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THE  
POSTCOLONIAL  
AND THE  
POSTSOCIALIST

A DEFERRED COALITION?  
BROTHERS FOREVER?



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In my apartment in Moscow I keep many old photographs of my young mother visiting India – inter-

viewing Jafri Ali Sardar, discussing her translation of Krishan Chander's novel with the author, taking part in an official meeting with Jawaharlal Neru. I also keep the textbooks which were published in the mid 1950s and written for the Uzbek fifth graders experimentally learning Hindi (rather than English) as a foreign language. My mother was one of the authors of these textbooks and also one of the first school teachers of Hindi and Urdu in the old city of Tashkent.

“Russian and Indian—brothers forever!”—claimed the poster hanging on the wall of this class. But there were no Russians in the old Tashkent school and their teacher – my mother - was Uzbek after all. Typically, those who were assigned the role of advancing the “peoples’ friendship” and mutual understanding were very often the Soviet colonial others. They were better at mastering the non-Western languages (often related to their own native tongues), grasping the cultural diversity of the foreign spaces and peoples which the racist imperial Russians saw as indiscriminate or opaque. Once sent to such non-Western countries, the colonial Soviet tricksters were able to establish sincere communication with the local population who instinctively trusted them more than the eurocentric and colonizing Russians. But these emisaries were required to remain the loyal tools of the Soviet empire and the mediators of its soft power to the global South. Those who refused or attempted to outsmart the power (like my mother) were seriously risking their careers and lives.

## **THE POSTCOLONIAL/POSTSOCIALIST ASYMMETRY**

In the last decade, many scholars have started to discuss possible links and similarities between the postsocialist and the postcolonial conditions (Kołodziejczyk and Sandru 2012, Chari and Verderi 2009, Suchland 2013, Kašić, Petrović, Prlenda, Slapšak 2012, Pucherová and Gáfric 2015, Annus 2017)<sup>1</sup>. These discussions have largely been initiated by either the Western experts analyzing postcolonial and postsocialist others in typically area studies and hence, inevitably objectifying way, or the postsocialist people themselves—mostly those living in the West and having received an injection of contemporary critical theories including the postcolonial one. In the latter case the postcolonial analogizing is used to explain the major shift that has taken place in the lives of the socialist people—the shift from the so called second world to the position of the global South or deep periphery today.

Significantly, there are much fewer meaningful cases of the postcolonial scholars attempting to reflect on the parallels between their condition and that of the postsocialist people<sup>2</sup>. Thus, in the spring of 2015 together with my Indian and Estonian colleagues living and working in Sweden we organized a conference on the possible dialogues and opacities between the postcolonial and the postsocialist feminisms. Symptomatically,

none of the postcolonial participants even attempted to address the links or parallels with the postsocialist condition or reflect on the reasons for their lack. Without conspiring, they focused each on their own local history—be it Latin America, Africa or India—not showing any interest in coinciding them with the other socialist modernity and its aftermath.

The postsocialist feminists, mostly of Eastern European origins, on the contrary, freely borrowed from the postcolonial discourse criticizing the subalternization and peripheralization of Eastern European countries after the collapse of the state socialist system. In their reasoning, the postsocialist women were seen as too advanced, emancipated and already westernized to be equalized with the subalterns who need to be liberated by the Western world. The postsocialist women unanimously found it insulting to be analogized with the postcolonial other. I see this as a manifestation of an important asymmetry in many ways preventing the possibility of coalitions and solidarity between the postcolonial and the postsocialist people, and leaving each of the groups once again, alone and facing the global neoliberal capitalist modernity with its inevitable darker colonial side. Today this global coloniality <sup>4</sup> discriminates and devalues not only the former colonial subjects and the ex-socialist people but also many other groups that were protected before by their mere belonging to European/White/Christian/mid-

dle-class/educated strata. I have been reflecting on the reasons for the lacking dialogue and deferred coalition of the postcolonial and postsocialist others, and on the necessary steps we need to take to build an alliance for a better and more just world. This article is a preliminary result of my reflections.

It seems that the postcolonial and the postsocialist discourses in their predominant descriptive forms refuse to notice each other's histories or see them as relevant. They remain blind to any possible connecting threads between their mutual seemingly independent experiences, and unable to theorize any overarching concepts or notions allowing to see the postcolonial and postsocialist narratives as parts of the same story. To me, the decolonial option is a more promising tool for conceptualizing the links between different "wretched of the earth" and also for preparing and launching "deep coalitions"<sup>5</sup> for the struggle to dismantle modernity/coloniality.

