

# PLACES IN THE SUN

Post-colonial dialogues  
in Europe and beyond

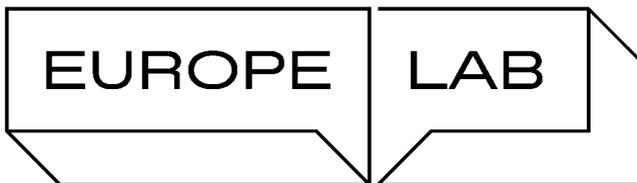


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## Post-Colonial dialogues in Europe and beyond



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To cite this book, consider the following:

Luntumbue, V., et al (eds.) (2021). *Places in the Sun: Post-Colonial Dialogues in Europe and Beyond*. Brussels: Institute for a Greater Europe.

To cite a chapter in this book, consider the following:

Voets, T.Y. (2021). "Reflections on the Black Lives Matter movement in Europe: Keeping the conversation alive", in Luntumbue, V., et al. (eds.). *Places in the Sun: Post-Colonial dialogues in Europe and beyond*. Brussels: Institute for a Greater Europe, 6–17.

ISBN 978-3-947214-09-9 (eBook and Printed)

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Cover design by Robin Luntumbue

Disclaimer: This book has been produced with the financial assistance of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum e.V. and their donors. The contents of the publication are the responsibility of the Institute for a Greater Europe and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum e.V. or their donors. The opinions expressed by the authors are their own and do not necessarily represent the views of the Institute for a Greater Europe or the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum e.V. The registered NPO addresses are Avenue de la Couronne 124, 1050 Ixelles (Brussels), Belgium (Institute for a Greater Europe), and 44, Bad St. 13357 Berlin, Germany (EU-Russia Civil Society Forum e.V.)

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# Acknowledgements

The *Places in the Sun* team would like to extend some thanks to our partners at the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum and their Europe Lab project, their sponsors, including the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the other participants of the 2021 Europe Lab for the discussions we had and that nourished our project. We obviously thank all our authors for their work and their valued perspectives. We also thank Dr Madina Tlostanova for meeting with us, and Marcell Ottó Ormándy for helping with the re-transcription of the interview, and for his proofreading and typesetting efforts across this book.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs



# Introduction

The book you now hold in your hands is the primary offshoot of a project led by a team of writers and editors from the Institute for a Greater Europe (IGE) for the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum's 2021 Europe Lab. The project also comprises of online publications, events, and discussions though the book does act as a sizeable *pièce de résistance*.

The IGE is an independent youth-led think tank with members all around the world, based in Brussels, Europe's most international city. Our organisation aims at fostering understanding and intellectual cooperation across Europe and beyond, regardless of borders. We privilege decentring narratives, knowledge and perspectives – and it is something we hope to have approached with this volume.

Our project was started after the year of *Black Lives Matter* – or the spectacular resurgence of the 2013 movement, which took the world by storm. Brussels, home to an incalculable number of diasporas, was also the theatre of numerous and intensive conversations on Belgium and Europe's colonial past – and its present. Grievances echoed by generations of diaspora members prior where finally being put forefront and for a short while, history felt like moving forward.

Eastward, a parallel trend could be observed, with an increasing number of academics and writers resorting to decolonial concepts and paradigms, in a wide variety of domains. How to explain this apparent success of decolonial theories in Central and Eastern Europe, a region where so

many countries pride themselves in never having colonised anyone? Was it a simple export from the West or a homegrown school of thought? Did it exist independently outside of academia?

These were the themes we set out to explore. Most of all we wanted to confront those two trends of the decolonial movement: the “Western” tradition, dealing with the legacy of the overseas empires, and the “Eastern” tradition, which explores similar concepts of exploitation, identity, and alienation in Central and Eastern Europe, and Eurasia. Our intellectual journey will be divided in three parts.

The first part, *Decolonialism in the West, something old, something new*, examines several facets of the modern decolonial movement, the plight of diasporas, the efforts of activists and the many debates surrounding the legacy of empire in Europe and the Americas.

The second part, *Understanding Post-Socialism through Post-Colonialism*, takes us to Central and Eastern Europe to confront the colonial fallout of a region historically dominated by the Russian and Soviet Empires, to understand how both the population of the post-Socialist region and their former hegemon relate to the idea of empire and articulate their relation to Western Europe.

Our third part, *A Dialogue of the Second and Third Worlds*, does away with the imperial core, and strives to foster discussion and exchanges between the former colonised peoples of the Global South and the inhabitants of post-Socialist states. We will explore both the history of this solidarity and its needed topicality.

Our volume wasn't envisioned strictly as an academic endeavour. True to the spirit of the decolonial tradition, we wanted to explore our subject

through different types of essays, conversations, discussions, and fiction. The field is a varied, diverse, and multi-layered one and we wanted to reflect that in the way we approached the matter, showcasing multiple perspectives, experiences, and worldviews. To that effect, our writing team includes academics, writers, activists, and artists from all over the world, whose diverse approaches bring us closer to that goal.

Diverse as they are, we also wanted to highlight how common the experiences of colonised peoples across the world can sometimes be, and how remembering that the same sun shines upon places like the Congo or the Caucasus can open new avenues for solidarity.



# Part I. Decolonialism in the West, Something Old, Something New

The year 2020 definitely put the decolonial movement under a new spotlight. Decolonial studies and outlook, with wind in their sails, were given more visibility, but with it also came backlash. For example, most decolonial movements in France or the United Kingdom were often suddenly decried as seditious agitprop copied and pasted from the United States. This uninformed framing both disregards the fact there isn't one radical group in the US whose members don't send each other online drives full of pdfs of Frantz Fanon's works, and the obvious older legacy of the decolonial movement in the West. Though undervalued, this abundant heritage is the result of an incessant and reciprocal transatlantic exchange, and this corpus is still the foundation for decolonial movements the world over.

This first part explores different strands of the decolonial struggle in the Western world, be it tackling social justice issues, the decolonisation of institutions like universities and museums, the structural legacy of racism and the role of diasporas. It confronts both the history of colonial Europe and some of the ways people involved in decolonial movements engage with it and its ramifications.

In a world changed by worldwide telecommunications, we also briefly question what the future of organising could look like, and how it could bifurcate from the historical tradition of decolonialism in the Western World.

# 1.1 Reflections on the Black Lives Matter mobilisations in Europe: Keeping the Conversation Alive

Thomas Yaw Voets

## *Introduction*

Are slavery and colonialism underrepresented in Europe's historical memory? Is the neglect of colonialism an expression of one or more fundamental underlying issues in European society? Is there a sense of superiority and latent racism in Western countries? As a result of the Black Lives Matter mobilisations that flared up across the world in the summer of 2020, these are some of the questions that have emerged in the centre of public debate in Western countries.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst the ensuing anti-racism conversations made a lot of people uncomfortable – and still do to this day, the difficult conversations on colonial memory and decolonisation within Europe have at times seemed impossible. It is with that in mind, that I reflect back in this essay on the Black Lives Matter movement in Europe and look at how it mobilised itself in Western European countries – thereby leading to calls for a long overdue, new wave of decolonisation. By then, examining how Western countries have moved forward from the Black Lives Matter mobilisations, I contemplate whether its outcomes have managed to deal adequately with the underlying social issues at hand.

### *The Black Lives Matter movement in Europe*

Black Lives Matter originally started as a protest movement in response to several high-profile cases, where unarmed African American men and women died at the hands of police officers.<sup>2</sup> It began in 2013, on the micro-blogging site Twitter, with the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, after the acquittal of George Zimmerman, who shot and killed Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old black teenager in Miami, Florida. Since then, the movement has grown into a network of formal and informal grassroots organisations – all mobilising around the principle and mantra that Black Lives Matter; and against police brutality and racism in the United States and beyond.<sup>3</sup>

In 2020, as a reaction to the brutal footage of George Floyd's killing – who died after being pinned under Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin's knee for almost nine minutes, while being handcuffed and pleading for air – thousands across the United States took to the streets in a massive, and seemingly effective response, calling for an end to injustice and police brutality. As a result, the Black Lives Matter movement returned to headlines and regained prominence. This time going beyond the United States and spreading to other parts of the world.<sup>4</sup>

Watching the events unfold across the Atlantic – at a time when former United States President Donald Trump's hateful rhetoric inflamed racial tensions<sup>5</sup> and tarnished America's standing in the world<sup>6</sup> – and seeing the wave of heartfelt statements from European leaders speaking out against police brutality, some Europeans spurred to action after having stayed silent on similar issues at home. Looking for ways to give a voice to their own anger, activists across Europe started mobilising and borrowed slogans from the civil rights movement that had inspired people on both sides of the Atlantic for decades.<sup>7</sup>

In Belgium, for example, some 10,000 people gathered in front of the Brussels' *Palais de Justice* for a protest organised by the Belgian Network for Black Lives. In a sea of hand-drawn “Black Lives Matter” and “No justice, no peace” placards, people held up signs calling out the country’s history of racism – “Belgium, too” and “We need to talk about Leopold II and Belgian colonies” – and the names of recent victims of police violence.<sup>8</sup>

In France, the violent and deadly arrest of George Floyd resonated with acts of police brutality that occurred around the yellow vests movement, and the death of Adama Traoré, a 24-year-old black man who died in police custody in 2016.<sup>9</sup> The movement’s actions heightened the political authorities’ awareness of organisations that have been working for years on integration, social mixing, and facilitating access to social assistance – such as housing, education, health and employment.<sup>10</sup>

In Germany, 15,000 people protested against racism in Berlin. Some spoke out about the country’s reluctance to acknowledge its colonial history and shared their experience of racism in Germany.<sup>11</sup>

In the United Kingdom, thousands of people marched through London.<sup>12</sup> In the town of Bristol, protestors tore down the statue of slave master Edward Colston, a member of the Royal African Company responsible for transporting approximately 100,000 slaves from West Africa to the Caribbean and Continental America. Within hours of the statue’s removal, a petition circulated on the web to replace Colston’s statue with one of racial equality campaigner and Bristol native Dr Paul Stephenson.<sup>13</sup>

All across Europe, in cities from Dublin to Copenhagen and from Amsterdam to Milan, protesters flouted COVID-related lockdown rules, and filled streets and public squares to demand justice for people of colour. In particular, those who died in police custody in their own countries.<sup>14</sup>

The Italian case, however, differed. In Italy, the Black Lives Matter movement was reported on, but not fully embraced. As such, the media mostly treated the protests as a news story rather than a cultural phenomenon worth being discussed and analysed.<sup>15</sup> The reason for this is that there still is a reluctance in Italian society to acknowledge the country's ethnic diversity, and Italians of different ethnicities are still often perceived as strangers who belong to other cultures. This is certainly influenced by the predominance, in recent years, of the migration crisis in the public debate.<sup>16</sup>

### *A long overdue, new wave of decolonisation*

Simultaneously with all these Black Lives Matter mobilisations and demonstrations, renewed calls for a wave of decolonisation were gaining prominence. In other words, calls for a long overdue reckoning for countries became revived. Until then, many countries did not have a good track record when it came to tackling racism – or even admitting its existence. The underlying message being brought up was also – painfully – clear: colonialism was not a one-time event of which the consequences ended when colonisers packed their bags and granted colonies independence.<sup>17</sup> On the European continent, this was particularly relevant given the prevalence of racial profiling, police brutality and discrimination against non-white citizens on the labour and housing markets.

Even more so, as discussions on colonialism long remained a touchy subject in a number of European countries, some have put forward the claim that, for a long time, there was a “selective amnesia” about Europe's imperial legacy and a “toxic nostalgia” that has tainted the general public's understanding of that dark part of their history.<sup>18</sup>

In France, for example, denial used to be particularly strong due to the deep-rooted image of the country as a neutral, colour-blind republic

that champions *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*. As a consequence, efforts to organise around a racial identity have historically been hindered by an insistence – from the government and in society – that a person’s identity as “French” trumps any other. For example, that of “black, Arab or Algerian”.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, the reality of ongoing racial discrimination in France has caused this “ideal” to become more and more questioned. As such, a generation of French writers and activists are asserting their identity as “black” in a way that challenges France’s sense of itself as colour-blind. This is prompting a complex and heated debate about how and whether to think about race.<sup>20</sup>

Outside of France as well, similar debates on race, racism in general, and racism against black people in particular, are becoming more of a common phenomenon. For example, in Belgium, increasing pressure is being put on the government to reckon with the country’s colonial past. This means that the long-debated issue of how to address the nation’s colonial atrocities – especially in Congo – is increasingly being moved forward.<sup>21</sup>

In Germany, the government is especially aware of the pressure from anti-racist movements and the need to support them, by doing some difficult self-examination. As such, German Chancellor Angela Merkel explicitly called George Floyd’s death a murder and decried the dangerous polarisation in the United States; whilst, at the same time, proclaiming that Germany should use this moment to look at its own issues with racism. Her statement makes clear that for a long time, Europeans pointed to the situation in the United States as a way of suggesting that racism is an American problem, and that this is simply not true.<sup>22</sup>

In short, one could say that the renewed calls for decolonisation originated from the fact that more and more people questioned the status quo and

wanted to know the truth about the dark past of the colonial powers and the continuation of neo-colonialism up to the present times. As a result of this questioning, perceptions of the greatness of emblematic figures of European colonialism (e.g. Jan Pieterszoon Coen, Winston Churchill, and Cecil Rhodes) are now being deconstructed or the subject of salutary denunciations. At the same time, respect is being demanded for the lives that were lost and squandered to make the idea of a modern world – and in particular a modern Europe – possible.<sup>23</sup>

### *Moving forward*

The public outcry witnessed across Europe has shown an unequivocal desire for change and for meaningful discussions on the prevalence of systemic racism in the region. Whilst the focus being on anti-racism is a necessary start, it will not be sufficient to make the fundamental changes that are needed to make Western European countries face their colonial legacy. To do this, however, Western countries must look for cooperative solutions that allow them to deal with the growing demand for a change in the visions and practices established between themselves, their former colonies, and their representatives.

As such, there are the everlasting calls from the diaspora of former colonies to be recognised as equals in the countries in which they live, without having to forego the ties and relations they have with their countries of origin. This follows urging by organisations of the African diasporas and antiracist movements in Europe, who – for decades already – have been formulating demands ranging from the removal of statues of colonial figures<sup>24</sup>, the renaming of public spaces<sup>25</sup> and the return of works of art taken from African colonies and kept in European museums<sup>26</sup>; to financial reparations for the violence of colonisation.<sup>27</sup>

In their struggle, an underlying request for recognition and condemnation of colonial history can be deduced – for example by means of establishing a truth and reconciliation commission in the countries they reside. Such is currently being done in Belgium, which in July 2020 set up a Special Commission within the Federal Parliament to investigate Belgium’s colonial past in the Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi.<sup>28</sup> Notwithstanding, there is still the risk that – if done in a forced manner – these initiatives become nothing more than cosmetic operations at the service of the status quo; and just exacerbate the divide that currently exists.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, the German experience – in which Namibia was offered and rejected a compensation for colonial atrocities that took place during the German Empire’s colonial rule<sup>30</sup> – shows that the process of recognition and condemnation is one that is sensitive and deserves the proper time and scrutiny. Already since 2015, after having formally acknowledged their colonial conduct to be an act of genocide, closed-door talks with the Namibian government have been taking place.<sup>31</sup> While producing tangible results (e.g. repatriations of human remains and pillaged cultural artefacts), some in Namibia have grown increasingly impatient – falling out with their government over this issue.<sup>32</sup> And diplomatic linguistic wrangling from the German side, to avoid being legally mandated to pay monetary recompense, only adds to their strain.<sup>33</sup>

Looking at the European level, there are few institutions that have the necessary funding and institutional capacity to support and complement the protest movements and their comprehensive demands. The reason being that Europe has not seen a tide-turning civil rights movement capable of making an impact on the political sphere. As a consequence, there is no European equivalent to the American Civil Liberties Union or the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, the European Union in particular, has a responsibility to not only engage marginalised people and their communities as consultants about these issues, but to change current power structures so that the people most impacted by structural racism lead these efforts.<sup>35</sup>

The above is especially relevant, as most European governments do not systematically collect data on how a person's race or ethnicity affects their chances of employment or on the housing market, their treatment in health care, or their interactions with police. Which is happening, despite the fact that a 2018 study by the European Union's agency for fundamental rights ("Being Black in the European Union") showed that "people of African descent in the European Union face widespread and entrenched prejudice and exclusion".<sup>36</sup>

Originally, the European Union's 2003 Race Equality Directive was supposed to deal with this. It required European Union countries to set up a dedicated equality body and to adopt legislation to address discriminations in housing and employment. But, since its implementation remains patchy, activists have criticised this approach. They claim that the Race Equality Directive's design is ineffective, as it was designed to tackle individual cases of discrimination rather than to address systemic issues.

Nevertheless, the European Union Anti-racism Action Plan 2020–25 – presented in September 2020 by the European Commission – represents a new hope for a lot of Europeans, for the reason that the Action Plan confirms the link between colonialism and the persistence of racial discrimination in European society.<sup>37</sup> It therefore embodies an important step forward in the contemporary fight against racism and discrimination in the European Union. And, as many hope, a large step towards addressing racism more effectively and building a life free from racism and discrimination for all.

*Conclusion: Keeping the conversation alive*

Considering what was discussed above, one could say that mobilising and protesting was the “easier” part. It managed to bring up, through a range of concerted efforts, a contested part of Europe’s history and allowed it to be discussed by a range of actors. It allowed for a reflection on society and for looking at certain issues that were taken for granted, through another perspective. Perhaps, a perspective that has been needed for a very long time.

Nevertheless, ensuring that these difficult issues remain at the centre of public debate, and that Western nations learn to come to terms with the legacies of British slave traders, Portuguese slave owners, Spanish conquistadores as well as German and Belgian colonial officers is the hard part. Until this is accomplished, however, Black Lives Matter remains an unfinished project in Western Europe.

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## 1.2 Brussel Eza Lola: Belgium and the Failure of Top-Down Decolonisation

Valentin Luntumbue

### *Introduction*

Over the last few years, in the Kingdom of Belgium, a new generation of activists have been echoing older demands regarding decolonisation, police violence, and discrimination against minorities. Belgium, a former colonial power that occupied Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), has since rebranded as a cosmopolitan and open democracy, whose capital-region, Brussels, is Europe's most diverse city.

But the spectres of colonialism still haunt the country. African diasporas, especially from the DRC, had been exposing Belgium's contradictions for long. Belgian institutions have lately decided to meet some of the demands themselves, but how sincere are these efforts?

### *Brussels and the Congolese Diaspora*

When exiting Brussels' city centre, climbing up the southeast hills towards Ixelles, upon reaching the location where once stood the ancient *Namur Gate*, one is greeted by a massive reproduction of one of celebrated Congolese painter Chéri Samba's works. On the painting, a text declaims: "*I have travelled the entire world, and never have I seen a city like Brussels and a neighbourhood like Matonge in Ixelles. Here, everyone mixes (more than a hundred nationalities in this neighbourhood alone). Difficult to describe Matonge or Brussels herself in a word. [...] Brussel eza lola. Brussels is a paradise.*"

Cross the street and you are now in Matonge. If we'd know nothing about Brussels, we'd call it a Congolese neighbourhood and claim it's where most of Brussels' Congolese community lives. Let's try to paint a more accurate picture though. Matonge gets its moniker from a vibrant eponymous Kinshasa neighbourhood and artistic hotspot. Matonge–Brussels is a hub for Congolese life in the Belgian capital: it acts as a meeting point, a first crashing place for African immigrants fresh off the plane, as well as a concentrated hotspot of South Asian-owned African grocery shops, African cafés, restaurants, and community centres. Like most of Brussels, it is rather diverse (the city boasts at least 193 different nationalities) and Congolese are but a part of its inhabitants. They have been joined in Matonge by other immigrant populations, like the Senegalese, and pushed out by aggressive gentrification and the municipality's long efforts to dislodge them.

Only a minority of the Congolese diaspora live in Matonge. The community can be difficult to study, as the DRC does not recognise dual citizenship – many Congolese immigrants opt to take the Belgian nationality. Estimates put the number of Congolese and Belgians of Congolese descent at between 40,000 and 50,000 persons, a number dwarfed by the number of Belgians of Italian (around 300,000) or Moroccan descent (550,000). In contrast to countries like Italy, Morocco, Turkey, or Portugal, Belgium never signed any migration agreement with its former colony, and special precautions were taken in the colonial era to avoid colonial subjects visiting the metropole. The power that be frowned at the idea of seeing Congolese people walking the streets of Brussels, bringing home the logic of segregation that prevailed in the colonies.

Though small, Congolese immigration is very diverse. Not only because the population of the DRC speaks an estimated 250 different languages, but also due to the particular dynamic of that migration, distinct from

the general history of migration in Belgium.<sup>1</sup> In the decades after the 1960 independence, a time that was marked between 1965 and 1997 by the dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko (who renamed the country to Zaïre in 1971), most of the migration flux was made up of exchange students. As the dictatorial regime violently crumbled in the 90s and gave way to unrest and a series of wars, migration from the Congo peaked as many now applied as refugees. The decade opened with the 1991 and 1993 lootings, the 1992 Katanga ethnic cleansing, and closed with the outbreak of the First Congo War.

Due to that early overrepresentation in student migration, the Congolese and Belgo-Congolese communities display, on average, a higher level of education than the Belgian national average. They are however also overrepresented in unemployment (especially the youth), and among vulnerable populations. Ethnic discrimination remains however understudied in Belgium.

Most Congolese immigrants choose French-speaking regions to settle, with a third of them choosing Wallonia, while almost half (49 %) live in bilingual Brussels. The remaining portion usually settles in Flemish cities, especially Antwerp. Those that live in the capital, usually settle more in the centre or the north-western municipalities (the historical neighbourhoods associated with poorer immigrants) than in Ixelles, where Matonge is situated. Congolese who take on Belgian citizenship do not differ that much, except the fact that they are even less likely to live in Ixelles.

Worldwide, the DRC diaspora is one of the largest, with a quorum estimated between 10 and 16 million. A majority of it is spread in other African countries, with a few millions scattered around the developed world. Every year, the diaspora sends billions back home, on average 2 billion USD a year according to the International Organization on Migration<sup>2</sup>,

with some UN sources claiming a record of 9 billion was transferred by the diaspora in 2011 – that would amount to half of the country's GDP.<sup>3</sup> Brussels' small Congolese community does seem to pale in comparison, but the city remains a diaspora hub, perfectly situated between Paris, London and Amsterdam, which also house sizeable Congolese communities. To many Congolese, like to many other immigrants, Brussels does feel like home. But it's also a city that abounds with monuments reminiscent of some of the DRC's darkest hours.

### *Colonial Belgium*

Belgium's colonial experience predates its official colonial ventures; it even predates the country itself. Like many other European countries, its development rests upon the establishment of the international colonial order following the conquest of the Americas. What is now Belgium, the Southern Netherlands, were long Europe's most developed and richest region, safe from Italy. It was home to Europe's first stock exchange, some of its largest cities and two of its wealthiest and busiest trade ports: Bruges and Antwerp.

A dependence of the Spanish Crown from 1556 to 1648, the ports of Belgium saw an inflow of silver, sugar, ivory, and spices. Antwerp, then the continent's largest port, was known as the sugar capital of Europe, as most of the sugar extracted from the slave plantations of the Americas transited by the port on the Scheldt before being distributed elsewhere in Europe. It is worth noting that a notable amount of Belgium's renowned delicacies are transformed colonial goods, often produced through slave labour: chocolate, fries or the famed speculoos, originally Frisian, whose Belgian recipe may require cinnamon, white pepper, cardamom, cloves or nutmeg.

Belgians were active in the pre-industrial colonial era – it was a group of Walloon Protestants who founded Nieuw-Amsterdam, the future New York – though they often took a back seat to their neighbours’ colonial adventures. Flemish merchants bankrolled early Iberian conquests, Belgian exiles founded the GWC<sup>4</sup>, and the Southern Netherlands briefly got its own charter trade company, the Ostend Company. Belgians also joined the ranks of overseas armies like Spain’s or, later on, Dutch colonial forces in Indonesia.

Religious resentment, xenophobia, anti-authoritarian sentiment, and economic anxiety led to the premature death of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands and the birth of the Belgian state in the 1830s. The country’s first king, Leopold I, slightly bored by his role as a constitutional monarch, set out to secure a colony pretty early on, with little success (a few settlers in Central America, a concession in China). Leopold’s efforts were overshadowed by his son’s. Leopold II, even more frustrated by the mild constraints of a constitutional monarchy, managed to have most of the Congo Basin recognised as his personal colony by the end of the 1884–1885 Berlin Conference, on the promises it would be a territory open to international free enterprise. Contemplating crowning himself an emperor, Leopold II settled for the title of *Roi-Souverain* (King-Sovereign). Not once setting foot on Central African ground, he would govern by edicts from Brussels and Ostend.

Originally a project solely fuelled by the king’s ego, the early colonisation of the Congo was bankrolled by several of his entourage’s wealthy bankers, businessmen and entrepreneurs. It was a private endeavour whose agents were internationally recruited, though a majority were Belgians. The colony’s “privatised” nature, coupled with Leopold’s authoritarianism, led to Leopoldian rule in the Congo to be the imperial age’s bloodiest. It coincided with a worldwide boom in demand for rubber, which grows in

abundance in the tropical forests of the northern Congo. Rubber, alongside other precious raw resources, was extracted through forced labour, corvees, or at the barrel of a literal gun. The Congo Free State, Leopold's private colony, grew extremely profitable for the king and his entourage as well as the Belgian corporations who were allocated concessions in the Congo but only insofar as it ran on extremely violent capitalist extraction and forced labour.

Between 1885 and 1908, Leopoldian rule led to the death of millions of Congolese, be it through war, forced labour, displacement or disease (usually caused by the first three). Estimates vary as to the exact number, ranging from five to thirteen million (as per one of the DRC's most famous historians Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem<sup>5</sup>), though the number of ten million (associated with the works of journalist Adam Hochschild<sup>6</sup>) is usually the most often mentioned. Those are only estimates, based on incomplete data (there was obviously no proper census in 19<sup>th</sup> century Central Africa) and imperfect reports, stating for example that some areas in the northern Congo were entirely emptied of their inhabitants (without us knowing if they were casualties or refugees). We can however get a picture of what life was under the Congo Free State thanks to testimonies recollected by the 1904 Commission of Enquiry, which often depicts colonial violence in gruesome details.

Said commission was authorised to tour various regions around the banks of the Congo River after years of international pressure, relayed by personalities such as Joseph Conrad, Arthur Conan Doyle<sup>7</sup> or Roger Casement, who penned the famous 1904 Casement Report<sup>8</sup>, which detailed the systematic murders, tortures and mutilations (in particular, the infamous severed hands) to which were subjected Congolese civilians. That

international pressure was echoed at home by Belgian anticolonial figures like socialist statesman Emile Vandervelde. The shock and uproar would eventually lead to the Belgian state annexing the Congo in 1908.

To rehabilitate its international image, Belgium announced its intention to run the now-Belgian Congo as “model-colony” and publicise said colonial efforts at home and abroad. To this day, Belgian textbooks repeat propaganda talking points without much of a critical look. Structurally, few things changed for many in the Congolese population. Corvees and forced labour were maintained, a plantation economy developed, and any strike or revendication was met with military force. The Belgian Congo was not so different from an apartheid state. Residential segregation was a legal reality as of 1898, and White and Native neighbourhoods were separated by what was called “neutral zones”. The school system was segregated, with distinct schools for Europeans, *Mulattoes*, and *Blacks*. Up to the 1950s, Congolese people weren’t provided with proper public education (that role being filled with varying degrees of professionalism by religious congregations) and forbidden from studying beyond secondary education. Women in particular were purposely undereducated. None of them held a university degree by the time of the independence, and less than thirty Congolese men did. Natives were confined to manual labour – mining, forestry, transport – to assist in the plunder of the country’s natural capital.

Congolese willing to be granted basic rights were expected to go through a gruelling process of “evolution” and emulate signifiers of Belgian life: a brick house with flowers in the front and electricity, European clothes... Successful applicants were granted the title of *évolués* (evolved) and allowed into white-collar jobs, without much of any other privileges. Their pay was often insufficient to maintain their lifestyle, and they were mocked in Belgian media for their white-mask-like simulacra of Europeanness, while at the same time being touted in propaganda as examples of Belgium’s

civilisational oeuvre. When the Congo acceded to independence in 1960, that sort of white-collar middle class accounted for around fifteen thousand out of fifteen million Congolese.

Traces of this apartheid-like regime are still visible in the DRC today, especially in the capital city of Kinshasa, today an immense city of at least 12 million. The mere size of the city is disconcerting, especially knowing that by the end of the colonial period it was only inhabited by around 100,000 souls. The colonial centre, by the Congo River, boasts large avenues that, if they may seem a bit tight for millions today, do look a bit too wide for its former inhabitants who might have enjoyed some shade: their width impedes the construction of barricades and allows for the easy deployment of troops. Several outlying but busy neighbourhoods look far and poorly connected to the centre, their names are often adorned with the prefix “camp”: they were dormitory towns for Congolese workers, away from the colonial centre. Still today, most of the economic activity is concentrated in said centre, whose streets are congested by commuters. And most of them disappear at night.

Truth is, Belgians never really intended to leave the Congo. And they never really did in some ways. Up to the last days of the colony, they expected to stay in Africa for another thirty years. They then sabotaged the DRC’s independence, supported two separatist movements and played a still unclear role in the assassination of the country’s first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba. Belgian troops and mercenaries intervened in the country several times, and, in consort with the US, they propped up the dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko that lasted until 1997. As recently as 2008, then Belgian foreign minister Karel De Gucht expressed his belief that Belgium holds a “moral authority” on the DRC and claimed a

“*droit de regard*” on Congolese politics. For this declaration that nearly led to Kinshasa breaking diplomatic ties, De Gucht was punished by being promoted to European Commissioner in 2010.

*The Colonial Museum and the King's Imaginarium*

The colonisation of the Congo wasn't always a consensual affair in Belgium, and not just because of the atrocities of the Congo Free State. Considered by many a risky or immoral adventure, colonisation was championed by the elites around the king and grand capitalists looking for investment opportunities. Among all of the king's efforts to rally the Belgian population to his colonial projects, the most notorious was the erection of the Congo Museum (now Royal Museum for Central Africa or AfricaMuseum), between 1905 and 1908 in the royal park of Tervuren, next to the Palace of the Colonies, built for the same purpose in 1897, during the Brussels International Exposition. The park housed human zoos during the events, populated with 267 forcibly displaced Congolese, of which seven would die and be buried in Tervuren.<sup>9</sup>

Built with wealth extracted at gunpoint from the Congo Free State, the Tervuren Museum was intended to showcase the Congo itself to the Belgian public. To this day, it houses an immense and disparate collection of variegated rocks (some radioactive), stuffed animals, desiccated arthropods, exotic plants, and manmade objects both common and artistic presented with the same reverence. It has captured the imagination of generations of Belgian children, often in awe in front of its large monoxylous pirogue or its stuffed giraffe, surrounded by neoclassical colonial paraphernalia.

The Museum is one of the many buildings erected by Leopold II with his colonial wealth, a list that includes several landmarks in Brussels and Ostend – but mostly vanity projects destined to his own private use. The

king's blood money funded works on his personal palaces, like the royal family's home in Laeken, and two luxurious villas on the Côte d'Azur. It also allowed him to try to turn Brussels into an off-Broadway version of Paris, with large avenues, parks, or neoclassical monstrosities, and fund the laborious construction of the Cinquantenaire Arcade, a monumental arch commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Belgian revolution – that was finished 25 years too late. One of the most curious of the king's legs is a pagoda, rumoured to be Japanese, actually built by a French architect for the 1900 Paris Exposition, that Leopold decided to buy and take home to Laeken.

The king's spree often prompted Congolese to assert that Brussels (and with it, Belgium) was built with their own money. Some humorously claimed the pagoda should be sent back to Kinshasa. To these boasts, Belgians often claimed, quoting a famous work of historian Jean Stengers, that the colony cost more than it paid back. This framing portrays a fundamental misunderstanding of what constitutes an imperial relationship, or what the purpose of a colony even is.

A colony doesn't even need to be in the literal green to be profitable. An extraction colony like the Congo's primary purpose is to serve as a pool of raw resources fuelling its metropole's industry and provide its corporations with investment opportunities as well as potential new markets where dump their products. A colony is also a scheme to boost a capitalist economy by diverting public funds into private hands. And it's a job programme, providing the colonial power's failsons, disgruntled petite-bourgeoisie and exploited working class with employment opportunities, often consisting in administering a new racialised proletariat overseas.

Along with this parasitic economic relationship, a colonial power often alienates its colonies intellectually and creatively. Not only does colonisation

substitute the former elite with a Western one, it also subjects a colony to modernity's scientific gaze. It gives anthropologists, biologists, historians, geologists... with a new world to conquer, study, document, and classify. Aside from the prestige and the intellectual stimulation they generate, colonial sciences also allow empires to build a monopoly on all knowledge surrounding their colonies.

The colonies also act as an *imaginarium*. A pool of endless novelty and creative *matter*. At a time where non-European art was regarded as inferior, European artists did endlessly tap into non-European forms to feed their celebrated creations. The strange world of the colonies also feeds into the imaginaries of the Europeans through colonial propaganda and goes on to inspire works of fiction that ensure these representations live on. In early-20<sup>th</sup> century Germany, pulp tales depicting exotic African adventures were all the rage.<sup>10</sup> Contemporary British novels, whose authors were enthralled with Britain's new role as the imperial caretaker of the Middle East, were often set in the region.<sup>11</sup> In Belgium, colonial motifs and the Congo have never stopped being portrayed in the country's comic book industry. Every year, creative Belgians travel to the DRC, to come back present Brussels' cultural scene with photographs, movies or some other media project, often to be celebrated. Congolese artists do not always encounter the same success when talking about their country. Belgian authors, creatives and artists often still dominate what is said about the DRC, and it's a go-to subject of study for generations of Belgian academics. As Fanon once wrote, "it is the coloniser that made and continues to make the colonised".

The Tervuren Museum is the incarnation of this cultural alienation. Originally a catalogue for Belgian eyes to feast upon all their colony had to offer, it then pivoted to claiming being a purely scientific institution, despite its allures of 19<sup>th</sup> century cabinet of curiosities. Due to its hegemonic position as a very well-endowed, regalian institution and its

wealth of historical archives, it still holds a tight grip on much of the knowledge-production related to the Congo. Its reach doesn't stop at the Belgian border. For example, Texaf Bilembo, a Kinshasa cultural centre that sometimes doubles as one of its hippest places, is one of his many partners. The centre's library sells several books stamped with the logo of the AfricaMuseum. Congolese scholarship is in dire need of funds, and Tervuren often finds itself implicated in a sizable portion of what is published about the DRC. Some editions of aforementioned Congolese historian Isidore Ndaywel's flagship historical sum are prefaced by Tervuren's ubiquitous and seemingly unmovable director, Guido Gryseels. The Belgian institution was also involved in the setting up of Kinshasa's new National Museum (MNRDC), though it still refuses to return any of the many (180,000) pieces it hoards.

### *Hegemonic Decolonisation*

The aging Tervuren Museum, long in need of refurbishment, entered a four-year process of renovation in 2013. Opportunity was seized to revisit the permanent exhibition, an endeavour that was touted as an ambitious decolonisation project – a first for Belgium. The Museum promised to deeply cooperate and listen to the diasporas, without clearly explaining what that cooperation would entail. So far, their interactions with the diasporas had consisted mostly in inviting some Brussels youths to take part to urban-culture-themed events.

Concretely, six members of Central African diasporas, most of them museologists or art historians (and usually Belgian themselves) were invited as consultants within the renovation working group. They were first intrigued by the fact that none of the five people of African descent working for the Museum were present in the room with them. They were kept seemingly out of the loop. The six consultants were then presented

with the new concept of the collections, along with the framing of Congolese history that was to be passed onto the visitor. The group of six first deplored the absence of contextualisation surrounding several pieces (such as masks, presented static and without their full costume, or their religious and social significations) and the refusal by museum personnel to do away with their colonial-era-style display cases. They questioned the necessity to adorn every room of the building with Congolese folk paintings (many of them by Chéri Samba). They also criticised the eurocentrism of the museum's historical narrative. Most of these critiques fell on deaf ears, and it became clear the consultants were brought to validate the museum's work rather than critique it. Behind the scenes, most of the scientific staff were reluctant to alter the way they worked. The six consultants dissociated from the whole process, and once their checks cleared, toured the media to publicly levy their critiques at the museum.<sup>12</sup>

Reading the concepts and the documents produced by the working group<sup>13</sup>, the fallout between Tervuren and its consultants makes sense. The entirety of the material displays the scholarly quality of an undergraduate essay. It is a compilation of older, usually Eurocentric, historical works and colonial tropes, at times paternalistic and condescending. Concepts like imperialism are never properly explained, or obfuscated. There's nary a mention of Central Africa's precolonial history. Complexity is reserved to the colonisers while the Congolese are painted with a very big brush. Jarring choices litter the documents. A section about education is eclipsed in size by one about crocodile-men and leopard-men, an interesting yet inconsequential footnote in the history of the DRC, that was only made relevant by colonial propaganda. Among the other tropes found in the drafts: the inflated importance of the "Belgo-Congolese community" a 1950s propaganda effort intended to quell international pressure and sublimate Belgium's apartheid regime, the relevance of the 1956 Van Bilsen plan, presented uncritically as a good faith plan to emancipate the Congo – even though it pushed for

another thirty years of Belgian occupation. The group of six were fed an alienating portrayal of what was their culture and history, shaped by the colonial bias of an institution in an indisputable position of power. They were asked to validate – as objects – a knowledge of themselves handed down from a position of authority by Europeans marinated in colonial imagery.

