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**THE MIGRANT COMMUNITIES OF THEORY:
POSTWAR COMPARATISTS FROM EAST-CENTRAL
EUROPE ON THE TRANSATLANTIC ROUTE**

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SUMMARY

There is little doubt that exile and emigration take a central place in the landscape of post-1989 theoretical investigations. The reconfiguring of the historical, political and ideological framework, together with the much-clamoured disavowal of communism, offer ample research matter to metaliterature, as well as arguments for pronouncements and revocations, directions to adhere to or, on the contrary, to react against. Furthermore, the ascent of postcolonialism, on the one hand, and that of the new comparatism (*World Literature*), on the other, amplified debates around the place of national literatures in a global context, while symbolic power negotiations went searching for arguments in the peculiar, undefined, and unstable aspects of literature. In this context, transnational literary models began to gain ground. One such “grey zone” recurrently summoned in critical discourse, particularly as an “export products factory” for the world literary market, is that of exile, emigration, or, to use a term first introduced in 1990, transmigration. Literature’s ground movements become all the more significant within the framework of authority negotiations taking place in the translation of power dynamics between the local and global.

The present research is grounded in the conviction that the only honest possibility to discuss literature in our times is by adopting a systemic, dialogical gaze. Its aim is to trace the networks of exchanges and intersections in which postwar Romanian and East-Central European comparatists are engaged and in relation to which they define themselves in the transatlantic space. While similar studies, such as those authored by Galin Tihanov or by John Neubauer and Borbála Zsuzsanna Török, have mostly focused on the migration of theory from East-Central Europe to alternative centres in Western Europe – France or, to a lesser extent, England – or have discussed metaliterature within the context of debates over poetry or prose, our analysis is circumscribed to North America – the United States and Canada – and shifts the focus on comparatism and theory itself.

One of our heuristic premises stems from the belief that contextually determined encounters, in institutional settings – such as universities, research centres, conferences, workshops or joint projects –, attuned to the theoretical effervescence of the host environment, contribute to the emergence of a “migrant community” of theory and comparatism. The transatlantic space allows these communities to be introduced to a connected network in which the reminiscences of their original formation – often similar for

emigrant East-Central European scholars – can be reconfigured in accordance with the new theoretical realities in which these scholars are now immersed. Another one of our main premises, derived from the first, is that within such a community there are certain national groups or “schools” of theoretical thought, organised on a federal basis. Despite no explicit programme in this regard, they nevertheless regulate the theoretical system from the inside. Thus, while not all members of a school have the same degree of international prominence, the internal circulation of their ideas serves as a springboard to the rise of “stars” within the group, both internationally and back home, in their countries of origin. They activate a kind of autoregulating system based on quantitative and qualitative criteria.

As a consequence of this authority transfer on a reverse route – from recognition by the “global republic” of theory to taking one’s place in the literature of origin – the critical studies dedicated to these figures have often pictured their return to their initial environment using the rhetoric of a just restitution. Part of world literature, they are reintegrated in the internal circuit of theory from a position of power, where the main investigations are chiefly concerned with the gains and losses of their literary destiny, and with explaining the secret to their success through continuities and discontinuities, brought upon them by emigration. Without losing sight of these aspects, which have already been discussed by prior research (such as Roxana Eichel’s study of Romanian theoretical exile), we propose here an analysis of transnational migrant theory which, in an American context, takes shape as a system with three dialogical facets, which determine each other reciprocally: that of “national” schools forged in the diaspora; that of the migrant community of East-Central European comparatism; and a third one of global theory.

Using the tools of quantitative and metacritical analysis, and a network-based and contextual interpretation of theory, I will seek to render a composite portrait of Romanian, Hungarian, Polish and Czechoslovakian migrant comparatism in North America. Starting from this, I will then explore the question of each of these comparatisms’ specificity, the correspondences determined by their original and adoptive environments, and the ways in which they were recognised on the world scene. The present work comprises three main chapters devoted to, respectively: the theoretical and conceptual framework of transnational studies; transnational theory from Romania in the transatlantic community; and East-Central European transnational theory in the same space, with the correspondences and differences between them. Each chapter, in turn, is structured around a cause-and-effect relationship. The first part of the chapter is meant to seize a theoretical undertaking – whether explanatory or demonstrative – , while the second one an applied, illustrative one.

To lay the groundwork to my demonstration, the first chapter traces the manner in which the understanding of concepts such as exile, expatriation, emigration and transmigration has evolved over time. More precisely, the way migrant groupings have been configured and defined depends on the conceptual and methodological reorientation of the postwar period. The reference framework within which exile and emigration have been reassessed was forged by the social, cultural and political aspirations of the 1960s and 1970s, which brought along a renewed interest for literature's hitherto peripheral domains, as well as by literature's accelerating mobility through scholarships or work and research opportunities, paired with a deliberate refusal of all rigid ties and notions of belonging. Often simplified as a "nostalgia" for one's origins, exile gradually began to lose its dramatic connotations, while emigration (which is above all defined by negation, as the *leftovers* of exile) became a term too broad to accurately define this changing phenomenon.