It is necessary to differentiate between various levels affecting the parallels and discrepancies between the postcolonial and the postsocialist conditions and imaginaries, and in doing so, to go deeper than the history of the state socialist system. The roots of the possible dialogues or the reasons for their lack lie in the intersection of the earlier historical layers, marked by the imperial rivalry and therefore by the imperial

difference in its multiple and complex manifestations<sup>6</sup>, and the later ideological and geopolitical differences merging with these original imperial-colonial levels.

### **Once again, a racism without race?**

A core category defining modernity/coloniality is race, intersecting with economic and social forms of the modern/colonial dependence. The difference in the interpretation of race and racism is one of the main reasons for the lack of understanding and deferred coalitions between the postcolonial and the post-socialist others marked by different forms of coloniality of being and often rigid stand-point positionality. In the case of the USSR and a number of other socialist countries racism acquired specific altered and distorted forms merging with class and economic factors, and was not identified as racism either by the local people or much less from the outside.

Race and racism were excluded from the state socialist social sciences and hence, any discussion of the mechanism for the shaping of the human taxonomies, had to be limited by the critique of the capitalist system and/or the denunciation of the previous Czarist regime as the Soviet modernity's own darker past. This deceived not only the naïve foreigners, including the fighters for the national independence and later representatives of the so called non-aligned countries whom the Soviet

empire strove to win using its soft-power techniques, but also many local subjects who were brainwashed by the Soviet propaganda and awarded an honorary belonging to the second world. These Soviet colonial tricksters realized that they were too weak to start an open decolonization and had to choose a lesser evil and try to infiltrate the Soviet system from within, pretending to be loyal to gain advantages for the suffering local people and for themselves.

The strata of the colonial socialist others who could tell the story of their discrimination and conceptualize it as racism, was rather thin. These groups were neither properly represented in the public discourse nor had any right to have a voice because they contradicted the Soviet modernity's grand narrative of the backward people civilized by the Socialist Russians to be accepted and assimilated into the only correct form of modernity. The universal class parameter in the State Socialist discourse was used as a common denominator absorbing race. Race then was translated into the language of class. Whereas in the Western liberal capitalist modernity with its darker colonial side race has remained the central factor into which the class distinctions were often translated in the proportion which was the opposite to the Soviet recipe.

In the Soviet "wonderland" the noble lineage and education were devalued and replaced with poverty, low



origins and illiteracy as “positive” factors guaranteeing social and economic promotion, welfare and security. One was better off being poor and illiterate because this meant he or she was entitled to be civilized and educated in the only legitimate way sanctified by the state and the communist party. In the end a specific Soviet intelligentsia artificially selected from the previously disenfranchised groups, took central place and sang their dithyrambs to the Soviet power. It is these people who were later ardently supporting the Soviet proletarian internationalist myth in meetings with fighters of anticolonial struggles from all over the world, and drawing a sharp distinction between the blissful Soviet paradise advancing the progress of the backward people, and the grim racist reality of the USA and Western Europe and their colonialist policies in Asia, Africa and South America.

However at a closer inspection the Soviet racializing and social engineering were merely a reflection of a typically modern/colonial mechanism of interpreting all negative characteristics through race. Even if one would not find here a commercial of a black child washing himself with Pears soap until he got white (McClintock 1995, 213), there were surely caricatures that depicted the bourgeoisie, the clergy and the aristocrats as racially degenerate people. The Soviet posters advertising the friendship of the peoples were based on the hierarchy which was racial in its essence and stagist in its form: the central or higher place was always occu-

pied by the Slavs (in the order of their closeness to Russians as an etalon), while the non-European peoples were put lower and farther from the center. In a sense Bolsheviks were against racism Western style and for racism Soviet way. What remained intact in both cases was, in Weitz's idea, the assignment of indelible traits to particular groups. Hence, ethnic groups, nationalities, and even social classes can be "racialized" in historically contingent moments and places" (Weitz 2002, 7). A biological interpretation of race by the 1930s had changed to culturalist arguments, with the significant exception of colonial spaces. In E. Balibar's words, "this approach naturalizes not racial belonging but racial conduct" (Balibar 1991, 22).