The Royal Museum for Central Africa reopened in 2018, accompanied by a rebranding campaign, and a fresh name: AfricaMuseum. Inside, few things had changed. Fewer objects were now exposed, from 1400 down to 700; some of the most uneasy statues (like a leopard-man about to strike his prey) were moved to a different room. The dead giraffe is still there. The big pirogue too. So are the dozens of racist sculptures decorating the walls and the bas-reliefs glorifying Leopold II. They are part of the walls, and the Royal Museum is a protected monument. A memorial honouring the “*Belgians who died in the Congo 1876–1908*” – the time of the Congo Free State – was left untouched. A small text was added, mentioning “*a demographic deficit of several hundreds of thousands, maybe a few millions*”. Interestingly, the English version of the text is a bit less tame.

All that colonial decorum, inseparable from the structure of the building, begs the question of whether it was even possible to decolonise what is the quintessential incarnation and perpetuator of Belgium’s colonial ideology. One does not simply decolonise the Colonial Museum.

### *Reconciliation on the settler’s terms*

The renovation of the Tervuren Museum did have one good outcome: it can be credited with instilling a second wind to Belgium’s minorities’ calls for decolonisation. A Patrice Lumumba Square was inaugurated in Brussels in 2018. A UN expert group visited Belgium in 2019 to assess

the human rights situation of people of African descent in the country. New generations were politicised and acquainted with the basics of decolonisation and were able to mobilise in 2020 during the worldwide BLM protests. The year was also marked by a declaration by King Philippe, who expressed his “deep regrets” regarding Belgium’s (and his family’s) colonial past, in a letter addressed to DRC president Félix Tshisekedi. The Federal Parliament announced the creation of a “*Truth and Reconciliation*” Commission, tasked with facing Belgium’s colonial crimes.

Many were disillusioned when a list of experts expected to be part of the commission was leaked. The group comprised as many Belgians as Africans and Afro-descendants, mostly historians. Though the presence of acclaimed Congolese historian Elikia M’Bokolo was a welcome surprise, the selection was problematic. No Burundian name made it on the list. Some experts had no idea their name was on said list until it was leaked. In total, the names of 20 experts made up the list, as individuals. No political or civil society organisation was taken into account in any capacity. It came as no surprise then that the list had in large parts been put together by none other than the AfricaMuseum, whose “decolonisation” was by now widely considered a farce within diaspora communities.

One of the experts, political scientist Olivia Rutazibwa, herself of Rwandan descent, had not been consulted before her name was added to the list. Rutazibwa publicly refused to take part to the exercise and relayed the grievances of many in the diasporas in an open letter. She criticised the “*White World logic*” impetus of fixing a top-down historical truth, the clearly limiting scope rendering it near impossible to address the wider racism present in Belgian society as a result of its colonial history and denounced the would-be Commission as “*a cosmetic operation at the service of the status quo*”.<sup>14</sup>

Again, the methodology of the Commission betrays a colonial gaze. The Belgian parliament, an organ of a former colonial state, is still complicit in colonial exploitation, appointing experts (a majority of which are nationals) to establish its hegemonic truth regarding its colonial crimes. Again, you cannot decolonise the Colonial Museum for the racism is part of the walls. You cannot decolonise a colonial state with the same tools it used to colonise the world. It is time hegemonic institutions and emanations of the state let go of their positions, lest the only decolonisation left possible will be to rebuild them brick by brick – and get rid of the statues on the walls.

Decolonisation is not a dialogue between an oppressor or an ex-oppressor that still holds most of the power and those who had to endure their rule. Decolonisation is a radical reclamation of self-determination and of the knowledge of the self, where most of one's identity were imprinted on them by a hegemon. The history of Belgian racism won't be properly told but by the ones who had to live it, and its structures won't be torn down by those who profit from it. Likewise, the Congolese should not have to negotiate how to frame the history of their occupation with their former colonisers.

### *Conclusion*

Like *évolution*, hegemonic decolonisation is a spook. Should the Congolese or the diasporas ever commit to reclaiming their own status as subjects, it's up to them to write their narratives, without the initiative coming from an institution legatee to the colonial apparel. Emulation between Africans (and other colonised populations) is the one that will help make sense of their history and experience, not conceding that authority to their former overlord.

The way forward is in Africans reclaiming their history and their imaginary, and in diasporas not fearing adding their voices to the chorus.

For those who have been treated as objects for too long to be able to create, study, produce... it is one of the ways we can decolonise knowledge – as a stepping-stone towards socio-economic emancipation. It requires time, effort, contention, coalition building and might be a long way ahead, but it is one that is wide open.

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## 1.3 Colonialism Must Fall: Reflections on Student Activism in UK Universities

Nupur Patel<sup>1\*</sup>

A narrative told from a magnifying glass ceiling.  
Hear the quick call to decolonize our education.  
See the fighting white tears to keep our miseducation.

[...]

If there are two sides to every coin  
Well then here's a little heads up  
Cause we're flipping the tale and  
Flipping the switch  
Onto the side of a truth unspoken.<sup>1</sup>

— Princess Ashilokun

'Ignorance Must Fall', originally a spoken word piece

### *Introduction*

For hundreds of years, the university has been an important institution for the production, exchange, and dissemination of knowledge. While it

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\* Note: This article was composed before Oriel College decided to retract its decision to seek to remove the statue of Cecil Rhodes in May 2021. Members of Governing Body stated that this was due to regulatory and financial challenges. In response to this disappointing news, the Rhodes Must Fall movement has stressed that it will continue to fight to have the statue removed. In protest, certain academics have boycotted Oriel College by refusing to undertake undergraduate teaching and admissions work at the College, as well as attending talks sponsored by the College.

has often been considered an elitist, exclusive organisation, it has gradually expanded to encompass a more diverse cohort from different social classes, ethnicities, and nationalities. Though academic in nature, its influence spans beyond the university walls: it shapes and is itself shaped by contemporary cultural, political, and economic discourses in wider society. As college heads of the University of Oxford recently stated in their open letter about anti-racist protests in 2020, education, and by association the university, is a key site which has the power to “promote, protect and advance equal dignity and respect, diversity of thought [...] tolerance and multiculturalism”<sup>2</sup> in national and global contexts. It provides a suitable breeding ground for debate and discussion. It enables contestation of archaic thought processes as well as injustices of various kinds. And yet, in recent years outrage has grown at the attempts, or lack thereof, by British universities to demonstrate these values. Within a specific decolonial context, many institutions have failed to address their Eurocentric curriculums and pedagogies, and campus environments. They have also neglected to explore their histories and legacies of empire. In other cases, they have ignored the significance of the various colonial artefacts and architecture that make up their foundations. Equally, they continue to promote colonial figures.

As a response to this, the UK has witnessed a rising number of activist movements, spearheaded by students across the country. These movements have sought to hold universities accountable and to push for a full decolonisation of academic spaces. Indeed, continuing the tradition of twentieth-century student activism, students have come together to protest with national campaigns like the UK’s National Union of Students’ “Why is My Curriculum White?” and #LiberateMyDegree campaigns, and more localised movements, such as “Rhodes Must Fall” at the University of Oxford, “POC Squared” at Queen Mary University of London, and “Broaden My Bookshelf” at the University of Huddersfield. While students have too often been portrayed as inexperienced and naïve in

pushing for change, such movements showcase the power and agency of students in their efforts to decolonise academic institutions and work in solidarity with one another. This article explores these strengths in more depth, with specific focus on the “Rhodes Must Fall” movement and “Uncomfortable Oxford”. In my examination of these initiatives, I touch on the history of student activism, and highlight the great advances that have been made by contemporary initiatives in decolonising the university setting. Subsequently, I reflect on what is still needed for universities across the UK to reach their full potential. After all, there is still a long way to go to ensure that universities formally commit to taking decolonisation seriously. Despite the extensive work of institutions like SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) University of London in decolonising their institutions, as *The Guardian* found in June 2020, only a fifth of British universities have formally committed to decolonising their institutions.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, there needs to be a more holistic effort to fully ensure that universities listen to students’ concerns. Moreover, we must question the university’s place in relation to British society and its complicated relationship with the past.

### *Decolonising the University*

My reflection on decolonising the university begins by firstly questioning what exactly decolonisation means in this space. Western universities have come to be known by pro-decolonial activists as a “key site” through which colonialism and the knowledge of colonialism are “consecrated, institutionalised, and naturalised.”<sup>4</sup> They have been built from colonial expeditions and exploits, and have existed for several years, further entrenching violent and oppressive colonial narratives. This fact alone makes the prospect of decolonisation an incredibly complex and drawn-out process. As Gurminder K. Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial and Kerem Nişancıoğlu state in their edited volume, *Decolonising the University*, decolonisation is

itself a multifaceted, and often contested, concept, with “a multitude of definitions, interpretations, aims and strategies”.<sup>5</sup> In broad terms, it is “a way of thinking about the world which takes colonialism, empire, and racism at its empirical and discursive objects of study.” Equally, it offers alternative means of thinking about the world and “alternative forms of political praxis”.<sup>6</sup> As underlined above, there are various approaches and perspectives on how these two principal aims can be carried out. Decolonising the university has included a critical examination of pedagogical practices – i.e. examining the Eurocentric biases within teaching, knowledge exchange, and production – re-evaluating traditionally exclusive course curriculums, and making campus environments more inclusive. Additionally, it can entail providing anti-racist training for staff and students, implementing effective complaints procedures for those who have experienced discrimination, ensuring better representation of staff and students from minority backgrounds and addressing attainment gaps between white students and other disadvantaged students. Many students have also pushed for universities to examine their colonial legacies, contemporary ties to oppressive systems, and iconography. All of these examples have been interpreted and addressed in different ways, which has added to the complicated and disputed debate about what it means to decolonise the university in the first place.<sup>7</sup> Certainly this unstable definition has often created an ambiguous response from universities themselves to commit to decolonisation. Such institutions are able to cherry-pick a few initiatives here and there, as part of a “tick-box” exercise that enables them to not have to be completely proactive in meeting students’ needs while remaining somewhat attractive to a new cohort of students in this era of ‘marketisation’ and ‘consumer satisfaction’.<sup>8</sup> It is no wonder, then, that student activists continue to put pressure on universities to make more fundamental changes to their infrastructure, beyond what has tended to be adding a few authors from marginalised groups to course reading lists. As members of a younger generation, these students join other game changers

of grassroots movements. They have the energy and vigour to provoke action from within. In the words of “Fill In the Blanks”<sup>9</sup> co-founder Rochelle Meaden, they “sit at the perfect interchange of anger and hope”<sup>10</sup>, and use their fearlessness to defy and even transgress the status quo.

### *A History of Student Activism*

The participation of students in political change is, of course, by no means a new occurrence. In fact, the student movements we have seen emerge in the UK have often been inspired by earlier movements in the twentieth century. On a global scale, the USA bore witness to the civil rights movements, which encouraged the involvement of a number of students. These young people took part in a number of marches, sit-ins, and meetings, most notably during the push for creating integrated schools, the lunch counter sit-ins of 1960 in North Carolina, and “The Children’s Crusade” of 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>11</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, many of the protests in Europe were staged to drastically reform a catastrophic “bourgeois” education system and express upset at conflicts in Algeria, Vietnam, and Latin America. Others criticised autocratic regimes and held demonstrations of an anti-imperialist sentiment to call for national self-determination in colonised nations.<sup>12</sup> In 1968, a wave of protests took place across the world. Students expressed their frustrations with the hopes of improving deep-rooted issues in society. In the UK, the “Long Sixties” consisted of a number of student movements which expressed similar outrage; they were created to condemn the Vietnam War, imperialism, the use of nuclear weapons, and outdated universities, through a range of events: marches, sit-ins, pickets and rallies.<sup>13</sup>

The anti-apartheid movement in South Africa in the 1970s equally made room for student activists. Their intervention represented one of the “most distinctive characteristic features of anti-colonial resistance”<sup>14</sup>. Students

and student organisations used universities and schools as mediums through which they challenged racial injustices. Many of these eventually expanded their contestations to encompass party politics and the wider community at large. The creation of student branches of national parties enabled a beneficial alliance between national and student change.<sup>15</sup> Moving to the 1980s, student activism was further launched onto the international stage through the presence of divestment protests that sought to push universities to terminate their investment in companies in South Africa. Shanty towns on student campuses were built to expose the system of oppression and violence against impoverished black people in the South African apartheid.<sup>16</sup> As Robert A. Rhoads has discovered, student protests of the 1990s in the USA changed their priorities from a focus on rights in the movements of the 1960s to opportunity, that is to say improving prospects for disadvantaged students. They aimed to make universities more accessible and prioritise multiculturalism and diversity within these spaces.<sup>17</sup> From the 2000s onwards, student movements have expanded their focus to more societal issues, demanding society to address the prominence of sexual assault cases on university campuses, gender-based violence and femicide. Emphasis has also been placed on protecting the rights of marginalised groups and supporting movements like “Black Lives Matter” and decolonisation initiatives in various spheres of influence.<sup>18</sup> Beginning with the 1960s up until the present day, what these student movements have in common is the understanding of young people as a force to be reckoned with. Their threat to the social order reveals the power that they hold in triggering local, national, and even global change. Student activists of today inherit a strong tradition of political agency that has enabled people across the decades to expose the injustices and hypocrisies of society at large. These activists have become catalysts for other groups to act. They look to agents of the past as inspirations for continuing the quest to “force political, social, and cultural debates of the era.”<sup>19</sup>

*Student Movements in the UK*

What perhaps separates contemporary student activism from previous movements is that recent initiatives appear to be much less elitist, and thus more accessible, to a more diverse university cohort. With the gradual rise of students coming from a variety of backgrounds, a slightly more representative group of people have taken part in shaping the future. They are more distanced from the white middle-class model of students,<sup>20</sup> and intervene in activism both for themselves and for future students. Moreover, in an age where the importance of identity politics has grown considerably, students are determined more than ever to demand more from their universities. They have often presented their critiques according to contemporary discussions about intersectionality, white privilege, structural racism, and equality, diversity, and inclusion. Across the UK we find a range of examples of student-led movements which serve to tackle different aspects of decolonising universities. The University of Huddersfield's "Broaden My Bookshelf" initiative, for instance, primarily concentrates on making sure that more BAME and LGBTQ+ authors appear on degree course reading lists and in libraries. It seeks to further question fundamental aspects of the traditionally exclusive and unequal nature of learning.<sup>21</sup> In 2017, this initiative was awarded £20,000 by the University of Huddersfield, which demonstrates the power that student-led projects can have in encouraging their institutions to invest, financially and emotionally, into their causes.<sup>22</sup> This can also be seen in the numerous decolonisation initiatives in various universities, including "Decolonise the University of Manchester", "Decolonise Sussex", "the Decolonise Durham Network", "Decolonising the Curriculum" at the University of Kent, as well as the National Student Union's "Why is My Curriculum White?" campaign. Together, these have worked to challenge the barriers of exclusively white university curricula and the Eurocentric forms of teaching that are paired with them. Some of these decolonising initiatives have been furthered by universities themselves, further pointing to the ability for students to not

only “shock and inspire”<sup>23</sup> national and international audiences for their campaigns, but also engage with universities in a way that modifies their foundations on a more fundamental level. Often these projects also benefit from the connectivity that this new “Digital Age” of social media offers them. Leaders of various projects have the ability to form networks and to share and exchange ideas that have worked in pushing for positive change. They can also provide important support networks for when activism inevitably becomes emotionally exhausting. As Alexander Hensby notes in his exploration of mediated protest events in UK Student activism cycles, social media accounts provide opportunities to “accumulate a wealth of videos, photographs and correspondence over a number of years”<sup>24</sup>, expanding engagement to students across different institutions. A strong social media presence also ensures a better chance for movements to sustain themselves and grow in influence. It even makes such movements more accessible to circles outside of the university setting who can tap into their available resources. At the very least, these movements set themselves up to receive more publicity opportunities that allow them a level of traction and continuity.

Perhaps more than anyone, students are in the best position to advise universities on how best to decolonise all facets of the educational system. As consumers of and co-producers in education, their needs are what should guide the direction in which universities are heading. The experiences of students of colour reveal the failures of universities to provide inclusive spaces, to enable minority students to succeed in their courses, and to properly come to terms with their colonial histories. Indeed, students have first-hand experience of the long-lasting impact of colonisation and racism on society. They offer a “unique insight” on how racism and inequality have had “catastrophic effects” and how these can be resolved in the university setting and beyond.<sup>25</sup> We see this very clearly in the POC Squared project, led by a trio of physics graduates from Queen Mary University of London.

Their aim is to make “systemic change” in STEM subjects, decolonising the science-related curricula, which have all too often been presented as apolitical. Additionally, they seek to provide more BAME representation in STEM jobs and to highlight the work and stories of scientists of colour who have often been erased from history.<sup>26</sup> This group has not only helped to shape the environment in which students of colour study, but also it has thought critically about life beyond university. The founders have emphasised the importance of their institution in preparing students of colour for future careers. They demonstrate the need to link universities to the wider world, in order to understand the all-encompassing impact that colonial narratives have had on society. As the initiative has grown, POC Squared has become a social enterprise that has received funding from The Royal Astronomical Society. Thanks to this financial contribution, it now pays contributors of their initiative. It is an important counteraction to the sad reality that people of colour are not always recognised, by universities, for their time and work in equality and diversity initiatives. On their website, the project’s founders have included a podcast and guides for BAME people applying for positions in STEM, as well as a detailed course module, entitled “Diversity in STEM”, which concentrates on postcolonial theory in STEM and how imperialism has influenced science.<sup>27</sup> With their often international perspective, students like these think more critically about university environments outside of a Eurocentric framework. It is a mutually beneficial act, which helps universities to grow with the times and empower students themselves to become “change actors” who have an important stake in education as “co-producers of knowledge”.<sup>28</sup> As we have seen with these few examples of student-led projects, students themselves have brought a new energy to decolonisation movements. They are a “vanguard for social change”<sup>29</sup> whose dynamic projects can cover more ground together in sparking change in academic spaces.

*Student Activism at the University of Oxford*

This cannot be more apparent in the University of Oxford, an institution that is built on tradition, prestige, and colonialism. In recent years it has become home to a number of student activist projects, including “Rhodes Must Fall” and “Uncomfortable Oxford”. Both projects have sought to uncover and challenge the uncomfortable history of violence and oppression with which the university is connected. “Rhodes Must Fall”, especially, has gained national and even international attention in the press. It was originally inspired an incident at the University of Cape Town in which a student threw a bucket of faeces at a statue of the imperialist Cecil Rhodes. Following this, “Rhodes Must Fall” in Oxford sparked debates about the decolonisation of education in the UK and the role of iconography in perpetuating racism and oppression. It focused on the areas of iconography, curriculum, and representation and tried to reform the university from within. Their efforts, the group hoped, would spark further change in other institutions.<sup>30</sup> On the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2015, 250 Oxford students came together in front of Oriel College to call for the statue of Cecil Rhodes to be removed. They argued that the university used the statue to glorify “an international criminal”<sup>31</sup>, alongside other imperialists like Christopher Codrington, Benjamin Jowett, and Pitt Rivers who have various buildings named after them. As they stated in their first official statement:

“Oxford continues to colonise the minds of future leaders through its visual iconographies, the concepts and histories of its curricula, the networks of power, the cultural capital, and the ‘civilised’ culture of ‘taste’ in which students are steeped.”<sup>32</sup>

Despite being depicted by some as unruly perpetrators of erasing history, the “Rhodes Must Fall” organisers have gained much support over the years. Admittedly, the project experienced a slight dip in influence as

many of its supporters graduated from the university; however, the death of George Floyd and “Black Lives Matter” protests all over the world in 2020 incited a new wave of support and fervour for the movement. This support led to a peaceful demonstration on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2020, which 1,000 people attended. “Rhodes Must Fall” became attractive to a set of people who were awakened by questions of privilege and racism; these supporters started to question their own contribution to racist structures. People engaged in speeches, petitions, marches, and dance protests, which were shared across social media platforms. Such activism complemented other movements like “#LeopoldMustFall” at the Queen Mary University of London. Relentless campaigning and a strong news coverage appeared alongside other events that involved the toppling of statues (namely, slave owner Edward Colston in Bristol<sup>33</sup>). These finally led Oriol College to vote in favour of removing the statue of Cecil Rhodes in June 2020.<sup>34</sup> Since then, the university has made a bigger effort to assess its relationship with imperialism, including a re-evaluation of course curricula, facilities, and resources for BAME students. Some colleges have also invested in research into the university’s colonial legacies. This has been, of course, due to not only “Rhodes Must Fall”, but also the work of other university societies and initiatives and individual staff and students. This exhilarating decision on behalf of Oriol College exemplifies the strengths of student activism that have already been discussed in this article. Indeed, “Rhodes Must Fall” has presented itself as a striking force which capitalised on social media, a variety of protest events and connectivity with other groups to carry out its aims. As the official “Rhodes Must Fall” book reveals, collaboration with other student initiatives like “Decolonise Sussex” and “Decolonising SOAS” has created much bigger debates about decolonising education and oppressive iconography, all of which have been more strongly embedded in the consciousness of students up and down the country.

Along similar lines, “Uncomfortable Oxford” started off a student activist project which perceives colonial artefacts and architecture with a critical lens. Kickstarted by DPhil students, Olivia Durand and Paula Larsson in 2018, it has now become an academic led- social enterprise. It aims to create discussions about “empire, race, class and gender”<sup>35</sup>, primarily through the walking tours that guides lead around the city of Oxford. These tours, entitled “The Original Uncomfortable Tour”, “Oxford and Empire”, “Uncomfortable Literature”, and “Follow the Money” have often been described as “Oxford’s tour[s] of shame.”<sup>36</sup> They are positioned as something unique alongside the usual pubs, ghosts, and city tours that are available to locals and tourists. During the COVID-pandemic, the organisation has managed to adapt to uncertain times by providing virtual tours, which take participants on a tour around particular buildings and monuments to explore material culture and colonial discourses that permeate the city. The adaptability of its program to this new virtual setting has enabled its expansion to not only residents and tourists in Oxford, but also to the alumni community of the university. Alongside this, a number of online panel discussions, workshops, podcasts, and talks have further extended the organisation’s ability to spread awareness about Oxford’s uneasy history. As tour participants are taken around Oxford, they are made to feel uneasy about what they are confronted with: statues, buildings and ideas that reflect the oppressive and violent attitudes of imperialism. To take this further, tour guides offer an interactive aspect of their tours, which encourages discussion. Participants are encouraged to share their responses to questions and to discuss topics that do not have definitive answers. This creates a constructive space in which people can learn from each other without the fear of being chastised or dismissed. It equally helps visitors to “think more about beautiful architecture they’ve just seen” and, in the words of co-founder Paula Larsson, “to apply [...] questions to every space they walk into next”.<sup>37</sup> It is about being more analytical and critical of the environment that you inhabit and thinking more deeply about

racist structures that are very much entrenched in society. The interactive element of their walking tours, I believe, has been a huge contribution to the organisation's success. Instead of being fed information that they may later forget, participants are encouraged to engage more profoundly with questions of power and memory, and to spark further dialogue about these in other spaces with different people. "Uncomfortable Oxford" does not simply look into the university; it projects outwards to the wider city to eradicate the traditional "Town versus Gown" division. It successfully brings together different members of the city. Their public engagement has facilitated important collaborations with various institutions around Oxford, including Oxford colleges and museums, as well as other student-led projects like "Common Ground", a movement, which examines Oxford's colonial past.<sup>38</sup> Much like "Rhodes Must Fall", "Uncomfortable Oxford" has gained media attention from British newspapers, which has furthered interest in its work. It has shown itself to be equally successful at staging debates about decolonisation in the West, bridging together the city's history and global events.

### *What is still needed?*

It is clear that both Oxford student movements, and other examples of UK student activism mentioned above, have shown remarkable successes in an era of decolonising education. However, it seems appropriate to state that there is still a long way to go. As mentioned earlier, despite the hard work and enthusiasm of student activists in sparking change, the university remains a place of frustration. As a recent *Guardian* article revealed in July 2020, out of the 128 British university institutions only 24 have committed to decolonising their curriculum; 11 out of the 24 have formally declared to reform the whole institution, with most of the work being directed at a few departments and a small group of academics and students.<sup>39</sup> To many institutions, decolonisation remains a buzzword, which is used to raise the

profile of a university without really putting in the hard work to make academic spaces more inclusive. In the new age of “marketisation” in which universities look to students as consumers, universities are more and more conscious of their public image. They wish to tick boxes whilst not wishing to do anything that may seem too radical or seemingly political in a country that still experiences a great level of ignorance and misguided pride towards the British Empire. As well as taking students more seriously in their calls for decolonisation, their movements need to be incorporated into the infrastructure of the university itself. Colonial legacies are deeply rooted in the university framework; incorporating initiatives that help to dismantle it not only formalises the procedure, but also encourages different members of the university to play a part in this, not just BAME students and staff. Breaking away from the prominent assumption that decolonisation only concerns minority groups, implementing working groups and training with specific and attainable goals will help to improve various facets of the education system. It will also facilitate better collaboration with students and staff and enable a better and more sustainable way of ensuring that the university becomes a more inclusive and continually self-critical space. It also acts as a possible solution to the risk of extinction that student movements potentially face when students inevitably graduate and move away from student activism.<sup>40</sup> The incorporation of student movements into the university itself is entirely achievable. The “Decolonising SOAS” project, for example, is built on the previous work of student activists. It is funded centrally by the university’s administration, paying, and calling on a working group to interrogate learning, teaching practices, and to provide resources and toolkits for decolonising higher education institutions.<sup>41</sup> In fact, SOAS represents a university that is striving to use its internal processes to further the agenda of student activists. It seeks to collaborate with other institutions to spark further change in the UK. In a society in which we now have more official data on the impact of colonisation

and education on BAME students, such as attainment gaps between white students and students of colour, universities owe it to students to listen to their needs and resolve long-standing inequalities.

### *Beyond the University*

It is, however, a detriment to the work of student activism if we only think about universities in their own right. Indeed, as we have discovered, the university is an important institution of power, which has the ability to reflect and influence knowledge, perspectives, and theories of contemporary society. In many ways, colonial issues with universities are symbolic of the UK's deep-rooted issues with racism and empire. In the grand scheme of decolonisation in the UK, there is a great lack of education and lack of willingness for many to educate themselves about the horrors of the past. Moreover, as a YouGov study in 2014 found, 59% of British people are even proud of Britain's colonial past. While almost half of young people felt ashamed about the Empire, two-thirds of over 60s viewed it with pride.<sup>42</sup> In light of the recent treatment of figures such as Meghan Markle in the British press, and the media's and the British government's often negative depiction of "Black Lives Matter" protests, it is hard to imagine that these statistics have drastically changed. Alongside this beaming pride for the Empire, there is also another set of people who are too uncomfortable and ashamed to face their country's colonial past. This uneasiness will always present itself as a barrier to the UK formally acknowledging its colonial legacy and trying to dismantle racist structures that are still in place. The whole of society, and not just young people, need to engage in this practice. On a more profound level, British people need to embrace vulnerability by viewing their history through a more unpleasant lens, and in the process, refrain from belittling and misrepresenting student activists as "anarchistic rebels", "the woke police" or even "snowflakes." They must move away from the assumption that students wish to replace or erase history. This

reluctance to be open to a new dialogue about British colonial history is what sometimes prohibits student initiatives from penetrating a wider audience and accessing more influential change makers, like members of parliament. It makes the job of acknowledging the UK's colonial heritage much more difficult, as well as investing in official channels and programs to repair racial inequalities in society.

### *Conclusion*

These improvements for universities and British society in general are, of course, only a few suggestions that should be considered in discussions about decolonisation. They are by no means easy to implement. Decolonising any space, let alone one as big as education, is a huge task that needs to be thought about and tackled from a variety of angles. It requires a profound collaboration with the whole of society. Student activists in the UK have come a long way in kick-starting this process. As we have seen with recent grassroots movements across the country, there is a deep urgency for change in the university and an understanding of students as powerful agents who seek to make academic settings more equal and inclusive. Students have raised key questions about the importance of the production and exchange of knowledge about the UK's past and how it continues to influence the structures that benefit some and discriminate against others. While such movements have come up against challenges of their own, both in terms of struggling to be heard by universities or being misrepresented in wider society, they offer hope for many that much more will be done in the future to ensure that the UK comes to terms with its colonial history.

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## 1.4 “Was Kant a racist?”: the public discussion on Germany’s belated intellectual decolonisation

Robin F.C. Schmahl

### *Introduction*

In April 2021, German and Nigerian authorities reached a compromise that will lead to the restitution of the Benin Bronzes held in the Humboldt Forum, Berlin. The discussion on the restitution of looted art was re-initiated in 2017 (Sarr and Savoy 2018; Savoy 2021) at a time when the Herero and Namaqua Genocide regained considerable attention with Germany deciding to repatriate the human remains of several former Herero and Nama prisoners from its ethnological archives (Rücker and Ziegenfuß 2018). Besides the aspects of restitution and repatriation, the debate on German colonial practice focused on a third issue: intellectual decolonisation. In 2020, a discussion on the influence of European colonialism on the German intellectual canon as well as its role for the development of scientific racism emerged across all channels of mass media production in Germany. Public debate concentrated mostly on a re-examination of the oeuvre of Immanuel Kant – the figurehead of the German Enlightenment.

This chapter provides a survey of the German public discussion on intellectual decolonisation in 2020 and 2021. It offers a case study of what happens when a question, i.e. *Was Kant a racist?* leaves the academic realm and enters public discourse. The meaning of such a question, its answer as well as the significance of both is dependent on its discursive surroundings.

To comprehend the question *Was Kant a racist?* posed in public discourse, we must understand why and when it is raised as well as how and where it is answered. This chapter sets out to explore these notions through the method of a four-dimensional Foucauldian discourse analysis after giving an overview of the scientific literature on racism in Kant's writings.

Before we start, I must address my positionality on the issue (Foucault 1982; Bourdieu 1992; Göğüş 2019). Having received my education from German institutions of Philosophy and History, I am endowed to their intellectual tradition and thereby influenced by Kantian philosophy or its critical reception. The importance of Kant for German culture and identity cannot be overstated. People with comparable backgrounds have encountered him numerous times in school, university, the media, or personal debates. Ever since my first reading of Kant's essay *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* (Kant AA VIII)<sup>1</sup> a now almost universally read piece in German schools, I have never ceased to think, talk, or read about Kantian ideas in my admittedly bourgeois-esque fascination with this author. Upon a reflection of my intellectual ambitions, I have come to realise how important his philosophy was for my work, even though my career is only peripherally concerned with him. As such, an attentive reader could understand this chapter either as an inside glimpse into decolonial endeavours in Western Europe, or as an awkwardly biased account of German society. Given my own positionality, I leave this question to the attentive reader to answer for his or herself.

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1 When referring to Kant's work I will use the standardized version of reference based on the Akademie-Ausgabe (AA) available under <https://korpora.zim.uni-duisburg-essen.de/kant/verzeichnisse-gesamt.html> (accessed 27.03.2021). For reasons of brevity, I refrain from direct citations; most relevant passages can be found quoted in German in the studies of Sutter, Leutgöb, Hentges and Diop, and in English in the works of Kleingeld. See (Sutter 1989; Hentges 2004; Kleingeld 2007; 2014b; Diop 2012; Leutgöb 2015).

*The Academic Debate: how to reconcile racism with universalist moral philosophy?*

Kant's racism receives peripheral though ever-growing attention within research. The first widely read studies on the topic appeared in the 1990s (Neugebauer 1990), with only a handful of theoretical works to draw upon (Moebus 1977; Sutter 1989). The subject was prominently introduced through the writings of Hill and Bernasconi (Bernasconi 2001; Hill Jr and Boxill 2001) which produced a philosophical and not merely historical engagement with racism in Kant's practical philosophy. Based on Kleingeld's research, there is now a wide consensus on identifying the evolution of Kant's thoughts on race in five phases: (1) white supremacism in the 1760s, (2) a normatively neutral hierarchy of race based on climatic environment in the 1770s, (3) a *scientification* discarding previous normative dimensions in the mid-1780s, (4) a teleological concept of race and re-introduction of normative hierarchies in the late 1780s, and (5) condemnations of colonialism and a possible adherence to a non-normative race theory since the mid-1790s. (Kleingeld 2007; 2014a)

Traces of Kant's racial hierarchies can be found as early as in his 1764 *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (Kant AA II) and in the lectures on physical geography (Kant AA IX). These passages display notions of white supremacy and were apologetic of the oppression of indigenous people of North America or sub-Saharan Africa (Sutter 1989). Kant attributed different levels of agency as well as rational capabilities to different races, among which the white European would constitute the closest degeneration (*Abartung*) from an original human race. As such, Kant was the proponent of a monogenetic though normative theory of race – a notion that was contested within the anthropological discourse of his time (Sutter 1989; Kleingeld 2007).

A change of his views can be detected in his *Von den verschiedenen Rassen der Menschen* (Kant AA II) and in the 1785 *Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrasse* (Kant AA VIII) that constituted a reaction to criticisms posed by Herder. Here, Kant accounts for the occurrence of physiological differences between races by referring to climatic environments (Hentges 2004; van Gorkom 2020). These writings abandoned his earlier conception of the white European as the closest degeneration of an original human race as well as any normative hierarchies. This *scientification* (Sutter 1989) of race theory utilised skin colour as a moral-independent method of distinction, showcasing a monogenetic theory solely based on hereditary physiological differences. Kleingeld has shown that his normative hierarchy of race was merely pushed to the background of his thought (Kleingeld 2007), as it would occasionally re-appear in other writings (Sutter 1989).

Kant's theory was not well received by the anthropological community of his time (Kleingeld 2007). Georg Forster criticised him for relying on teleology instead of empirical data and reproducing white supremacist ideologies (Diop 2012; Gray 2012). As a justification of his ideas, Kant revisits race in his essay on teleological principles (Kant AA VIII). Ignoring the lack of empirical evidence, he defends his theory and “re-attaches” (Kleingeld 2007) a normative dimension while endorsing anti-abolitionist ideas.

As Kant did not restate his racial theory, we would have to assume the continuity of his outlook in his later life – a notion that, however, appears to be in open contradiction to his universalist moral philosophy and cosmopolitan political theory. Scholars have developed three different approaches to reconcile this apparent contradiction:

The first proposes a shift in Kant's attitude towards race and colonialist practice during the 1790s (Muthu 2003; Kleingeld 2007; 2014a; Storey 2015; Eberl 2019). This approach emphasises how the introduction of

(legal) cosmopolitanism (*Weltbürgerrecht*) and the absence of a normative racial theory after 1792 indicate a change in thinking. Kleingeld demonstrates that a close reading of his *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (Kant AA IV) and *Zum Ewigen Frieden* (Kant AA VIII) exhibits an acknowledgement of equal agencies across all races and includes condemnations of colonialism.

The second approach understands Kant to be *implicitly* racist and his philosophy not all-inclusively universalist (Sutter 1989; Eze 1994; Bernasconi 2001; Mills 2005; Sandford 2018). This approach shows how his moral philosophy might be permeated with inherent racism. Sutter and Mills stressed how Kant characterised non-European races to live in an ahistorical state that is non-significant for the progress of humankind. Those races would be unable to progress from their violent state of nature, inevitably leading to their enslavement by European powers. Even more so, non-European races are animalised (Sutter 1989) or denied personhood (Mills 2005) which leaves them un-effectuated by Kant's universalism that is in turn nothing more than white-egalitarianism.

The third approach detaches Kant's racism from his moral philosophy by contextualising it as an insignificant and historically conditioned side note to his oeuvre (Louden 2000; Hill Jr and Boxill 2001). Louden parallels Kant's remarks on race with his problematic thoughts on gender and asserts that "Kant's theory is fortunately stronger than his prejudices, and it is the theory on which philosophers should focus." (Louden 2000, 105) This view is only occasionally expressed within research anymore, as it has been shown that Kant himself deemed his teleological notions of race as central to his work (Kleingeld 2007) and that his ideas were not shared by contemporaries (Diop 2012).

*Iconoclasm and Beyond: German Public Discourse in 2020–2021*

In this chapter, I understand *public discourse* to be a juxtaposition of what I described above as *academic* or *scholarly discourse* – both being subcategories of the Foucauldian concept of *discursive formation* (Foucault 1961; 1969). Whereas scholarly discourse takes place within academic institutions, mostly between scholars as speakers/writers *as well as* listeners/readers, public discourse on the other hand entails some notion of *the public* as an audience. The latter typically takes place in mass media outlets, while enabling its audiences through different forms of conveniences, e.g. linguistic accessibility, to partake as speakers/writers, but more often as listeners/readers.

In his *Archeology of Knowledge* (Foucault 1969) Foucault understood a discourse as the re-occurrence of verbal relations between words, objects, subjects, or subject matters, and the regulation of the production of statements. He identifies four dimensions appertaining to the production: (1) occurrences of objects, (2) stabilisations of authority, (3) how statements are grouped and their desired effects, and (4) the materiality of the production (Foucault 1969; Ophir 2018). As such, four corresponding dimensions of analysis can be developed: (1) what object is produced, (2) who or what authorises the production, (3) what is its inherent logic and terminology, and (4) what are its strategic ends (Diaz-Bone et al. 2008). The discourse must then be operationalised in sources that are susceptible to analysis. I have opted for a selection of German TV and radio broadcasts, social media productions, podcasts, public lectures, as well as magazine and newspaper articles from 2020–2021.<sup>2</sup>

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2 When describing the particular characteristics of the discourse I did not resort to reference all sources in which these can be detected. Instead, I have opted to reference mostly those sources in which these particularities are especially exuberant, exemplary or were not expected to be found.

As for the first dimension of analysis, the produced object is expectable: Kant and racism in enlightened thought. With the exception of one newspaper comment that questioned the occurrence of racism in Kant's writings (Wolff 2020) all sources accepted one of the three outlooks described above (Willaschek 2020; Aguigah 2020; Frank 2021).

More interesting than the produced object is what is omitted. Usually, the sources did not offer a discussion of the validity of the three different approaches, but rather opted for the presentation of one without elaborating on the academic debate surrounding the topic (Die Anstalt 2020). Furthermore, the concept of race itself, or the (critical) philosophy of race is not discussed at all.<sup>3</sup> Current racism or how Kant's theories of race conduce to racial discrimination today is also left out completely. Even the concept of *decolonisation* (Boulbina 2019) is not present, at least overtly, in almost all sources. The existence of only one exception from the rule confirms this notion: within a 50-minute interview by *Deutschlandfunk Kultur* one guest scholar mentions the concept *once* when describing the aspirations of African philosophers to change international academic discourse (Aguigah 2020). Colonial history appears occasionally; however, it is most often articulated as British colonialism, whereas a discussion of specific German colonialist practices is usually omitted.