The migrant community of comparatists seizes this paradigm change, which begins in earnest shortly after their departure to the United States and Canada (most of them emigrate between 1960 and 1980) and is theorised around 1990. For this reason, this community will define itself in relation to these conceptual shifts, as a transitional group between exile and emigration – through "nostalgic" reflections we can sometimes identify in their texts, through translating these reflections in diaries or memoirs aimed at a local audience, through subjective (or even affective) asides in the selection of literary examples stemming from their area of origin – towards "nomad" comparatism (Borbála Zsuzsanna Török) or the "*globe-trotting*" (Susan Suleiman) of "transmigration" (Schiller, Blanc).

Thus, the first part of this chapter will trace the conceptual boundaries and nuances around transnationalism, proceeding from exile, migration, and diaspora studies. Firstly, I will review the theories which argue for a paradigm shift in the 1990s, and confront them with more sceptical models, which question the usefulness of this novel theoretical framework. Roughly structured as a literature review of transnational theories, the first chapter will prove, following Paul Jay and Susan Stanford Friedman, that the concept of transnationalism, while borrowed from anthropology and the social sciences, merely provides a solid grounding to a work method which was already established in literary studies. In the second part of this chapter, I will seek to uncover the uses of this concept in the Romanian scholarly corpus. These investigations will also allow us to assess the status quo of current research, and understand *what* and *how much* has been discussed in transnational terms in the national literature, and which is, after all, the role of theory in this type of debates.

The second chapter delineates a group portrait of the “Romanian-American tendency in comparatism” (Letiția Guran). Much the same as Hungarians, Poles or Czechoslovakians, Romanians in America do not claim a shared designation and shy away from presenting themselves, in their correspondence, as a “school” of emigration. Despite all this, after 1989, when they make their triumphant return to Romanian scholarship, they are often read in dialogue and linked to each other in literary criticism. With few exceptions, the previous statement is true especially in regard to Virgil Nemoianu, Matei Călinescu or Thomas Pavel. Pursuing the path of research which places Marcel Cornis-Pope or Mihai Spăriosu alongside the three previously mentioned (see Terian, Guran, Vajdová), in the second chapter the latter will take on a place of choice in redefining exile as it transitions towards transmigration.

A precise description of the phenomenon requires a return to the initial context, which anticipates, and to a certain extent explains the departure to the United States. In order to do so, the first part of the second chapter presents the landscape of criticism and theory in postwar Romania, and unfolds the shared context of intellectual growth which, up to a point, underpins certain later tendencies in these scholars’ research trajectories: their relationship to structuralism or with modernism and postmodernism, their views on the aesthetic and their trust in literature, their anti-radical attitude and their discursive moderation. Working within limited boundaries outside the political, with broad interest in world literature and fluent in foreign languages, Pavel, Nemoianu, Spăriosu, Cornis-Pope or Călinescu will take advantage of Western study opportunities to renegotiate their identity.

In order to then explain their place in the world theory market and the symbolic power transfer they mediate, the latter parts of the chapter will focus on analysing the five models of critical thought particular to each of these scholars, and their transnational fate. After all, upon leaving Romania, the migrant comparatists are already academically trained and have relatively clear directions in their research. Therefore, their academic trajectory in the United States is built in dialogue or in opposition to the “national” phase of theory. The main objective of each individual analysis is to follow an intellectual path on its transatlantic route and to re-enact the evolution of relevant theories in a broad context, by reading them in relationship to each author’s texts from their Romanian period, to their response to the new intellectual environment tied to an extended network of theory, and to their return after 1989 to/within Romanian literature.

Contrary to previous research on similar topics, the present study emphasises the comparatists’ role in creating links from two directions, rather than simply inventorying the

gains and losses incurred in theory's transnational travels. The first direction is that of authority negotiations and symbolic capital transfer between the country of origin and the host country. The second one is concerned with the manner in which the comparatists mediate the transition from the category of exile (still perceivable in the writings of Nemoianu or Călinescu) to a type of self-definition which does away with origins and belonging – a theoretical nomadism, initiated by Spăriosu and Cornis-Pope and fully realised chiefly by Christian Moraru.

Therefore, while the first chapter lays the theoretical framework of our research, and the second one presents the outline of a first case of coherent grouping of transatlantic migrant scholars (i.e., comparatism of Romanian origin), the third chapter unveils the twin aims of the current work: to illustrate several models of national “schools” of East-Central European comparatism and also to identify the clusters and nexuses of convergence, encounters and mutual determination between them, as they played off in the forging of an East-Central European migrant community in the United States and in Canada.