The politics of Soviet *korenizatsija* (literally, "rooting") of the 1920–1930s, and later an anti-nationalist campaign (nationalism being used as an accusation only in relation to non-Russians<sup>7</sup>), the forced deportations of the whole ethnicities, manifested the Soviet politics of creating and controlling nationalities from above. As Weitz points out, the social characteristic easily collapsed into biological (Weitz 2002, 11), the class enemies became the enemies of the people and enemy nations. The Soviet ideology contradicted itself in creating nationalities in the periphery, on the one hand (including the imposed literacies and the sense of ethnic-territorial belonging), and on the other hand, regarding the national traditions and customs that came

to be associated with this ethnicity only due to colonization—as a threat.

This Soviet hypocrisy in relation to racism is hard to grasp from the outside especially if one is not familiar with historical details and cultural nuances. An ignorance about the Soviet reality and its propagandistic false self-representation is one of the reasons for the reluctance of postcolonial scholars to venture into this area and compare their situation with that of the Socialist and postsocialist subjects.

## **THE INTERNATIONALIST RHETORIC AND THE COLONIALIST LOGIC, OR THE SOCIALIST DREAM OF THE POSTCOLONIAL PEOPLE**

The USSR with its showcase ideology offered a grand utopia or a new religion. The failed socialist modernity has lost its most important future vector and turned into a land of the futureless ontology. By losing to the capitalist modernity it failed to meet the expectations of so many "wretched of the earth". This was a traumatic experience that in many cases needed to be compensated or at least buried deep which is what the postcolonial subjects with leftist views and social expectations often attempt to do. But it does not lead to any critical analysis of state socialism or to a clear understanding of differences between utopia and reality. Many democratic social movements and thinkers

of the global South are still marked by a residual sympathy towards the Soviet experiment, and socialism as such. For them it is difficult to equate socialism with colonialism, particularly since state socialism has always represented itself as an anticolonial system.

The Soviet experiment was positioned as a liberation and particularly for the former colonies of the demonized Czarist empire. Their main lost illusion was independence, with which the Bolsheviks originally lured the colonies back into the Soviet yoke to later enslave them, to deprive them even of the rights which they enjoyed in Czarist Russia, and most importantly, of the nascent local national modernities.

The 1917 Bolshevik revolt was positioned as liberating for all toiling classes and tactically used to gain more allies and restore the empire. Yet it was someone else's revolution and someone else's history, which many anticolonial thinkers interpreted as a recoil in the sense that the expectations of the empire's periphery that blossomed after the 1917 February revolution and the beginning of the Russian empire's demise, were abruptly aborted by the October revolt and the subsequent crashing of all national liberation parties and movements, constituent governments and councils of deputies, such as the Union of Mountaineers, Musavat, Ukrainian Central Rada, the Bolshevik Ter-ek and the liberal democratic Mountaineers republics,

etc. The persisting myth of the lagging behind Asia and the Caucasus erases important historical events which took place prior to the October revolution and immediately after, and signify the political awareness and independent goals of the colonial regions and elites.

The Bolshevik revolution was far from being anticolonial. It was a deferral and strangling of decolonization impulses that had just started to develop. As it has often happened in the Russian history, the good and the evil easily swapped places, enslavement was presented as liberation and efforts to decolonize were branded as reactionary uprisings of the old forces, especially after the quick coming of the Soviet thermidor. The consequences of this deferral and distortion have unfortunately marred the history of the Soviet empire and its colonies from the start to the end, and are still not resolved today when these old grudges murge with the newer social, economic and political divisions threatening to destroy the Russian Federation from within.

In many anticolonial texts written by the fighters for independence coming from the Western capitalist empires of modernity, there is a shared reluctance to criticize the socialist world. The alternative colonizer looks more attractive than one's own familiar former master. Particularly when this colonizer made a point out of advertising its distinctly internationalist anti-racist stance while practicing racism and colo-

nialism all along. And even if the majority of the non-aligned countries today have almost unanimously turned to the West for their models of the future or to different forms of dewesternization (trying to preserve the local axiological bases combined with the Western economic and technological models), it has not necessarily been a voluntary and happy choice. Behind the pragmatic attitude and the need for survival, there is also a wisp of disappointment in that the state Socialist promises of universal happiness that have never been fulfilled. In other words, it is not only the postsocialist people themselves, but also others in the world who have reasons to be nostalgic of the socialist utopia and therefore reluctant to dismiss or see it as similar to western imperialism and colonialism.