Although the discourse engages with experts, the discussion moves beyond the dominant question within scholarly discourse. Whether Kant *was*

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3 I suspect this is due to the reason that the current acceptable use of the German language in public discourse does not allow for the usage of the German word for "race" (*Rasse*) in a prominent way. Contrary to discussions in the Anglophone world, the word *Rasse* is nowadays completely omitted because of its reminiscence of the despicable hygiene theory (*Rassenhygiene*) of the national-socialist movement in the 1930s and 1940s. See on that (Weingart, Kroll, and Bayertz 2001; Harten, Neirich, and Schwerendt 2006). Note that in some sources the speakers/writers had no issues with using the English term *race* in a German lingual context while substituting the term *Rasse* almost entirely with words such as *origin*, *skin colour* or *ethnicity*, see for instance (Scobel 2020; Aguigah 2020).

a racist does not appear to be the primary object of discussion, but rather *how* to engage with him today. Public debate is not concerned with a theoretical reconciliation of Kant's racism and his moral philosophy, but rather raises the question of intellectual iconoclasm (*Denkmal-/Büchersturm*). Kant is characterised as the "father of the Enlightenment" (Die Anstalt 2020) and his oeuvre as an intellectual monument. His person is elevated to be a symbol (Küveler and Lühmann 2020) and central to cultural identity. Almost all sources discuss iconoclasm and the metaphorical toppling of Kant's monuments, either acknowledging its necessity though impossibility (Wuttke 2020; Die Anstalt 2020) or framing it as a misguided form of "cancel culture" (Scobel 2020) and as a consequence of excessive political correctness (Küveler 2020). As such, iconoclasm moves at the centre of the debate with its opponents calling for utilising Kant's universalism to fight racism today (Gerhardt 2020; Scobel 2020; Lieder 2021).

The second dimension of analysis questions who or what authorises the enunciative production. Public figures with their institutional backgrounds in media outlets are the primary speakers within the debate. Especially when scholars are only engaged with indirectly, if at all, the sources focus on the issue of iconoclasm (Scobel 2020; Küveler and Lühmann 2020; Die Anstalt 2020).

What authorised the discourse is a universally shared characteristic. The growing attention for the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) over the course of June and July 2020 is portrayed as the primary cause for the start of the discussion in almost all sources. This notion is quite often coupled with the physical toppling of monuments within the Anglophone world, especially that of Edward Colston in Bristol. Here the discussion on BLM entered German discourse, as a call for intellectual iconoclasm (Wuttke 2020; Küveler and Lühmann 2020). However, no spokesperson of the German BLM movement took part in the debate about Kant within any prominent mass media outlets.

Furthermore, even people of colour (PoC) did not speak about the issue in any prominent way. *Die Anstalt*, a popular TV satire by the ZDF that is hosted by two white comedians, aired an episode on racism in German society where the role of hosting the show was given to PoC. However, in the section concerning racism in Kant's thought, these left the stage for a "typical" white German to discover racism within the German intellectual tradition through an imaginative conversation between him and German intellectual idols (Kant, Marx, and Arendt). At the end of the scene, the presenters returned to the stage lamenting the inability of white Germans to perform intellectual iconoclasm and citing Malcolm X – apparently as an alleged echelon of *their own* intellectual tradition (Die Anstalt 2020). Granted, this does not represent the authentic agency of PoC and one should conceptualise the episode's artistic choice as a political ruse to showcase the alleged multicultural environment of the production. Nonetheless, it is interesting how the engagement with racism within the German intellectual tradition is portrayed as an exclusive endeavour of white Germans. Furthermore, the show implied that authors such as Kant, Marx, or Arendt couldn't be intellectual idols of (German) PoC. Upon closer scrutiny, this instance appears to showcase a wider trend within the discourse: as the public debate on Kant's racism is almost exclusively performed by white Germans, the discussion is, at least subliminally, portrayed as a racially exclusive issue restricting the participation of PoC.

The third dimension of analysis is concerned with the inherent logic and terminology of the enunciative production. Indeed, the discursive formation seems to be constituted mostly by singular arguments (Geier 2021), conversations (Küveler and Lühmann 2020) and interviews ("Kant und die Rassismus-Debatte – 'Die Vertreter der Aufklärung sind nicht unschuldig'" 2020), or stage productions (Die Anstalt 2020). The discourse does not prominently feature any proper discussion, i.e. a debate between speakers of differing opinions who can critically engage with one another in

a direct manner.<sup>4</sup>The used terminology ranges from academically elaborate to polemically comedic according to medium and genre-type. Iconoclasm, playing a central role in the discourse formation, appears in different verbal constructions (*Denkmalsturm/Denkmalsturz/Büchersturm/Ikonoklasmus*).

The terminology within one source was particularly interesting. In a roughly 23 minutes long video, Gert Scobel, a prominent media figure with an academic background in philosophy who now runs a successful internet mini-series on philosophical topics for ZDF, unpacked the debate on Kant's racism in his usual editorial style – a source with about 60,000 views as of 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2021 and perhaps one of the most widely heard voices within the discourse (Scobel 2020). Although the video starts with an expectable register of style, the used language takes a militant turn in the second half of the video. Scobel repeatedly emphasises the importance to “combat” (*gegen...zu kämpfen*) racism “armed” (*bewaffnet*) with the ideals of the Enlightenment. This “battle” (*Kampf*) however is impossible to fight without “fortifying” (*stärken*) Kant's universalist arguments. For that matter, an Orwellian “radical intellectual iconoclasm” (*radikaler Büchersturm*) and an expulsion of Kant from the philosophical canon would equal a “flight from the inner enemy” (*Flucht vor dem Inneren Feind*). Scobel's terminology is surprisingly combative and belligerent though exemplary for the emotional nature of the discourse. Engaging with racism is often portrayed as a battle, whereas the real enemy should not be identified with historical figures, but with racists today. This “real enemy” might assume that he or she has the echelons of German philosophy on his or her side, if German society will not fight the battle with the intellectual weapons developed by that very tradition.

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4 There is a small exception to this rule. The FAZ published a series of opinion pieces which commented on one another. See (Willaschek 2020; Wolff 2020).

The last dimension of analysis asks for the strategic ends purported by the discourse. In my overview, public discourse moves beyond the challenge to reconcile Kant's racism with his philosophy. Instead, the dominant question is not *what* Kant was but *how* to deal with him today (Chodura et al. 2021) and whether intellectual iconoclasm is necessary. This question is in turn answered in the negative, either as it would be impossible for (white) German society else it would bereave it of the tools its intellectual tradition has to offer. It is apparent that the public discussion did not purport a decolonisation of German institutions or intellectual canon as it does not thematise German colonial practices. Neither does it admit postcolonial voices nor authorise PoC to participate as speaking agents. Furthermore, since direct engagements can hardly be found, the discourse did not seem to offer a free venue for open debate. Although the sources presented some arguments on the topic, these were merely a means to justify a preconceived conclusion and not organised in a dialectical manner. While the discourse appears to be a discussion on the outset, it is rather an exercise in parallel speech, whereas different media figures present their views without any significant rules of engagement.

The strategic goals of the discourse constitute a defensive reaction to the challenge of iconoclasm imposed by BLM in the Anglophone world. The discourse is a presentation of possible responses to similar challenges for German society. While it offered new opportunities to speak about notions of race within history, it re-affirmed the self-perception of tolerance and inclusivity. Germany is portrayed to be able to discuss its troubled past without the need of iconoclasm or decolonisation. The discourse did not produce an equal discussion between people of different ethnic backgrounds on race and colonial history, perhaps even excluding PoC from adherence to the German intellectual tradition and from the discourse itself. In

other words, what the public debate about Kant offered was a superficial decolonisation – a decolonisation in appearance, but not on a deeper societal, contentual or philosophical level.

With the end of 2020 and to satisfy the interest of the public, the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities has launched a digital lecture series (Beckmann 2020; Zorn 2021a; 2021b) on racism in Kant's writing. As it seems, it has closed the matter as a hot topic of debate for now. Unfortunately, the lectures did not address decolonisation and what deeper implications the discussion could carry for the future of German society or combating racism today.

### *Conclusion*

The analysis presented above showed how public discourse offered a way to re-assure the conscience of Germany's bourgeois, white mainstream society. The debate moved away from an engagement with racism to the question of intellectual iconoclasm. Iconoclasm is then dismissed either through its impossibility, or through its unnecessary. German society is imagined to be able to address racism in its intellectual tradition without having to initiate the arduous process of meaningful decolonisation that would involve proper discussions across all different layers of society and a comprehensive debate of German colonial practice.

I admit that my initial working hypothesis predicted a different outcome for studying German public discourse on Kant. I assumed that the discussion would be marbled with what Nietzsche described as critical history – a historiography for the “oppressed and those indigent for liberation” (dem Leidenden und der Befreiung Bedürftigen) that mainly purports the damnation of all that lies in the past (Nietzsche 1988). A form of historiography that, when left unbalanced by the other two

forms identified by Nietzsche<sup>5</sup>, is capricious and unconstructive for the improvement of society. However, what I found was that public discourse was almost entirely devoid of a discussion of history as it took place, but rather concerned with meta-historical aspects, i.e. how to deal with history itself. In the end, I was surprised by how unproductive and exclusive the debate would turn out to be. In conclusion and as an impassioned appeal to German society as well as the German intellectual community, I believe that, following Nietzsche, exercising more critical history in the form of a belated though meaningful intellectual decolonisation would help Germany coming to terms with its colonial past and racism today.

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5 Nietzsche described those as a monumental history for the “active and determined” (Thätigen und Strebenden) as well as an antiquarian history for the “preserving and revering” (dem Bewahrenden und Verehrenden). See (Nietzsche 1988).

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## 1.5 Colonial Legacy in the Americas: Effects on Latin American societies and Indigenous peoples

Ibrahim Sultan

### *Introduction*

Formal independence from colonial rule in Latin America began early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and spread quickly. This first wave of decolonisation in Latin America led to the independent states we know today, which share similar histories, power, and societal structures. Still, we await a second wave to complete their struggle for independence.

Latin America's first decolonisation wave began with Haitian independence from France, in 1804. It continued with independence from Spain and Portugal on the mainland, spreading quickly due to the turmoil of the Napoleonic wars in Europe, which provided an opportunity for many nations to break free. Their battle for independence was seemingly concluded, justice supposedly done, and autonomy over their societies won.

But the reality is far more complex – and problematic. The decolonial process has never been completed. Colonialism and its legacy continue to have profound negative effects on Latin American nations and Indigenous peoples. The descendants of those who migrated to Latin American nations during colonial rule – and the US, which plays an outsized role in the region, and historically has represented a colonial mentality – keep colonial systems

of governance, culture, language, and religion in place. These Euro-centric power structures disadvantage the indigenous people of the Americas, who have yet to achieve full independence and equality.

Before I continue, I also want to acknowledge that the term *Latin America* itself gives authority to the colonial identity of the region and its people. Latin is a European language, the language of the Roman Empire that evolved into the modern Romance languages we know today. The term *Latin American* is now used to describe anyone from the Americas, excluding the US and Canada, regardless of race or ethnicity. While we can envision a unifying identity for all peoples of this diverse region, this one still carries the weight of colonialism. The label *chafés* – particularly for those who are indigenous to the Americas, with ancestry stretching back tens of thousands of years, yet who now represent a minority population and voice in their historic lands. As ethnic groups, they predate the very concepts of the Western hemisphere and its continent(s), yet this identity unites people based on the imperialist mentality that created colonial nations throughout the region.

### *Euro-centric histories*

The fight for independence from colonial rule was led by descendants of upper-class European settlers. The history of the Americas is commonly taught today from this perspective, framing independence movements as a rebellion against the parent colonial state resulting in the liberation of Latin Americans. It centres Mestizo and Euro-Americans at the expense of other groups.

For example, Simon Bolivar was a Creole (a person of Spanish parentage born in the Americas), a Latin American aristocrat educated in Europe. Known as “the liberator”, he is celebrated for his role in fighting against the

Spanish to release much of South America from colonial rule. Bernardo O'Higgins, the hero of Chilean independence and the first president of Chile, was of Irish descent, the son of an Irish Viceroy of Peru. José de San Martín, an officer in the Spanish army, famously defected to liberate Argentina, leading the Army of the Andes across Argentina, Chile, and Peru. In contrast, natives and Afro-Latino people are regularly absent in prevailing narratives of the fight for independence in much of Latin America.

Placing Creole leaders as central figures in the struggle for independence has helped to maintain white/Mestizo majority rule ever since. It accorded these groups legitimacy and status that persist today. Thus, the history and mythology of nations in Latin America began with colonisation and then extended into the era of independence when nations rejected Europeans' formal imperial power but not the ongoing dominance of their descendants, cultures, and ideals. Meanwhile, the indigenous, Afro-Latino, and Mestizo populations of many nations remain at the margins of society, fitting themselves into the mould introduced by their former colonial rulers. They often try to emulate European ideals of citizenry and governance and look to those of European descent for their sense of self and national identity. As in settler-colonial nations elsewhere in the world, this has set up nations for ongoing inequality based on citizens' ancestry.

### *Continued colonial practices and wealth inequality*

The power accorded to those of European descent placed them in positions of control over land and wealth. This, combined with the embrace of European ideals (i.e. development, profit, and paternalistic attitudes towards non-European people, cultures, and ways of life) led to ever-increasing settlements in indigenous territories. Continued European-descended rule, along with invitations for US and European companies to exploit the

land and cheap labour, has led to large and persistent wealth inequalities. Descendants of colonial settlers, foreign companies, and European individuals and entities hold most of the land and wealth of the region at the expense of indigenous and Afro-Latino citizens.

Eight of the world's twenty most unequal nations are in Latin America, more than any other region on the planet (Sandin 2020). Comparing them with similar unequal societies in former African colonies like South Africa, where European-descended minority populations still own a vast majority of the arable land, we can observe similar outcomes related to the distribution of wealth. The deep inequality former European colonies suffer – and the violence that inevitably results from it – is part of the legacy of colonialism.

One stark example is Chile. While considered to be one of Latin America's most stable democracies, it has become a nation mired in deep inequalities. These inequalities were strengthened during and since the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, who overthrew the democratically elected socialist president Salvador Allende. The former was less concerned than the latter with inequality or marginalisation. Under his rule, Chile's constitution was drawn up into the only constitution in Latin America not to acknowledge its indigenous peoples. At this time, Chile also became the playground of Milton Friedman and the "Chicago Boys", a group of Chileans educated at the University of Chicago who embraced Friedman's ideas. These technocrats promoted US-backed free-market liberalisation and privatisation, predicting that these changes would produce an economic "miracle" for the nation. Chile's deep inequities continue today, and unsurprisingly, the most marginalised of its citizens are the indigenous peoples who live there.

The history of the indigenous Mapuche nation in Chile is illustrative of postcolonial inequality. Between 1976 and 1990, Pinochet's government engaged in colonial-era-style theft of land, displacing the natives from much of their territory. This land grab reflected the elevation of European concepts of land ownership over the Mapuche nation's territorial claims, and the valuing of lands primarily for their business and development potential. The land was sold to individuals and companies, including farming and logging interests. Tensions have grown due to these companies' unsustainable industrial practices and due to other projects that disregard Mapuche values, such as the construction of a hydroelectric plant that floods areas they consider sacred.

For decades the Mapuche have been vocal in advocating for their autonomy, the return of ancestral lands, and the right to practice their culture. They have also engaged in violent resistance, attacking banks, churches, forest industries, and security forces, and the government has retaliated with violence of its own. Clashes with the Chilean military police have led to casualties on both sides.

The conflict has intensified in recent years. In 2020, tensions boiled over and resulted in overt fighting between Mapuche activists and security forces, with many Mapuche arrested or shot. On August 1st, 2020, a group of civilians, with support from members of the Chilean national police forces, assailed Mapuche community members who were on a hunger strike in one of Chile's poorest regions. This attack raised the temperature of the conflict, and Mapuche activists later responded by occupying the municipality of Tirúa in southern Chile and removing the statue of Chilean founding father Bernardo O'Higgins. The Mapuche's demands for dialogue to resolve this conflict have not yet been met (Iqbal 2020). This seemingly eternal struggle between the Chilean government and its indigenous peoples dates

back to before the nation was even established. Independence for colonial settlers and their new state did not bring independence for natives; their fight against colonial rule continues.

In contrast, Brazil recognises its indigenous population in its constitution, and compared to other Latin American nations, it has a relatively high proportion of land controlled by the indigenous population. However, that has not stopped the federal government and the non-indigenous population from encroaching on their territories and conducting genocide against them. Before European contact, there were estimated to be 2,000 tribes and nations in what is now Brazil. Diseases introduced by Europeans decimated the indigenous population; smallpox and measles were at times deliberately spread through native populations by those who wanted their land.

The history of Brazil's indigenous groups exterminated by disease was echoed in February 2021, when the last surviving elder of the dwindling Juma tribe died of COVID-19. We may attribute the tribe's fate to the nation's leadership and its disregard for the lives of its most marginalised citizens. For two decades beginning in 1964, Brazil's military dictators pushed for massive construction in the Amazon with little regard for the original inhabitants of these lands. Business interests engaged in ethnic cleansing of Amazonian tribes with impunity. The Juma were one such tribe, suffering a massacre in 1964 that left only twelve survivors. Fast forward to 2021, indigenous groups, lacking healthcare access, were at heightened risk of being hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Brazilian government had downplayed the danger it posed, with President Jair Bolsonaro antagonising governors and mayors who attempted lockdowns to curb the spread of the virus. The extinction of the Juma tribe is thus a direct result of national policies, past and present, that fail to value or protect indigenous people.

President Bolsonaro has continued a legacy of Portuguese and Brazilian encroachment into Amazonian lands, encouraging farmers to burn the forest and replace it with grassland for beef production. President Bolsonaro, an admirer of dictatorships past, holds an attitude towards indigenous people similar to his predecessors. And he showed his intentions immediately upon rising to power in 2019. Within hours of taking office, he attempted to reassign the power to delegate the identification of traditional lands from the FUNAI (Fundação Nacional do Índio, “National Indian Foundation”), a governmental organisation that was granted that right under the Brazilian constitution, to the agriculture ministry, which has a vested interest in removal rather than protection, and in development and industry rather than indigenous rights.

Laws still in place from the former colonial period allow one percent of the population in Brazil to own almost half of the nation’s land (Navarro, 2015). Among the one-percenters are the descendants of the former royal family of Brazil. And under a system termed *enfiteuse*, which requires the Brazilian public to pay property taxes to former Portuguese royals and nobles, the population of certain regions has to pay taxes to the former royal family to live on their historic lands. Many places, like Rio de Janeiro’s most expensive districts, force this obligation on average citizens. The Brazilian people pay for the continuation of European royal existence, a continuation of colonial domination, and they do so on top of the regular taxes they pay for their seemingly independent state (Navarro 2015).

Guatemalan independence from Spain in 1821 brought little relief to the majority of its citizens. The ruling class was able to lay claim to the majority of the land. United States-based multinational corporations have controlled most of the land and wealth for decades. Guatemala has the highest indigenous population of all the states in Central America, most of which were not settled as the North and South continents were.

“Three main companies – Dole, United Fruit, and Del Monte – dominate the banana industry in Latin America. These multinational corporations (MNCs) have participated in cartels, have used their enormous political influence, and have chronically abused the rights of their workers” (Clark, 2021). The United Fruit Company, notorious for its influence in Washington, D.C. and over the nations subject to US imperialism, was one of the worst abusers. One UFCO policy required “all persons of colour to give right of way to whites and remove their hats while talking to them”. The company and the US treated the indigenous population as subjects who existed to labour for them (Gaffey, 2020). In 1954, Guatemalan President Jacob Arbenz attempted to reform the system after hundreds of years of oligarchical and MNC rule by redistributing land among the population. The United States then conducted Operation Fortune, a CIA-sponsored coup ousting the democratically elected president, ensuring no land reform would take place, and protecting the interests of wealthy corporations. The ousting of Jacob Arbenz gave rise to Guatemala’s 36-year civil war (1960–1996). After the coup, a series of military generals took control spreading violence and killing thousands of indigenous Mayans, all with US backing. Many people, mostly native Guatemalan refugees sought safety in the United States. Neo-colonial practices by the US caused the same devastation and instability former colonial powers initiated during their rule. To this day it has one of the most unequal land distribution records in the world. The majority of land in Guatemala is held by a few multinational corporations and elites, with roughly two percent of the population owning 70% of the land (Viscidi, 2004).

### *Indigenous Language death*

Colonial-era laws and inequality of wealth are not the only systems of inequality that remain in place throughout the Americas. Colonisers also perpetuated these inequalities through societal norms that stem from

culture and language. Latin America is an extremely diverse region; of its many indigenous nations and languages that pre-dated colonisation, a number survive to this day. Language loss is the region's most acute crisis after climate change. Before colonisation, estimates place its linguistic diversity at 300 different languages spoken by 5 million people in what is now Mexico and Central America, and over 1400 languages spoken by 9 million natives in South America and the West Indies (Marques 2021). These linguistic and cultural groups were joined by European populations including Spanish, Portuguese, French, British, German, Italian, and Dutch, as well as Africans, brought over during the slave trade. The resulting intermixing of people and languages has no comparison anywhere else in the world. But like most colonised regions in the world, large numbers of indigenous languages have not survived, and those that have are in danger of extinction as colonial languages dominate.

Why did colonial languages replace the region's indigenous languages? Colonisation's power structures gave rise to linguistic hierarchies as well. Throughout the region, indigenous speakers of different ethnicities are marked as primitive and rebellious, unable or unwilling to assimilate into the dominant society. They face discrimination for speaking their native tongues, as this is considered to cause friction in larger societies. These attitudes represent the region's colonial past being carried on, and the linguistic diversity of the region continues to dwindle as a result. Spanish is the most widely spoken language in the region today, followed by Portuguese, French, English, and Dutch. Indigenous mother tongues have been lost and sidelined because of aggression, discrimination, and lack of representation. Latin America has been a linguistic battleground for centuries, and because of colonial conquests, the linguistic scenery has changed forever.

More widespread native languages, like Quechua and Nahuatl (indigenous languages of the Andes and Mexico and Central America, respectively), are making a slight resurgence today. This follows their attempted extermination in 1770, when both languages were banned by Carlos III, King of Spain. Since the Portuguese arrival in South America, over 1,000 languages have disappeared in Brazil (Ore, Diaz, 2019). The Brazilian government only recognised the right of indigenous people to use their native languages in 1988.

The mix of historical and legal discrimination, abolition, and globalisation has killed most indigenous languages in the Americas. Languages shape how humans experience the world. They help us understand the range of our perception and creativity – and of how others perceived and created before us. The continued erasure of indigenous American languages in favour of a handful of colonial tongues cuts us off from the full breadth of the region's humanity.

In contrast, Bolivia – Latin America's only indigenous-run nation – has taken steps to recognise the value of diversity, rectify the damages of the past, and prevent further language loss. Bolivia recognises 37 national languages, reflecting the nation's commitment to maintaining the linguistic diversity of its people. Other nations should follow Bolivia's lead in granting indigenous languages the status and resources to preserve them as key elements of the region's culture.

### *Direct colonial rule in Latin America*

Lying 7,000 km from France on the East coast of South America is French Guiana. French Guiana is formally considered to be a part of France, not an overseas territory, though it is frequently absent from the everyday consciousness of the French public. A majority of its population is Afro-

descended, and while French is its official language, the population primarily speaks Guianese Creole. French Guiana is an often-overlooked part of Latin America, one of the few lands in the region still subject to foreign rule.

Besides French Guiana, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and a handful of other islands in the Caribbean remain under direct French control. They serve as a strategic window to South America for France and the EU. In addition, French Guiana is home to the Guiana Space Centre, the second busiest spaceport in the world (after Cape Canaveral in the US). These Latin American nations join a list of various other French colonies around the world, including territories in the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. This control, from the nation that claims with conviction to have acknowledged the wrongdoings of colonialism and made amends with its colonial past.

The typical French discourse about these territories is usually very familiar, reflecting colonial attitudes that consider a colony's dependency on the paternal state rather than equality between partners. After World War II, given the need to restructure the French Republic, France sought to make its remaining colonies a part of the state. This strategy reflected a desire to retain strategic influence and overseas markets while recognising (and celebrating) the formal end of colonial relationships. However, these colonies remain underdeveloped, unequal to the mainland, and exploited through typical colonial and neo-colonial dynamics.

By 1999, the rate of poverty in French overseas colonies was higher than in any region of the French mainland. The majority of French Overseas territories have some of the highest unemployment rates in the E.U. And almost half of the young people under twenty-five have no diploma, compared to only a fifth in France proper. In French Guiana, 50% of the population have only completed primary-level education. In Martinique,

the percent of children living under the poverty level is almost double that of France's, while in French Guiana 32% of the population cannot afford their basic needs (Verges, 2021). Despite rampant poverty and unequal opportunity to those in mainland France, the cost of living continues to rise, in part because 80% of everyday consumer products in French Guiana are imported from France. This is because France requires that products, even those from neighbouring Brazil, must first pass through France before returning to South America (Verges 2021). Such regulations elevate the interests of the French mainland at the expense of the residents of its colonies.

France's territories ache under the rampant inequality that is the legacy of colonialism. Multiple revolts, protests, and strikes have taken place in French colonies in the Americas calling for an end to persistent inequalities, exclusion, and racism. But so far, such efforts have failed to secure more than promises from Paris.

### *Colonial Social Hierarchies*

It's no secret that the colonial era created social hierarchies and norms that pervade the minds of formerly colonised peoples around the world. Higher social status afforded to people of European descent in colonial settler societies provides opportunity and generational wealth not available to the rest of the population. While many Latin American societies favour whiteness over other racial identities, race in Latin America is not such a clearly defined concept as in the United States or Europe. Often "race" is closely associated with ethnicity and socioeconomic status; the higher a person's SES, the closer they are to perceived whiteness, phenotype aside.

Since colonisation, European immigration to the Americas has historically been viewed as positive in many nations. Europeans are seen as bringing

wealth and skills that otherwise would be lacking. However, the movement of Natives and Afro-Latinos – whether within a nation or between nations – has often been judged more harshly. Even when they attempt to migrate due to instability, itself often brought on by the effects of colonialism and imperialism, they are considered undeserving, “illegals”, burdens on society rather than contributors. Reflecting these attitudes, a policy termed *Blanqueamiento* was enacted in many Latin American countries at the turn of the 20th century. These policies promoted European immigration as a means to whiten and “civilise” the population while removing Native and Afro-Latino peoples, pushing mestizos and mulattoes to the margins of society. For example in 1889, Brazil enacted a policy to grant automatic naturalisation to immigrants who arrived from Europe, and in 1921 the Brazilian Congress passed a law that specifically prohibited Black immigrants (Hernandez, 2015).

Argentina, too, looked to European immigrants in order to “modernise” the nation. Argentina’s 1853 Constitution, still largely in force today, demonstrated a preference for European immigration. Not until 1994 did the Argentine Constitution receive amendments in an attempt to eliminate explicit racial discrimination in the nation’s highest laws. The new amendments prohibit discrimination, aim to ensure equal civil rights to nationals and foreigners, and recognise indigenous communities previously excluded (Randall, 2012). Yet racial discrimination persists against indigenous peoples, Afro-Argentines, Mestizo-Argentines, non-European immigrants, Jews, and Arabs because of social conventions that favour the ruling class.

In contrast to Argentina and Brazil, Peru has a white minority and a majority population of indigenous ancestry. But the population is still confined to colonial hierarchies in its collective national consciousness. Peru is one of the few nations in Latin America still rich in indigenous

culture. The country's indigenous communities and UNESCO World Heritage Sites represent a large source of national pride and produce a great deal of tourism income. Still, people of indigenous or African descent earn 40% less than mixed-race or white Peruvians (Collins, 2010). Under the regime of former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori from 1990 to 2000, 270,000 indigenous women were sterilised without consent. Controlling their birth rates was seen as a way to preserve resources and combat economic downturns (Benvidas, 2021). Today the majority of Peruvians identify as mestizo or of mixed ancestry, a common phenomenon throughout Latin America because of the benefits associated with proximity to European identities.

### *Conclusion*

Historical and contemporary analyses of colonialism are important as we chart a future for all formerly colonised nations. The legacy of colonialism is still pending heavily over much of the planet and still looms large in Latin America. Formal colonialism itself persisted as recently as September 1981, when Belize gained independence, making it the last nation to join Latin America's first wave of decolonisation. The region has not yet had time to reconcile its colonial history, much less its aftereffects. The battle for human rights, land rights, economic equality, and cultural dignity rage on. Direct colonial rule still persists, ensuring resources and influence over the region for a handful of nations at the expense of the local population.

As William Faulkner said, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." So long as the consciousness of the region is bound to the legacy of their former rulers, and historically dominant groups maintain an unwillingness to embrace the diversity of the region, there will never be a chance for the nations of Latin America to break free of their colonial past.

Latin America has the opportunity to be a model for an increasingly interconnected world. The region's diversity represents a possibility for people of all backgrounds, languages, religions, and customs to live together as nowhere else in the world. The embrace of that diversity, the extension of equal opportunity to all people, and the restructuring of societies to end the colonial legacy has the potential to open limitless horizons for all peoples of the Americas.

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## 1.6 Anti-blackness and the “Unsayable”: A Philosophical Investigation

Han Asikhia

The unsayable is often characterised as a by-product of trauma and is thus a topic of great concern. First-person accounts such as Brison’s express difficulty in articulating what is dubbed as the unspeakable: “how to speak about the unspeakable without attempting to render it intelligible and sayable” (Brison, 2002, xi).<sup>1</sup> This is an important theme that creative accounts like M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* (an account of a massacre perpetrated by the crew of an eponymous slave ship that threw over 130 of its captives overboard) highlight how language can become fragmented when we talk about the traumatic experiences: “*w w w w a wa/ wa a wat/er...*” (Philip, 2008, 3).<sup>2</sup> Often, however, traumatic incidents in the public domain (and out of it too) are pushed out of the public mind and thus scripted as unspeakable. This is especially pertinent when we discuss anti-blackness, which either undergoes a type of dismissal. A process of silencing – acts of violence are then invisibilised and uprooted from their violent context. However the question remains, what is unsayable?

### *Section One: A Phenomenological Context for Anti-blackness*

Husserl proposes that the flesh is general for us all, that there are conditions that are universal to the embodied. However, if we consider the experience of racialised Bodies and especially that of Black Bodies, it is evident that bodies do not move through the world in the same way. The body is not only the method by which we experience the world but also the reason for *why* we experience it as it is. How the White body experiences the

world is likely to be very different to how a Black body does. The Black Body then acts as the signifier for the conditions of its social experience (Seawright, 2018).<sup>3</sup> If this is so, then the unsayable is characterised by the violent conditions Black subjects experience. For example, France takes on a colour-blind model for public policy or even for how the racial dimensions of poverty are treated as irrelevant in public conversations. Thus, the racial dimensions of violence are either removed or dismissed. The essay aims then to analyse how anti-blackness emerges when the violent conditions are treated as unspeakable. We will analyse how the Black subject is treated as malleable in the face of the unspeakable and what the consequences entail. By malleable, it is meant as the way meaning changes when Black is added to a context. This thesis will also be paying close attention to how anti-blackness is shaped under silence.

### *Section Two: The Conditions of the Black Body*

The unsayable is characterised as the violent conditions that are signified by the Black Body. By this, it means the displacement of people in the transatlantic slave trade and then again, the deportation of members within the Windrush generation – a generation of Caribbean people who arrived in the UK between the years 1948 and 1971. In both cases, it is noteworthy that these communities were forced or explicitly invited – in the case of the Windrush generation – for their labour. If the unsayable is characterised by the refusal to articulate the violent conditions of Black life, then it follows that they must undergo a change. These conditions are not represented as unsayable because they are never spoken but rather because the racial dimensions of these conditions are often ignored or whitewashed in public discourse. For example, Black women are represented at a higher proportion in birth fatalities or even the way racism is so quickly dismissed as a reason for police violence. “This did not happen because X was Black but rather because they did this” is a common method of dismissing anti-

blackness as a reason. The gap between the condition of Black life and the racialised dimension of why it is happening allows for these conditions to take place and remain removed from past and present patterns of racial domination. For example, would public discourse necessarily relate its casual stereotyping of Black subjects as aggressive to the police responding to Black subjects with a higher level of violence? Individualising incidents of anti-blackness, however, naturalises it. If we treat incidents of anti-blackness as separate then they appear as a natural fact of Black life rather than related to historic and present contexts of domination.

However, we still need to assess the relation language has to anti-blackness in the face of the unsayable. If the unsayable is the violent conditions of Black life, then incidents of racial discrimination appear as separate occasions rather than a long pattern of racial discrimination. Returning to the theme of plasticity, we see a change in the lexical meaning of terms such as ‘girl’ or ‘boy’ when Black is added to it. Children, for example, are characterised as much older when Black is part of that context. However, while this sentiment might be viewed as wrong or even racist, would the violent undertones of it be articulated in the public domain? Consider how children are viewed as older and the violence levied against them – as shown by the case of a six-year-old Black girl who was arrested in Orlando, Florida (Zaveri, 2020).<sup>4</sup> Or even how the language of anti-abortionist supporters changes when Black communities are included in the conversation: “If it were your sole purpose to reduce crime,” Bennett said, “you could abort every black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down.” (Glaister, 2005).<sup>5</sup> Highlighted here is the way words lose their significance and meaning when occupying the same space as Blackness.

Furthermore, if the unsayable is something that means violent conditions, dominant groups can then assume that there is no consequence to their words – when for example, someone characterises Black people as

invulnerable to pain. People might note that there is a racial underline to what they say, but would they then conclude that this exact sentiment leads to violent consequences? The unsayable then characterises anti-black notions as something unconnected to Black life and its positionality to violence.

It is from this; the historical conditions of the Black female subject are permissible. Similar to present contexts, Black enslaved women underwent a stripping of meaning and lexical contexts. The Black body was treated as both the signifier and location for commodification. It is this context that excluded Black female subjects from Western narratives of female bodies. This then allowed Black female subjects to simultaneously experience gendered violence as well as the violence assigned to men (Spillers, 1987).<sup>6</sup> This process of lexical plasticity allowed for the commodification of Black female subject's reproductive labour. This refusal to acknowledge and articulate the violence of these conditions goes on to make them permissible. There is a reason why the violence of a slave's conditions was articulated first when abolishment was beginning. The use of language then not only reaffirms Black subjects as a commodity but also conceals the violent conditions of Black life under the unsayable.

This comes into greater clarity when we analyse mother and child relationships. Childbirth is commonly characterised as something imbued with possibilities. However, within the context of the Black female slave, reproduction is instead imagined as labour, a source for new workforces (Hartman, 2016).<sup>7</sup> Once again, the lexical meaning is changed and transformed when concerning Blackness, now only pertaining to its most basic meaning. New reimaginings of kinship and motherhood were eradicated within these contexts. Motherhood in all these contexts only led to continued commodification and an increased workforce. Toni Morrison illustrates the impossibility of acquiring new meanings in her novel *Beloved*

by having her protagonist Sethe, a fugitive enslaved woman, kill her own daughter to avoid her being brought back into slavery. She stops the process of commodification but also ends all possibilities of dominant conceptions of motherhood.

It is important here that mother-children contexts for the Black enslaved are not sustainable when it is so easily cut through. However, historical responses to infanticide show a rhetoric more often than not focused on punishment, thus denoting these incidents as singular. Punishment responds to the crime at hand; it does not allow us to consider why it is taking place. However, by doing this, the violence of these contexts is obscured. It is not merely that the conditions of the slave life are violent and challenging; instead, it is impossible for mother-child relationships to exist in these violent conditions. The violent conditions of Black life are concealed as unspeakable, then split actions and harms away from their context. These contexts can then go unquestioned even while structures of slavery become undone. If this context then goes unquestioned, then new structures of violence can be created in its place. The transatlantic slave system then can be recreated in the form of mass incarceration of Black subjects or unsafe water pipes in predominantly Black communities.

### *Section Three: Silencing*

However, we still have the question of how anti-blackness forms in silence. What takes place when the unsayable is not merely impossible to say but refuses to be articulated? This is a pertinent question when we consider that accounts of anti-black violence have often been unacknowledged, thus escaping articulation. Furthermore, attempts to articulate experiences of trauma or anti-blackness are dogpiled.

In 2011, a series of riots, dubbed as the London riots, lasted from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of August. Commonly known as the London Riots, criminality is popularly touted as the reasoning behind the riots. This articulation then invisibilises the origin of the protests, which took place due to police violence. Silence on the unsayable then allows for the misconstruction of it. The continued silence of the unsayable, however, not only perpetuates misconstructions but also sides the bystanders with the perpetrator (Herman, 2015).<sup>8</sup> Through this, whole communities are rendered invisible, their epistemologies and experiences discounted by dominant thoughts. It is this refusal to articulate cases of abuse that lead to cases similar to the London Riots. It is this exact space that allows violence to take place once more. It has been stated often enough that articulating experiences offer the opportunity for healing (Ratcliffe, 2020, 1).<sup>9</sup> If that is so, silence, similar to the change in lexicon meanings, reaffirms experiences of violence and trauma. This is further emphasised when we consider inmates in prisons. The possibility of a dialect between prisoners and the general public is cut short by the separation of people. This then removes an opportunity for both the public and prisoners to articulate the harm that is done. What is instead created is a lopsided dialect. The general public, for example, has a lot to say about the harm done by prisoners, but prisoners are unable to respond. Invisibilisation then removes the possibility to heal and have harm rectified.

#### *Section Four: The Removal of Language Possibilities*

This forced silence, however, also happens through the removal of all language possibilities. All language possibilities are stripped away, only leaving coloniser languages as a possibility for articulation. What is illustrated is the isolation of self in relation to a habitual world via the removal of all known languages.

[The sea, the slave ship] filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror, when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled, and tossed up to see if I were sound, by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions, too, differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke (which was different from any I had ever heard), united to confirm me in this belief (as cited by Spillers, 1987. 99).

