” [9, p. 17]. The post-socialist space of the Central and Eastern Europe provides a rich material for studies of different post- and neo-colonial tendencies.

Within this field of enquires two braches should be considered – the theoretical and conceptional *postcolonial theories* and material and empirical one – *postcolonial studies*. There have been attempts at applying them in the studies of the post-socialist Europe and the republics of the former USSR, dominated by cultural and literature studies, which is also the case of the postcolonial studies in general. An interesting example is the article of D. Ch. Moore in which he states that the “Russo-Soviet colonial activity fits imperfectly” into the “classical” taxonomy of colonial expansions [6, p. 119] and that “Russo-Soviet” empire, as he calls it, can be studied within the postcolonial framework. Based on his assumption and on the general information about the postcolonial approach, two hypotheses for the study of the forms and contents of the (n) ostalgias in Russia, Ukraine, and East Germany can be suggested:

*Hypotheses A. (N) ostalgias in the post-soviet space can be seen as a form of cultural and social resistance to the contemporary postmodernist world order of “the West”.*

Ostalgie in the GDR reveals a longing for a sense of community and friendship (better described by the Russian term товарищество – *tovarischestvo*) which is opposed to the postmodernist higher level of individually of the nowadays capitalistic societies. This opposition itself can be critically researched from the postcolonial perspective, of course. It is also surprising how the scarcity of the majority of products and luxury goods in the GDR or USSR can be presented in a positive manner like a response to the nowadays

consumerism seen as a negative result of the capitalist development. It can be claimed in this respect that the specific components of the ethos of the Soviet culture have spatially and temporally transcended the Soviet Union and they remain viable in the world today because of their power to provide an alternative to the postmodern reality, which, in term, can be studied from a postcolonial perspective, using its rich corpora of criticism of the modern liberal and neo-liberal paradigms of (post) modernity.

*Hypothesis B. Specific Russian cultural imprint in the ethos of the soviet culture goes beyond the borders of the Russian national culture and its traditions and internalizes itself through the post-soviet culture in the contemporary forms of different (n) ostalgias.*

It can be assumed that the cultural codes as well as other components present in the modern forms of (n) ostalgias can potentially be traced back to their origin in the Russian national culture. However, with their development into the Soviet culture, which was aimed to become and international and, ideally, a cosmopolitan culture with no particular national attachment, these components internalized themselves in originally different cultures and are still present and reproduced there. An example of it can be the *tovarischestvo* mentioned above or nepotism in its different forms, collectivists' cultural values, the critical attitude towards local authorities with a strong belief in the central power etc [7, p. 300]. They might also be traced back to the traditional Russian culture (e. g. to the *slavophiles* and *zavadniki* debates) and by doing so we can study the process of imperial expansion not in a chronological order criticized by the postcolonial approach, but by tracing the transformation, transmittance and preservation of ideas, values, and beliefs in the process of "Russo-Soviet" imperial extension. It can also lead to a new concept of *homo (post) sovieticus* – the new generations that are not the direct product of the soviet system but still have acquired and incorporated some elements of the *homo sovieticus* into their worldview,

at least in their type of critical stance to the modern western "capitalist" and globalized world.

By means of applying the postcolonial methodological perspective to the study of the components and mechanisms of nostalgias, which, in turn, can be seen as particular products of (post) soviet culture manifest in *homo (post) sovieticus*' mindsets as *Denkstrukturen* and behavioral patterns, it becomes possible:

- a) to identify the cultural codes of the traditional Russian culture internalized in the soviet and the post-soviet culture;
- b) to compare the components of the post-soviet cultural ethos in the selected cases;
- c) to reconstruct the post-soviet ethos in its contemporary forms and critically analyze its potential to provide an alternative to the post-modern Western (neo) liberal worldview.

Identification of the cultural codes of what can be seen as a *traditional* Russian culture is inevitably a case of criticism within the postcolonial research paradigm since traditionality as a concept is disputed and critically deconstructed. This approach seems to be useful and informative because it enables to discern what can be regarded as "soviet" and what should be seen as "traditionally Russian" for further scientific investigations. Finally, it would allow a phenomenological rich description of the (*post*) soviet cultural ethos.

In conclusion it should be pointed out that the postcolonial methodological framework for comparing different nostalgias, exemplified in this article by East Germany and Ukraine, can be a very broad conceptual approach, which might have its own advantages and disadvantages in terms of limitations for empirical studies of the mental mechanisms of nostalgias and their components. As it was mentioned in the article, other disciplines can be used to get deeper into e. g. the psychological aspects of emotional attachments to the past, like sociology of emotions. All in all, postcolonial methodological framework can be applied to study specific aspects of the postsocialist political and social phenomena, like *Ostalgie*, and enrich our knowledge about the transformation processes and mechanisms in Central and Eastern Europe.

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## ПОСТКОЛОНІАЛЬНІ МЕТОДОЛОГІЧНІ РАМКИ ПОРІВНЯННЯ ПОСТСОЦІАЛІСТИЧНИХ НОСТАЛЬГІЙ (НА ПРИКЛАДАХ СХІДНОЇ НІМЕЧЧИНИ ТА УКРАЇНИ)

*Ностальгію за соціалістичним минулим у Центральній та Східній Європі як складне явище з різними компонентами розглянуто на прикладах Східної Німеччини та України. Аналізуються можливі способи дослідження цього явища в межах постколоніального методологічного підходу. Запропоновано дослідницькі гіпотези і питання для подальших порівняльних досліджень різних (н)остальгій на основі положень постколоніальних теорій.*

**Ключові слова:** остальгія, постколоніальні дослідження, постсоціалістичні країни, НДР, пострадянські країни, радянська культура.

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## ПОЛІТИЧНА КУЛЬТУРА ДЕМОКРАТИЧНОГО СУСПІЛЬСТВА У КОНТЕКСТІ ФЕНОМЕНУ ГРОМАДЯНСТВА

*У статті досліджено політичну культуру демократичного суспільства на прикладі функціонування інституту громадянства і загальноєвропейського та національного виборчого права у державах-членах Європейського Союзу.*

**Ключові слова:** політична культура, інститут громадянства, виборче законодавство, Європейський Союз.

Ця стаття пов'язана з трьома важливими поняттями сучасної політичної науки: політичною культурою, демократією та інститутом громадянства, що стрімко розвиваються з середини ХХ ст. Кожне з них формує широке поле досліджень, продукує нові теорії, відображає розвиток науки і суспільства. Проте, попри незалежність та самодостатність цих феноменів, важливо також розглядати їх у взаємозв'язку, аби дослідити взаємовплив та взаємообумовленість політичної культури, демократії та інсти-

туту громадянства, з'ясувати слабкі сторони демократичної політичної культури.

З часів появи концепції політичної культури всередині 1950-х років, з'явилося багато робіт, присвячених вивченню цього феномену. Найвідомішими є праці Г. Алмонда, С. Верби, К. Бойме, Л. Даймонда, Л. Пай, Г. Пауелла, Р. Такера, У. Розенбаума, С. Хантінгтона. Визначаючи це поняття, кожен з дослідників акцентує увагу на певних особливостях. Зокрема, Л. Пай визначає політичну культуру як систему