The above mentioned combination of proletarian internationalist rhetoric and the colonialist racist logic was only one of the manifestations of the typical Soviet double standard policy. Alexander Akhiezer pointed out this

manipulative Bolshevik tactic of coinciding simultaneously with the cultural values of different and often completely opposite groups, successfully persuading each of them that the Bolsheviks defend their and no one else's beliefs and later using these groups for selfish ends. The result was not the common good as it was proclaimed, but a complete utilitarianism coupled with shameless demagoguery and manipulateness – not only in

economic and political spheres but also in the spiritual realm” (Akhiezer 1998, chapter “Pseudosyncretism”).

This element of the soviet system is seldom taken into account in its non-Western interpretations.

Previously I attempted to define Russia as a Janus-faced forever catching-up empire meaning that as a double-faced Janus, it had different masks for different partners – the servile visage turned to the West into which Russia has always longed to be accepted but has never succeeded, and a patronizing compensatory mask of a caricaturistic imitating civilizer meant for its own non-European Eastern and Southern colonies (Tlostanova, 2003; 2010). The same configuration largely defines the relations with the former colonies of other empires.

The Russian/Soviet empire has been marked by an incredible diversity of economic and social structures almost impossible to unify within one (even pseudo-federative) state. This also referred to different forms of colonialism which typically coexisted and at times merged in the Russian imperial policies rather than succeeding each other as it often happened in other cases. In addition the colonial othered spaces were not sharply divided from the metropolitan sameness by the seas and oceans or by a distinct racial difference as much as the Russians would have loved to see themselves as “white” and “European” as opposed to

the Asiatic or Black colonial others.

The Soviet propaganda was more successful when applied to the more loyal and open postcolonial people visiting the USSR than the hardened Western critics. The postcolonial guests had a specific optics marked by their anti-racist and anticolonial agendas, took the offered happy pictures and statistics, fake testimonies and made-up narratives at face value and generally saw what they were pushed to see. This schizophrenic Soviet duality ominously emerges from the seemingly cheerful laudatory diaries, letters and stories of the African, Indian, Caribbean writers, journalists, actors, film makers invited to visit the Soviet Union, and tricked into becoming the friends of the state socialist regime.

## **(POST)COLONIAL INNOCENTS ABROAD**

An interesting early example is Rabindranath Tagore's *Letters about Russia* (1930)[1956] which includes his reflection on the "backward" peoples of the Russian empire in need of 'enlightenment' with the help of the Soviet Russians. Tagore uncritically reproduces the Soviet progressivist rhetoric when he writes about the history of Bashkirs – an ethnic group which has suffered a lot as a result of colonization and Sovietization (70). The Soviet modernity constructed a false opposi-



tion with its own Czarist's past whose many elements including the imperial policies of control and subversion, the development of state monopoly in the key industries, and generally, industrialization at the expense of peasantry, were intensified rather than cancelled by the Bolsheviks. This operation of disqualifying the past allowed to re-code many people, social and political movements, ideologies, beliefs, and values—into their opposite. The easiness of this re-coding could make anyone into an enemy without moving a finger. Consequently the former fighters for the national independence with the help of which the Bolsheviks often came to power, automatically became the enemies and the bourgeois nationalists as soon as they tried to finish the strangled decolonization and continue fighting for advancing the national forms of modernity. As many other people who had the misfortune to be located in the sphere of the Russian/Soviet empire's geopolitical interests, the Bashkirs were promised autonomy which was later curtailed through repressing intelligentsia, the peasants and the clergy, as well as through typical Soviet policies of mass sacrificing of dispensable lives (through famine) for the insane industrialization plans.

Tagore could not possibly know that in 1920 a Bashkir leader of anti-colonial national liberation movement, Zeki Velidi Togan expressed his disillusionment with Bolshevism, pointing out in his letter to Lenin the cyn-

ical and manipulative Bolshevik tactics:

You accept the ideas of genuine national Russian chauvinism as the basis of your policy . . . We have clearly explained that the land question in the East has in principle produced no class distinction . . . For in the East it is the European Russians, whether capitalists or workers, who are the top class, while the people of the soil . . . , rich or poor, are their slaves . . . You will go now finding class enemies of the workers, and rooting them out until every educated man among the native population . . . has been removed (Caroe 1967, 112–113).