Equiano, the author of these lines, notes that throughout his journey, he was given three different names: *Michael, Jacob, Gustavus Vassa* (35, 36). First-person accounts of the enslaved demonstrate that the process of cultural undoing took place in all linguistic iterations, with slaves forced to speak exclusively English and criminalised for being able to read or write in most slave states. The stripping of all cultural meanings then is only denoted by the removal of all language possibilities. Speaking the unspeakable then did not only become almost impossible but dangerous altogether. Speaking the unspeakable in English, for example, opened up the possibility of misconstruction from the dominant group and thus further abuse. This, again, was reflected in attempts to speak home languages. Slave owners attempted to render slaves not only invisible but also silent. New modes of articulating the unspeakable emerged from new modes such as songs. However, this was directly related to the removal of all other language possibilities. Perhaps what is most noteworthy here is whom the articulation of the unspeakable was meant for. Songs that illustrated the violent conditions of life took place because all language possibilities were removed and because most other possibilities to be heard by the right people (other slaves) were removed. Articulating the unspeakable for public groups often led to violence misconstruction and

attempted to render the enslaved as silent. For example, when abolitionist and feminist Sojourner Truth gave her iconic speech at the 1851 Ohio Women's Rights Convention, asserting her womanhood, '*Ain't I a Woman*' was met by violent misconstruction. "But that was before he stopped talking English because there was no future in it." (Morrison, 2016, 25).<sup>10</sup> Speaking the unspeakable in public spaces then is met with hostility.

It goes deeper than this still, if articulating the unspeakable in public spaces is often met with dismissal and silence, then how are Black subjects meant to speak of the violence that conditions their life if that whole context remains unrecognised? How is a sustainable dialect formed if one participant of the conversation is so aware of the violent conditions of Black life and the other participant has dubbed it as unspeakable? What is then formulated is an unequal conversation; it is from there violence is allowed to persist. Furthermore, it is from there violence at the unspeakable being spoken takes root. Public conversations on race often fixate on the improvement of Black life, thus avoiding the historicity of a context of violence from where Black life emerges. This then does not simply silence Black subjects in public conversation or leave them open to abuse, but it also leads to the invisibilisation of these violent conditions. It is from these conversations that Black experience can be concealed as the unspeakable: "You know when they come here, you invisible. You know you don't even have a number in the system." (Solange, 2016).<sup>11</sup> What then takes place is linguistic domination in the public domain that both make sure to hide Black experiences and the violence that conditions it to the unspeakable, all whilst reproducing new forms of violence via invisibilisation and abuse. Take, for example, people who bring discussions of anti-blackness to the public's consciousness and the response that they get, which can range from dismissal to dogpiling to outright violence.

*Conclusion*

This essay aims to highlight how characterising violent conditions of Black life allows anti-blackness to emerge. Close attention has been paid to how the unspeakable being characterised as such has allowed new modes of lexical domination to occur. This is especially pertinent when we consider how Black subjects are silenced when talking about anti-blackness in the public domain. This, in addition to the whitewashing of racial dimensions, allows for anti-blackness to be imagined as singular unconnected incidents. This historical pattern allows for new modes of violence to only worsen. However, whilst this essay highlights how anti-blackness distorts language possibilities, it is important to note that new possibilities for articulation are being created by and within our communities. These language possibilities rooted in grassroots offer the space to discuss the conditions of Black life openly and honestly. Liberational language possibilities have often taken place from the margins. Conversations regarding Black life become depoliticised within the public sphere. I, therefore, reject a need to root these conversations in the public if we wish to lead conversations that are open and imaginative. If anything, this essay has laid out the ways in which it is impossible to bring this form of discourse into the public arena without replicating the same patterns of violence that we see rooted in our histories.

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## 1.7 Looking beyond nation branding: the prism of hegemony and Orientalism.

Jessica Gosling\*

“History is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and rewritten, so that ‘our’ east, ‘our’ orient becomes ‘ours’ to possess and direct.”

— Edward Said 1

“Democracy is the best school to learn soft power.”

— Joseph Nye

“Perception, unfortunately, always trumps reality”

— Simon Aholt

### *Introduction*

Across the world, norms are both the same and different. If we take into account the overlap between hegemony and Orientalism, it further allows us to build a more robust understanding of nation branding and soft power. Norms are customs of conduct dependent on one’s identification in a certain social context in which actors adhere to a “logic of appropriateness”.<sup>2</sup> International hegemony is rather a mobilisation of leadership by

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\* Views and research expressed here are the author’s own and do not represent the views of the UK Government and are not statements of UK Government Policy.

a predominant power to order relations among actors.<sup>3</sup> Historical contexts matter with nation branding, as history is a cornerstone of how countries market themselves. Hegemonic influences are as powerful today as ever before. One undeveloped feature of soft power is the processes by which one person is drawn to behave in line with the desires of another actor.<sup>4</sup>

Soft power differs from hard power in that no brute coercion is used to persuade the adversary to follow one's own desires. Soft power is used by countries to show and encourage their interests, such as freedom and equality. They influence other countries to share their interests as a result.<sup>5</sup> This may include the results of significant world issues such as trade negotiations, the fight against terrorism, disease transmission, and climate change. The inducements a country uses to exert influence under hard power as "carrots" and the threats as "sticks"<sup>6</sup> where one must coerce or influence the other based on material objects.<sup>7</sup>

Power is described as a country's ability to exert influence over other countries and political groups in order to regulate their actions. The scale, wealth, and capacities of a nation decide its fiscal, military, and political strength. Nations may use their influence to persuade other nations to join them in pursuing their goals. Most global frameworks for studying hegemony centre on relations among states and other political communities. The construction of difference is established across socio-cultural things within society, from novels and paintings to even political/governmental reports.<sup>8</sup> The notion of Orientalism equipped Europeans with the skills and ideology to engage with the 'Orient' on a number of levels.<sup>9</sup>

Since the 19th century, the term hegemony has been generally interpreted to symbolise the political supremacy of one state over another.<sup>10</sup> This essay will look at how, through the prisms of hegemony and Orientalism, we can better understand nation branding and the establishment of social norms.

The implications and impact of promoted images of countries are substantial as they can affect the audience through the creation of expectations, and the desire for image verification.<sup>11</sup>

Nation branding as a term refers to a country's whole image on the international stage, covering political, economic, and cultural dimensions<sup>12</sup> Nation branding is a metaphor for how effectively countries compete with each other for favourable perception,<sup>13</sup> often through intangible links like tourism, culture or heritage. National branding goes beyond the narrower purpose of country-of-origin or place brands to promote specific economic interests.<sup>14</sup>

### *The case of hegemony and Orientalism*

The impact of hegemony  
Many scholars view the field of international relations marked by the rise and decline of dominant powers. In this way, some focus on the processes of economic transformation, some political dynamics, and sometimes both of these things. A hegemon has been defined as something (such as a political state) having dominant influence or authority over others.<sup>15</sup> Within this, hegemonic ordering takes place within existing international structures, which creates opportunities and constraints. Hegemons may find themselves constrained by elements of an international order that they helped produce.<sup>16</sup> Yet, hegemons rarely enjoy sufficient power to completely overhaul order entirely. Such was the case with the US, where the terrorist attacks and Washington's responses adversely affected the vital 'soft' foundations of its power, including the appeal of American values and culture, perception of US hegemony and the apparent legitimacy of the exercise of American power.<sup>17</sup> In turn, this constrained US hegemonic power by limiting the effectiveness of foreign and security policies.<sup>18</sup>

The relationship between the concept of hegemony and empire has always been fraught. Hegemons putatively control the foreign relations of other polities, while empires impinge on their domestic politics.<sup>19</sup> Hegemonic ideologies can be generated by philosophers, policymakers, and scholars who study certain parts of society and then advocate a certain perspective.<sup>20</sup> Hegemonic relations describe patterns of leadership and control among nominally autonomous polities. On the one hand, some conclude that “hegemony” is just a substitute for “empire”. On the other hand, some suggest a variety of procedures for detecting when a hegemonic relationship is really one of informal empires. Empires arise when constituent units no longer enjoy such nominal autonomy.<sup>21</sup> Yet we see a problem when we begin to try to distinguish hegemony and informal empire, as both bleed into one another.

For Antonio Gramsci, cultural hegemony is ultimately the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class, which manipulates the culture of that society.<sup>22</sup> This can range from belief systems, perceptions, and values, in a way that a ‘ruling-class’ worldview becomes the accepted cultural ‘norm’. Yet, cultural hegemony can only be realised as a concept if it is taken within a variety of contexts. For Jackson Lears, relying on one single definition is misleading.<sup>23</sup> Cultural symbols can have an integrative significance within particular communities.<sup>24</sup> Yet, often such symbols may not be realised within wider socio-economic or even political structures. In turn, it allows for inequalities of power to be subsumed by an implicitly functionalist “cultural system”.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, cultural hegemony was aided by “intellectual historians trying to understand how ideas reinforce or undermine existing social structures and social historians seeking to reconcile the apparent contradiction between the power wielded by dominant groups and the relative cultural autonomy of subordinate groups whom they victimise”.<sup>26</sup>

### The impact of Orientalism

Orientalism as a concept has gained its strength directly from cultural hegemony. Some, like Edward Said, believed that central narratives of Western scholars governed the East.<sup>27</sup> In this way, the 'East' was the geographical territory spanning Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East whilst the 'West' was seen as the European Great Powers.<sup>28</sup> Said argued that the perception of the Orient, or the 'East' in the 'West', was one that was primitive and exoticised, which directly fuelled the assumption of Western superiority.<sup>29</sup> The paradigm itself depicts Eastern cultures as static and irrational, compared to Western society, which are understood to be both modern and civilised. The process of Orientalism, or indeed the otherisation of representation, by directly comparing hegemonic powers and everything else, allows scholars to examine how international orders themselves shape hegemony and bids for hegemony.<sup>30</sup> In this case, Orientalism was a hegemonic discourse, where essentialist assumptions served the ruling world powers.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, this was manifested throughout all forms of discourse including literature, research and conversation both due to, and in order to, perpetuate the power of these dominant groups.<sup>32</sup>

At its core, Orientalism is the sheer exploration of how the colonial gaze framed (and still frames) the Orient as a visionary opposite to the Occident to be governed. Said's critique of Orientalism has been seen as highly valuable for demystifying the Western narrative of 'world history' as an accepted universal reference point.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, his highlight of how such a binary representation of Europe in the context of the wider colonised world remains relevant today. Nevertheless, his work is not without challenge or criticism. For some, the Said's re-articulation of a complete binary between the East and the West<sup>34</sup> was problematic as power relations were fixed and one-way (West to East).<sup>35</sup> In this way, Orientalism, as a concept, represented the sheer dominance of the West (the Occident) over the East (the Orient)<sup>36</sup> from the beginnings of capitalism and imperialism to the

present. For some, Said didn't cover the true representation of what the concept of Orientalism means. Bernard Lewis argued that Said's account of Orientalism was a reduced representation of the West presented through an ideologically loaded narrative and imperceptive of its own assumptions<sup>37</sup>, whilst Western scholars were depicted as evil.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, before the peak of 19<sup>th</sup> century European colonialism, scholars who focused on the orient mostly studied Islam alongside other non-western civilisations out of intellectual curiosity.<sup>39</sup> Some Orientalist scholars were opposed to European imperialism. Ian Burma (2008) argues that some Orientalist scholars held the 'othered' perspective of the Orient, to directly contract and oppose colonialism. Such is the case of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), a German Romantic philosopher, who advocated the exotic "otherness" against the rationalist opinions of imperialist powers.<sup>40</sup>

Orientalism as a lens of study has been understood to be a pretext for oppression and imperialism. It is a political doctrine and nobody can write, think, or act on the orient without being influenced by Orientalism.<sup>41</sup> It was also able to reinforce colonial stereotypes about the east.<sup>42</sup> Orientalism was popular because it was able to explain a complex and diverse culture in a simplistic way. Where it argued that uneven power relations between two unbalanced halves distort knowledge<sup>43</sup>, where non-European cultures for the most part became objects of discussion, rather than equal participants within the dialogue. In turn, such a perspective has portrayed Eastern cultures as inherently subservient to Europeans. Though geographies of power and inequality have shifted dramatically in the last two centuries, the concept of Orientalism still has relevance due to new discussions of belonging, race, and difference. Any of Orientalism's binary oppositions do not go far enough to explain an ever more globalised world. The argument of such a binary does not account for the fact that the flow of information between countries is greater with global interconnectedness than ever before.

The legacy of Orientalism is an interesting one. Drawing on the role of hegemony, the presence and construction of “*certain cultural forms which dominate over others*”, Said sought to prove how Orientalism was being internalised by Western and Eastern cultures alike.<sup>44</sup> Yet, he did not explore the concept fully, failing to offer the necessary depth in Gramsci’s concept of hegemony.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, one of the biggest legacies of Orientalism is the elevated awareness and reflections amongst scholars of the positions from which they write. For some, having such a level of self-consciousness can quickly dissolve into identity politics or even support the view that only one group of people can write about themselves.<sup>46</sup> This viewpoint highlights the often-contradictory links formed by the postcolonial realm. Indeed, scholars have expanded Orientalism’s resolutely binary opposition between West and East into the richer concept of cross-cultural hybridity.<sup>47</sup> For some, this hybridity is a situation of democratic strain and resistance against imperialism; others instead have criticised it as a neo-colonial dialogue closely aligned with transnational capitalism.<sup>48</sup> Cross-cultural hybridity is then where something no longer allows itself to be realised within the binary meaning and instead upends it by occupying, resisting, and disorganising the space around it.<sup>49</sup>

For several decades, accusations of Orientalism have mainly been directed against those on the political right. Some argue that in the wake of 9/11, the Bush administration was influenced by Orientalist influence where the stance of “good West versus bad Islamic world” became dominant.<sup>50</sup> The effect that US foreign policy had post-9/11 can still be felt today: they then constructed an Orientalist paradigm through which most US actors still view the Middle East today. available to rising states as they seek to challenge the existing order. To be drawn to US society, public policies, or political values, one nation must be prosperous or benefit others in other countries<sup>51</sup>, or even share common values. For Daniel W. Drezner, the logic of resistance and revisionism for a number of nation-states has

been directly in response to the American hegemonic organisation of the world economy.<sup>52</sup> Drawing on Susan Strange's notion of "structural power"<sup>53</sup>, Drezner examines the strategies available to rising states as they seek to challenge the existing order where rational revisionist nation-states would attack the "ideational" dimensions of the existing hegemonic order.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, F. Gregory Gause III points to the importance of variation in the "international institutional context" for British and American dominance in the Middle East in shaping the effectiveness of their power-political efforts.<sup>55</sup> Such insights forward the notion that hegemonic polities are both order makers and order takers.<sup>56</sup>

### *Impacts on norms, soft power, and nation branding*

The influence of both hegemony and the gaze of Orientalism on norms, soft power, and nation branding cannot be overstated. Norms are a rule or standard that govern conduct within society, serve as a guide or control, or even regulate behaviour. For some, it is a societal expectation, where it has become a standard to which we are expected to conform whether people choose to or not.<sup>57</sup> The concept of a norm remains complicated at best, as scholars have interpreted it in a variety of ways.<sup>58</sup> All societies have rules or norms specifying appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and these are based on cultural values, which are justified by moral standards, reasoning, or even aesthetic judgment.<sup>59</sup> Norms are not necessarily things that are deemed 'good' nowadays. However, within the sense of a given norm, actors who partake in that norm assume that their acts are natural.<sup>60</sup> Norms can be identified as efficient or inefficient only if we know the ends they are to serve.

Norms are effective in the sense that they direct behaviour<sup>61</sup> by creating a sense of obligation amongst groups.<sup>62</sup> Understanding this sense of obligation is critically important to understanding norms<sup>63</sup> and how

they in turn operate. Norms become obligatory as they are internalised<sup>64</sup> and it is this system of internalisation that provides their peculiar force. The norms are blueprints for behaviour, as they set the limits in what people may seek alternate ways to achieve their goals.<sup>65</sup> The assumption of self-interested behaviour underlying the norms necessarily leads to an evaluation of performance that is based upon whether such goals of actors are fulfilled.<sup>66</sup> Such standards of behaviour may appear at several levels, including for example at a local level, state level, or at an international level where a community of individuals or actors share a common identity.<sup>67</sup> The diffusion of norms is mainly concerned with whether a given norm is effective in obtaining the desired result by the party that has the power to approve or deny such a norm.<sup>68</sup> This is indeed true in the case of nation-states.

Norms are directly influenced by hegemony and Orientalism. Social norms must either be shared by other people or be partly sustained by their approval and disapproval.<sup>69</sup> Norms can spread across different individual entities, such as epistemic societies<sup>70</sup> or transnational advocacy networks.<sup>71</sup> At a nation-state level, norms are spread via epistemic groups, or people that share a shared identity based on the empirical method.<sup>72</sup> Hegemony and norms are intrinsically tied together. The case of the rise of China in the past twenty years is important here, especially in the context of global governance and the norms that hold them up. In the past two decades, China has re-emerged as a dominant power, with the world's second-largest economy and a world-class military. Indeed, as China embraced the open international order, it aligned itself with US values.<sup>73</sup> At present China is pursuing a multipronged strategy toward global governance. With the one hand, supporting international institutions and agreements aligned with its goals and norms, like aligning with the World Bank or the Paris Agreement regarding climate change.<sup>74</sup> With the other hand, China seeks to undermine those values and create alternative institutions and models

when it isn't convenient for it, such as in the case for human rights. Furthermore, in areas where norms or institutions are not fully present, like internet governance, China acts on its own accord to work with other authoritarian powers such as Russia to create standards that reflect their interests.<sup>75</sup> The divide between which norms nation-states choose to adhere to or not, will be an ongoing problem when trying to address common challenges. It also creates the narrative whereby having two systems of global governance will badly undermine any cooperation, as no one will be held to account.

Much like norms, soft power is incredibly influenced by hegemony and Orientalism. Nye's soft power is described as one country's ability to draw others so that they want what they want<sup>76</sup> by examining how said country might persuade another to want the same goal. The ambition to attract another is the capacity to modify the other's expectation over their choices such that one's end intention becomes the other's sought approach. In the case of nation-states, the effect of soft power can depend on how they gain admiration. The ambition to attract another is the capacity to modify the other's expectation over their choices such that one's end intention becomes the other's sought approach. Soft power can be expressed by intellectual capital, national values, and international policies. Some academics consider knowledge<sup>77</sup>, charity or philanthropy<sup>78</sup>, and diplomacy<sup>79</sup> to be modes of soft power. A country's culture embraces its views, goals, and group actions, as well as its popular culture. As Nye also says, the receiver filters knowledge and soft power in the form of community and other qualities.<sup>80</sup> Nye implies that credibility is one of the most valuable soft power tools<sup>81</sup> yet without defining how one becomes dependable to their soft power.

Perceptions of trust and attractiveness matter, as they shape behaviour, and how a country is understood. In turn, such understandings of a country have a direct impact on its economy by affecting the foreign direct investment

(FDI) and tourism levels.<sup>82</sup> The case of Georgia is incredibly interesting within this nexus. In the wake of the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991, Georgia was sprung with a unique opportunity. The newborn Caucasian state created an image for itself as a trustworthy country through ongoing engagement with international norms, and greater alignment with the European Union. At the same time, its location as a cultural crossroads between East and West has shaped its open outward-facing culture and in turn influenced how others think of Georgia. Tourism is now a strength of the Georgian economy accounting for just under 8% of GDP in 2019.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, Georgia is now a partner in the Creative Europe Programme allowing for any cultural and creative organisation to team up with wider partners based within Europe, further supporting Georgia's cultural networks and influence. Moreover, Georgia punches above its weight in sports, and is currently ranked twelfth in the world for rugby.<sup>84</sup> From having the world's oldest winemaking industries to some of the most popular cuisines and a collection of cultural festivals, Georgia's soft power is growing.

Nation branding is a subset of soft power and is directly influenced by hegemony and the concept of Orientalism. Nation branding is driven largely by practitioners and there is an urgent need for conceptual and theoretical development of the subject.<sup>85</sup> Scholars pertaining to this political perspective on nation branding are critical about the emphasis on market positioning and competitiveness as outlined above, stressing that attempts to brand nations can be risky and even counterproductive, in that it might create mistrust and prejudice efforts to win the hearts of others.<sup>86</sup> Scholars looking at nation branding from a political perspective see it as coordinated government efforts to manage a country's image in order to promote tourism, investment, and foreign relations.<sup>87</sup> In this light, nation branding is seen as a powerful political tool, especially for small, peripheral

nations eager to strengthen their economic position and to compete against the economic, financial, or military clout of superpowers.<sup>88</sup> With the rise of digital world however, nation branding is now ever more complicated.

Historical contexts matter with nation branding, as history is a cornerstone of how countries market themselves. Hegemonic influences are as powerful today as ever before, just in different ways, through the utilisation of digital engagement. The concept of Orientalism also remains an important lens to examine nation branding, as how we compare ourselves to others is a vital part in identity building. National identity representation requires building a positive image to a variety of one's self to external and internal audiences. However, doing so in the context of the digital space can prove difficult. Indeed, search engines have indeed already exceeded the credibility of traditional media.<sup>89</sup> So how can nation-states build trust effectively, when we now live in an age where information is always available at the touch of a button, through search engines and other digital platforms?<sup>90</sup> Digital technology has upended how nation-states build themselves, how they define themselves, what they do, and how they do it.

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## 1.8 Colonial Imaginations and Post-colonial Realities: The Cameroonian Diaspora and the ‘Anglophone Crisis’

Hilary Koum Njoh

### *Introduction*

The popular African media Instagram account @nneworldwide has built its identity on the promotion of a transnational Black community. Specifically, one that is rooted in a shared African identity which spans across the continent and its many diasporas. The account celebrates the independence days of each country in the African continent. On 1 October 2020, @nneworldwide made a highly controversial post expressing “Happy Independence Day British Cameroon”.<sup>1</sup> There was a clear divide in the comments: between those who supported the celebratory post for recognising the plight of a minority community, and others who condemned the account for promoting division that plays into a separatist ideology. The latter’s concern was that this move validated a narrative which contradicts the conventionally held belief in a single unified Cameroon. This had resulted in heated debates in the comments where multiple comments under the post asked for the picture to be removed.<sup>2</sup> The anxieties of the commentators reflect valid concerns over the state of the country, and the fragile relationship between Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonians.

The ongoing “Anglophone Crisis” demonstrates how allegiances to Anglophone and Francophone identities have survived decolonisation in Cameroon. This essay, while written in the context of the current conflict, is also a personal reflection on how I as a member of the Francophone

Cameroonian diaspora in Canada have had the privilege of being removed from the immediate threat of political violence, juxtaposed with my deep sensitivities towards the crisis. This position has forced me to think critically about the unique role that we, in the diaspora, play as agential in the conflict and the subsequent movement. The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: it begins by providing a brief colonial history of Cameroon, then background information on the “Anglophone Crisis”, followed by a critical discussion of a post-colonial identity formation. Thereafter, an analysis of social media activism and how this medium has been used by members of the Cameroonian diaspora. At the end, a personal anecdote will conclude this topic. The central question explored in this paper deals with the role of the Cameroonian diaspora, and its influence in furthering the post-colonial movement in the context of the “Anglophone Crisis”. This essay maintains that social media activism by the Cameroonian diaspora has been both supportive of, and limiting to a decolonising agenda.

### *Brief Colonial History*

To understand the current context of the crisis and the decades-long post-colonial movement some background information on the Cameroonian colonial experience is required. The country which is now known as Cameroon was a previously held German colony from 1884 to 1916.<sup>3</sup> Germany’s defeat by the Entente Powers during the First World War marked the partition of the colony between France and Britain. Where France occupied four-fifths of the territory and Britain controlled the remaining one-fifth of the land.<sup>4</sup> The British controlled areas were the Southern and Northern regions bordering Nigeria – another British colony.<sup>5</sup> The different colonial administrations resulted in the development of two distinct Cameroons, that each had their own unique cultural, social, economic, and political systems.<sup>6</sup> This had a lasting effect on the construction of Anglophone and Francophone identities, as identity

construction took place under separate conditions.<sup>7</sup> After demanding reunification and political and economic independence, the Francophone nationalist party Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) pushed to begin the process of formal decolonisation.<sup>8</sup> French Cameroon obtained its independence on 1 January 1960. In contrast, Britain originally had the intentions of administering their trustee territory in the North and South as a part of Nigeria, with the hopes of eventually integrating the regions.<sup>9</sup> On 11 February 1961, the British Northern Cameroonians voted to join Nigeria, whereas the British Southern Cameroonians had opted instead to join independent French Cameroon.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, after gaining their independence in October 1961 Southern Cameroon had entered into a two-state federation.<sup>11</sup>

Notably, the proposal of reunification was not a popular option for Southern Cameroon since this was not a harmonious partnership between two equals. Southern Cameroon was presented with the choice of either “being absorbed into the emerging giant to the West” or “trying their chances at a loose federation with French speaking Eastern Cameroon”.<sup>12</sup> Thus the decision evolved mostly as a rejection of the Nigerian option, in the hopes of preserving some type of socio-cultural specificity within a two-state federation.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, contrary to these desires, the 1961 two-state federation was temporary, as the country ultimately transitioned into a highly centralised, unitary state.<sup>14</sup> In the 44 to 45 years period where Cameroon was arbitrarily divided then later ‘reunified’, the French and British colonial administration had undoubtedly left a legacy beyond a linguistic tradition which troubles the region to this day.<sup>15</sup> Issues over integration in the post-colonial era have been hotly debated by those within the country’s borders and beyond, as conflict in Cameroon ensues.

*Summary of the Anglophone Crisis*

What is referred to in this essay as the “Anglophone Crisis” predates the conventionally held 2016 starting date. For activists, academics, and citizens the “Anglophone Crisis” is an extension of a much longer concern, although 2016 is the date when this topic began trending internationally. The “Anglophone Crisis” describes the failure of ‘reunification’ following colonial rule, coupled with a resistance to assimilation on the part of the Anglophone minority.<sup>16</sup> A minority which continues to reject a state-sanctioned erasure of cultural specificity during the 60 years following reunification up to the present time.<sup>17</sup> During this period a deeper Anglophone consciousness of being marginalised intensified,<sup>18</sup> furthering the conceptualisation of an Anglophone Cameroon that has a meaningful difference to Francophone Cameroon beyond mere differences in the official language.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, there is significance behind the 2016 date since September saw Anglophone lawyers engaged in peaceful protests over what they viewed as a government sanctioned erasure.<sup>20</sup> Largely due to the development of policies that ignored an Anglophone legal tradition in favour of the ‘francophonisation’ of the common law system practiced in the Anglophone regions.<sup>21</sup>

In October 2016, a strike was organised, and in November, the Anglophone Teachers Trade Union also staged a strike to protest against the ‘francophonisation’ of the educational system.<sup>22</sup> The peaceful protests quickly turned violent when the military shot at protesters, wounding many and killing several.<sup>23</sup> The period since 2016 has been characterised by an escalation of violence including random police and military checks, the burning of villages, targeted attacks on schools, and the kidnapping, assault, rape, and murder of multiple civilians.<sup>24</sup> The consequences of such violence have created a spirit of rebellion and a want for Anglophone succession.<sup>25</sup> On 1 October 2017, championed by Anglophones in the diaspora, who had taken over the leadership of the Anglophone rebellion, there was an official

declaration for the restoration of Anglophone Cameroon as an independent state titled the 'Federal Republic of Ambazonia'.<sup>26</sup> This marked a transition from peaceful protest to violence on the part of Anglophone separatists.<sup>27</sup> Terrorist attacks and arson use against schools in particular had intensified.<sup>28</sup> The exchange of violence between the Francophone government and the Anglophone minority has proven detrimental. As of October 2018, there were over 400,000 internally displaced people in Cameroon and as of February 2019 35,000 Cameroonian refugees had escaped to Nigeria.<sup>29</sup> The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in their North-West and South-West Crisis situation report stated that as of 31 July 2019, there are more than 700,000 children who have been out of school in the past three years.<sup>30</sup> Many groups have proposed different solutions to the conflict. Some of the Anglophone protestors have advocated for two-states or four-states federalism, some Francophone sympathisers made suggestions for a ten-state federation instead, which they define as a true decentralisation.<sup>31</sup> However, none of these options have been seriously considered by the Paul Biya government, which currently enjoys a high degree of centralised power.

### *Post-colonial Identity Formation*

As aforementioned, this paper discusses a tension between the binary construction of Anglophone and Francophone identities. It adopts a critical lens in constructivism that highlights the way individual and collective identities are constructed and evolve through narratives of the 'self and other'.<sup>32</sup> From this theoretical perspective, identity formation in Cameroon is cemented by a shared sense of belonging that excludes an 'othered' minority.<sup>33</sup> The Anglophone and Francophone labels come from the colonial administration of the state between 1916 to 1960 in the case of Francophone Cameroon and 1916 to 1961 for Anglophone Cameroon. One ought to ask what the significance of the linguistic divide is. Since this

identity formation is based on languages that were foreign to the region which had its own history prior that 45-year colonial moment. Cameroon is referred to as Africa in miniature due to the multitudes of ethnicities and dialects present in the country.<sup>34</sup> It is a state that is characterised by its sociocultural diversity, yet overshadowed by the failings of its sociolinguistic diversity, principally its bilingualism.<sup>35</sup> An Anglophone versus Francophone binary fails to account for the cultural richness of the state and all of its complexities. This essay maintains that the hyper-visibility of this linguistic tradition is a colonial legacy that runs contrary to a decolonising spirit. This is not to disregard the unique Anglophone experience in Cameroon or to further the myth that “Cameroon has always been one and no more”.<sup>36</sup> However, it is a call to think critically about the origins of these labels and the significance of their continued use.

For the purpose of the paper the Cameroonian post-colonial movement is understood in the tradition of other Black renaissance movements from the Harlem Renaissance to Negritude which call for a decolonisation of the mind. In the case of the aforementioned movements, this advocacy resulted in the formation of pan-Africanism and the establishment of transnational anti-colonial networks.<sup>37</sup> In order to rescue Cameroon from the colonial imagination, decolonisation of the mind calls for the collapse of a French colonial policy of assimilation and the “illusory” promise of British colonial legacies.<sup>38</sup> The challenge post-colonial Cameroon is faced with is the need to embrace a national identity that harmonises a wider cultural identity rather than merely the binary of Anglophone nationalism or Francophone nationalism. This is why the creation of Ambazonia does not represent a utopia, as it formalises old colonial era linguistic fault-lines.<sup>39</sup> These contemporary divisive policies and practices of pitting groups against one another are reminiscent of those established by colonial powers.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, reconciliation requires engaging in post-colonial discourses and political action across the linguistic divide rather than using the tactics of

the former colonial regimes. This is only possible when all citizens benefit from the same rights and privileges of citizenship. In this respect, the crisis, although founded on colonial logic, can be understood to have evolved into an issue of governance in the post-colonial state with massive human rights violations.<sup>41</sup>

### *The Role of the Diaspora in Social Media Activism*

Social media has evolved the landscape of political activism in Cameroon. When used during times of crisis, social media platforms provide a space and community for all those who seek to voice their concerns despite the limitations of geography. Social media has been used to mobilise support for various causes, including encouraging individuals to actively participate in political discussions and collaborate on political action.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, it makes it possible for any individual to post material that has the potential to reach mass audiences; this ability has expanded the potential for news production, distribution, and consumption by allowing anyone to influence the flow of information.<sup>43</sup> In the context of the “Anglophone Crisis”, social media has played a major role in applying pressure on the government. Recognising the power that this ability holds, the Biya government shut down internet access in Anglophone regions of the South-West and North-West to diminish the spread of information from affected areas.<sup>44</sup> Starting in October 2017 activists in the diaspora took cues from activist on the ground and started using the hashtag #bringbackourinternet to draw international pressure.<sup>45</sup> Their efforts proved successful as internet access was restored in March 2018.<sup>46</sup>

For those living in the diaspora of Europe and North America, the use of online spaces to mobilise political action is not new. For example, in July 2001 the Southern Cameroon National Council–North America created their websites as a part of its ongoing strategy: “to unite the forces

of Southern Cameroons' liberation in the diaspora and on the home front".<sup>47</sup> Defining the website as "a one stop source to learn and update themselves about Southern Cameroon, one of the only African countries still under colonialism and seeking its independence".<sup>48</sup> Currently, social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and Clubhouse allow a new generation of Cameroonians to be agential in the context of conflict by sharing developments, ideas and resources with ease. Interestingly, this has resulted in an interplay between social media and mainstream media. Traditional media platforms use social media for news distribution and citizens have the ability to bring issue areas on the radar of major news networks.<sup>49</sup> This cyclical relationship, though imperfect and unequal, provides a great space to participate in the news distribution process. From a knowledge production standpoint this is extremely powerful in that it challenges the monopoly that individual news networks and governments have in their ability to frame particular incidents as 'newsworthy'. In polarising crisis situations like that of Cameroon, the framing of this information is critical as it may be subjected to bias.<sup>50</sup>

### *The Diaspora and the 'Contemporary' "Anglophone Crisis"*

The year 2020 saw a rise in transnational Black consciousness raising as political activism on social media from #endsars, #congoisbleeding, #zimbabweanlivesmatter, #blm and countless others have brought into the spotlight the interconnected nature of oppression. Cameroon was not the exception as #anglophonecrisis, #endanglophonecrisis, #justiceforcameroon captivated the attention of international audiences and their governments. This attention increased substantially following the Kumba massacre which saw the murder of eight school children, and at least 12 other children injured by gunmen in civilian clothing on 24 October 2020.<sup>51</sup> "Anglophone Crisis" specific social media accounts administered by those in the diaspora have used their platforms to take political action, bringing the conflict to the

attention of their domestic governments mainly in the United Kingdom and United States. These actions have proven fruitful as the United States Congress passed H.Res.358 (116<sup>th</sup>) which called for an end to all violence in the Conflict by both the government of Cameroon and armed groups.<sup>52</sup> These awareness campaigns serve a dual function in humanising those affected by the crisis and in “dewesternising” international interest by focusing on Cameroon. When stories of political violence in Africa and the African diaspora are shared, they speak to issues of survival and of stories of resistance. In collaboration with actors in the country, Cameroonians in the diaspora have used social media to exert a more prominent role in the conflict. These political actions are consistent with the post-colonial tradition of emancipation from oppressive regime tactics. The freedom provided by online spaces can be regarded as emancipatory, since this is a medium where critical political thought and action can be explored.<sup>53</sup>

*Personal Anecdote: From External Observer to Engaged Actor*

The first time I was forced to confront the realities of the “Anglophone Crisis” was in 2018 when my family and I went back home to celebrate my sister’s wedding. On what was meant to be a happy occasion I observed the humanitarian crisis and felt tension and fear permeate the air, as talk of civil unrest was spoken in hushed tones. What surprised me most upon returning to Canada, was discovering that many of my peers were completely unaware of the severity of the conditions on the ground. At first, I was overwhelmed with feelings of anger and sadness, then I thought of my own positionality and the privilege I hold as a member of the Francophone Cameroonian diaspora in living in Canada. I have the ability of being removed from the immediate harms of political violence and travel to the country for a celebratory reason because the region of Francophone Cameroon where my family and I are from is not under a state of emergency. While experiences of political violence are not exclusive the Anglophone minority, I recognise

that some, like myself are able to navigate through the country freely and escape the engulfment of terror and civil conflict. The 'Francophone guilt' that I felt on the basis of my privilege, is similar to White guilt in that it is absolutely useless unless it is paired with political action. Additionally, it centres the concern on myself, and how the suffering of others makes me feel rather than the fact that political violence is a harm in itself regardless of who it is enacted upon. As a part of the majority, I ask myself if this is even my story to tell? Or if I am occupying a space that would be better reserved for Anglophone scholars to speak their experiences? This position has forced me to think critically about the role that we in the diaspora play, in this conflict and the subsequent larger decolonial struggle. Moreover, the responsibility we all hold to those in our home country and to each other. Rather looking at the conflict as my Francophone 'self' is against an Anglophone 'other', I think about how to view this inherited conflict as a collective 'us' against the crisis.

Other young diaspora Cameroonians and I have used social media to educate ourselves and to help mitigate the humanitarian concerns of the conflict. We have used the aforementioned social media platforms to mobilising support, collecting resources, and apply pressure onto the Biya Government. On this I have divergent thoughts. Personally, I see the use of the online space as a continuation of Black liberation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which comes with a new set of challenges and responsibilities. I believe the significance of social media in spreading awareness cannot be disregarded, however awareness is only the first step in inciting a meaningful change. After the topic stops trending and performative activism no longer provides social clout, I ask myself if we in the diaspora will continue to hold ourselves accountable. To keep the dialogue going and to continue to support the decolonising agenda in the country. In the hopes of expanding the reach of comradery to include all those who view being Cameroonian as a meaningful part of their identity.

### *Conclusion*

Members of the diaspora have been involved in the decolonisation project from conception of the original decolonisation movements of the 1950s and 1960s to our present times. The decolonising agenda has remained, despite the modes of activism changing. The political landscape is now digitised, democratising the landscape of who can get involved with the movement. The diaspora has continued to play a significant role in furthering the post-colonial movement in the context of the “Anglophone Crisis”. Granted it is not always productive as there are limitations in social media activism as well as the continued use and entrenchment of colonial era identity markers being the Francophone and Anglophone identity. The objective in the essay has been to describe how these identities have survived a formal decolonisation in Cameroon. This essay began by highlighting a contemporary debate on Instagram about a 60-year-old problem. Then it introduced the foundation of this concern in the Cameroonian colonial experience and provided a brief summary of the “Anglophone Crisis”. Next, a critical analysis of post-colonial identity formation was advanced. Thereafter it explored the role of social media in period of crisis and its impact of the “Anglophone Crisis”. After approaching the topic from the position of an academic, I conclude the essay with a personal reflection on my experience and perspective as a member of the diaspora. The “Anglophone Crisis” demonstrates the importance of maintaining a transnational dialogue on the conflict and its consequences. My hope is that the diaspora continues stay actively engaged in the region in the pursuit of inciting long lasting change.