While trying to map out East-Central European comparatism in North America, certain limits were encountered which create gaps in our research. Due to language barriers, lack of prior scholarship, and even the lack of quantitative studies which would at least mention postwar theory from ex-Yugoslavia in the United States (one of the only names referenced in dialogical studies is that of Darko Savin), we were forced to exclude it from our analysis. However, the absence of Yugoslav emigration, which can be partly explained as well by the persistence of internal political conflict after 1990 which might have entailed a reduced interest for metaliterature, does not diminish the overall argument of the present study.

In the course of this research, I will seek the arguments that point towards a dialogical disposition of comparatism in Eastern and Central Europe. In a revision of transnational studies which discuss the existence of a regional area and the reasons for this connection between literatures, the first such argument will be that of a similar genesis and of shared origins. A second argument for the cohesion of the migrant community stems from the choice of the North American space as an alternative environment for intellectual growth. Cultural heterogeneity, openness towards peripheral and semi-peripheral countries, institutional access (to universities, print media, radio, or work opportunities connected to literature), the pressure of competition on a performance-oriented market, or the involvement of migrants in joint projects with higher visibility, are some of the trends which direct the comparatist

community. To better explain the concept of “migrant community” proposed here, I will define it in relation to three related notions: on the one hand the “imagined community” (Benedict Anderson) and the “interliterary community” (Dionýz Ďurišin) – the “migrant community” is born at the crossing between these two -, and on the other the notion of “modernity at large” (Arjun Appadurai), which provides the general framework for this phenomenon.

This migrant community of theory and comparatism will also be explored in its federal configuration. Doubtlessly it is dependent on the national “schools” that compose it, which each have their individual specificities. The greater part of this chapter will investigate the features and the main representatives of emigration from Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Often these scholars are themselves authors of studies on the poetry and prose of migration and coordinate research projects dedicated to national literatures (initiated in the United States or in Canada), and thus maintain their role as ambassadors of their cultures across the Atlantic. The encyclopedias, dictionaries and compendia on exile and emigration from these three European countries usually mention those authors who have also produced other kinds of writing (Czesław Miłosz), while often neglecting the other genre of the diaspora – theory. Thus, our outline of the national “schools” of comparatism in the United States and Canada fills in the map of migration, tracing the mediating pole between global and local literature and the way in which the comparatists take advantage of their own position. The unevenness, both qualitatively and quantitatively, between the national theory “schools” and between their representatives, and the selection of “spokespeople” for each group in literature’s globalised space can only lead to a secondary investigation, as to the true relevance of their theory in international comparatism, and the ethics of variation or positive discrimination, which offers visibility on different criteria.

Proceeding from this, I will attempt to bring forth the core convergences in terms of themes, style, critical or ideological attitudes, and to discuss the way in which they relate to the literature from their areas of origin. Furthermore, following John Neubauer’s approach to poetry and prose in exile, this study will identify some transatlantic centres where East-Central European theory is emulated, cities and institutions where the exchange of ideas, shared projects and cross-pollination become possible. A map of East-Central European theory in the transatlantic space will be drafted through both quantitative filters and external contextual, and derived explanations.

The two case studies which conclude our work propose further discussions regarding the textual materialisation of these dialogical networks of East-Central Europeans in the transatlantic space. The case study focusing on Thomas Pavel and Lubomír Doležel demonstrates a similar biographical path and intellectual development, aiming to understand the similarities between these two scholars not only through their shared East-Central European origins, but also in relation to their host environment. The second case study, which analyses the topic with further methodological tools via East-Central European regional geography, expands the scope of our research towards a model (among many possible ones) of discursive and analytical intersection within the migrant community described here.

There is no doubt that a study on migration involves many challenges in defining and conceptualising its scope, taking into account the breadth of the changes that occurred after 1990, and the epistemic shift of transnationalism. For this reason, we found it necessary to provide ample space to clarifications of the terminology we used, all the more so because the migrant community here discussed is underpinned by a substantial redefinition of exile and emigration and their shift towards transmigration. Furthermore, the national directions of transatlantic migrant comparatism vindicate our main hypothesis – that of showing their federal coherency, within national “schools”, then in an East-Central European community, and ultimately in a global one – but also fill in a gap in reception which we had identified in exile and migration studies.

Due to limitations of time and space inherent to this type of research, as well as owing to the gaps in the bibliography (incomplete studies of exile, which ignore theory and comparatism, and which are often written in the national languages of each country of origin), the national trends of the migrant community described here should be seen as potentially incomplete. As much as prose or poetry, theory and comparatism do not comprise a pre-defined or precise number of authors. Ultimately, the aim of this thesis is not to exhaustively describe a phenomenon, but to outline and explain a network of meaning within transatlantic migrant communities, a dialogical thought system. Last but not least, this thesis stems from the belief that theory and comparatism are, by their very nature, the literary genres most reliant on the ideas of dialogue and community, but also the genres which are most susceptible to being instrumentalised for various agendas.

KEY WORDS: transnationalism; comparatism; migrant community; literary diaspora; exile; transmigration; regional space; East-Central Europe