Similar deception characterizes the Soviet chapters of the autobiography *I wonder as I wonder* (1956) written by African American poet Langston Hughes who was invited to USSR in 1932 to make an antiracist film which was never produced. Hughes made a long journey to Central Asia and his reflections on the Soviet enlightenment of the “backwards Asiatics” are not only a curious addition to the long list of innocent testimonies of the fooled foreigners but also a poetic if highly subjective look at the early Soviet (post)colonial life through a very specific lens, translating class and ideology back into race. Hughes wrote his memoir at the time of the mass famine and the beginning of mass terror but remained largely insensitive to both. Aided by the Eurocentric interpreter with increasingly anti-Soviet beliefs, the poet attempted to justify his own blindness to the sinister signs of the coming totalitarianism

by comparing the racial politics in the Soviet Turkestan and the US segregation: “I was trying to make him understand why I observed the changes in Soviet Asia with Negro eyes. To Koestler, Turkmenistan was simply a primitive land moving into twentieth century civilization. To me it was a colored land moving into orbits hethereto reserved for whites” (135). Hughes is not naïve. He deliberately chooses one perspective and ignores others. The evidence of the Tashkent trams in which the locals can now ride together with the “whites” i.e. Russians, overweighs for him any discussions of political repressions, marked or unmarked by ethnic-racial factors.

Hughes easily equates those the Soviet politically repressed with those at home who opt for racism and segregation as if the higher class belonging was automatically linked to racism or the anti-Bolshevism characterized only in the higher classes. During his trip the poet meets with only one particular type of people – the Russian Bolsheviks, the Russian Czarist time colonizers, or the poorest local strata which has fully accepted the Soviet power as the only source of support. Unable to speak any local language and protected by the secret service from meeting any politically unloyal groups, Hughes can never hear the voice of the local intelligentsia, businessmen or nobility who would strongly disagree with the Soviet mythology he is pushed to reproduce. Moreover he is not even aware

of the existence of the local intelligentsia simply reproducing the racist Russian myth of the backwards and illiterate asiatics in need of the Russian civilizers. Yet Hughes's coloniality of perception and of knowledge are unintentional as he easily combines a fascination with the artifacts of the ancient Uzbek culture and the racist myth of the talented Russian directors creating a national theater for the Uzbeks who have never had this artistic form before.

In 1976 Afro-Caribbean lesbian feminist poet and activist Audre Lorde was invited to visit the USSR. Her "Notes from a trip to Russia" are no less historically, culturally and politically confused than Hughes's text but much less straightforward and simplified in their interpretation of race, sexuality, gender, and the intersectional discrimination in the Soviet Union. Lorde's perception is marked by an acute affective sensibility – she does not repeat the propagandistic clichés, rather trusting her own personal impressions of the people, of urban and country-side spaces, sounds, and smells. And this intuitive grasping balances her ignorance and helps her see the colonial affinity between Africa and Central Asia. Soon she starts asking inconvenient questions and manages to pinpoint the gap between propaganda and real people, always opting to escape from yet another meeting for the solidarity for the oppressed to go to the local fruit market instead: "The peoples of the Soviet Union, in many respects, impress

me as people who cannot yet afford to be honest. When they can be they will either blossom into a marvel or sink into decay” (28).

## **THE DARKER SIDE OF THE POSTSOCIAL-IST POSTCOLONIAL ANALOGIZING**

The postsoviet trajectory of Russia and its ex-colonies shows that first they were lured by the carrot of the catching-up modernization and even, in some cases, by the promise of getting back to the European bosom, but these models were grounded in false evolutionism. With different speeds and with different extents of realization of their failure, most of these societies grasped that they will never be allowed or able to step from the darker side of modernity to the lighter one, from otherness to sameness. The only move they can count on is comprised of the small steps climbing the ladder of modernity leading ultimately nowhere, yet always enchanting with a desired but unattainable horizon. Then a number of postsocialist communities started cultivating disappointment in the European/Western project, and its critique, resembling the postcolonial arguments or even openly borrowing from them. In a sense this was a repetition on a larger scale of what the Bolsheviks earlier committed in relation to the former Czarist colonies: first a promise of liberation and then a quick and violent termidor and a slow endless lag-

ging behind for the remaining tamed slaves.