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## Part II. Understanding Post-Socialism through Post-Colonialism

Over the last few decades, many writers and academics from the post-Socialist region (that is European and Eurasian countries up until 1989–1992 dominated by a communist party or satellites of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) have been taking inspirations from their counterparts in the West – from Audre Lorde to Edward Said – to articulate their experience and the particular trajectories of their homelands. In this part, we try to examine some of the tenets of applying decolonial theory to Central and Eastern Europe as well as Central Asia.

We interrogate the colonial nature of the Russian state, the local hegemon, but itself a European periphery. Then again, didn't the Russian Empire carry out the Circassian Genocide, exterminating a million of indigenous Caucasians and ethnically cleanse its Siberian frontier? Didn't the Soviet Union displace entire populations, Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, and North Caucasians, and conduct atomic experimentations regardless of the health of its Central Asian subjects, much like other colonial empires? In this part, we try to ask how different was the Russian Empire from its overseas counterparts, how colonial was the officially anti-imperialist Soviet Union, and what was that history's fallout (sometimes literally) in the region.

We also explore the region and its peoples' relationship to the West, the other prevalent imperial force, and its colonial or Orientalist gaze towards Eurasia – both through a historical outlook and contemporary perspectives.

## 2.1 Post-Colonial Offerings for Post-Soviet Beings: Tools and Tactics for the New World

### EastEast

EastEast is an online magazine on culture, art, philosophy, and everyday life, with a core goal of challenging and reinventing notions of the East. The EastEast project essentially began in July of 2020, by a remotely assembled editorial team. Composed entirely of individuals either from or based in post-Soviet countries, each member brought a unique set of experiences and interests to the task at hand and, having not all met one another in person, through conversations we began to both introduce ourselves and lay out our visions for the introduction of our platform. One of those initial conversations is presented here, along with a follow-up discussion that took place nine months later, in which we reflected on our shifting perspectives and observations about the nature of our work. Throughout these editorial exchanges, we ruminate on the ways we treat our legacies, our individual and collective presents, and consider the potential of decolonial tools and the ways we may implement them in constructing the future. The participants of the conversation are Editor-in-chief Furqat Palvan-Zade, senior editors Kirill Rozhentsov and Lesia Prokopenko, responsible for Russian and English versions respectively, photo editor and ethnographer Nastya Indrikova, music and food features editor and copy-editor Ben Wheeler, special features and news editor Elizaveta Fokina.

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*August 1, 2020*

KIRILL ROZHENTSOV: When thinking about EastEast as the platform's name, I'm always reminded of the image of a compass. Between the east and south cardinal points, apart from the southeast, intermediate directions such as east-southeast and south-southeast are also mentioned. So, I see "East-East" as both a metaphorical and geographical direction, that gravitates towards that very East people are accustomed to defining or capturing, but still never coincides with it completely. And in this gap, the possibility of heterogeneity appears, this is where multiplicity is born.

NASTYA INDRIKOVA: Sticking to your metaphor, I personally define EastEast as a kind of movement.

LESIA PROKOPENKO: I also think that, in addition to the direction, the East in this case is also about the place where the movement in this direction starts. Thus, the title mentions it twice.

KIRILL ROZHENTSOV: And we are looking eastwards from the East, right?

LESIA PROKOPENKO: Well, yes, because we are also "the East".

KIRILL ROZHENTSOV: By the way, I have never perceived it that way. For example, I was born in Mari El – a national republic in the Volga region, which is often exoticised. For instance, there was Alexey Fedorchenko's film *Heavenly Wives of the Meadow* Mari art and research projects dedicated to the Mari people and their traditions, attempts at reconstruction that we are now observing. I am partly Mari myself, only I didn't grow up in the outback, but in Yoshkar-Ola – a rather depressive provincial capital, where I never experienced all this ethnic originality. Then I moved to Moscow,

and, consuming unified American and Western European media formats, I never got in touch with anything that could be identified as “the East”. I mean, I never thought of myself, Mari El, or Russia as a part of the East. Perhaps, it has to do with the problem of the dominant view of the East, which is very clichéd, and there was nothing in my personal experience that I could refer to as the East. But maybe this multiplicity we are trying to talk about and which is embedded in the name of the project will help me to find new images that would correspond to the reality I see around, to find myself in the East and the East – for myself.

FURQAT PALVAN-ZADE: For me, the East is my native environment, which is always around. At the same time, now I find myself on the post-Soviet periphery, where, due to various historical circumstances, many things in culture are deeply intertwined. My dad is a Marxist and atheist, while my mom is a believer, she prays five times a day. The question of whether it is the east or west has never been raised; it is just a part of my identity. This seems to be a universal thing. One can take a somehow easy approach to the issue, not from the colonial trauma perspective – like there is one part of your identity that you can describe as eastern. In my opinion, it’s a universal situation, similar to one’s female and male components in gender. The fact that we are looking east from the East also seems important to me.

LIZA FOKINA: It is not my idea, but this is exactly how I imagine EastEast’s mission, although it might sound a bit radical. I think it is about collecting the fragments of a cultural vessel broken by the hegemony of Western civilisation. As a visual example, I recall *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* by Ai Weiwei. But in this case, we’re not aiming to collect these fragments to recreate some kind of vessel, but instead we are giving them the possibility to take their own shape – which would still retain the contours of the common.

BEN WHEELER: Growing up in the Pacific Northwest of the US, I even had the perception in my childhood that the “East” encompassed all the lands outside of my home in a way; starting with what was directly east, the rest of the country and the east coast of the US (which were already new and foreign places to me), across the Atlantic to Europe, Africa, Asia, and back across the Pacific to me, arriving from the west. My mother was raised in the same town as me and in her childhood, while walking along the beach she would collect curious, stained green-glass orbs that would occasionally float up onto the shore. These turned out to be Japanese buoys used by sailors that had come loose in storms and were pushed by currents for who knows how long across the Pacific Ocean, arriving on the beaches of my small hometown. For me as a child, these were precious relics from some unknown “East”, but in fact, they’d floated in on waves from the west. In a sense the opposite of Furqat, my native environment was the West: the west coast, the Pacific Northwest, the American West, and all of the reductive images and associations with the “East” that went along with my upbringing became things I had to gradually question and unlearn.

LESIA PROKOPENKO: There is an idea I’m very much fond of – the idea of disidentification. I’ve been reminded of it again just recently. Initially, it caught my eye in Preciado’s *Testo Junkie*. Later, in 2018, I was at the Berlin Biennale Curators Workshop, where we had intense discussions around various issues related to belonging and (de)colonial situations, with colleagues from African countries and from West Asia, from South America and Eastern Europe. It was then that we brought up this concept and talked a lot about one’s disidentification from particular borders. And recently, Antonia Majaca, a researcher who curated this workshop, has mentioned disidentification in her new essay: in it, she connects it to belonging and comes up with the hybrid notion of “disidentified belonging”. It has always been important for me to challenge the concept of national identity. And so, I got really interested in how, on the one hand,

one could go through such disidentification and, at the same time, stay aware of one's own complex origins and relation to certain territories. I find the idea of "disidentified belonging" to be a very valuable tool. At some point, I had felt that I had to question the imposed static "Ukrainian identity", which belligerently defends its quasi "Westerness" as opposed to the ex-USSR: I always saw it as something very synthetic and eventually got interested in the possibility of the plurality we are talking about here now. But I believe it is important to combine the rejection of such categories with some kind of materiality. For example, the way Oxana Timofeeva describes land or how she talks about belonging.

NASTYA: May I also ask a question? Remember a month and a half ago we had an internal discussion about the dichotomy of centre and periphery? We've decided that we do not want to work within the framework of this particular opposition and operate with the concepts of "centre" and "periphery", that this is not relevant for us at all...

FURQAT: I wouldn't say that we have actually come to this conclusion and that we'll never come back to this way of thinking. We need to understand that the very concept of periphery arose in certain historical circumstances and bears particular connotations. We must approach it critically but with humour. For example, I personally perceive my country as peripheral. On the other hand, for me, as a researcher and editor, what is happening off-centre is much more interesting. It seems to me that we have not decided that we will not think in this logic – we somehow still operate within such categories. Yes, they need to be challenged. But perhaps first it would be good to realise that centres and periphery exist. I'm not sure that many people, in general, understand that there is the centre of the capitalist system and countries that serve it – this picture of the world is not obvious.

LIZA: I agree with Furqat that the periphery is more complex and unpredictable than the centre. During my school life in my hometown of Kineshma, in the Ivanovo region, I thought that living in the province implied a certain form of backwardness. But everything is a little more complicated, as I see it now, and if it weren't for the motivation to possess the centre's tools, no will for a critical understanding of life outside of it would appear. At the same time, the periphery produces some unexpected spiritual and intellectual potencies that are simply inaccessible to the centre, which often lives within the framework of certain clichés. In general, staying curious seems to be the best strategy.

BEN: This may just be my own take on the title EastEast, but I feel that both its repetition and ambiguity are meant to spark the reader's curiosity, almost like a challenge to follow us to a series of not yet specified locations, a route that may move from centres to peripheries while stopping in between.

LESIA: Also, the distinction between centres and peripheries seems to always depend on the place one is speaking from. Since 2013, I have been engaged in various activities of the Institute for Public Art, which holds its annual meetings in Shanghai. The Institute operates a particular division of the world into regions, which at some point really impressed me, because it was not what they would come up with somewhere in Germany, for example, and certainly not in America. According to them, the world is divided into such regions, I'm reading: Eurasia; West, Central and South Asia; East and Southeast Asia – these are three different regions. Then, Oceania, Latin America, North America, and Africa. I am a specialist from Eurasia.

FURQAT: Is “Eurasia” Central Asia and Eastern Europe?

LESIA: I represent the entire region of Eurasia. Nobody cares about Eastern Europe!

NASTYA: I’ve just thought that it is probably more interesting not to be a world citizen, but to be a centre that looks at everything around it – a pretty pleasant feeling, isn’t it? Sometimes it feels really good realising that I own a place and that everything is arranged the way I want it because I’m a Moscow native bleeding poor Russia dry. This is precisely why this feeling is so hard to fight.

LESIA: What if one develops such a feeling regardless of where they are? It could be quite efficient. Of course, it is very convenient if location defines you as a centre. But there are many other factors that can define you in this way. I am very much aware of what it means, because over time, I have also developed this feeling. At the moment, I am not even in Kiev – I’m in a small town an hour and a half away from it, and it doesn’t bother me in the slightest.

LIZA: During the quarantine, I visited my hometown and there was a feeling that many of the centre’s advantages had ceased to exist and the division was no longer relevant.

KIRILL: I have a similar nomadic sense of “self”. I’ve never become too attached to any of the places where I’ve lived, often taking them for granted. I may like a certain place better than another, but I have never overidentified either with Moscow as “the capital of our homeland,” or, conversely, with Yoshkar-Ola as the periphery I needed to escape from. Or St. Petersburg, where I find myself, having been pushed away by the environment of Moscow. Everywhere you just search for something you

need, for existence opportunities, build relations and settle down for a while, put down roots – but without plans of staying there for good. And this is a kind of a situational state, which, in principle, does not bother me. But at the same time, I do not have any anxiety that is driving me to new places.

LESIA: Yes, it is not anxiety that should be driving one to new places. If anxiety is driving you to new places, you will never really get there. There should be something else.

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*April 1, 2021*

FURQAT: Since the beginning of EastEast in July 2020, we have definitely evolved: it's hard to say in which way exactly. But this balance of playfulness and critique has been important the whole time.

LESIA: We could discuss how our views and goals have been changing. Do you think our initial aspirations, our focus on the decolonial vocabulary, and the ways we discuss identities have changed with all this experience?

FURQAT: I have changed my location, moved from Tashkent to Amsterdam, and it got me thinking even more about these decolonial frameworks and postcolonial optics. Here, I see people using these at every corner, and I also feel something artificial about it. When we were discussing our front page and the general impression we want to convey, we ended up wishing to be more specific, more focused on certain materiality, with objects and stories...

LESIA: I agree with what you said about artificiality. Just like any fresh political agenda, this trending decolonial discourse provides one with the feeling of being completely infallible, entirely morally clean, knowing who

is right and who is wrong. And this is the most dangerous thing about it because once we have this fixed idea, we are entering the same vicious circle of judgement. Maybe decolonising our thoughts means precisely getting rid of such black-and-white optics, it is about seeing things in their complexity.

BEN: I could say that over the eight months, the experience of working as a copy editor has affected me on a logistical, everyday working level. I didn't approach the process with the impression that there is somehow one correct form of English, but my understanding and emphasis on maintaining that way of thinking has become much more nuanced after seeing the ways that different contributors apply the language. I'm thinking about my role as a copy editor: how do we reflect the way people use this language, how do we show their interpretation of it? I'm trying to avoid ascribing the hierarchies of a "correct" language, especially since we are talking about English, which, in its special parasitic way, tends to really infiltrate other languages and take over. But it's precisely the infectious nature of English that allows for numerous peculiarities. I hope I'm getting better at maintaining intelligible texts that allow for flexibility, rather than automatically funnelling them through a native speaker's perspective on the language.

LESIA: I liked something Furqat said about turning to the material and pragmatic side of things rather than sticking to rigid ideologies. I guess this is, in a way, what you, Ben, are talking about too. It's not about what we are proclaiming, but more about the ways we are dealing with our work, and the constant transformation it requires.

BEN: And allowing yourself, not just as an individual but also as a team, to actually evolve and change as we move forward. It's important to resist the need to establish immovable lines and stances.

LESIA: This work at EastEast in particular is often teaching me how to be wrong, how to accept being wrong. The way it overlaps with ideological discussions is particularly important.

NASTYA: As a photo editor, I really started enjoying “bad”, unprofessional photography . . .

KIRILL: When we were just starting the project, I was, of course, fascinated with the decolonial discourse. Given that the decolonial turn is, in the first place, a product of Western academia, my fascination was mainly caused by my own exclusion from this academic context that I was accessing through secondary sources: I didn't get a chance to study in Europe or the US. Paradoxically, my interest in decoloniality had to do with the desire to be more like one of these white academics... The fact that we are not that widely read in Russia, apart from a certain circle of people we know, has really cooled me down, and made me consider it more pragmatically. On a personal level, it somehow made me immune to a fascination with trendy philosophical theories. One should treat them with some healthy suspicion and not let them occupy you, since these discourses reproduce many of the same structures of domination that they seemingly criticise. It might be clear for everyone, but for me this has been the most important paradox of decolonial thought.

FURQAT: For me, decolonial thought is still a certain truth of life, one of the optics that helps me in navigating this world, and I keep looking at the world through the logic of interaction between centre and periphery, the logic of power relations between them. But indeed, this discourse is often reproduced by institutions simply to justify their right to exist. And it certainly is a paradox. I wouldn't want EastEast to become a similar institution that legitimises itself with a certain “righteous” theory.

LESIA: The question is, how do we avoid it? Is there a way to do it? In my view, it's a matter of everyday tactics, it's about the everyday sensitivity in what we are saying and what we are doing, rather than measuring our practice with broad-scale universalities.

FURQAT: On the other hand, maybe institutions *should be* constantly legitimising and explaining their existence. But that's true, artificiality and alienation are sewed into any organisation of labour, any bureaucratic structure. One has to seek balance between these different aspects.

KIRILL: I guess, in our case, one of the things that prevents the ossification, is the heterogeneity of interests and occupations of each of the EastEast team members. In a certain way, it makes our work as an editorial board more complicated because it's more difficult for us to formulate some common goals – which is something every organisation needs. Yet, on the other hand, such diversification, such non-singularity is helping us to avoid hiding behind a certain institutional façade. The heterogeneity of these interests, backgrounds, experiences, occupations, and even personality traits might be helping us to preserve certain gaps and ruptures that make EastEast something less prone to rigid identification.

BEN: I would have it any other way, honestly. In addition to that, we get to know each other through the material that we produce or support.

LESIA: And it's about creating new space really. I guess if it weren't for the pandemic, this project wouldn't exist.

FURQAT: True, it's just a very weird coincidence.

NASTYA: As for me, I'm trying hard to stop being an "activist", especially in the decolonial context, as well as get rid of the "white saviour complex". I'm learning to let things happen on their own.

FURQAT: It's important to avoid generalisations. I guess the whole point of decolonial optics is to consider particularities, to look at particular situations, particular objects, particular people and places – this still holds true.

LESIA: In addition, it may imply losing the very position through which one generalises and judges things; learning to be a nobody.

BEN: Which has its own set of complications, of course, as one could end up denying their "cultural history" and not coming to terms with the privilege one experiences. Bringing myself to zero might be a privilege in and of itself. The initial recognition of things you've picked along the way, of the judgements and assumptions that you have is what's really important.

LESIA: Absolutely. Being nobody implies, in the first place, learning to be somebody. We don't have an option to not have an identity. It's part of the system of causes and effects that we are all entrenched in: we also have responsibilities towards our ancestors and towards the places we occupy. When I'm talking about learning to be nobody, it's not about erasing the materiality of your experience, but rather about erasing your judgement.

FURQAT: It is a life-long process of education. It is useful to articulate what you are learning and unlearning. Not all the time, of course, but sometimes you may try.

## 2.2 The Eternal Empire: Decolonising Russia

David Saveliev

### *Introduction*

Healthy empires are all alike; every deteriorating empire is deteriorating in its own way. The British left their colonies almost entirely but maintained close cultural ties with many of them, the French were less willing to leave without a fight and are still eager to exert neo-colonial control over *Françafrique*. The Russian Empire, on the other hand, retained most of its territory and is still managing to hold together, masquerading as a nation-state. Throughout this essay, I will showcase how to apply the imperial paradigm to modern Russia, but more importantly, I will show how Russia and Russians grapple with their imperial reality, especially how decolonisation works in Russia and its periphery. My goal is not to make moral judgements, but to showcase ongoing political and cultural processes.

It might be odd for some to conceive of Russia as a living and breathing empire made in the image of old empires of the 18th century, but the reality is that Russia is best described through an imperial paradigm. A widely agreed-upon definition of an empire is a state that rules over distinct territories in a top-down manner.<sup>1</sup> The controlled territories tend to far exceed the original state's territory. An empire is different from a federation specifically due to the top-down approach – federative structures are more bottom-up, autonomous, republican.<sup>2</sup> In the following paper, I aim to demonstrate that the Russian past and present fit the definition of an

empire almost to a T. The largest part of the essay is dedicated to analysing Russian history through an imperial lens. This section is followed up with a relatively brief analysis of modern anti-imperial movements in Russia.

*Building the Third Rome: the development of Russian imperial identity throughout the X-XXI centuries*

Kyivan Rus' and Muscovy, 900–1540s  
 Russian history is often traced back to the Kyivan Rus'—a loose confederation of principalities with its centre in Kyiv.<sup>3</sup> The Rus' was not the autocratic empire that Russia would become, with several city-states practising forms of democracy, like the *veche* system in the northern Novgorod Republic.<sup>4</sup> The Rus' was significantly influenced by the Byzantine Empire, eventually adopting Christianity in 988. So, early in its history, Russia learnt of the attraction of empires. According to chronicles, Rus' travellers were fascinated and enamoured of Constantinople that they called Tsargrad – the ruler city, the city of rulers.<sup>5</sup> The concept of Tsargrad as the ideal of an empire and as Christian *metropole* is still so important in today's Russia, a major Russian TV channel is named after it.<sup>6</sup>

However, in 1237, Rus' principalities learnt of the darker side of empires. The Russian city-states were brutally crushed by Mongol invaders. The disunited princes of the Rus' were unable to stand to the war machine that was the Mongol Horde.<sup>7</sup> With powerful city-states defeated, the vacuum was filled by a little principality called Muscovy. It seemed that Muscovite rulers had learned the lessons of the past – they grew to be authoritarian and decisive.<sup>8</sup> In 1380, Dimitri, the Prince of Moscow, defeated a Mongolian army at the Battle of Kulikovo, marking the beginning of the end for Mongol rule over Eastern Europe.<sup>9</sup> In the following century, Muscovy proceeded to expand, annexing the Novgorod Republic and finally ending its vassalage to the Mongol Horde in 1480.

The newly sovereign Muscovy was full of imperial ambition. It had accepted the now-infamous double-headed eagle as its symbol, to display the Muscovite princes' connection to the Byzantine Empire.<sup>10</sup> Shortly after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Muscovites came up with a motto that defined much of the following Russian history: “two Romes have fallen, the third is standing, and there shall never be a fourth”.<sup>11</sup> Muscovy was meant to be the third and final Rome, the ultimate imperial metropole. This became a geopolitical and religious *idée fixe* that is influential to this day.<sup>12</sup> Muscovy expanded in all directions, battling and conquering its neighbours. In 1547, it was three times its previous size and rebranded as “Tsardom of Russia”. Muscovite princes now called themselves Tsars – a Russianized pronunciation of Caesar, another homage to imperial ambition.

#### The Russian Tsardom, 1547–1700s

The ambitious Tsardom found itself in a precarious position. It was situated on the European Plain, making it an easy target for large armies who would have no issues travelling across flatlands, just like the Golden Horde did. Moscow needed natural barriers to protect itself, and it went looking for them. By the 1700s, the Tsardom stretched all the way to the Sea of Japan in the east and to the Caspian Sea in the south, having conquered all of Siberia and then some. Siberia, an area of 13.1 million square kilometres, became Russia's treasure vault. Today it sustains the Russian economy with oil and gas just like in the old days it provided furs and gold.

#### The Russian Empire, 1721–1917

The appetites grew, and Russia began looking for easier maritime access to tap into the European trade market. In 1721, Tsar Peter I officially proclaimed himself as an emperor and Russia as an empire after defeating then-superpower Sweden in a bid for the shores of the Baltic Sea. The empire became fully crystallized. In the following centuries of Romanov rule, Russia kept on expanding, enveloping entire nations along the way.

Russian rulers built institutions of Russification – settling Russophone, orthodox peoples. In Eastern Ukraine, for instance, Imperial policies often explicitly aimed at destroying the non-Russian schools and community centres. Many communities were labelled as *inorodtsi* (alien-born), making it near impossible for them to enter governing structures. This is still relevant today, as Russia used Crimean descendants of Russian settlers as a pretext for annexation in 2014. The Russification of Eastern Ukraine still bears fruit in Donbas, where it created an identity fracture and a motif for Russian imperial overreach.<sup>13</sup>

### The USSR, 1917–1991

After the abdication of Nicholas II in March of 1917, Russia was proclaimed a republic. However, it quickly demonstrated that it will not rescind its imperial ambition. The provisional government of Kerensky, which is often framed as liberal and democratic, was adamant when it came to providing more autonomy for conquered nations. Any calls for a more federative approach were met with threats of violence and war.<sup>14</sup> The Bolsheviks, who came to power in November of 1917, initially promised a less imperial approach to governance. Lenin and Trotsky thought beyond of boundaries of states or nations – they dreamt of a world revolution that seemed just behind the corner. While often dismissive of nationalist aspirations of colonized minorities, the Bolsheviks nevertheless instituted the process of *korenizatsiya* (rooting) that enabled greater political and cultural autonomy for colonised peoples such as Komi or Tyva.<sup>15</sup> Some minorities were even granted semi-autonomous republics, like the Republic of Sakha or the Republic of Dagestan. Most of these republics still exist *de-jure* as federal subjects of Russia. Culture flourished, and it may have seemed to some that the USSR is on its way to transforming the empire into a true federation.

However, after Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin strengthened the imperial institutes, shutting down *korenizatsiya* and imposing further Russification.

Entire peoples were once again resettled and forbidden to speak their own language, like the Soviet Koreans or Crimean Tatars.<sup>16</sup> Territories of the former Russian Empire – the Baltics and Poland – were reconquered. The Second World War only exacerbated Stalinist imperialism. In fact, the Crimean Tatars' deportation happened under the pretext of Tatar-German collaboration, since many ethnic minorities initially saw Germans as liberators from the Russian yoke. This changed later on – as a Ukrainian saying went “the Germans taught us something the commissars couldn't: they taught us to love the Soviets.” However, the damage was already done and Stalin's suspicions of ethnic minorities were only confirmed as the Red Army fought the Nazi auxiliary units sometimes entirely made up of Ukrainians and Balts. These units later transformed into the bulk of anti-colonial, anti-Soviet resistance that went on into the 1950s.<sup>17; 18</sup>

The Internationale, that highlighted the globality of Bolshevism, used to be the soviet anthem since Leninist times. But by 1944, the Soviet national anthem crystallized the imperial *idée fixe* once again. The anthem now began with

“Unbreakable union  
Of freeborn Republics  
Great Rus' has welded  
Forever to stand!”

A hereditary connection to the continuing imperial tradition of Russian tsars was highlighted. It is with the sounds of this anthem the Red Army conquered most of Eastern Europe, capturing land from Kyiv to Berlin. Throughout the Cold War, the USSR engaged in imperialism to counter the USA in their global superpower struggle. Stalin's death didn't change

much. The USSR still fought to expand its sphere of influence all over the world, including the traditional imperial playgrounds of the Middle East and Africa – most notably in Angola and Palestinian Territories.<sup>19</sup>

#### Russian Federation: 1991–?

When the USSR fell in 1991, it separated across the lines drawn by Soviet leaders. Russia, however, still retained most of the soviet land, being essentially shrank back to its 17th century borders – don't feel bad for Russia, it is still by far the largest country on the planet. After the Soviet collapse, Russia couldn't let now-independent states like Ukraine and Lithuania go. Russian policymakers termed them as “near abroad”, treating them as rightful Russian land.<sup>20</sup> Why was the imperial mind-set so persistent in Russian foreign policy thinking? I argue that the key answer lies in the material conditions of the Russian state. Unlike most European empires, Russia historically has been directly attached to its holdings. When the British left Kenya in 1963 there were no physical bridges connecting the two. On the contrary, Russia and its near-abroad are tied by myriads of infrastructural arteries that date back to imperial times. Anything from railway standards to gas pipes to nuclear stations' fuel logistical chains in the former USSR comes from a unitary system that often disregarded national borders.<sup>21; 22</sup> Take, for instance, the electrical system of the former soviet states that is still essentially united for most CIS states.<sup>23</sup> Many border settlements in the south of Russia still get all their energy from Ukraine and Kazakhstan.<sup>24</sup>

Almost a decade after the Soviet collapse, Russia went on to invade and conquer territories of its neighbours who would want to escape its sphere of influence, Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014). But it is important to note that even within Russia, Moscow finds itself in need to quell anti-colonial sentiments. Most notable here is Chechnya that fought two bloody wars in 1994–1996 and 1999–2000 for its independence from Moscow. Moscow

prevailed and after a great deal of atrocities on both sides, the rebellious republic was reintegrated into Russia. But Chechnya is far from being the only one. All around the Russian Federation, in Siberia, the Urals, and the Caucasus, anti-colonial, separatist, and regionalist movements have a long history, that I will touch upon in the second part of this essay.

Russia has been an expansive autocratic empire since Muscovy's rise – it ruthlessly conquered its neighbours while also having a fetish for imperial symbolism it inherited from the Byzantines. Over the course of its history, Russia became an inherently imperial entity that not only carried out imperial projects but also made imperialism an integral part of its national identity. Even the Leninist international and somewhat anti-imperial project was eventually subdued in favour of a traditional imperial mind-set. Russia had its own “manifest destiny” since the 1300s and it still hasn't run out of destiny to manifest. Imperialism became a part of Russian identity, of Russian statehood. Imperialism is baked into Russia by the very physical infrastructure it inherited from the USSR and the historical Russian Empire. Russia, saddled by Moscow that has to draw resources from the vast lands acquired by conquest, is a federation in name only. Russia is, first and foremost, an empire.

### *Decolonising Modern Russia*

The surface understanding of Russian history I laid out in the first chapter is important because the core–periphery relationship within the Russian Federation is built in an inherently imperial manner specifically due to Russia's peculiar history. The European powers could distance from their old imperial possessions, the USA had all but annihilated the indigenous peoples and, in effect, started from scratch, etc. Moscow, on the other hand, still exists in the same polity as peoples who are extremely distinct from

Muscovite culture, and live within today's Russia because centuries ago said Russia came to them and conquered their land – in Sakha, Tyva, Chechnya, Dagestan, Kamchatka, the list goes on.

### Imperial infrastructure in contemporary Russia

The legacy imperial infrastructure is two-fold: physical and ideological. The physical infrastructure is baked within the Russian economy and the way of life. I've mentioned one example of this above – the soviet infrastructure that ties Russia with the now-independent post-soviet states. But consider the Russian economy itself that today is heavily reliant on its natural resources, namely oil and gas. While since 1991 Russia might have lost its superpower status it nevertheless remains a superpower in the energy sphere. Energy revenues account for more than 80% of Russian exports.<sup>25</sup> The companies that export and develop the gargantuan Russian natural wealth have their offices in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Their CEOs and top brass mostly come from the European part of Russia, its imperial core.<sup>26</sup> No wonder – the Russian core is where top universities and top jobs are located. However, the gas and oil that companies like Gazprom and Rosneft exploit are not in the core of Russia. Take gas, Russia's number one resource. The largest gas fields are in the imperial crown jewel – Siberia, situated in the autonomous republics that were mostly set up during *korenizatsiya*. Yet the Nenets or the Sakha people get little to no revenue from resource exploitation, while corporate offices in the Russian core get the most capital.<sup>27</sup> Consider the Republic of Sakha. An administrative unit roughly the size of India, Sakha is the starting point of the Power of Siberia pipeline that transports natural gas from Sakha to China.<sup>28</sup> The pipeline brings billions to Russia, yet Sakha remains one of the poorest regions in the country with infrastructure so deteriorated that its capital, Yakutsk, is cut off from the rest of Russia during summer: there are no bridges over the Lena River that blocks roads to the city. The

infrastructure itself creates a core–periphery relationship between Moscow or St. Petersburg and the rest of Russia, making many in national republics feel like they are living in a colony.<sup>29</sup>

The ideological infrastructure is represented mostly in the narrative pushed by the Kremlin, as well as adjacent groups like the church and oligarchs. Take the Russian school program that is often used to strangle education in local languages. For instance, in the Tatarstan Republic, Tatar language classes were made into de-facto extracurriculars after Vladimir Putin himself urged for the Republic's official language to not be taught in school on a mandatory basis. Russian is, of course, a mandatory class, and all other subjects are taught in Russian.<sup>30</sup> A similar encroachment on local languages is happening all over Russia and not just within the school system. Sometimes it leads to ironic moments. For instance, in 2021, an activist arrested for his support of the opposition leader Alexey Navalny in the Komi Republic was able to flabbergast the entire court by refusing to speak Russian and demanding the proceedings to be held in Komi, a *de-jure* official language of the republic. The court did not have the capacity to do so and the activist was let go.<sup>31</sup> But modern Russification is just one example. If we continue in Tatarstan we will find plenty of imperial ideological infrastructure. The capital of Tatarstan is Kazan, an ancient city that fell to Russia's troops in 1552. The dominantly Muslim Tatars never fully accepted Moscow's rule and various uprisings went on throughout the region's history.<sup>32</sup> The local Tatar communities were forcefully Christianised and Russified, but Kazan remains the hub of Russia's Tatar and Muslim activism. The authorities, however, never stop trying to stake the imperial claim to the land: memorials to Russian tsars are often planned to be installed. However, they nearly always meet social backlash: memorials to Ivan the Terrible (the conqueror of Kazan) or Catherine the Great (one of the most enthusiastic Russifiers in history) never made it into Kazan.<sup>33</sup> Another historically Tatar city, Astrakhan only recently managed to fight off plans to install an Ivan the Terrible statue.<sup>34</sup> Ivan the Terrible is

infamous for the massacres his troops initiated amongst Tatars and other indigenous peoples during the Russian expansion eastward. In Cheboksary, the capital of the Chuvash Republic, an Ivan memorial was finally installed. However, the Chuvash were not enthusiastic about the brutal tsar either, as Chuvash lands were raided incessantly during the Russian conquest of Kazan. The statue had to be placed into a plastic casing to prevent vandalism.<sup>35</sup>

The Russian Orthodox Church is yet another vehicle for cultural imperialism. According to Kamil Galeev, a Tatar researcher working at the Kennan Institute, the church's role has not changed much since the days of the Tsardom of Russia – it is still a major force for religious Russification. According to Galeev, most top brass in Tatarstan, while ethnically Tatar, adopt Christianity in order to move up the career ladder in the state bureaucracy that is dominated by ethnic Russians and Orthodox Christians. The Orthodox Church builds churches all over Russia – even in dominantly Muslim regions, more shiny temples are being built.<sup>36</sup>

Summing up, modern Russia is encased by the imperial legacies of its past that are too many to count – from the church to economic infrastructure use to education – all is arranged to maintain Russia as an empire, masquerading as a nation-state.

### *Decolonisation movements in modern Russia.*

#### Separatism

The reaction to the imperial nature of the Russian state has created multiple movements that I broadly sort into a bipartisan taxonomy. I classify them as regionalism and separatism. Separatism is fairly straightforward. It is illegal to be a separatist in Russia, so separatist movements, when they emerge, take an extremely violent form. If in countries like the US, the Texas Nationalist Movement can even host its own website, Russian

separatists are far more delegitimised, arguably forced to seek more violent ways of obtaining independence. The prime example here is, of course, Chechnya. The rebellious nation has long been a thorn in Russia's side: majority-Muslim Caucasian tribes that Russia colonised throughout XVII and XVIII centuries never fully accepted Russian rule. Sporadic engagements continued throughout the centuries, and right after the Soviet collapse, Chechnya burned in a separatist war. The Russian state's approach to armed separatism in Chechnya has been twofold. On the one hand, the Russian army shelled peaceful villages and massacred civilians.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, currently Chechnya is a de-facto semi-autonomous region. Ruled in a kind of a viceroyship by Ramzan Kadyrov, who fought against Russia in the First Chechen War, Chechnya has implemented a system of Sharia laws, as well as its own Chechen culture and bureaucracy that is nearly insular from "mainland" Russia.<sup>38</sup>

It is important to note, for the sakes of highlighting the ephemerality of the Russian state, that at the times of the weakening of autocratic state institutions, Russian regions always sue for more sovereignty. The three periods that are considered most democratic in Russian history – the rule of the Provisional Government in 1917, Perestroika, and the Yeltsinism of the 90s – all saw robust separatist movements. Even in the late 90s, projects like the Urals Republic or a true autonomy of the Sakha Republic were taken seriously by many.

### Regionalism

Regionalism is a fascinating and, arguably, uniquely Russian phenomenon. It is close to federalism in that its adepts don't necessarily want their regions to secede. Rather, they want a "Russia of hundred flags", a true decentralised federation where economic and ideological infrastructures are not centred on the European core. Regionalism has been on the rise recently. In Lithuania, a traditional safe space for east European dissidents,

the Regions Institute has been registered with an explicit purpose of eradicating Kremlin-centred approach to Russian studies.<sup>39</sup> An example of regionalist protest would be the recent Khabarovsk protests – the largest Russian protest of the last years not associated with traditional opposition figures like Alexey Navalny. In Khabarovsk, the Kremlin attempted to remove the local governor, allegedly for his involvement in a murder committed in the 90s. The citizens of Khabarovsk, however, perceived this as the capital's overreach against a member of a non-dominant party. The spontaneous protests raged on for months. Khabarovsk is mostly ethnically Russian. However, being geographically closer to Tokyo than to Moscow, Khabarovites have a distinct regional identity they don't want to see threatened.<sup>40</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Summing up, modern Russia has an imperial history like many other powerful states. However, it is distinct in that it managed to keep most of its empire and is still organised in an imperial manner. This created multiple reactions, importantly regionalism and separatism. As decolonisation entrenches in western discourse thanks to movements like *Rhodes Must Fall* and *Black Lives Matter*, it can be expected that the decolonisation movements in Russia will take more power and influence. Would that mean that Russia would have to plunge deeper into authoritarianism, strangling threatening regionalist movements in the grasp of a unitary state? Or will we see a “Russia of a thousand flags” where regions thrive in a federalist utopia? And if the federalist utopia would come about, would this mean an inevitable end to the “Russian state”? What would the reckoning with imperial past mean for Russian foreign policy? Would it be possible for Russian leaders in the distant future to consider reparations for Ukraine based on the centuries of imperial subjugation? Any of these possibilities could come about – we will just have to wait and see.

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## 2.3 Russia, heir to an odd empire

Nadya Kamenkovich

### *Introduction*

Whenever we speak about colonialism, the first association is with the classic European colonial powers. Huge empires stretched over thousands of miles, an island in Europe dominating thousands of people across the ocean, Spaniards discovering and conquering new faraway lands, turning them into “overseas territories”. However, to the East of the mighty colonial empires, one might find an even more tremendous one – Muscovy/Russia/Soviet Union, that covered 36 million square kilometres at its peak.<sup>1</sup> While the European colonial empires controlled lands overseas, the Russian Empire (and later the Soviet Union) stretched their influence through dry land (though given the advancements of maritime travel it was easier for the Europeans to reach their colonies located a lot further). Was Russia an empire from the beginning? Probably not, but then when did it become one? Can the Soviet Union be defined as an empire? And after the collapse of the Soviet Union did Russia inherit any of its imperial characteristics? And even more importantly, did it change its nature? In this essay, we will try to answer these questions by researching the development of the Russian imperial self, from the formation of the Russian Empire to the present-day imperial narratives in Russian politics.

### *The Russian Empire*

When did Russia become an empire? The certain answer would be 1721 when Russia was officially proclaimed the Russian Empire under Peter the Great. However, one might claim that Russian imperialism goes back

to the baptism of the Kievan Rus' in the 10<sup>th</sup> century – when it became closely linked to the Byzantine Empire. Or one might refer to the fall of Kazan to Ivan the Terrible in 1552, which brought thousands of Tatars, and Finno-Ugric people under Orthodox Slavic rule. But no matter what the exact date was, the concept of Empire has embedded itself in Russia's self-perception very early. Before officially becoming an empire, Russia started to view its imperial might and expansion as the basis of its existence and the pillar of the vertical of power.<sup>2</sup>

One might wonder if there was a moment when the expansion would have been enough... But Russia continued growing. As Stephen Kotkin views it: "Whatever the original causes behind early Russian expansionism [...] many in the country's political class came to believe over time that only further expansion could secure the earlier acquisition".<sup>3</sup> The Russian Empire continued moving outward, believing that it was the way to forestall external attacks. And according to Maxim Khomyakov, the expansion of the Russian Empire was indeed very much like the expansion of its Western counterparts, for it had the same traits: "the transfer of people; the concept of terra nullius; the idea of the continuing dependence of the new settlements upon the sending country; the discourse of civilisation and modernisation; definitions in tribal if not openly racial terms, etc."<sup>4</sup> We will not go in-depth discussing the imperial nature of the Russian Empire. Let us just agree that the Russian Empire's imperialist policies might be viewed as comparable to that of the Western colonial powers.

### *An odd empire or self-colonisation*

Russia was an empire for many centuries. However, Russia was an odd empire. It contained a unique dualism of being a coloniser and colonised at the same time. Russia became an heir to the Byzantine Empire in 988 and an empire in its own right in 1721, but Russia itself became a colony

a lot earlier. The very origin of Russia – the invitation of Rurik in the 9<sup>th</sup> century to rule over the Rus’ in order to unify the lands and stop the bloodshed among Russian princes – is indeed a “primordial impulse of self-colonisation”<sup>5</sup>. Russia started with colonisation, but what’s astonishing – with a voluntary colonisation.

Nevertheless, the true “birth” of Russia was the Petrine reforms. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Peter the Great decided to modernise Russia. Multiple reforms, ranging from the modernisation of the army to industrialisation and governmental reforms modelled after Europe, were aimed at “Europeanising” Russia and eliminating its traditions, perceived as backwards by the monarch. Boris Groys viewed the Petrine reforms as the beginning of an authentic Russia since prior to them, there was no Russia – Russia as we know it just did not exist.<sup>6</sup> So, when said Russia finally emerged with the Petrine reforms, Russia emerged once again through colonisation. A new Russian self was created by giving up its past and its history, and smelting it from the European culture and history that did not belong to Russia: “when it is born into history, Russia historically is no more”.<sup>7</sup>

On the one hand, Peter made Russia an empire – he was a great conqueror and coloniser that managed to take over many other states, confident in its messianism. However, on the other hand, the Petrine Reforms were an act of self-colonisation and “psychological destruction of the Russian people”.<sup>8</sup> These reforms made Russia “backward” forever. Peter the Great had the Russian Empire embrace the idea of European civilisation as a base and a template – he wanted Russia to be a European state. But the embodiment of this desire meant that Russia would be doomed to be a catching-up state learning from the advanced European states forever.<sup>9</sup>

While the Russian Empire perceived itself as the West towards Asia, for the European Countries it was always the Orient. Madina Tlostanova very accurately defined this issue as a double self-identification. Russia is portrayed as a quasi-Western subaltern empire that merged self-perception as a metropolis and colony, as an empire and a periphery (to the West).<sup>10</sup> The Russian Empire, whilst being an empire, colonising its neighbours, conquering peoples, was also a subaltern. Russia had its own colonial periphery and at the same time was the European periphery, part of the European colonial empire, though not colonised in the formal sense, thus becoming a subaltern.<sup>11</sup> Peter's reforms resulted in a relentless existential crisis for the Russian Empire and its successor, the Russian Federation.

The most famous embodiment of this issue has been the never-ending argument between the Slavophiles and the Westernisers. The Slavophiles viewed Russia as a unique civilisation with its own unique way of developing, whereas Westernisers saw the country as part of Europe and believed that it should follow the European path of development. Interestingly, among Slavophiles, there were advocates of the "Asianist subtrend" that claimed that since Russia occupied a unique position between Europe and Asia, it had a greater right to rule over the peoples of Asia.<sup>12</sup> They believed the Russian conquest of foreign peoples was not comparable to those of the Europeans, it was a better one, for the Russians were "gentle colonisers" with a consciousness of Asia as well as Europe trying to elevate Russia above the West.<sup>13</sup>

Looking a bit ahead, let us mention that the Petrine reforms were one of the issues of Russia's then international status and self-perception on the international arena as well. Russia viewed itself as equal to other European states and claimed the same status. But for the European states, it was

a forever laggard.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, Russia was a threat, a giant military power, a rival to the East, but still a barbarous giant that was never good enough for Europe.<sup>15</sup>

### *The Soviet Union – an empire again*

The Russian Empire ended, but its core persisted. One might expect the Bolsheviks would have brought freedom, relief from the colonial tensions and burden. Lenin framed colonialism as the product of capitalism and denounced the imperialistic colonial exploitation of “backward” countries as well as the rivalry between capitalist empires competing over their newest colonies.<sup>16</sup> The Soviet Union accepted the colonial nature of the Russian Empire, but the “new Soviet Union” was supposed to be, if anything, an anti-colonial state. Nevertheless, as Francine Hirsch puts it, “After attaining power, however, [the Bolsheviks] began to express concern that it would not be possible for Soviet Russia to survive without the cotton of Turkestan and the oil of the Caucasus”.<sup>17</sup>

So, the Soviet relations between the periphery and the centre did resemble colonial ones. One might mention the expansive and aggressive Soviet policies in Central Asia in the 1920s: the Kokand Autonomy, the Emirate of Bukhara, the Khiva Khanate were conquered, the Soviets continued fighting with the opposition in the early 1920s and then implemented multiple repressions against local elites in the 1920s–1930s. All decisions in the Soviet Union were made in Moscow. No matter how far away the region was, its fate was decided in the capital. Special ministries back in Moscow were supposed to make decisions alongside the ministries inside the republics (for instance, the Central Asian Sovnarkhoz). The centre indeed depended on the peripheries’ economies, markets, and production; while the peripheries were less developed... At the same time, the centre suppressed the local cultures and implemented “Russification”.

Nevertheless, when labelling the Soviet Union as a colonial empire, one should mention several specific traits. For example, Abashin claims that the fact that local elites played a significant role in the governance of the republics and constituted a significant part of the elites in the centre couldn't have taken place in the "classical European empires".<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the peoples of the peripheries had officially enjoyed the same rights as the Russians. Universal social benefits were granted in all republics, and wages were relatively similar in all regions.

*Russian self in the international politics*

So, having said all that, let us try and answer a question: How is a state with a long history of imperialism, that happened to be one of the largest empires of the 19th century, and one of the two superpowers of the 20<sup>th</sup>, supposed to behave on the international stage? And when answering this question, keep in mind the duality of colony and metropole as an unalienable issue of the Russian identity.

First of all, let us mention the apparent significance of the imperial self-image of Russia. Modern Russia still heavily relies on its self-perception as a great power, whose greatness comes from its past victories. However, Russia, in its own eyes, is still a great power, one that has an absolute right to behave like such. This projection of itself as a great power, along with a necessity to expand as a colonial empire, perfectly explains Russia's current policies in its "Near Abroad" as well as its more far-reaching activities in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. At the same time, Russia views itself as a victim, entitled to safeguard its geopolitical sphere of influence against foreign encroachment, which it perceives, in turn, as aggression.<sup>19</sup>

However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a brief period when Russian foreign policy was dominated by liberal "Westernist" ideas,

which portrayed Russia as a Western, capitalist-oriented state. At that time, Yeltsin claimed that Russia was no longer the main power centre of an enormous communist empire.<sup>20</sup> So, it was Russia's chance to be finally accepted in the ranks of the European nations it admired for so many years. To that end, Russia signed the Partnership and Cooperation with Europe in 1994 and joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991 and the Partnership for Peace Program (1994).

However, when the first "confusion" and crisis in Russia passed, it became apparent that Russia and the European Union (EU) adhered to very different worldviews and understanding of Russia's place in the new unipolar world. Given Russia's history and heritage, it expected to be treated as an equal. Whereas the EU saw Russia only as one of the former Soviet states that had to change and adhere to the EU's norms and values. As the 1999 Common Strategy of the EU on Russia stated "Russia's return to its rightful place in the European family [...] on the foundation of shared values enshrined in the common heritage of European civilisation" was anticipated by the EU. According to Morozov, from the Russian point of view, it was Europe's refusal to accept Russia as it is, its constant desire to make Russia follow the European norms that made any rapprochement impossible.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1990s, in Russia, advocates for the Western course and their rivals (including many partisans of a more nationalist stance) once again clashed in a debate over the future of the country. The outcome was the formulation of Russia's core foreign policy principles, such as "Russia as a Great Power". Russian politicians came to an agreement that Russia should focus on maintaining stability and protecting its interests, which laid not only in Russia itself but within its "Near Abroad" as well.<sup>22</sup> The term "*Near Abroad*" itself mirrored the Russian worldview's imperial heritage and its policies. Russia views the former Soviet republics through the lens of a "special history" that was supposed to guarantee a "special relationship" with separate,

but not foreign states. It was ultimately a bid to fit the familiar Soviet order into a new reality. Indeed, the legacy of Moscow's control over the union republics could not vanish overnight. So quite quickly, Russia returned to its familiar heritage of the empire – as a regional hegemon (or at least attempts to perform this role). The attempt to integrate with Europe was substituted by Moscow's endeavour to concentrate and solidify its own influence over its neighbouring regions (for instance, through EEU).

The EU kept building its policy towards Russia on normative aspects, while Russia, which managed to recover some of its economic might and accumulate enough power, embarked on a quest for an even more ambitious goal – becoming one of the global hegemons. To be more precise, one could refer to the so-called Primakov doctrine that established Russia (along with China and India) as one of the poles of power in a new multipolar world. However, at the same time, Russia kept developing its tangled relations with Europe. Even as late as 2020, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov announced that the EU ruined its relations with Russia, as Russia continues to draw on its position compared to Europe.

Amid multiple ties and close partnership with China and broad activities in the Middle East and Africa, the Russian worldview still stays Eurocentric and strongly dependent on the West. Russia's current foreign policy discourse is the perfect embodiment of this duality.<sup>23</sup> Russia, while engaging in imperial pursuit in its "Near Abroad", justifies this policy by accusing the West of colonialism and neo-colonialism, and maintaining a consistent discourse of the importance of "decolonising the world order" by promoting a multipolar order. According to Morozov, it is Russia's subaltern imperial position that results in the idea that any "political action is only seen as legitimate if it is directed against the West (or at least demonstrates Russia's independence from

the West)".<sup>24</sup> No matter how hard Russia tries to distance itself from Europe, integrating with China and other Asian countries, BRICS countries... it will not change the fact that it is still really closely connected to Europe.

### *Conclusion*

After centuries of being an empire, it is not surprising that Russia continues to formulate its worldview and its policy in an "imperialistic" manner. Russia cannot imagine itself as a "junior" partner in any relationship. Being an heir to one of the biggest empires and one of two superpowers, it is used to playing the leading roles. Russia's current pursuit of the status of a great power perfectly fits in this logic. However, it would be a different story if the Russian Empire (and the Soviet Union), were simply colonial empires. Starting with the Petrine reforms, Russia emerged and existed, always positioning itself in relation to Europe. It is the duality of the Russian "self", centuries of comparing itself to the Europe and constant "catching up" with its neighbours to the West that has tied Russian identity to Europe. One could state all the aforementioned explains Russian policy in the international arena, which continues to be dictated by the self-perception as an empire and a subaltern at the same time. We might risk and say that expecting the continuation of duality in Russian politics will persist. It is becoming more and more apparent that Russia will not adopt the Euro-Atlantic norms and principles and that, in contrast, it is drifting away from the European view of the world. However, while becoming more distant from Europe, Russia, at the same time, "stays" at the same position of constant comparing itself to its "cool neighbour".

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## 2.4 The Aryan Alliance? Nazi Eastern European Imperialism within the Censored Dutch Press

Jonas Lammens

### *Introduction*

In an article titled “The Sevenfold task of the Dutch *Volk*”, published on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1942 edition of the *Utrechtsch Nieuwsblad*, a war-time censored paper for the metropolises of Utrecht and the surrounding region, Anton Mussert’s speech to the Dutch people is recited as a reference point for what had happened and what was to come under the Nazi leadership of Europe. Mussert, leader of the Nazi endorsed *NSB*, gave a speech on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 1941, on the first anniversary of the movement becoming the state party, to his fellow party enthusiasts and to the wider citizens of the Netherlands. In this recounted speech, Mussert emphasised several intrinsic elements of the Dutch and their position and role in the New Order of Europe. Firstly, he emphasised the Dutch’s innate Germanic descent as a *stam* (tribe), by stressing the need for an “active deliberate participation” amongst all Germanic people, to obtain the “complete justice” of their pioneering entrepreneurial spirit in the newly conquered Eastern European lands.<sup>1</sup> Having alluded to the loss of Indonesia, “all overseas roads” were now closed in realising this Germanic greatness. Instead, the “physical, moral, and spiritual elevation”, and the redemption of his people would have to come from the cooperative bonds, which Germanic self-consciousness and brotherhood had realised.<sup>2</sup> For the war, as he had emphasised, was no “ordinary war”. It was not a dispute of one state’s quarrel with another or its assertion of dynastic claims. Rather, it was inherently a biological

struggle. Or as he coined it, a “clash of two worlds” fighting against both the “imminent danger” of spiritual and physical racial degradation. Indeed, it was a fight against the forces of modernity, synonymous to the inherent properties of European decay, wishing to extinguish the “Jewish led” Anglo-Saxon “money forces” and Asian Bolshevism, which personified the ultimate antagonist to the return of Dutch purity of race and spirit.<sup>3</sup> In this speech, Mussert pays homage to the multifaceted sources of his ideological authority. Subconsciously reiterating the very purpose of the *Volk*, which he and his contingents believed was finally metamorphosing into conscious manifestations across the spectre of Nazi controlled Europe. This publication, offers us a microcosmic insight of the macrocosmic trajectory intended for the Dutch *Volk*. Indeed, it marked a seeming return to Dutch greatness in Europe through this belief of revolutionary progress and leadership, by forming a racial kindred alliance of a united Germanic spirit through reclaiming what had been apparently lost: the ‘Lands of the East’ and its unbound potentiality for reignited Germanic racial redemption, and, in turn, greatness.

The topic of Nazi imperialism in Eastern Europe, as an inherent characteristic of the regime, has become of greater historiographical significance amongst European scholarship in the last 30 years. Particularly prevalent are the German schools of thought, which have stressed the ideological and bureaucratic continuation of a Prussian Imperial *geist* that would succumb the very essence of Nazi thought and objectives to its prevalence.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, wider scholarship has followed this trend of analysing Nazi Eastern European colonialism in light of the greater German and European preceding context of the Imperial Age.<sup>5</sup> Arguably, the current contributions of this revisionism owes its particular historic lens of analysis to Hannah Arendt’s 1953 *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, which popularised in its post-colonial thought the significance of an accumulated European ‘Imperial consciousness’ in understanding Nazi occupation. The

precedence of this inherited 'Imperial conscious' spillover into the successor organs of former high-imperial bureaucracies, as well as the intellectual spaces of the nation in the developing conditions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> Prior contributions such as Aimé Césaire's 1950 essay, *Discourse on Colonialism*, stressed that the uniqueness and shock factor of Nazi rule was that the "White man" became a subject of Imperial treatment previously reserved for the overseas indigenous people.<sup>7</sup> Where Nazi Imperialism considerably differed from systemic overseas colonialism, was that the Nazi occupation was too short-lived to leave 'enduring cultural legacies' and 'structures of domination', whereas in the post-colonial setting of former European colonies the contrary was observed.<sup>8</sup>

Modern scholarship has stressed that newspapers can offer us an insight into these competing narratives of thought and their manifestation in the actions undertaken by their ideologues. For as the lasting legacy of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, has left on newspaper scholarship; the paper press became throughout Europe, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a means of promoting a common identity amongst a racially kindred people, becoming co-creators of their 'imagined communities'.<sup>9</sup> What was radically different to the liberal bourgeois press, which pre-existed occupation, was that the Dutch press became in a sense one behemoth monotone expression of Nazi desires and strides in reaching those teleological objectives. As one can interpret from the works of Habermas, the public sphere of Dutch life became dominated, through these newspapers, by a radical 'steered media' of Nazi thought, attempting to condition the very debate and conscious collective goals of the Dutch.<sup>10</sup> This correlated to the Nazi administrative belief that the function of the Dutch press was solely to 'instruct' and 'guide' the population as a "significant instrument of influence", as Goebbels stated, in the hope of realising their own Aryan destiny within the collective Germanic will.<sup>11</sup>

*Controlling the Narrative*

As echoed by Governor-general Seyss-Inquart, the teleological objective of Dutch occupation was in realising an Aryan destiny and identity. A goal that laid not in Nazi coercion to this cause but rather in a 'self-willing' domestically cultivated Dutch cooperation.<sup>12</sup> Ironically and contradicting this aim, in order for this will to be truly ingrained within the press, the Nazi occupants realised that their grip had to be strengthened in controlling the themes and messages which daily publications of newspapers possessed.

For the Nazi administration, the Dutch voluntary farmers were Aryan colonisers realising the organic boundaries of their Aryan empire through their differing yet coherent activities to the cause. As reported by the *Agrarisch Nieuwsblad* on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April 1942 there was a duality of objectives at play.<sup>13</sup> The 'crusade' East would both realise a Germanic destiny tying their bonds to their Aryan 'brothers', whilst also securing the 'food position' and relieving the 'landhunger' for generations to come.<sup>14</sup> The latter appealed to an indigenous concern amongst both the populace and administrative echelons, hence a vital remaining reason for collaboration. The term "*voedsel positie*" (food position) became a reoccurring theme in newspaper articles around the summer of 1941 and well into 1942, to justify and glorify the role of the Dutch colonial farmer as a saving grace for the nation.<sup>15</sup> Considering the intensification of British blockades as well as the devastating news of the loss of Indonesia, non-National-Socialist officials of government came to conclude by December 1941 that colonialism on the terms of pure resource extraction was a necessity for the nation's self-preservation.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, in the early years of occupation, there was a balance, which presented itself between the secular obligation to the cause and the ideological motivators for colonisation. One article employed these inherited public anxieties of the Dutch. It illustrated the severity of the Dutch 'landhunger'

by drawing upon the historic precedence of the population surplus of 100,000, as well as the migration of 40,000 farmers from 1890 to 1905.<sup>17</sup> However, as conflicts in the East began to escalate, the tone began to shift. For example, five days after the opening phases of Operation Barbarossa, in late June of 1941, Seyss-Inquart addressed the Dutch people in a manner of prophecy. His speech, covered in a newspaper article called for “the Crusade against Bolshevism”, emphasising the need for “indivisible” and “unshakable” unity for the mission in creating a “community of grain” for Europe in the East.<sup>18</sup> Fighting the decadency of “Judeo-Bolshevism” the Dutchmen would be rekindling a connection they had experienced “for 800 years” as “pioneers” within the region.<sup>19</sup> The invasion of the USSR undoubtedly accelerated the debate and early successes catalysed the actualisation of the vision, as demonstrated by the successive establishment of CULANO (*Commissie tot uitzending van landbouwers naar Oost-Europa*) a national-socialist agency tasked with the sending of Dutch settlers to Eastern Europe.<sup>20</sup>

Candidates for this homesteading mission were required to undergo a thorough vetting of their racial and moral purity in order to qualify for the mission.<sup>21</sup> One fundamental requirement for the mission was inherently an ideological one. As the press began increasingly stressing the mission was a “return” to the East, marching and mimicking the “forefathers” and through their devotion launching a “Germanic counterattack”. This East which from the Germanic *stams* (tribes) had been displaced, they had also settled in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>22</sup> From 1942 onwards, the glorification of these Dutch volunteers, through ascribing them as the very embodiment of a Germanic intrinsic will of the *Volk*, became the central theme in attempting to realise the full incorporation of the Dutch people into a kindred Aryan *Brudervolk*. Behind the soldiers of the voluntary SS legion, the “second front” is being formulated, by the ushering in of new recruits, to “stand shoulder to shoulder” in effort to colonise the new

territories.<sup>23</sup> An alliance of “gun and spade” marked the symbolic start towards the realisation of a Greater German Reich in the East, which the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands – NSB) and Nazi administration had stressed to the press had an innate Dutch ownership. This second front would entail assimilation of the area through the “youthful” colonialists embodying the very spirit of perceived ‘Dutchness’. For the men, this meant being the “disciplined father”, whilst for the women, it meant being the “sympathetic mothers”; encouraging through the coupling of recruits the fruition of the very locus of society, the family. This spirit was captured through training these recruits to possess child-bearing and rearing properties.<sup>24</sup> This narrative reflected its wider contemporary Nazi sentiments. For as Himmler had expressed in the summer of 1942, the objective of these Eastern frontiers was for them “to dwell only with truly Germanic blood” and thus achieve true Germanic ownership.<sup>25</sup> It was through this alliance of the Dutch soldier fighting the ‘decadent’ Bolshevik hordes, whilst the farmer opened up a “second front” in purifying the newly incorporated lands with likewise their blood and labour, that the administration could attempt to capture the prophesised Aryan Imperial mission in the East.<sup>26</sup> By the last months of occupation, farmer and soldier became an interchangeable agent through the language deployed in newspapers. As demonstrated by an emergency appeal for frontline aid the volunteers were labelled under the collective term of “*strijders*” (*fighters*).<sup>27</sup> Hence the fears of politicising the mission East had come true. From the spring of 1942, the publications surrounding Eastern colonialism had distinctly become dominated by the direct ideological discourse of the NSB and Nazi discourse. Having achieved monopole status through their assurgency of presence and power over the press, they now had free reign to purge and coerce the press to their ideological intentions. Of the 710 daily and weekly papers that had been on the market in summer 1940, only 184 remained in existence by the summer of 1945.<sup>28</sup> Hence, the non-NS bureaucrats, who were unsympathetic towards the

overtly racialist dimension of Germanisation, withdrew their support in the spring of 1942, realising the Nederlandse Oost Compagnie (Dutch East Company – NOC) and the *Landdienst* had become the project of the NSB and Nazi ideologues and administrators rather than still, in essence, being quintessentially an independent Dutch mission to secure nourishment for the nation.

*The 'Pioneering' Farmer, The 'Retarded Slav', and the promised East: Mysticism, Historicism, and Orientalism in the Censored Press*

By 1942, the press had become the state apparatus tool in forwarding a historical 'manifest destiny' of an Aryan will. A sentiment that was not new to the Nazi administration but rather a self-admitted embodiment of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century thought which was now finally at the forefront of their racial destiny. Nazi ideologues and their Imperial predecessors (as well as the wider pre-existing racial anthropological and eugenics academia in the Netherlands and Germany) all stressed the historical precedence of the Germanic Past. For the Past would realise and speculate the racial and spiritual trajectory of the Germanic *Volk's* resurgence in the unfolding developments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the interwar years had seen the institutionalisation of German scholarship on *Ost* and *Westforschung*, through the administrative funding of research, which stressed the intrinsic 'Germanness' in the eastern and western borders of its nation.<sup>30</sup> As demonstrated by Ratzel's coining of the word *Lebensraum* during the previous Imperial heights of the Prussian Empire (1901), the bureaucracy had already adapted an internal stance, which saw the future of geopolitics as being shepherded by a *Grossraume politik*.<sup>31</sup> This idea, which would later be endorsed in Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and further political philosophy, created in practice the equivalent of a 'German Monroe Doctrine', which believed that nations would be organised in colossal spheres of influences.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the prevalence of a sentiment of a predetermined destiny for the Germanic

people and Europe cannot be stressed enough in these writings. Sentiments that ascribed the pre-First World War Prussian state as a “mutilated torso”, a part of a wider Germanic biological *Reich*, make up a collective tapestry of scholarly and bureaucratic debate which Nazi thought inherited.<sup>33</sup> The framework of this thought reaffirms the claim that the senior Nazi ideologues and administrators were indeed, the “inheritors” of a colonial bureaucracy, which the Greater German Reich was keen to embody.<sup>34</sup> After all, many early 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial figures became important in the politics of the Weimar Republic, with their rationalism succeeding their tenancy of office by being further developed and emphasised amongst the Nazi elites.<sup>35</sup> No truer does this politicised sentiment resonate in the Netherlands than through such beliefs being manifested in the wartime organs of press censorship, which sported a hybrid input of both home-grown National-Socialism as well as the directives put forward by Berlin. From 1942 onwards these ideologues had free reign in realising these prophesised ideals through the narratives they ascribed the farmer and the East. They had the freedom to characterise the Dutch farmer as an agent that had embraced the spiritual and racial purification that the “German essence” had to offer.<sup>36</sup>

Articles by native racial scientists, such as Dr. Johan Theunisz, began appearing, employing a historic presence of the Dutch as Eastern colonisers emphasising a ‘renewed’ spirit was taking form. The article drew upon a Dutch presence in the region from the Carolingian period to the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, emphasising the renewed presence was a prerequisite property of the Dutch and thus wider Germanic racial destiny.<sup>37</sup> These orators became, through their enhancement of prevalence through the regime, the favoured line of thought concerning Eastern settlement. It became the state doctrine, and, more significantly, the doctrine of the Aryan spirit in understanding the events that had occurred. Every other narrative was reduced to a secondary status. In the same spirit that the

planned architectural remodelling of areas of Western Poland was meant to signify the arrival of the Teutonic Knights of the twentieth century, the volunteers of this crusade were the racial architects of reclamation.<sup>38</sup> Several notable articles recited the poem “*Naar Oostland*”, a 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century Flemish song recounting the emigration of Flemish farmers to parts of north Germany.<sup>39</sup> The song became assimilated in the press to embody and idolise a Dutch colonial destiny of the return to Eastern Europe despite this meaning being a fabrication of the original text. It had previously been used in an article concerning the experiences of Dutch labourers in Germany, but now this folklore song had been appropriated to the colonising project.<sup>40</sup> Now, the text which translates to “To the East we want to go, over those green heaths, is a better place”, was proclaimed to have “revitalised meaning” in these times where the Dutch “entrepreneurial spirit” was once again in the region.<sup>41</sup> Even the leader of the NSB controlled *Landdienst*, Evert Jan Roskam, was glorified in papers as the very embodiment of a racially healthy stock of colonising Dutch farmers. One paper argued from the historic precedence that he was a descendant of the “free Saxon farmers” and thus his “patriotism and love for his country” came “naturally”.<sup>42</sup> Other articles in 1942 began advertising exhibitions, which promoted this historicism. Articles such as *De Waag’s* “Dutch East-colonisation” in May 1942, advertised the exhibition *Nederland-Danzig*, which was being held at the university library of Utrecht, dedicating a two-page report on historic presence of the Dutch in the *Oostland*.<sup>43</sup> It argued that the Dutch persistence in the region resonated with an innate “Dutch Entrepreneurial spirit” and “dare”, which were now “again” being realised in the East. This dare would manifest itself into a permanent revolution of Germanic spirit with one article, earlier that month, stating these “fertile lands” would bear the “heirs” of the “sons and daughters” of the converted contingent.<sup>44</sup>

The ideal of this *Volksgemeinschaft* carried a duality in its discourse and practice. On the one hand, it was about furthering the inclusion of the

Germanic people through the promotion of the spirit manifesting itself across Aryan peoples and Europe. Whilst, on the other hand, dispossessing and excluding those who stood in ideological contradiction to it. In this case, it meant romanticising the newly incorporated lands and the colonising mission of the east, whilst demeaning the Slavic residents. Press stories of farmers' experiences romanticised the "once again rediscovered East" for its "unbound potentiality" of individual and collectively Germanic redemption.<sup>45</sup> This story, reported in *De Algemeen Handelsblad*, labelled as the least compromising paper towards the Nazi administration, shows the extent to which even the most resilient papers had been Nazified in embodying their ideological oration.<sup>46</sup> Another publication interviewed the farmer leader De Waard, about his experiences in Ukraine. The article stated that he was "eager" to return East for the "vast spaces awaiting exploitation" had a sense of unbound "liberation" and possibility about them.<sup>47</sup> This will, as another article stated, put the "collective will" of all labour first, comparing it to the "golden calf" of the Old Testament.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, like God's punishment of the entire Jewish following for the work of a minority, the role of the Farmer was to purify it completely. More pressing, this comparison was used to talk of "Judeo-Bolshevism" and the ideology of communism, which had lurked in the East and the need for the Farmer to purge these lands of the pagan properties these people possessed. After all, the creator had "intentionally sculpted" the Dutch *Volk* to civilise through the imperial projects before, and now once again, the Aryan spirit had summoned them to the lands of Slavic decadence in the hope of making it their "*Germanje*".<sup>49</sup>

Since the heights of the Prussian Empire, the administration created an 'organic frontier' against the caricature of an Oriental East.<sup>50</sup> The Nazis extended these ideas to new heights marked by a semantic shift from "lands and peoples" to "spaces and races".<sup>51</sup> Dehumanisation became, as these newspapers demonstrate, an everyday social phenomenon, rooted in



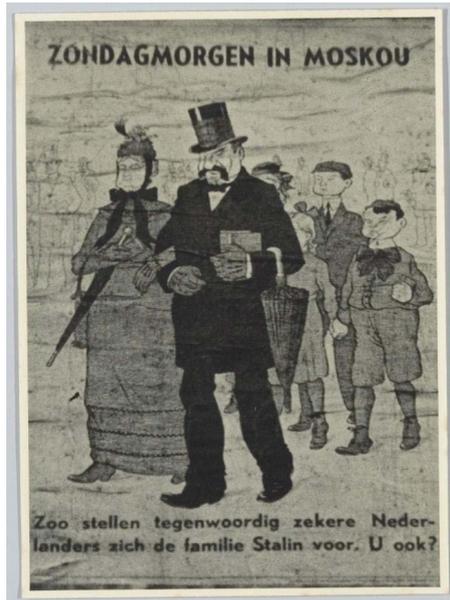
*Fig 1. "Away with it through the Dutch Labour Front"*

the ordinary social-cognitive processes that these articles beheld.<sup>52</sup> When speaking of the mission in the east the people were demonised to further the legitimisation of the project not just in the realms of extraction. But, rather, to also serve as a necessary undertaking in ‘civilising’ these peoples to standards of occidental enlightenment. Articles began accrediting the Slav as being a “retarded” group of peoples who had not utilised the richness of their land and required Germanic encouragement to prosper.<sup>53</sup> When the inevitable happened of young Dutch farmers finding Slavic girlfriends and brides in the East, one paper reaffirmed the belief saying a harmonious marital life was not possible with this other “achterlijk” race, stating abstinence was the only way of keeping the Dutch race pure.<sup>54</sup> This language, which had previously been consistently reserved for non-occidental peoples was now being utilised for a new subaltern people, the Slav.<sup>55</sup> As one article

concerning the recruitment of ambulance operators on the eastern front stated: the war for Europe and the Germanic people was being fought against a “non-human” enemy, which lurked there.<sup>56</sup> It was a racial self-defence against an “Asiatic bolshevist” horde, which embodied, if unacted upon, the death of European culture, traditions, and race. The Orientalist nature of the project cannot be overlooked in the duality of the narratives it expressed and embodied. For the Nazi administration had furthered the development of an academic tradition, which incorporated a distinctive “ontological and epistemological” racial purpose for the Aryan by furthering their own racial domination through demonising the Slav whilst glorifying the opportunity the land possessed.<sup>57</sup> The Farmer defied, for ideologues and administrators like Darré, everything which modernity stood for; the colonisation was about rekindling a Germanic “blood”, exclusively that blood, through the “soil”, by revitalising peasantry homesteads in these newly acquired territories in the hope that ethnic salvation may be redeemed through this racial gentrification.<sup>58</sup> It required complete Germanic isolationism from the inferiority of the indigenous peasants and this message was relayed home to the Dutch people through the homogenous tone of the newspapers. Based on the first impressions these sentiments left, the logic of this destruction and redevelopment chimed with an occidental pattern of past Imperial projects. The encouragement by Rosenberg to draw direct links to this, through advising colonial commissars to read Imperialist travelogues and establishing localised East European organs, which embodied African techniques of colonial governance, made the project intrinsically a discourse born out of similar racialist dimensions of past global imperial rule.<sup>59</sup>

The savagery of European colonialism, disguised with the pretence of having a “civilising” role was continued by Nazism by bringing this barbarism home to the continent of colonial powers.<sup>60</sup> What was distinctly different was that this Nazi Imperial thought rejected the humanitarian

mission and explanation which other colonial powers had ascribed their Imperialism to. Instead, teleological purpose of colonisation was redefined. As demonstrated by the mechanised murder of the Jews and Slavs of



*Fig 2. Sunday Morning In Moscow: An anti-Slavic/Bolshevist poster depicting the 'family Stalin' with exaggerated 'Asiatic features'*

Eastern Europe, the only bonds that counted were not those that recognised a common humanity, but rather, one which recognised their own racial kinship as the necessary benefactor for the purification and salvation of their race.<sup>61</sup> The practices of administration and the terminology utilised in the very discourse, which once was reserved for the non-occidental people, was now being administered towards the Slavic peoples of Eastern and Central Europe. No truer does this sentiment chime than in the newspapers of Holland, where the East and Slavic people were characterised by paradoxical qualities.

The demands of war on Germany's manpower alone made Dutch recruitment to this cause an ideologically fitting convenience for realising these visions after a Nazi victory.<sup>62</sup> It would however never come and instead the Netherlands became subjected to intensifying resource extraction, which squandered what was left of the illusionary vision that they were equal partners in a family of Germanic races.<sup>63</sup> Instead, as argued by Ardent and Césaire, it required a Dutch exposure through their own subjugation to extraction to realise they too were 'subalterns' in a wider European Nazi Empire. It is argued that the Nazi occupation didn't leave a lasting legacy on the Netherlands. However, as the following part will argue, it did leave a legacy amongst social commentators of a changing discourse concerning its colonies. Indeed, post-colonial attitudes were born not in a post-war setting but rather originated from the reactions to experiences from the Nazi administration's colonial and occupational heights. The marginalised appeal and rhetoric of the NSB and Nazi discourse would not just alienate the wider Dutch readership from the mission in the East, but it would furthermore reevaluate their own colonial position.

*Inheritors of the East? The Crisis of the East Indies and the rise of Post-colonialist thought in clandestine literature*

As echoed by Arendt, a Dutch will of possession of the East was not possible without an appeal to experiences and desires, and that required tapping into the domestic political needs and circumstances of the wartime Dutch people.<sup>64</sup> Whilst the administration had already partly realised these circumstantial conditions of appeal, through their extensive rhetoric surrounding prospective food shortages, the loss of Indonesia was another fundamental worry ingrained in the Dutch past. As emphasised by Foray the Dutch were nostalgic, proud, and self-righteous towards their East Indies.<sup>65</sup> A feeling best captured by the dependency on this colony for domestic growth, with a GDP amounting to 15–20% of their annual

income, believed to be the “highest ratio” of external GDP of any colonial nation at the time.<sup>66</sup> By spring 1942, the Japanese occupation of the East Indies swept in new public emotions of unease and fear that the loss combined with the lack of Nazi guarantees of Indonesia would reduce the Kingdom of the Netherlands to a minor European power, living in the shadow of a global Empire.<sup>67</sup> Long established fears and debates resurfaced to the front of a collective Dutch consciousness. One notable example was Sandberg’s 1914 pamphlet “India lost; disaster born”. Written by a former local colonial authority and active NSB member, it was republished by the NSB during the war’s Indonesian crisis.<sup>68</sup>

However, in its present circumstances the Dutch were increasingly feeling an internalised colonisation in their own right. Being amongst the highest economically exploited nations in Western Europe ‘real national income’ had halved by 1944 from its original evaluations of pre-war (1938) figures. Moreover, by the autumn of 1943, labour drafts had mobilised a coerced workforce of over a quarter of a million men, around 3% of its total population with 44% of their entire economy mobilised for the war effort.<sup>69</sup> The Netherlands had become a ‘subaltern’ people with the woes of famine in 1944 Winter Hunger amplifying these feelings; the readership of the censored press were in a state of complete disillusionment. The promised treatment that realised their Aryan status as Germanic partners of colonisation was by 1944 a clear façade victim to a down spiralling Nazi European Order, as Allied victory seemed imminent. Instead of encouraging the Dutch to Germanise, the loss of the East Indies had made the public more resentful towards the occupier<sup>70</sup>, creating a debate amongst clandestine thinkers, which began a cross-analysis of the developing colonial affairs. On the one hand, it was about reflecting ‘inward’, for the need of either reform or complete emancipation of the Indonesian people, as well as drawing comparison to these realities in what was occurring ‘eastward’ in the incorporated lands.<sup>71</sup> Now more than ever,

having experienced the Nazi occupation and conditions of their rule the Dutch could appreciate “the Indonesian people’s drive for freedom” and thus the fundamental need for a redefined peacetime relationship.<sup>72</sup> The clandestine writers were responding to the censored press’ use of the loss of Indonesia as a motivator for Eastern Colonialism. When the NOC was launched in the summer of 1942, the narrative in newspapers stressed the potentiality for redemption for the Dutch through reclaiming their colonial tradition in the *Oostland*. Indeed, in their intentions, Rost van Tonnigen had hope that the financial assets and benefactors, freed up by the loss of Indonesia, would begin imminently reinvesting in the successor colony of the east.<sup>73</sup> Papers began hailing the NOC for its creation of “new possibilities” for the “entrepreneurial” Dutch people, which resided in the reclaimed and “purified” lands.<sup>74</sup> Designated to Dutch settlement, it stressed that the Dutch would “continue to take its place under the sun” and demonstrate its “excellence” in its understanding of colonisation.<sup>75</sup> Such sentiments of nationalist pride which colonialism brought predated Japanese invasion. However, the discourse had now shifted from the liberal tone of the ‘civilising’ mission, which justified colonialism to an attitude that legitimised on racial characteristics.