Yet, there is something disturbing in the application of the postcolonial theory to the postsocialist reality. When thoroughly analyzed it turns out to be Eurocentric and racist, although it is a specific sort of Eurocentrism grounded in typically modern/colonial agonistics i.e. a rivalry for a better, more prestigious place in the human taxonomy created and supported by modernity/coloniality. This classification of the humankind in relation to the colonial matrix of power and ontological marginalization of non-Western and non-modern people is evident in both capitalist and socialist discourses. The Socialist modernity practiced its darker colonialist policies differently in relation to European and non-European colonies and also in relation to different historical forms of colonization and coloniality that coexisted in the vast spaces of this territorially largest empire. Soviet colonialism was difficult to detect, particularly for the outsiders, precisely because it was mutant and excessively intersectional (arguably more so than other forms of colonialism).

Modernity/coloniality justifies violence against those who are branded sub-human. One of the consequences is the uncritical acceptance of the existing global hierarchy where everyone is assigned a never questioned place, and even those who are unhappy with this place are scared of losing this already precarious position or

being associated with those who stand even lower. In many cases this turns into a victimhood rivalry detected in both postcolonial and postsocialist groups. This is a sad result of the continuing coloniality of being, thinking, and perception, which does not allow to break free from the universally accepted agonistic paradigm - compete or perish. A true decolonization then means delinking from this logic and refusing to compete for a higher place in modernity, or for a tag of a victim which would allow to gain access to charity and affirmative action. Hence the Eastern European clinging to Europeanness, hence the postsoviet reluctance to be associated with the ex-third world. In this case the postcolonial analogy is used negatively, and with indignation: “How can we be compared with Africans or Arabs? We are European and White”.

The postcolonial analogy applied to the postsocialist world is rather superficial and erases the nuances of many local histories. Reintroducing these nuances into the scholarly and activist discourses and advancing a critical self reflection outside the prescribed Eurocentric mythology, is a necessary step for the elaboration of theory and practice at the intersection of the postcolonial and the postsocialist experiences rather than simply borrowing the postcolonial terms and concepts outside their historical context. The postsocialist analogizing with the postcolonial discourse is too often done not for the sake of solidarity with the global

south, but for negotiating a better place in the modern/colonial human hierarchy and in order to not be seen as postcolonial others. In the political discourses of several Eastern-European states there is a rather jealous attitude to anyone who attempts to take their place as the main 20th century victims of communism. Hence their rejection of the Middle Eastern refugees who are seen as potential rivals in the historical victimhood race.

This is a peculiar form of colonial and imperial amnesia detected not only in the case of the former empires but also the former colonies and quasi-colonies which do not want to be seen as such, particularly if in the process of colonization the conquering empire stood lower in its racial status than the colonized countries. Thus the Baltic littoral is ready to forget the Teutonic invasions, subsequent forced Christianization, economic exploitation, serfdom and the imposed roles of the second-class Europeans. Likewise, the Baltic states do not focus on the Czarist imperial policies but continue to see the Soviet occupation as the main national tragedy. Benedikts Kalnacš reflects on the insecure Europeanism of the Baltic social and cultural profile marked by the constant balancing at the crossroads of the imperial dominations from Russia and the German speaking nations in the West. The colonial periphery is a looming third reference point in the awkward positioning of the Sovietized Eastern Europeans from which they try



to distance themselves despite subconscious feelings of the affinity in their historical destinies (Kalnacš 2016).

The local histories of Central, Eastern, South-Eastern Europe were imperial and colonial histories too as for several centuries these locales have stood at the crossroads of various imperial struggles between the Ottoman sultanate, the Russian czarist empire and the Habsburg empire (the “older” second league empires, inferior to the winning capitalist empires of modernity). Traces of these complex relations and imperial rivalries are clearly seen in the identifications of Eastern Europeans claiming their place not in the capacity of eternal overtakers or second-rate Europeans, and not as the new subalterns of the global coloniality.

Exclusionary tactic and victimhood rivalry are becoming rapidly outdated in the face of enforced fragmentation and reemergence of the ultra-right. So it is not a question of encapsulating within one’s narrow position, but rather a necessity of always being critical of our own locus of enunciation, of arguing from a specific point which we should not be afraid of displaying. In the logic of pluriversality we are all equal and therefore we have the right to be different, yet this difference is not a closure, it does not prevent us in all our diversity from joining the struggles crucial for all.

## **THE POSTCOLONIAL AND POSTSOCIAL-IST COUNTERPOINT**

The lacking dialogue between the postsocialist and the postcolonial others stems, among other things, from the dis-coordination of the capitalist and socialist modernities, which shared many (mostly negative) features, such as progressivism, Orientalism, racism, providentialism, hetero-patriarchy, and a cult of newness, but coded them differently, thus confusing their satellites, colonies, and their own citizens. The trajectories of the two groups were quite different. The former colonial other entering the larger world controlled by the West does not have to change his or her modernity – it used to be Western and remains today the main landmark for the postcolonial other who simply continues his/her progressive movement toward the cherished belonging to sameness or in some cases, creating a national version of modernity which often continued the trickster game of manoeuvring between the two modernities of the Cold War times.

Today the situation is simplified and there is no need to manoeuvre any more. The postcolonial other could at the same time cherish a dream of an other socialist modernity which however had to remain a dream, whose loss is unfortunate but not catastrophic.

In the postsocialist case, a lot more is at stake. The

postsocialist people were asked to forget about their version of modernity and start from scratch in a paradigm of a different Western and neoliberal modernity. They had to reorient ourselves to someone else's modernity or go back to the national modernities strangled in the 1920s during the re-establishment of the Soviet empire which first cynically used the national liberation movements in the former Russian colonies to fight its multiple enemies and gain power, and very soon announced them to be bourgeois nationalists subject to repressions<sup>8</sup>. However, going back to these shortlived modernities is hard as even their memories were erased from the official public discourse.

This configuration is different and more complex than the postcolonial trajectory and due to it the postsocialist subjects seriously lag behind the postcolonial countries. Instead of the progressive development, there is a drastic change of ideal and hence an abrupt regression and a new progressivism, but much slower and humbler – as if in punishment for disobedience and efforts to proclaim a different modernity.

If we attempt to draw a schematic time-line for the development of postcolonial and postsocialist discourses we will see that their relation reminded a musical counterpoint: in many ways the two discourses coincided, but it happened at different historical moments and in different political contexts and prevented them from

hearing each other. The early postcolonial discourses were largely leftist, anti-capitalist and still progressivist without questioning the universalized western norms of education, human rights, democracy, women emancipation— invariably understood through the Eurocentric lens. However early enough there emerges a more critical kind of postcolonial theory which attempted to question the Western modernity as such (including its leftist versions). This critical postcolonial discourse follows the principle that postcolonial and other forms of coalitions grounded in multispatial hermeneutical principles (instead of taking the other to a frozen difference) are more important in our struggles for liberation than any one single form of difference, be it gender, race, religion or class. It is important to idealize neither socialism nor the constructed tradition with its pre-colonial social and cultural systems. These sensibilities disagree with the post-Socialist stance both when we criticize state socialism and when we refuse to romanticize the tradition.

The development of the post-Socialist critique did not correspond to this postcolonial logic at all, neither in its temporal nor in its notional accents and nodes. Initially the post-Socialist trajectory was marked by an almost emotional rejection of everything Socialist and a fascination with Western knowledge, at a time when postcolonial scholars still largely rehearsed the leftist anti-capitalist discourses and at least indirectly opted

for Socialism. Later a number of post-socialist activist, scholars, thinkers started reinterpreting the socialist legacy in a less negative way, criticizing the Western infiltration of the post-Socialist academia, NGOs and other knowledge production bodies. They were doing it at the point when postcolonial discourse started developing its anti-Western modernity stance and objectively the two discourses intersected, although the traditions they were having in mind were totally different and they did not hear each other at that point as they still do not hear each other today.

This schematic juxtaposition of postcolonial and post-socialist trajectories still shows that there are indeed many intersections between the two but they take place at different moments and are triggered by different reasons leading nevertheless to similar results and even possible coalitions, because ultimately they manifest different reactions to the same phenomenon of coloniality.