The narrative had to be one, which embodied the realisation of this Social Darwinian order, with the Slavic peoples of the East replacing the semanticist properties of the preceding “backward inferior savages” of the non-occident Indonesians.<sup>76</sup> Everyday experiences of Nazi occupation had revaluated and made the Dutch self-critical of their colonial past and futures. The clandestine press began styling itself as the ‘conscience of the nation’ and surpassed newspaper circulation by 1944.<sup>77</sup> For instance, the 1945 published *Haaien voor Nabatoe* (Sharks near Nabatu), distributed and published by the agents of the leading clandestine organ the *Bezige Bij* (Busy Bee), reflected a rising anticolonial sentiment to both overseas Imperialism and the continental formulation of it, through its

manifestations in the *Ostplan*. The fictional story follows *Lazard*, a lawyer for a Dutch tin mining company operating on the fictional island, Nabatu, situated in the Dutch East Indies. *Lazard* soon becomes disillusioned being in the privileged position of a conscious agent of the operation and mission statement of the companies operating there. As *Lazard*'s narration entailed, the Dutch operators "we the whites" were "strangers in this land" guilty of "depleting the soil" and "carrying off ore worth millions of guilders and leave the population behind, poorer than ever before".<sup>78</sup> Undoubtedly such narratives echoed the rising sentiments towards Nazi extraction of Dutch domestic product. Moreover, it reflected a clear criticism in the role the Dutch had played in its past overseas colonial ventures, and was now being revisited and envisioned in the project of the 'New East'. Another popular clandestine attitude, towards how these newspaper narratives of Germanic imperialism was received, is reflected in the poem *Duitsche Beschaving* (German Civilisation). It challenged the *Blut und Boden* sentiment, mocking the apparent ancient claims of a Germanic consciousness, stating that "Today, he still screams and he barks about soil and blood and race, and hereby shows that in the past his forefather was a howler", stressing that when 'Dutchness' was conceived the "Kraut was still in the trees hanging on paws and tails".<sup>79</sup>

Clandestine literature, from the spring of 1942 onwards, offers us a further insight into the resilient opposition to the Imperial project through its responses to the developments of the Indonesia crisis. The paper *Vrij Nederland*, began questioning and arguing that an army of a million "free Indonesian" people empowered by greater reforms towards self-determination would have put up greater resilience in the defence of their homeland.<sup>80</sup> One article by *De Waarheid* in 1941 drew direct parallels to the Dutch concentration camp system present in Indonesia with what was unfolding in the East.<sup>81</sup> The visible segregation and eventual roundup of

Jews, paired with the public speculation of these deportees going to camps, made up a collective Dutch rumour mill to which these unfolding practices could be likened to their colonial past.<sup>82</sup>

The imminent and eventual loss of Indonesia ought to be considered as a focal shift in two distinct ways. Firstly, in the immediate rhetoric it provided surrounding the vision of a pan-Aryan colonised Eastern Europe found in the censored papers. Secondly, shaping the very clandestine resistance literature and attitude which set a wartime tone and attitude for a liberated Dutch postcolonial attitude. The latter would become self-realising to the Dutch as Nazi economic extraction intensified as war conditions worsened, forming an undisputable case for the evils of Imperialism and reform through the varying experiences the Dutch people had undergone as subalterns themselves. The Nazi administration with the press as its organ paired the worsening of Dutch domestic economic conditions with the Indonesian crisis to create a formula of propaganda. This narrative rooted in a historicism of a past collective experience was paired with the current emotions of resource scarcity and hunger to promote the project of Eastern Imperialism.

In the end, the German and NSB efforts to convert a liberal Netherlands into Aryan colonisers was met (on the whole) with waves of disinterest, alienation, and disgust. As the living conditions became worse at home, the racist dimensions of kinship were a self-defeating prophecy. What these experiences did instead was begin an irreversible process of internal questioning of centuries-long Dutch Imperialism. Colonialism, and its physical and metaphysical dimensions 'came home', turning the descendants of colonisers into the colonised. This phenomenon is easily overshadowed by the government's military response to Indonesia's War for Independence, in the immediate post-war setting. Nevertheless, within the social peripheries of Dutch war-life the orientalist fetishism and

fantasy (of Empire) became an increasingly shameful and regretful reality amongst the populace. From experiences such as this a new and globally rising consciousness was set in motion within Europe, a theory so powerful that it would shatter the chains of occidental powers beyond its continent and sweep out direct Imperial rule.

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## 2.5 On superiority and inferiority in academia: an autoethnography

Olga Burlyuk

This essay is a recollection of episodes from my professional life spanning over a decade and various academic contexts, country-, discipline-, and seniority-wise. While it is a story by an emigrant, it is not a story of emigration; that one would have had to be a book. Likewise, while it is my story, it is not a story about me. It is a story of subtle, nearly invisible, structures in academia and the heavy day-to-day burden of fending off assumed, imposed, and self-imposed inferiority complexes: in relation to the “centre” one arrives at, in relation to the “periphery” one (never really) leaves behind, and, specifically in my case, coming from Ukraine, in relation to this “periphery’s” very right to be seen as a separate unit, a periphery of its own. Being an autoethnography, this essay addresses the political through the personal and treats emotion as an inherent element of any human interaction – also in academia.\*<sup>†</sup>

*July 2007*

I have obtained my Bachelor in Law degree at the end of June. Although for lawyers in Ukraine a Bachelor’s degree qualifies as “incomplete higher education” and mandates another full year of study, the system does allow for

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\* A longer version of this essay has been published previously as Burlyuk, O. (2019). Fending off a triple inferiority complex in academia: an autoethnography, *Journal of Narrative Politics*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, pp. 28-50 (open access).

<sup>†</sup> This research has been supported by a Postdoctoral Grant of the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO), grant number 12N6718N.

an interruption at this stage. My study mate and friend Tanya and I begin strategising our “year abroad”. It cannot be a “year off” in the sense western students have it for various reasons, starting with the absence of the freedom of movement, so it has to be a formal study to justify a long-stay visa. We are looking at Master programs. As regular Ukrainians in financial terms, and non-EU citizens on top of that, we cannot afford to pay western/non-EU citizen tuition fees or even demonstrate sufficient subsistence funds, so it has to be on an all-inclusive scholarship. We are looking at countries and universities that grant those. Even though we both speak decent German and I speak some Polish, English is by far our best-spoken foreign language (and we’ve already taken all tests necessary to prove that). We are looking at study programs in English. You might think the UK is on the top of our list, but no: we dismiss the UK altogether because its visa regime is different from the rest of Europe, and we do not wish to be “stuck in the UK” unable to travel anywhere else, do we?! We are looking at Schengen-zone countries only. Finally, we fear that the Nordic countries might be too dark, too cold, and too expensive, so these are also scrapped off the list. All things considered, we opt for the Netherlands. During the summer, we apply to a number of Dutch universities.

### *September 2007*

I win a prestigious MATRA/MTEC scholarship of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and arrive in Maastricht to do a Master of Arts in European Studies (and Tanya heads to Rotterdam to do an LLM).

I land in what to me resembles Pleasantville (I have seen the movie just a few months earlier): seemingly perfect, too good to be true, in dire need of “colour”. Just like the two main characters of *Pleasantville*, I feel trapped in a TV-show. And yet I know it is for real. When someone refers to a “bad neighbourhood of Maastricht”, I laugh hysterically.

I also find myself immersed in a community of students who are on average 3-4-5 years older than me (now 21) and are only about to start thinking of who they “wish to become when they grow up”. Yet, I am told, Maastricht University is among the most competitive study environments in the Netherlands: because of all the Germans studying there. Having arrived from Ukraine, where life is a daily struggle for most people, having studied in the most competitive faculty of the most competitive university in the country, having worked part-time on top of that in a Kyiv office of an American law firm to be able to afford anything at all, I do not find the environment competitive or the studies tough. From where I stand, it is rather a holiday from real life. The apparent discrepancy in default opportunities and an omnipresent sense of entitlement are very disturbing and confronting to me.

I also lose my name. First time, when most (if not all) people mispronounce “Olga” (“l” and “g” are both soft, not hard) and simply don’t get (and also mispronounce) the informal diminutive “Olya”. Second time, when I learn that the university accounts me by my student number and not by my name. Third time, when I comprehend that my patronymic (the part of one’s name that takes after one’s father’s name, e.g. I am Olga *Volodymyrivna* Burlyuk because my father is Volodymyr) is not taken up in any of the administration of me abroad because it does not feature in the transliterated bits of my passport, only in the Cyrillic bits.

All in all, I experience a major shock to the system. By December, I descend into what might be my first ever depression. I have trouble falling asleep and occasionally wake up with sore muscles even though I don’t do any exercising. I am homesick, too. My close friend that year is Anita, a fellow student from Romania. We are each other’s in-house therapists and have long chats trying to give meaning to what we both are going through. Things do get better in due course.

*April 2008*

I join on a student trip from Maastricht to Prague and Dresden. Somewhere on a German autobahn, it hits me that the general sentiment in the bus (packed mostly by Dutch and German students) is that we are going to “the wild east”. I experience cognitive dissonance: in Ukraine, a trip to Prague is definitely, most certainly a trip to the civilised west. “If Prague is the wild east, where does that leave Ukraine and what does that make of me?” I wonder.

In Prague, we are brought to the Museum of Communism. “What a waste of time and opportunity!” I lament. “I don’t need to be shown communist artefacts, most certainly not when I am in beautiful Prague!!!” But I presume it constitutes an important educational component of this study trip to the wild east, once communist. The museum displays “occupant” artefacts alongside their “dissident” counterparts: books, manifestos, posters, clothes, flags, banners – what not. The atmosphere is gruesome as well as entertaining. It is my first ever encounter with the official condemnation of communism. I try to imagine a museum like this in Ukraine, but I can’t. Ukraine at the time is ambivalent on what to make of its communist past (it still is today, although less so); condemnation is already among the options, but not yet mainstream. After the museum, the group continues on the outdoor part of the “communism tour”. I sneak out, together with Tanya and Oksana (a Ukrainian and a Russian girl), and go visit St. Vitus Cathedral instead.

We continue to Dresden. As we tour the city, I am hit by a deep sense of having arrived... home. I know it is a foreign city I have never been to before, but it feels so familiar. As we walk around Dresden on our excursion, I feel euphoric and somehow lighter. I register the obvious resemblances with Ukrainian cities – socialist architecture along broad streets and boulevards (because they can be broad as they are new because the old have been destroyed during the war) – but I know that’s not it. I try, again

and again, to pinpoint what gives me a strong sense of home, scanning every detail in the surroundings: people's faces and their clothes, street, road and commercial signs, urban planning, construction materials used, and what not. Eventually, I come to realise that it is... the grass! Not the all-same-colour-same-height-same-density (one may say flawless, I would say sterile) "lawn-grass" you find in the "west", but the "wild grass", with little flowers and weeds growing through it, you find in the "east". I am amused by this observation: how sweet that a warm feeling of homecoming can arise from a simple, meek thing like grass!

### *August 2009*

Now that I have been granted a PhD scholarship by the University of Kent at Brussels, I need to climb an even bigger mountain: the Belgian long-stay visa. For this, I have to undergo a general medical examination, which includes an HIV blood test and an X-ray of my lungs, and turn up at the Belgian Consulate in Kyiv to write – by hand – an essay on "What I plan to do in Belgium and what I will do in case things go sour" (the assignment is announced to me there and then). I am allowed three hours to write my essay. "This trumps even the Americans!" I have a flashback in amazement: two years earlier, an officer at the American consulate asked our Jessup team to recite our case pleadings on the spot, right there at the visa application window, in order to prove that we were indeed going to the international rounds of an international law moot court competition. I am appalled at the visa application procedure. The lawyer in me wonders if it is legal (especially the part where my medical records are effectively passed on from one third party to another in a sealed envelope without me knowing what's inside – maybe nothing at all?!). I feel reduced to a human-like creature that poses a threat to a civilised, disease-free people. I am outraged

and powerless at the same time – scared that I may be denied that visa, will arrive in Belgium late or not at all, will lose my scholarship and not be able to pursue a PhD; I do not feel in a position to challenge the system.

I do get a visa, after one month of agony of uncertainty and a tight two hours before my flight to Brussels, which is just enough for me to rush to the airport and catch my plane (yes, I show up at the Consulate on the day of my flight with a fully-packed suitcase, in case that visa does come through).

### *June 2010*

I discover a funding scheme by one of Soros foundations: a supplement scholarship for doctoral students with minimal main funding. It is open to a list of nationalities; Ukraine is one of them. As I prepare my application, I repeatedly ask myself whether I shall inform Bojan, a Serbian fellow-PhD student, of this opportunity or not (I know that Serbia is among the eligible countries). I realise that the odds of two applicants from one institution getting funded are slim to none, so it would be the two of us being weighed off against each other if we stand out in the crowd to begin with. And “us” is “our stories” – so, before I know it, I find myself measuring our personal stories against the criteria “sad” and “touching”. I conclude, rational that I am that his is a sadder one: the breakup of Yugoslavia was more dramatic than the breakup of the Soviet Union, and whatever deprivations I suffered in Ukraine in the 1990s and struggles I had in the 2000s pale in comparison. It is obvious that if I want to increase my chances, I shall not bring Bojan into this.

I don't tell anyone about my dilemma, not even my husband: deep down, I am ashamed of even thinking along these lines, let alone the possibility of acting upon them. After a few days of inner torment, I decide to tell

Bojan: for the sake of fair play among us “the underprivileged” and because I too think that, as the one with a sadder story, he deserves to get it. It is a win-win for me, I conclude after all: if I get it, I get the money; if Bojan gets it, I get to... feel good about myself! I tell Bojan about the funding opportunity and make it my business to keep him to submission deadlines (I know he is not good at keeping deadlines).

He gets it. I don't.

### *November 2010*

I am in Ukraine to do fieldwork for my PhD, running the winter streets of Kyiv from one interview to another. I meet the director of one of the leading Ukrainian think-tanks, a (then) highly reputable senior (and elder) female policy analyst. I walk into her office and present myself as a Ukrainian researcher currently doing a PhD on the EU rule of law promotion in Ukraine at the University of Kent. She turns around and says, melodramatically: “All these scholarships! They tell us it is ‘for the good of Ukraine’, ‘for Ukraine’s development’, but that is simply nonsense. Where are *you* and where is *Ukraine*?! In my opinion, all these scholarships are a great waste!” She concludes her passage with an irritated sigh and a dismissive waving of her hand. I am caught totally off-guard by this remark and feel my body shrink. Shocked by her attitude and open resentment for what she thinks I might – and, ironically, I don’t! – represent, I stand silent for a moment. “It is not a nationality-based scholarship that I’ve got, you know. It is a university fund thing, and it is granted on the basis of merit through an open competition. And I am doing research on Ukraine, you see, so it is for Ukraine’s benefit, too”, I mumble quickly in my defence as I redeem my senses. I regret the defensive response I gave her that same instance (and I still do today). I stand (yes, I am still standing) disconcerted. I try to brush off the guilt feeling she has just shoved all over me and focus on what it is I came for: the interview.

We proceed with the conversation as if nothing happened.

*September 2012*

I attend the 42<sup>nd</sup> annual conference of the Academic Association for Contemporary European Studies (UACES) in Passau, Germany. A senior German professor of international relations, an older man I have never met before, is a discussant on my panel. I attend welcome drinks on the opening night and – coincidentally – meet the professor. We chat, and he asks me to tell him a bit about my background. I tell him that I am from Ukraine, that I studied law at the National University “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy”, and that I went to do a Master in European Studies at Maastricht University after that. He interrupts me right there with a joyous exclamation, “I knew it! I knew it! You *must* have studied abroad! I saw from your name that you probably come from the east. But when I read your paper, so well-written and well-structured, I knew *immediately* that you must have studied abroad!” He is all-smiling. I stand perplexed, confused on what to make of it. It is most certainly not in Maastricht that I learned to read and write. The jovial look on his face tells me that he means it as a sincere compliment, so I quickly thank him for his appreciation of my paper. And yet I feel like I have just been compared to a bear that can ride a bicycle: here I stand, nicely in the middle of a *manège*, all exotic, amusing, and extraordinarily skilled!

*July 2014*

I collect my PhD diploma at the graduation ceremony of the University of Kent in the majestic, grandiose Canterbury Cathedral. My husband films bits and pieces with his phone to turn into a video clip and show to my family later: there is no way any of them would have been granted a UK visa to attend the graduation in person (I barely got mine!), so there’s only us two here.

*October 2014*

The janitor comes to clean my office in Ghent University (I work there as a postdoctoral assistant since July). He notices a small Ukrainian flag hanging off my bookshelf and asks in his broken Dutch, pointing to the flag, “Are you from Ukraine?” – “Yes”, I reply in my broken Dutch. – “Oh, I am so sorry for what is going on in your country. I am from Kosovo. I can relate to your experience. I can feel your pain.” I am deeply touched by his words and become all emotional, smiling back politely and thanking him. As he walks out again, my eyes fill up with tears. Now that I hear these simple words of compassion from him, I realise that he is the first one in my workplace to utter them.

*February 2016*

My two good friends and colleagues from Ukraine, Natalka and Katya, and I decide to co-edit a special issue on civil society in Ukraine post-Euromaidan. It will be a side-project for all three of us: Natalka works full-time for an international organisation; Katya works full-time for a Ukrainian think tank; and while I do work full-time at a university, civil society in Ukraine is not my primary research area. It will also be practically challenging, as we are based in three different cities and have no budget whatsoever for this. But we are so drawn by the idea and so committed to the “no one but us” slogan of the Maidan that we decide to do it.

We have selected contributions through an open call for papers and are in one of our multi-sited Skype conferences discussing the potential outlet. We agree right away that we do not want a journal with “soviet”, “communist”, “Eurasia” or anything with a third world flavour to it in the title. As a result, we have to cross off of our list many of the area-studies journals that could have been interested in the topic. We then agree that it would be best – indeed necessary – for our special issue to be published open access: that

way, also scholars in Ukraine and other countries in the region (who have little to no access to international academic journals) can read it. We cross off a few more potential outlets of our list. We also want it to be published as soon as it is ready, not wait in a publication queue for years, so we drop a few more journals with long waiting times. I don't remember which one of us proposed *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal* first, but we all love the idea right away. We get all excited at the idea of investing in Ukrainian academia and promoting a new journal of our alma mater at the same time! We are well aware that publishing in this journal will not score us any "hard points" in western academic metrics, which disregard pretty much everything that is not an article in an impact-factor journal. But we don't care: we have a bigger cause and longer-term goal in sight.

We fear we may lose some of the authors because the journal does not rank; and we do.

### *July 2017*

I go to China to teach a two-week course in the University Immersion Program at Sichuan University in Chengdu. This is my first trip "to the east of Moscow", so I am very curious and excited. To prepare for what is coming, I have long talks with my colleagues who taught at this summer school in the past and attend a training session "Dealing with China" (or something along those lines) offered at Ghent University. I am ready. Bring it on!

As I arrive in Chengdu and begin interacting with the Chinese hosts, it strikes me that – from their point of view – I have arrived *from the west*. To them, I am a "western professor". "Now, this is something new!"

I think to myself. I am so used to being the one *from the east* that I feel slightly misplaced and uncomfortable in this new status. I don't know *what* I was thinking before coming here, but I was not thinking of *that*.

On the second day, I meet Bonnie, my assistant for the coming two weeks. This is the first time she is “assisting a foreign professor” (which, I sense from her intonation, is an honourable task). She is truly fantastic. Without Bonnie, I would have been totally and utterly socially paralyzed, so I am very glad to have her on stand-by. And yet, I cannot help feeling some emotional discomfort about the whole set-up: how can I be *having* a Bonnie when I *am* a Bonnie? I look at Bonnie and I see myself ten years prior: a student in Kyiv, grateful for every and any opportunity to speak English to a rare guest-from-the-west (a native-speaker as a bonus), curious, eager, and enthusiastic, proud to show off the good sides of my country and struggling to conceal, justify or at least explain the not-so-good ones. I see someone who feels lesser and inferior by default, regardless of whether she is treated as such, before she is treated in any way at all.

I am blacklisted, I discover months later, for having touched upon politically sensitive issues in my classes, although we have been *explicitly* advised against doing so in the welcome session. Officially, my “please don't send her again” verdict was due to “poor student evaluations”, which, my students told me via email, they had never been asked to fill in. As I take my eyes off the computer screen and look through the window behind it, I bet you, I see the “invisible hand of the Communist Party”, which I could sense with my every cell every minute of my stay in China, show me a middle finger.

*November 2017*

I give a guest lecture on the conflict in Ukraine to a group of Master students at the Free University of Brussels. This is not my first lecture on the subject. Equipped with my previous experiences, I open the lecture with the following statement: “I am a young Ukrainian woman talking about root causes of the war in Ukraine. I know you will dismiss everything I say in the next two hours on accounts of age, nationality, and gender. Who am I as a young person to talk about tectonic shifts in international relations? Who am I as a Ukrainian to know and say anything ‘objective’ and ‘authoritative’ about Ukraine? Who am I as a woman to talk about war?” This opening has a stunning effect on my audience.

*January 2018*

It is a late evening at our research group’s annual midweek research seminar. The day sessions are over, the dinner is finished, and I am chatting about this and that with two colleagues of mine. Out of nowhere, the conversation turns to the question of Ukrainian language, and one of them authoritatively says, “Ukrainian is to Russian what West Flemish is to Dutch”. I freeze for a moment with a glass of red wine centimetres away from my mouth (I was about to take a sip), dumbfounded by the sudden statement. I have been asked the question “Is Ukrainian different from Russian?” about a million times, in all possible and impossible settings, and I have learned to take that one with a poker face; but this is a new low. I consider asking her what makes her think so. I consider countering her answer with one of my standard responses formulated over the years. For example, that Ukrainian and Russian technically (if you consider vocabulary, phonology, morphology, syntax and other elements of grammar) have less in common than do Italian and French or Italian and Spanish. Or that Ukrainian and Russian have less in common with

each other than they have with Polish (and that Ukrainian is actually closest to Belarusian). Or that, ironically, although Russian is the most widely known Slavic language, it is actually the least Slavic of the Slavic languages due to strong historic influences of the Finno-Ugric and the Tatar-Mongolian peoples and languages (and later Western European ones, too). Or that Ukrainian has 12 official dialects (and many unofficial ones), and we all know from linguistics that dialects do not have dialects. Or that, paradoxically, even though Ukrainian is often perceived as a “minority language”, there are about twice as many people speaking Ukrainian today than there are people speaking Dutch (even combined with Flemish and West Flemish, yes). I have many more sets of arguments up my sleeve. No, Ukrainian is not to Russian what West Flemish is to Dutch. Ukrainian is to Russian what Dutch is to German. But I don’t wish to engage in this conversation. I have had it so many times. It is always the same, always predictable. I could not be bothered, not tonight.

I un-freeze, take that sip of red wine, gaze away and say absolutely n-o-t-h-i-n-g. Ironically, we *are* in West Flanders at that moment – and the realisation of it makes me chuckle, so I almost choke on the wine.

### *February 2018*

Together with Gergana, we are working on a project on unintended consequences of EU external action. We have assembled a great team of scholars to investigate unintended consequences of EU external policies in their respective areas of expertise and are now preparing for the author workshop and two panels at an international conference after that to discuss the results.

Every time I tell someone about the project, I get to hear, “Oh, so you must be writing about the EU and the Euromaidan?!” I have to explain then that

I am not, in fact: the theoretical/conceptual part, which Gergana and I are in charge of, concerns EU external action in general, not EU policy towards the European Neighbourhood or Ukraine in particular. At first, I link this common perception to my research profile, which indeed, has a prominent Ukraine-component. As the question pops up again and again, however, I begin to wonder to what extent it reflects an assumption, seemingly held by so many fellow researchers, that I am somehow confined to the study of Ukraine, can and shall only generate country-specific knowledge, relevant (only) for those involved. I have always worked on Ukraine by choice, out of genuine curiosity and a strange sense of mission, and I was largely blind to the extent to which I was playing into a stereotype. It was not until I clearly stepped out of the box – also by choice, out of curiosity and a sense of mission (frustrated with the way we study EU engagement in third states, I decided to try and improve that at least a tad) – that I realised I was in one.

I grow so conscious of this implicit assumption that each time I hear the question anew, I fire back, “Oh, it has nothing to do with Ukraine!” (in a friendly, not angry tone).

### *April 2018*

I am accepted as a visiting scholar at the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University. I learn the news late on a Friday night. I am very tired, so I don't trust my own reading of the email and ask my husband to check if there is maybe a “no” or “not” or “un-” somewhere that I overlooked. He confirms that this is indeed a positive response. I am ecstatic. It is a dream come true. As we celebrate, my husband tells me that I spoke of going to Harvard at our first date 12 years ago. Apparently, I said, “I don't know when and in what capacity but I am going to Harvard”. I have no recollection of saying this whatsoever, but I readily believe him I did.

In the weeks that follow, I am careful not to look too happy around my colleagues at Ghent for fear they may think I am celebrating the going away part, which is not the case. I struggle to explain to them what Harvard's symbolic value is *to me*. I consider saying it as it is: the path to Harvard from where I come from, which is considered periphery by Ukrainians themselves, is much longer than from wherever it is that they come from (and I don't mean this in geographic terms). But I don't. Who am I to judge the length of their path? I only know the length of mine.

### *June 2018*

The 2018 FIFA World Cup is hosted by Russia. Like many Ukrainians, I boycott the event in solidarity with the dozens of Ukrainians held as political prisoners in Russian jails and in condemnation of Russia's conduct in Ukraine and pretty much everywhere else in the world. In contrast, my all-Belgian colleagues are following the World Cup closely: Belgium has qualified for the tournament (which is a rare thing!) and has a good chance of doing remarkably well (which is equally rare!). I find this an alienating situation for me, exhausting emotionally, and intellectually. A part of me contemplates sending out an email shaming my colleagues and calling upon them to “come to senses” and boycott the event that gives Russia's horrible regime international legitimisation. We are a bunch of international relations and development scholars! Shouldn't we be taking a stand on something like this?! Another part of me begs *me* to “come to senses”, calm down, and accept the fact that my battle is not their battle and my pain is not their pain. “Who am I to poison their truly unique moment of Belgian national unity and pride?” I challenge myself.

Football is all our exceptionally euphoric group talks about during lunches and coffee breaks. I chew my food and sip my drink quietly, holding it up once again, so as not to spoil everyone's fun.

*September 2018*

I am in a research seminar on critical ethnography at Ghent University. We are asked to formulate a dilemma related to our research and positioning. I formulate mine: “What am I: a Ukrainian scholar working in the west, or a western scholar coming from Ukraine, or a westernised Ukrainian scholar, or what?” The group tells me I am “all and none of these at once” and ought to embrace it. “Easier said than done”, I say to myself as I nod back to the group. By the end of the seminar, I decide to write an autoethnography on this.

A non-ethnographer that I am, I do not have a diary to turn to. And yet, once I sit down and create a Word document, once “the gates are lifted”, crystal-clear memories flood my mind, and I write, write, write. Somewhat to my own surprise, I remember episodes, dates, places, names, quotes like it all happened yesterday. Ideas of memories and episodes to include pop up in my mind one after another, also when I am busy with something mundane – so I regularly have to stop whatever it is I am doing and rush to my desk to note it down. The few people who know I am working on this warn me that it will be a painful and traumatic process; so, I observe myself attentively. I make a pact with myself: if it is too hurtful or makes me feel bitter, if I notice that I write in frustration, in anger, to spite – I immediately stop. But no, it is not painful, and I do not feel heavy, or empty, or bitter. Quite to the contrary: I feel lighter with every word I write. It is actually great fun, perhaps the most fun I have ever had writing (at least, professionally). What a load I have been carrying and what a timely idea to off-load it!

I finish the first draft of this article in less than two weeks, working on it on the margins of my regular workload. It takes many months of reflection and soul-searching after that to finish it.

## 2.6 How Post-Colonial is Post-Soviet Central Asia?

Jakub Stepaniuk

### *Introduction*

The nature of such historical events as signing the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, organising the Berlin Conference in 1885, or concluding agreements between Great Britain and Russia at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century over Afghanistan seems pretty analogous. All of them assumed arbitrary division of remote lands between great powers seeking access to free natural resources and unlimited labour force. Today, the academic environment tends to be quite consistent when it comes to acknowledging the mission of “civilised” Europe to “uncivilised” Africa or Asia to be nothing else but imposition of own cultural norms and violent subjugation of indigenous populations that consequently led to their enslavement and exploitation. Everything seemed to be neatly inscribed into the ideology of imperialism.

Some scholars would define the rivalry between Tsarist Russia and Great Britain over the control of Central Asia as the “Great Game”. In order to avoid direct confrontation between these two powers, a series of agreements and minor protocols were signed in 1873, 1885, and 1895 (Baumann, 1993). They assumed the territory of Afghanistan to serve as a buffer zone, recognising territories located to the north to become an exclusive sphere of Russian influence, and the area of nowadays Pakistan and India to be conferred under British administration. This resembles a classical scenario of colonial diplomacy known in Europe for decades, not to say centuries.

Nonetheless, there is a very interesting phenomenon to notice. The framing of the British conquest of Indian and Pakistani territories in terms of colonialism remains rather obvious in contemporary English historiography whereas there is a small revisionist minority of historians and politicians who would still endeavour to undermine these claims advocating the missionary purposes of the conquests. On the contrary, modern Russian historiography reacts quite allergically when someone inscribes tsarist conquest or Soviet control of Central Asia into the set of colonial practices. There are a lot of reasons contributing to the emergence of blurred or hybrid concepts of colonialism within Russian context. One of them is the Leninist ideological redefinition of imperialist colonialism that was unequivocally condemned and rejected from the Soviet political agenda. Additionally, western historiography became even more ambiguous during the post-1945 period when Moscow's policy towards other Soviet republics, socialist satellites, and allied regimes was indicated for utilising imperialist and colonial practices in hopes of undermining Soviet legitimacy to control these areas.

As a result, we can observe a plethora of contradicting interpretations of the Soviet presence in Central Asia today. It has direct repercussions on defining intergovernmental relations between Moscow and Central Asian republics evincing with ambiguous Russian claim to treat the region in terms of exclusive sphere of its socio-political and economic influences. In the following paragraphs, I will try to shed some light on the shape and extents of the hybrid interpretation of Russian/Soviet colonialism towards Central Asia by referring to the aspects serving as subsequent sections of the paper. These include: the Russian perception of geopolitical space, the contextualisation of tsarist conquests, the nature of Soviet administration, and contemporary challenges.

*Russian perception of geopolitical space*

In this part, I would like to mention two very significant aspects of the specificity of the Russian perception of geopolitical space since they might explain a unique understanding of colonialism that deviates from interpretations offered by western models. The first concept refers to the words of a tsarist historian, Sergey Solovyov, who claimed that Russia is a “country that colonises itself” (Morozov, 2015). A sort of inspiration for making this unprecedented statement can be found in Prussian policies towards its eastern territories populated by Slavs and Balts. To put it shortly, Germans needed a stable frontier separating them from Russia that was to be established by a massive purchase of land from indigenous peasants, cultural Germanisation and imposed resettlements (Koehl, 1953). It was defined in terms of an “internal colonisation” and differed slightly from the Solovyov’s reflexive interpretation of Russian colonialism but can give a general idea of a process that does not have to be necessarily directed at overseas areas.

Moving forward, the reflexivity of Russian colonialism refers to the obliteration of classical categorisation into subjects and objects of the colonial process defined in terms of the centre colonising its outskirts. According to Solovyov, Russia was defined by its extensive territory whose stability stemmed not only from peaceful borderlands but also from the core that had to be constantly resettled and recolonised. By applying these ideas to the ancient history of Russia, he claimed that the first state structures lacked a centralised decision-making place and were marked by relentless dichotomies between Kiev and Novgorod, or Moscow and Petersburg (Etkind, 2015).

Another historian, Afanasy Shchapov, continued Solovyov’s discourse on Russian self-colonialism by adding that the main determinants of the directions of territorial expansion were defined by physical geography and

ecology. Precisely speaking, the hunt for such essential survival products as fish and fur as well as the exploration of potentially arable land that entailed a rising phenomenon of deforestation were key elements that guided Russian settlers. Quite importantly for the whole analysis, Shchapov mentioned also inevitable ethnic mixing with sparse indigenous tribes (Tlostanova, 2018).

Vasily Klyuchevsky, a significant figure representing the subsequent generation of late 19<sup>th</sup> century tsarist historians, attempted to readjust Solovyov's and Shchapov's interpretation of the Russian self-colonialism to the context of his era marked by the conquest of the steppe and the mountainous areas in the Caucasus and Central Asia. By referring to decentralisation and ecological preconditions, Klyuchevsky argued that Russian expansionism was defined by the shapelessness of space and a consequent tendency to semi-settledness (Klyuchevsky, 1956).

How do all of these concepts relate to the topic of Central Asia? First of all, the reflexive nature of territorial development of the Russian state embraces the Central Asian steppe as a logically subsequent piece of land to be incorporated and settled for the sake of establishing a peaceful and stable borderland area that potentially offered new natural resources. Empirically speaking, the establishment of the line of strongholds between Orenburg and Omsk, which enabled the gradual colonisation of modern northern Kazakhstan in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was as natural as the subjugation of the Khanates of Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Secondly, since these conquests are perceived as a common evolution of the Russian state, they are uncritically approved by contemporary Russian historiography. The source of further discrepancies with British or French schools of post-colonialism is entailed with the later Leninist interpretation of subjugation of Central Asia, which completely jettisoned the idea of

self-colonialism, identifying anything colonial with the imperialist and capitalist west. Hence, this is the reason today's Russian historians avoid inscribing the conquest of Central Asia into colonialism at any cost.

Another conceptual ambiguity around colonialism in Central Asia is entailed with the idea of Eurasianism. Geographically speaking, the definition of Eurasia is quite simple, defined in terms of a physical unity of both the European and the Asian continents. More significant for this work is the socio-political explanation, firstly formulated within Russian émigré communities after the October Revolution by such intellectuals as Nikolai Trubetzkoy and preached until today by many nationalist circles including Aleksandr Dugin's. In simple words, Eurasianism assumes the existence of a separate socio-political sphere serving as a counterbalance towards both Western European civilisation as well as Eastern Asia (understood as China or Japan). In terms of territory, it usually refers to the post-Soviet space; however, its borders are rather malleable and might include other countries (Bassin, 2003).

The definition of a Eurasian geopolitical space as a united and single sphere of common cultural norms and values gives many implications to the relations between Russia and Central Asia. Firstly, by referring to the abovementioned shapelessness and semi-settledness, it assumes a shared cultural community constituted by Russian and Central Asian nomadic nations. Secondly, the continental nature of the Eurasian space stands in opposition to the island mentality embodied by the Atlantic western sphere, as well as the East Asian sphere, concentrated around the Pacific Ocean. Thirdly, ethnic mixing and cultural cohesion assume as well unity between the normative systems of Islam and Orthodoxy and the union of Slavic, Turkic and Finnic tribes. In short, discourses on classically conceptualised colonialism fail to really fit into the context of Eurasia as the whole space is defined as single and united.

*Tsarist conquests of Central Asia*

There are a lot of unanswered questions and dilemmas regarding the Russian conquest of Central Asia. Was the “Great Game” an actual rivalry between contrary Russo–British interests where both powers struggled to take control over Central Asia and India? Were the escapades of military and intelligence emissaries crossing the unassailable peaks of the Pamir Mountains dictated by the desire of colonising large swaths of desolate steppe and inarable highlands?

The Leninist interpretation of the Russian conquests of Central Asia in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century offers a quite simple and logical account that falls into capitalist and imperialist narrative. Economic crisis induced by the so-called cotton hunger caused by the American Civil War exerted a huge pressure on Moscow’s manufacturers to find a new source of cheap raw materials and a market to sell their products. With such interpretations, Soviet historiography explained the reasons for the conquest of Tashkent in 1865 that paved the way to subjugating fertile soils in the surrounding area and taking control over vast cotton plants along the Syr-Darya River. If so, what was the reason for conquering the Khanates of Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand in subsequent years whose economic benefit of being subordinated to Moscow was highly disproportionate to the expenditures spent on demanding military operations?

Bearing in mind the assumption that one of the greatest demonstrations of power in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the amount of controlled territory, the struggle for the status of becoming the largest global empire between Russia and Great Britain seems to be a more persuasive argument to claim why both countries devoted so many resources to control economically useless provinces. Were the Russian conquests of Central Asia then actual colonialist practices? Academic literature on this topic remains quite polarised and fluctuates between two extremes, the first offering

the missionary framing of Russian as newcomers bringing civilisation, development and stability, the second advocating for a heroic combat of indigenous communities who struggled to preserve their own cultural autonomy.

As suggested in the article published by Alexander Morrison, the story of establishment of the so-called tsarist Turkestan on the provinces of Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand is made up from a set of ideologically and pragmatically inconsistent microhistories (Morrison, 2014). On the one hand, before the ultimate military conquest, some of these areas had already become economically dependent on Russian merchantry, which was brought about by internal insurgencies and crises. Therefore, some of the local populations actually believed that the emergence of Russian administration could initiate a period of stability and economic development and thus supported the Tsarist army during the invasions. On the other hand, one cannot forget about the many attempts of resistance that led to bloody massacres as the one in Gök Tepe in 1881 when thousands of Turkmen soldiers and civilians were killed by the tsarist army (Derekov, 2015).

### *Central Asia under Soviet administration*

The first years of Soviet administration in Central Asia seemed to put an end to tsarist imperial policies. Conceptually speaking, Leninism, at least in theory, attempted to offer a structure of an equal and cohesive multicultural society. In opposition to western capitalist powers, the Soviet system sought to showcase an alternative reality where living under the same governmental roof did not necessarily lead to ethnic segregation and exploitation of peripheries by the core.

This was to be achieved by a twofold mechanism. In terms of ideology, Moscow promoted proletarian internationalism where the interest of the

working class would prevail over racism and nationalism. This was mainly aimed at eliminating potential hostile sentiment stemming from Islamic and Turkic populations towards the Russians, still remembering the violent tsarist conquests of sovereign Khanates. In terms of administration, the Soviets promoted the revitalisation and modernisation of national identities claiming reconstruction of culturally “backwards” communities whose “backwardness” was a result of tsarist imperialism. Hence, a federalist state model had been introduced where every socialist Soviet and autonomous republic was represented in the central government. Moreover, popularisation of national awareness was to be implemented by promotion of local languages, massive construction of educational systems, or eradication of illiteracy.