## **A DEEP BOTTOM-UP HORIZONTAL COALITION?**

The intricate experience of the Soviet colonial intelligentsia and its lonely efforts to counteract that I mentioned in the beginning of this article, should be revisited and revived today, at a different level of tricksters

finally coming out and struggling in solidarity. Such “deep coalitions” to counter modernity/coloniality can liberate us from endless appealing to someone else’s ideals, free us from the double consciousness of those who cannot belong and will never belong. But these coalitions should be initiated from below, and never be vertical and hierarchical, never again imposed from the imperial center. Even more importantly, they should start from ruthless decolonising of our own selves, minds, bodies, genders, sensibilities, and memories. But for that we need to work hard and painfully to be our better selves. It is not only about eradicating ignorance and learning about each other. More importantly, it is about nurturing particular subjectivities grounded in correlationism, horizontal solidarities and caring attitudes instead of predominant agonistics.

For the non-European postSoviet people it is crucial to remember and retrace the forgotten links with the global South, but to remember them differently from what the Soviet empire prescribed and controlled before, to bypass the distorting imperial mediation and concentrate on the positive resistance and re-existence as another way of being in spite of coloniality and beyond modernity, and the co-existence of many models of knowledge and perception of the world, including the postcolonial and the postsocialist ones. It should be a coalition not of the “offended” competing in their victimhood, but striving to change the logic of

the world order in such a way that nobody is an other any more, that we are all equal not only on paper but in reality and hence have the right to be different and practice pluriversality in the world consisting of many interacting and intersecting worlds.

## NOTES

1. Although there are efforts to establish “postsocialist studies” similarly to postcolonial ones, when I refer to postcolonial and postsocialist, I do not mean these terms as distinct theoretical paradigms but rather as geopolitical conditions into which people are born and which they have no power of altering.

2. One example is Kalpana Sahni’s *Crucifying the Orient: Russian Orientalism and the Colonization of Caucasus and Central Asia* (1997). Her exceptional insight and lucidity stem not only from the outstanding knowledge of archival sources but more importantly, from her deep and subtle understanding of the colonial lining of the Soviet rhetoric, which is very different from its habitual reproduction in the case of the majority of postcolonial interpreters of Soviet life.

3. Postcolonial and Postsocialist Dialogues: Intersections, Opacities, Challenges in Feminist Theorizing and Practice. International conference. Department of Thematic Studies (Gender Studies Unit), Linköping University, 27-28 April, 2015.

4. Coloniality is the indispensable underside of modernity, a racial, economic, social, existential, gender and epistemic dependence created around the 16th century, firmly linking imperialism and capitalism, and maintained since then within the modern/colonial world (Quijano 2007).

5. Deep coalitions is a concept theorized by decolonial feminist Maria Lugones. She sees them as being always in the making. Deep coalitions never reduce consciousness of the colonial others. Fanon's views also turned to be too close to the tabooed SRs – the Socialist Revolutionaries who were the Bolsheviks' old and successful rivals with a much more attractive ethnic-national program grounded in wider autonomies for the members of the federation, a complex and constructivist understanding of the nation and the centrality of peasantry for Russia.

6. A global imperial hierarchy has started to be shaped in the emerging world system in the sixteenth century and has been transformed in the course of time. The post-enlightenment phase of modernity placed Spain, Italy and Portugal in the position of the South of Europe or the internal imperial difference. The Ottoman Sultanate, and Russia became the zones of the external imperial difference, rooted in different (from the core



European norm) religions, languages, economic models, and ethnic-racial classifications. European norm) religions, languages, economic models, and ethnic-racial classifications.

7. If the Soviet colonial others were accused as the enemies of the people as soon as they attempted to fight the Soviet yoke, the anticolonial fighters from the global South were treated in accordance with a more nuanced tactic. The Soviet empire censured their writings and represented them as ardent Marxists. This is what happened with Franz Fanon. His revisionist (from the Soviet Marxism point of view) works were not translated in the USSR as Fanon dangerously insisted on the leading role of peasants instead of the proletariat, and accentuated the psychoanalytic perspectives on the double, banned in the Soviet Union.

8. The people of the Soviet colonies quickly realized that the Bolsheviks lured them back into the Soviet yoke to later restore colonialism. The anticolonial anti-Soviet revolts continued until WW2 and in many cases long after. Yet the information about the Central Asian 1922-23 and Ibragim-Bek 1931 antisoviet anticolonial uprisings, the Baksan revolt in 1928 and Khadzimed Medoev's revolt in 1930 in the Northern Caucasus, Ukrainian resistance to Bolsheviks in 1917-1920 and peasant revolts of the 1930s to name just a few were never included in historical text books or openly discussed.



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