The results of these policies were rather far from idealised strategies aimed at eliminating discriminative and exploitative colonialism (Myer, 2003). There is a plethora of various socio-political empirical instances to portray this. Firstly, instances of ethnic mixing such as mixed marriages were extremely rare, whereas communities of local populations and newcomers seemed to function as parallel social realities. Secondly, these divisions were demonstrated in many Central Asian urban spaces as European newcomers in such cities as Tashkent usually settled in modernist quarters whereas Turkic communities remained in their traditional *mahallas*. Thirdly, there was a very visible phenomenon of ethnic stratification of labour where Russians controlled the majority of administrative positions, leaving the hardest physical jobs to the locals. This tendency was only strengthened during the Second World War when a plethora of factories along with their workforce was moved from the western borderlands occupied by Nazi Germany to Central Asia, which only deepened the sense of alienation. Fourthly, the massive collectivisation of agriculture was very often opposed by the indigenous nomad tribes, which required an even bigger influx of Russian labour force. Fifthly, the Red Army that stationed in Central

Asia was made up of a majority of Russian soldiers. The sense of occupation was only increased when the Kazakh steppe was chosen as the main localisation of nuclear testing that led to a disastrous contamination of the natural environment and irradiation of many local communities. Sixthly, the administrative disintegration of Turkestan into Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Turkmen republics together with the promotion of distinctive cultures and languages was aimed at weakening the potential movement of pan-Turkism perceived as a threat to Soviet territorial integrity, and thus Moscow's internal security. Seventhly, ideological eradication of religion from the Soviet political agenda materialised in the elimination of many vernacular cultural traditions being deeply ingrained in local Islam. Therefore, persecuting confessions of faith led to an implicit imposition of Russian and western normative structures. Eighthly, Central Asian societies also experienced cultural Russification since Soviet arts and popular culture including cinematography or theatre were produced and transmitted from Russian cultural centres. Finally, Central Asia was also a subject of linguistic Russification in manifold terms. This included not only the implementation of the compulsory teaching of Russian, which became the exclusive *lingua franca* in administrative, military, or cultural matters but also the introduction of Russian vocabulary in local Turkic languages affected by comprehensive standardisation practices.

The combination of above-mentioned empirical political, economic, and cultural arguments clearly demonstrates that Moscow implicitly used internal Russian hegemony veiled under the Soviet state structure and the communist ideology to conduct a multifaceted colonisation of Central Asia. Some would argue against claiming that ethnic separation was a norm for multicultural societies or that colonialism practiced in British or French terms was much more invasive and violent. Therefore, it is presumably the most accurate to define Soviet practices of colonisation in Central Asia as a hybrid mechanism conducted tacitly, in some parts probably inadvertently.

*Contemporary challenges of Post-Colonial Post-Soviet Central Asia*

As I have already mentioned in the text, modern Russian historiography decided to uphold the Leninist stance that rejected the assumption of Central Asia being colonised. By accusing the western powers of utilising neo-colonial practices in their frameworks of foreign policy directed at African and Asian countries, Moscow attempts to delegitimise projects like the EU's Neighbourhood Policies, military interventions, and state-building strategies. At the same time, acknowledging that Soviet or Russian control of Central Asia falls into the category of classical colonialism would strongly delegitimise Moscow's geopolitical projects, especially the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) or the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Many scholars mention these organisations in terms of cumbersome imitations of western institutions, like the EU or NATO, undermining the alleged voluntariness of other members such as Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan (Roberts & Moshes, 2016). A lot of these arguments are saturated with a post-Cold War bias suggesting the establishment of EAEU or CSTO serve to prolong the post-colonial post-Soviet control of Central Asia or the Russian immediate neighbourhood since the original idea of restoring the unified Eurasian order was firstly formulated by Nursultan Nazarbayev in 1994 (Tarr, 2016). Nevertheless, it is true that Russia remains the key decisive power, reaping a majority of the benefits, while other members are left without viable alternatives.

Analogically to the instrumentalisation of the myth of the "Great Game" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some theorists tend to ascribe the sense of rivalry over post-colonial Central Asia to be recolonised by the aspiring China and the west, to some extent also potentially by Turkey and Iran, in the wake of faltering Russian influence. Whereas it is true that Central Asia became recently the subject of increased economic and political interest from the side of various foreign powers, it would be, at least for the time being, an exaggeration to claim that such powers compete with each other to

dominate the region. First of all, Chinese economic investments are quite complementary with Russia preserving its security interests (Melnykovska, Plamper & Schweickert, 2012). Secondly, Central Asia does not seem to be a priority in the foreign policy agendas of the EU or the US whereas Turkish and Iranian economic capacities are too weak to challenge Russian or Chinese positions in the area.

### *Conclusion*

In this work, I tried to evaluate the applicability of the tsarist conquest and the Soviet control of Central Asia to the colonial narratives. Whereas many historical events can serve as accurate arguments to claim that Central Asia was colonised by tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, the picture is more complex in comparative perspective as it does not correspond to the classical examples of British or French colonisation of Africa and Asia. There is a probability that in case other powers would show more interest in restraining or challenging Russian political and economic role in Central Asia in the future, the post-colonial narrative of Moscow exploiting the region with the use of institutional instruments of EAEU and CSTO replicating Soviet hegemony could rise.

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## 2.7 The abduction of Europa – Europeanness in Central and Eastern Europe

Valentin Luntumbue

I was once leaving my Saint Petersburg apartment and, as often, shut the door behind me without double-closing it. We were living on the third floor of an old house facing the Griboyedov Canal, in a very quiet neighbourhood by the Admiralty Shipyards. As I crossed the Rimsky-Korsakov Prospect to get to the bus stop, I noticed someone had texted our housemates group chat. One of my roommates had written, “*Guys, lock the door behind you when you leave. You’re not in Europe anymore*”.

### *Doors and windows*

In the years 2014 and 2015, I lived and studied in Russia, before moving (shortly) to Ukraine. It was the first time I had set foot in Russia, and discovered the country for myself. I walked into it trying my best to keep my apprehensions at bay – as it felt both like an unknown place and unspecifically familiar. Many families have strange legends about their origins, and my mother’s was just “*we came from the East*”. I thus went to Russia feeling almost as if I was reconnecting with some nebulous familial past.

For most of the time I have spent in Russia, I was a student at the Saint Petersburg State University’s School of International Relations. My campus was situated within the exuberant Smolny Convent. Like some other universities in Russia’s main cities, it was a rare island of relative intellectual freedom within the country’s public discourse, though located

not that far away from the European University at Saint Petersburg. The latter has been regularly submitted to pressure by government officials and was even forced to close down for a short time in 2008.<sup>1</sup>

In Smolny, it was interesting to hear Russian academics tackling international relations from their perspective – and articulating their relationship to Europe. “Here in Saint Petersburg, we say that Peter the Great opened a window on Europe, but just a window, not a door!” said one of my professors. “The Tatar Yoke made Russia lag behind Europe for 200 “years” said another. Another one of them asked us to resolve the disputes between Slavophiles and Westernists, in a paper on the topic of “is Russia a European or Eurasian country?”, essentially asking us to settle a 300-year-old controversy in 300 words or less.

The question of Russia’s identity was presented as both tragic and too large to be comprehended fully by the rational mind. And Russia’s relation to Europe was framed from a position of paradoxical subalternity. What was once the world’s largest European empire had also been long considered a backwater periphery by its Western counterparts. The racist caricature of the Russians as an Eastern horde had been in parts internalised, but also reclaimed and re-appropriated.

My response to the assignment was a practical one, inspired by a concept I had gathered from one of my sociology courses: Russia had a salient identity. Just like people have a registry of identities they switch between, like masks, according to the situation, Russia too was both European and Eurasian according to its interests and the wider context.

Starting with Peter, the Russian Empire had historically shown itself keen to contend with other European powers and thus presented himself as an equal to them. This inclination then somehow shifted under reactionary

emperor Alexander III. The Soviet era had been a complex one with Russia adopting both stances alternatively. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia had to reinvent itself once again. The crumbling of the Soviet Empire was pinned on its overextension in supporting the Third World, which was now seen with enmity. Russia turned to the West and to the transatlantic international structures, hoping to “re-join” Europe. Following the ultimate failure of Boris Yeltsin’s presidency and the crises in the Balkans among others... Russia broke away again. Under the Putin era, Eurasianism, an ideology championed by some more reactionary Slavophiles, would make a comeback, and be consecrated by the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (formally) in January 2015.

This crude overview is easily refined by resorting to some of the concepts scholars from the Russian Federation use themselves to frame that reality – the most apt being Madina Tlostanova’s *Janus-faced Empire*.<sup>2</sup> Like the two-faced Roman deity of war and peace, Russia has two faces: the one it shows the West and the one it shows the East. To the West it showed a mask sculpted by its inferiority complex and the unflattering portrait imposed upon a peripheric Russia through the Eurocentric hegemony of its European counterparts. To the East, confronting the conquered peoples of Central Asia and the Caucasus, further in the *Orient*, Russia could wear the mask of a European power, bringing with it Europeanness and modernity. Indeed, to the Kazakh or the Chinese what were the Russians if not Europeans?

Europeanness was thus viewed alternatively as a colonising force coming from the West to reshape Russia in the likeness of Western Europe at the price of its soul, and as a civilising force to be wielded against the colonised people of the Empire – and later the Soviet Union. In both cases, Europeanness does come out as somehow alienating and above all a function of colonisation, imposed or otherwise.

### *European Omphalos*

This almost tragic relation to Europeanness was profoundly contrasted with what I saw in Central Europe. I never really did use the term “Central Europe” before living there. To a Westerner like me, who only properly discovered the region on the eve of the 2004 Enlargement, Central Europe meant the Rhineland, and anything east of Berlin was Eastern Europe.

From what I had gathered, the term, though way older and prominently used in reference to the Hapsburg Empire, had been reignited and reclaimed in the anti-Soviet movements of the 1980s – especially in Milan Kundera’s 1984 essay, *The Tragedy of Central Europe*. It reaffirmed the profound Europeanness of Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Hungary, and framed Soviet occupation as an unwilling divorce from their true place of belonging.<sup>3</sup>

When the People’s Democracies came to an end in 1989 and Central European countries made their decisions to join the Euro-Atlantic international structures clear, the consensus was that they had found their way back to Europe. It was as their history had been put on hold for 45 years and they were finally getting welcomed back into the European fold. While, to Russians, Europeanness was a colonising force alienating them from their identity, to the Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks and Balts... Europeanness was a force for emancipation from the Soviet yoke, an almost decolonising tool that allowed them to recover their true identity and renew with their national sovereignty. This impulsion crystallised chiefly with the formation of the Visegrád Group in 1991, which furthered their integration to the European Union and still acts as a potent advocacy group within the European institutions.

The idea of Central Europe was not only pertinent from a geographical perspective (who would still lump Russia and Poland within a same nebulous “Eastern Europe” anymore?) it also reveals a distinct way of being

European. It is a reclamation, a rejection of being considered a periphery. After all, anything can feel like the centre depending on where you are standing. Poland has as much a claim to being the centre of the continent as Germany does.

It also purports that Europe's true north is not to its West. It can be on a playful note, such as Vilnius' local tourism board's decision to market the city as "the G-spot of Europe" since 2018.<sup>4</sup> It can also turn into a claim to be Europe's true civilisational centre. The illiberal turn taken by Fidesz' Hungary or PiS' Poland has seen those forces and their allies champion a rather traditionalist interpretation of what it means to be European. Liberal commentators in the West sometimes pin this resurgent nationalism on atavisms and essentialisms, rather than try to understand it in the particular environment of Central Europe – an ecosystem at times scarce in alternatives. In post-socialist countries where leftist traditions are often viewed with distrust, reactionaries have more room to manoeuvre around liberals, whose politics often fail to deliver for the many.

Inversely, reactionaries do understand the importance of regulating the ecosystem that allowed them to prosper. In recent years, liberal institutions in Central Europe have been hindered by the powers that be – the most famous example of that trend being the case of the *Central European University*. The institution, founded in 1991 in Budapest by Hungarian-American billionaire George Soros as part of his efforts to diffuse liberal ideas in the ex-Eastern Bloc, was relocated to Vienna in 2019, following new regulations introduced by the Hungarian government in 2017. Interestingly enough, a brand-new private university is set to open in 2021 in Warsaw, the *Collegium Intermarium*. Taking its name from an old geopolitical project championed by Polish nationalists, the institution will be aiming at providing elite learning to the future reactionary elite of Central Europe. The institution appears to be an endeavour of *Ordo Iuris*,

a fundamentalist Catholic NGO, hard at work in Poland and lending its weight to numerous conservative bills, particularly on the issue of abortion.<sup>5</sup> *Ordo Iuris* might also appear to have played a role in the establishment of Poland's infamous "LGBT-free zones". It is also noteworthy that the Polish capital is already home to two liberal private universities of reputation, the new Varsovian institution intends to compete with: the *Collegium Civitas* and the *College of Europe*.

This venture echoes like a miniature of the wider project of developing and solidifying an alternative hegemony to Western European liberalism in Central Europe. Ironically, this project is true to both Kundera's vision of a re-centred Central Europe free from a simple East–West dichotomy, and somewhat in tune with 21<sup>st</sup>-century Russian nationalism, which also espouses and champions traditionalist values in contrast to the liberal West.

### *Neu-Berlins and Borderlands*

The idea of Europeanness is a contested one, but rarely is it as contested as it is within those countries that are, in popular imagination, stuck between "Europe's" *neighbourhoods* and Russia's *Near Abroad*. The European identity of societies from the Bug River to the Caucasus has become fodder for culture wars not unlike those found in the West.

Like to Russia, Europeanness is to those countries a salient identity. In Georgia, Ukraine or Moldova, Europeanness has been mobilised by the ruling classes as a way to counterweight Russia's influence, whose encroachment within the region's many "grey zones" (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Donbas...) has been of concern. Others, like in Armenia, Azerbaijan, or Belarus, have been walking a fine line between two informal blocs visibly at odds. During my first visit to Kyiv on the anniversary of the Maidan Revolution, I was in awe at the number of EU

flags floating in the centre of the Ukrainian capital. The Ministry of Foreign affairs itself was adorned with huge European banners. The apparently unsolvable identity dilemma the country had been embroiled in since at least the Orange Revolution was promptly resolved when *Little Green Men*, operatives acting on the behest of the Russian executive, spearheaded the invasion of Crimea and the Donbas.

But one would miss the forest for the trees by only looking at it at the foreign policy level. Within Eastern European societies, Europeanness has been appropriated by traditionally liberal groups and activists, associated with progressiveness, and opposed to anything tied to Russia. The “Europe” that is mobilised is a nebulous and essentialised idea to be opposed to backwardness or Russian influence.<sup>6</sup> Or, as one Azerbaijani activist once told me: “By Europe, we do not mean a concrete country like Germany or the Netherlands, but rather a symbol, a set of good ideas”.

Several cities across Eastern Europe have been undergoing makeovers in recent years, to better inhabit what they perceive is European urbanity – embracing the idea of pedestrian zones and swelling with hipster cafés. The change might be warranted, as Soviet cities were organised differently for a different purpose. I have seen both Tbilisi and Kyiv being called “the New-Berlin” (a shorthand for cool cities) for their bustling contemporary culture and art scenes or their busy electronic music venues. But again, so have been Belgrade, Warsaw, Budapest, and half the Baltic capitals.<sup>7</sup> Oddly, this display of urban Europeanness marking a secession from Russia’s hegemonic model has not spared Moscow itself. The Russian capital has been subject to some extensive urban transformation projects in the late 2010s, especially prior to the 2018 World Cup. Those peaked in 2016, on the night of February 8 to 9, during what was dubbed “The Night of the Long Shovels” when dozens of kiosks and makeshift shops were destroyed. Said kiosks had appeared in the crisis-stricken

1990s, in space left empty by Soviet planners, around metro stations or large avenues, and were usually installed without a permit. When I returned to Moscow before the pandemic, after leaving it years prior, I felt like walking into a different city.

Culture wars around Europeanness have solidified around several issues, but none so virulently as anything related to LGBTQI+ matters. Often, in the absence of more substantial material reforms, the organisation of successful Pride marches has been held as a powerful signal of progress. For example, the Tbilisi Pride week organised in the Georgian capital has been touted as a clear sign of the Caucasian country's stern European path. The three attempted Tbilisi Pride marches have however been outright attacked by Orthodox, far-right activists, and the clergy in 2013, 2019, and 2021. The clashes have been largely portrayed as a confrontation between pro-European liberals and pro-Russian reactionaries. Despite some frequent Russian sympathies, however, many of said reactionaries were Georgian nationalists before anything else and usually opposed to Russia, a former colonial overlord that occupies a fifth of Georgia's territory. Georgian ultraconservatives often rather take their inspirations from far-right and Christian nationalist Western movements like the Italian *Lega* or the German *Alternative für Deutschland*.<sup>8</sup> They have also, however, fully co-opted the concept of *Gayropa*, a derogative term pioneered by Russian conservatives to deride Western Europe's perceived queer-friendly attitudes that have been largely exported across borders.

The ambiguity of Europeanness in the Caucasus and the way it finds its place into identity binaries is not new. The cliché but classic novel *Ali and Nino*<sup>9</sup>, telling the epic love story between a young Azeri aristocrat and a Russianised Georgian princess against the background of the Great War and a crumbling of the Russian Empire, is an early illustration of how easily identities can crystallise in borderlands. Neither settling well in

Tbilisi, a city that is too essentially European and progressive for Ali, nor in Persia, a land that is too conservative for the modern women that is Nino, the couple finds their way back to their home city of Baku – the perfect balance between West and East, Europe and Asia. Seen from the banks of the Caspian Sea, the relative “periphery” that is Georgia seemed like Western Europe, while Baku was at the centre of a new spectrum.

It is worth pointing that the novel ends with the fall of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic, one of the republics that emerged from the disintegration of the Tsarist Empire. It was a progressive, western-oriented state, and also the first in the Muslim world to grant women the right to vote in 1918. Like its neighbour the (Menshevik) Democratic Republic of Georgia, it is often touted as a first experiment in state sovereignty and ideal to strive towards, as well as a proof of today’s Azerbaijan or Georgia’s valid claims to modernity, and sometimes to Europeanness – although their current politics have very little in common with early-20<sup>th</sup> century social democracy.

### *Europa across the waves*

In the euro-optimist years of the late 1990s and early 2000s, I was taught that Europe got its name from the Phoenician princess of the eponymous Greek myth. I was also told the story of Europa taken away from Tyre to Crete, across the waves, by a bull-shaped Zeus, denoted Europe’s ties to the East. Depending on who told the story, it could have been a rather Eurocentric way of appropriating the legacy of Levantine civilisations and make Europe their true successor (rather than their actual descendants), or inversely, highlighting Europe’s voyaging and multifocal nature, its history of diversity and migrations.

The ambivalent symbol of Europa on the bull has been adorning European institutions' buildings for years. And the Council of Europe has been using it since at least the 1950s. The likeness of the Levantine princess can also be found on the current *Europa* series of euro banknotes. A modern abstract fountain sculpture by Belgian sculptor Olivier Strebelle named *the Abduction of Europa* also stands in the middle of the Square of Europe in Moscow, between Kievsky station and the Moskva. And despite Russia's complicated relationship to Europeanness, it doesn't feel out of place. After all, one of the most beautiful pieces of art inspired by the myth is Russian artist Valentin Serov's 1910 painting *The Abduction of Europa*.<sup>10</sup>

Europeanness too is an ambivalent concept. It is a contentious term both between states and within them. It is a floating signifier, around which often crystallise the many contradictions of the continent. It's been both decried as a colonising force and wielded as one by Russia, as well as held by some as a vehicle for self-determination in ex-Soviet satellites and former Tsarist imperial peripheries. In what it says and what it doesn't, it reveals the in-betweens and the fault lines of European identity. It also shows how varied and conflicting the ways of being European are.

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## Part III. A Dialogue of the Second and Third Worlds

In the Summer of 1935, a young and penniless Aimé Césaire, missing his homeland – the French island of Martinique, was feeling homesick. One of his friends, a Croatian student named Petar Guberina, offered the future founder of the *négritude* to take him with him to Yugoslavia for the holidays. Initially feeling like a fish out of water, Césaire was welcome by Guberina's entire family and taken on a tour of the Dalmatian coast, whose beauty astonished him and reminded him of the Caribbeans. As he started to feel at home, he pointed to a particularly beautiful island and asked his friend its name. "Martiniska" answered Petar. Both Césaire's home and the Dalmatian island got their name from Saint-Martin. He joked "I haven't had enough money to be able to set foot in Martinique in five years, but now I have come back to Martiniska in Yugoslavia!" The Martinican writer would then start writing his masterwork *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Notebook of a Return to My Native Land).

In this last part, we set out to confront both the "Western" and "Eastern" decolonial traditions, have them dialogue and come to a head – find out where their differences lie. Is it reductive to consider decolonialism in the East an academic venture, compared to a more grassroots trend in movements linked to the Global South?

We also explore the rich and complex history of Socialist and Third World cooperation in the fight against imperialism, as this dialogue is far from new. Is this common history ground for coalition and mutual understanding? After all, British industrial capitalism wasn't only fuelled by the cotton harvested with African slave labour on stolen Native American land and the riches of the Indian subcontinent – but also by the many raw resources extracted by Russian serf labour.

## 3.1 The Non-Aligned Movement, the Soviet Union and decolonisation in Africa

Adrian Waters

### *Introduction*

The Cold War period saw the African continent liberating itself from the shackles of colonialism and taking matters into its own hands. Decolonisation was a crucial factor that ensured the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), an ambitious political group encompassing Third World countries in search of an alternative to the bipolar international system that sprang up after World War Two. Many of its aims, especially those related to colonialism, were shared by one of the two superpowers, i.e. the Soviet Union which was at the time a key actor in providing assistance to newly-independent African states. Indeed, some members of the NAM had close ties with the USSR and its allies. This behaviour arguably undermined the principle of non-alignment. In this chapter, the ways in which both the NAM and the Soviet Union contributed to the process of decolonisation during the Cold War will be compared and contrasted. It will start with an overview of how decolonisation and certain independent African countries, notably Egypt, played a part in the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement. This will be followed by a section on the USSR's ideological standpoint on colonialism and the concept of non-alignment, before proceeding onto an examination of how the two entities in question dealt with decolonisation. The chapter will conclude with a case study of Namibia that will be used to establish how the aims and behaviours of the NAM and the Soviet Union overlapped.

### *How decolonisation fostered the Non-Aligned Movement*

By the time the Second World War ended in 1945 most of Africa remained under European colonial rule. However, the tide was already turning against colonialism due to three reasons. Firstly, the major imperial powers, like Belgium, Britain, France and Italy, were not so strong anymore.<sup>1</sup> These countries were socially and economically exhausted by armed conflicts and their citizens had started to question their importance on the world stage.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the rising super-powers, the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), who had never occupied any land in Africa, were unsympathetic to European imperialism.<sup>3</sup> Many Americans disliked this phenomenon since their state had fought for independence from Britain. Colonialism also entailed less freedom and free trade which Americans value. At the same time, numerous white Americans did not think that non-whites could govern themselves if they were not aided by those of European origin. As the Cold War unfolded, Washington became concerned that postcolonial rulers would join the Soviet camp. In fact, the USSR supported the liberation movements in African colonies and some of these radicalised following the Soviet example.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, during the wars that involved certain parts of the world up until that point, many Africans learnt about the Western way of life as students or as soldiers. African men and women who went to Western universities discussed ideas of free choice and democratic government when World War Two was being fought in defence of these principles. In August 1941, the Atlantic Charter was issued by the US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the UK prime minister Winston Churchill declaring that every nation had the right “to choose the form of government under which they lived”.<sup>5</sup> Churchill wanted to exclude the British empire from the Charter, but was overridden by Roosevelt. Educated Africans who read the document were encouraged to think of their own countries and it soon became clear to them that colonial rule had to be opposed after they returned home. These factors resulted in the *unscrambling* of Africa, as a contrast to the *scramble*

of the 19th century when the continent was divided among the European powers. In 1945, only four African countries were independent (Egypt, Liberia, Ethiopia and the Union of South Africa), but by 1976 the number rose to 47.<sup>6</sup> It cannot be denied therefore that the start of the Cold War happened in parallel with the process of decolonisation for various reasons which forced Western European countries to relinquish control over their respective empires, leading to the formation of new states in the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia and Africa.<sup>7</sup>

So, it was the post-1945 period that saw the emergence of non-alignment as an alternative to the bipolar Cold War division and the growing likelihood of a new global, probably nuclear, conflict. It was pioneered independently by three national leaders—India's Jawaharlal Nehru, Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito and Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser. These three men conceived the idea of non-alignment partially because of the political circumstances they faced. As early as 1946 Nehru asserted that his country should not be involved in the disputes of other states. In his view, alignment with any power bloc was wrong since it would inevitably result in hostilities. Tito pursued non-alignment after Yugoslavia was expelled from the Soviet camp in 1948. Later in 1951, fearing a Soviet invasion, he announced that his country would side with the US-sponsored North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in case of another world war and even signed an arms agreement with the United States. After the death of the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in 1953, the USSR tried to normalise its relations with Yugoslavia. However, Tito was unwilling to return to the socialist bloc and instead followed policies that would guarantee a high level of independence from the two superpowers by formalising rapports with Asian and African decolonising countries. Egypt went on the path to non-alignment after 1952 when Nasser seized power. In 1953, the Pakistani foreign minister discussed with the Egyptian president the plan for a Western-supported, anti-Soviet alliance in the Middle East. Nasser rejected this on the grounds

that it would be just a different form of occupation after 70 years of British control. Consequently, as an outcome of talks with Nehru and Tito, Nasser espoused non-alignment during the 1955 Bandung Conference, an event that laid the foundations for the Non-Aligned Movement.<sup>8</sup>

### *The birth of the Non-Aligned Movement*

In April 1955, the Asian-African Conference was held in Bandung, Indonesia. Its participants comprised around 340 delegates from twenty-nine countries and colonies with diverging political and economic viewpoints and cultural backgrounds who gathered to agree on a common position within global politics. All of them highlighted their rejection of imperialism, colonialism, racism and apartheid.<sup>9</sup> The African delegations represented Ethiopia, Liberia, Ghana, Libya, Sudan and Egypt whose leader Nasser was often described as the ‘Spirit of Bandung’ and thus he turned into “a symbol for Afro-Asian solidarity.”<sup>10</sup> Not only did these African representatives become part of what was regarded as the “core group of the future third world coalition”, they also provided an important input to the principles of non-alignment by making independence one of its main attributes.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the Bandung Principles that were issued when the Conference was over, reflected fundamental tenets like respect for human rights, sovereignty and territorial integrity of African and Asian countries, independence, equality, non-interference in domestic affairs, peaceful resolution of conflicts and the promotion of mutual interests and cooperation. Obviously, some of these concerns were shared by the newly sovereign or decolonised Asian and African states. Most of the countries that performed a significant role in the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement were former colonies, such as India, Indonesia, and Egypt. Hence, “they were avowedly anti-colonial and had an interest in freeing the rest of the Third World from colonial rule”.<sup>12</sup> Whilst making a clear link between Nazism and colonialism, the Bandung Conference also

announced its backing for the rights of the people of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia to practice self-determination, thus expressing the spirit of rebellion against European rule.<sup>13</sup> It can be said that it was during this event that the Afro-Asian countries began the anti-colonial Third World movement, which later became known as non-alignment. For Africans, the Bandung Conference was influential since it generated the essential conditions for hastening the fight for freedom from foreign domination and imparted the required leadership and guidance to the increasing awareness of Africa's part in international politics.<sup>14</sup>

Later in 1961 at a summit in Belgrade, the Yugoslav capital, the Non-Aligned Movement was formally established. During this event, the role of Kwame Nkrumah, the first prime minister of the newly independent Ghana, was crucial as he insisted on "the importance of African perspectives."<sup>15</sup> After his country achieved full sovereignty in 1957, he took the initiative of adopting non-alignment as a foreign policy approach. During a speech at the Council on Foreign Relations, in New York, USA, in 1958 he insisted that the emerging African states should keep away from Cold War rivalries and engage in non-alignment so as to spare the continent from "devastating violence."<sup>16</sup> In the same year Nkrumah organised the first Conference of Independent African States (CIAS) in the Ghanaian capital Accra which was attended by the then self-governing African countries (with the exception of South Africa): Ghana, Ethiopia, Liberia, Morocco, Tunisia, Sudan and Egypt. All the participants understood that they needed a common foreign policy line that would help the African continent play a pivotal part in global affairs. Moreover, they were aware of the implications of the bipolar international system and the enmity between the two opposing blocs (Western versus Soviet) and accordingly agreed to pursue non-alignment and subscribe to the Bandung Principles. So the Accra Conference produced a collective stance among the participants in which any action that might undermine their interests and freedom should

be avoided. At the 1961 Belgrade Conference, there were 25 participants, of whom 11 were African. Although by then there were 27 independent African countries, only a few attended the event due to the turmoil caused by the Congo crisis and the Algerian War of Independence.<sup>17</sup>

The African governments who took part in the Belgrade Conference did so for a number of motives. Firstly, they saw the meeting as an opportunity to exhibit themselves as rulers and maintain their legitimacy in relation to their populations and other countries. Secondly, every non-aligned state had an interest in ensuring that the US and the USSR acknowledged the legitimacy of their position within the Cold War regardless of the reservations held by both superpowers. Lastly, a small group of governments, including Nasser's Egypt, believed that organising such a gathering would reinforce their claims to both regional and international leadership.<sup>18</sup> The African delegations made their mark during the Belgrade Conference by appealing for action against imperial and colonial rule, which they considered to be the greatest threat to their sovereignty. African speakers placed emphasis on Portuguese colonialism in southern Africa, British and Dutch refusal to relinquish their colonies, the oppression of blacks in South Africa and French violence against the Algerian independence movement and against Tunisia over Bizerte. In the closing declaration of the Belgrade Conference, the participants highlighted that the end of any manifestation of colonial domination was a precondition for peaceful co-existence among the peoples of the world.<sup>19</sup> Although they recognised that imperialism was in decline, the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement feared that the collapse of colonialism would bring about new conflicts. The countries that joined the Movement were conscious that they had to work together and manage the process of decolonisation, otherwise the superpowers would try to take advantage as demonstrated by the 1960-61 Congo crisis.<sup>20</sup> Overall, African states

ensured that the struggle against colonialism was one of the principal themes of the NAM for its whole existence. As explained above, non-alignment was a response to the aspiration of African countries to protect their independence. This concept was added to the ideology of the NAM by African statesmen, particularly Ghana's Nkrumah, together with the support for liberation movements as a precondition for non-alignment.<sup>21</sup>

*The Soviet Union's viewpoint on colonialism and non-alignment*

Although the NAM and the Soviet Union were two completely different entities, they shared some similarities especially with regards to the fight against colonialism. The Soviet view of colonialism was based on the ideas of Marxism-Leninism as developed by Vladimir Ilych Lenin, the first leader of the USSR. His revolutionary outlook on national self-determination, which he saw as the right to form an independent state, was not restricted to European countries, but also included their colonies. In his perspective, "socialists must not only demand the unconditional and immediate liberation of the colonies", they should also support "the more revolutionary elements in the bourgeois-democratic movements for national liberation in these countries and assist their uprising – or revolutionary war, in the event of one – *against* the imperialist powers that oppress them".<sup>22</sup> Soviet support for the self-determination of colonised peoples as a government policy was evident during the tenure of Lenin and his successor Stalin. After World War Two, Marxism continued to influence the minds of the emerging Third World leaders, many of whom had attended Western universities. Others, like Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh, received training in Moscow and would adapt Marxism-Leninism to their country's unique circumstances. The USSR's backing of self-determination in the colonies was appealing to these figures, even if some had disputes with the Soviet leadership over

certain ideological and policy aspects. Nonetheless, Lenin and Stalin's scathing criticisms of colonialism explain why several Third World figures aligned with the Soviet Union to counter Western imperialism during the Cold War period. Moreover, Marxist ideology captivated Third World nationalists since it provided a theoretical framework for comprehending and fighting imperialism.<sup>23</sup> This political thought made sense to the leaders and intellectuals of developing countries because in Lenin's dialectical perspective any endeavours by colonies to be truly independent and have control over their economies would be opposed by Western imperialist powers whose economic system relies on cheap resources and new investment outlets to survive. The struggle between "increasingly radical Third World leaders or popular movements and the West would culminate in Western interventions which would rally the people to "liberation", lead to expropriation of Western investments, and then impel "liberated" nations along the path into the socialist community".<sup>24</sup>

By the time Stalin died in 1953, the focal point of the Cold War moved to the postcolonial sphere and thus the Soviet Union increased its efforts to portray itself as an anti-imperialist force and to employ the issue of colonialism to strengthen its foreign policy. Under the leadership of Stalin's successor Nikita Khrushchev, the USSR actively strove to revitalise its influence in postcolonial countries. It started by reactivating its Marxist internationalism and trying to use its leverage through a network of communist and socialist parties and organisations. It also attempted to win the hearts of postcolonial governments by offering political and economic help. Against the backdrop of the Cold War and the Bandung Conference, the Soviets revised their ideological worldview which divided the world into two camps, capitalist and communist. Khrushchev made this model more nuanced and placed both postcolonial and communist-led countries in the same zone in contrast to the capitalist states. So the Soviet leadership

now had an ideological basis for their closeness to decolonising countries. Throughout the late 1950s, the USSR gave military and financial support to governments that were regarded as amicable and as regional leaders, such as Nasser's Egypt and Patrice Lumumba's Congo. It even favoured the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples at the United Nations General Assembly in 1960.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, by the early 1960s, Soviet strategists determined that the Third World was "an arena of crucial significance."<sup>26</sup> Khrushchev concluded that the swift decolonisation process had prompted an opportunity in which the "transition to socialism" could be promoted elsewhere in a manner that can "help secure the historical foundations of the Soviet state".<sup>27</sup>

With regard to the Non-Aligned Movement, the Soviet doctrinal stance considered it to be an element of the social development of the Third World, a symbol of the national liberation movement's struggle against colonialism. Despite the NAM's rejection of the bipolar order, Soviet officials viewed it as part of the global confrontation between Marxism and capitalism. From the late 1950s onwards, Soviet authorities supported Third World neutralism because they expected to benefit strategically from such an approach. By 1963, Moscow supposed that the foreign policy aims of the neutralists were equivalent to those of the socialist camp since the two groups of states jointly condemned colonialism and their concurrent attitude towards the removal of foreign military bases. Soviet diplomats later conceded that the policies linked to non-alignment pursued by Third World countries held "common ground with various Soviet objectives".<sup>28</sup> The growing significance of the NAM was positively acknowledged in the 1970s by Soviet foreign policy experts and politicians. For instance, in 1976, the USSR's leader Leonid Brezhnev declared that postcolonial states were able to defy "imperialist tyranny" and that their "substantial contribution to the peace and security of the world's peoples may well be even greater in future."<sup>29</sup> Just like during the interwar period, the Soviet Union tried to

widen its influence in Africa and Asia by championing anticolonial and postcolonial coalitions, such as the NAM.<sup>30</sup> This was evident in the Soviet treaties signed with Third World states which committed the USSR to uphold and encourage non-alignment, seen as “an important factor for peace”, while its treaty partners conveyed their agreement with the Soviet Union’s policy of reinforcing “the friendship and cooperation with all nations”.<sup>31</sup> Apart from stressing the importance of issues dear to the USSR like the struggle against racism, imperialism and neo-colonialism, which are mentioned in the treaties with African countries, these agreements also required the Third World signatory to abide by “an active and assertive policy of non-alignment” and to have a track record of ending colonialism and opposing “the traditional Western monopoly of economic power and political and military domination.”<sup>32</sup> Hence the Soviet Union recognised the vital role the NAM played in the decolonisation process. Like the USA, it presumed that the non-aligned countries “could meaningfully support or impede the policies of Moscow or Washington” and therefore had an interest in cooperating with the Movement on common goals.<sup>33</sup>

### *The Non-aligned and Soviet approaches to African decolonisation*

Because the NAM started as an anti-colonialist group, “the testing of this movement’s principles was therefore much more promising on the African Continent”.<sup>34</sup> By the time of the 1961 Belgrade Conference every African state had announced non-alignment as the basis of their foreign policies, although this commitment differed from country to country.<sup>35</sup> The subsequent summit held in Lusaka, Zambia in 1970 was a major step in the struggle against colonialism and racism.<sup>36</sup> The majority of participants (62 percent) were African, including the representatives of five African liberation movements. Apart from apartheid in South Africa and decolonisation, primary African concerns were prioritised during the conference, resulting in the decision to give greater and more effective material support to the

liberation movement via the Organisation for African Unity (OAU), a group which made non-alignment one of its core principles.<sup>37</sup> In the 1980s, the NAM's anti-imperialist and anti-colonial tendencies gained special significance again. The conferences held during this decade focused on the fight against colonialism and South African apartheid to a strikingly higher degree than before, mainly as a way of overcoming disagreements between members.<sup>38</sup> The eighth NAM Summit held in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1986 was dominated by African issues. In particular, Robert Mugabe, the Zimbabwean prime minister, highlighted the topic of sanctions against South Africa.<sup>39</sup> The non-aligned states chose to concretise their solidarity with oppressed South Africans by establishing the Action for Resisting Invasion, Colonialism in Africa (AFRICA) Fund.<sup>40</sup> This fund, into which 280 million dollars was paid, was supposed to aid the countries bordering South Africa in their fight against it.<sup>41</sup> In 1989, 54 states and "several international organisations had pledged 476 million dollars in cash, kind and technical assistance to the Fund" and 40 percent of this promised amount was realised that year.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the continued emphasis on defeating colonialism, in the 1980s some Asian NAM members, together with Yugoslavia, criticised the movement for stressing topics that were not in touch with the times. They claimed that colonial ways of thinking and behaving no longer affected international political debates and that other issues, such as the environment, deserved more focus.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, due to the NAM's sustained attempts, numerous Third World countries declared independence from colonial rule. The movement is also worthy of praise for playing a part in ending the apartheid system in South Africa which was achieved partly by the NAM's pressure on the Western patrons of segregation and partly by its uncompromising support for those who wanted self-determination.<sup>44</sup>

For most of the Cold War, Soviet leaders thought that their country's track record of anti-colonialism and economic growth would entice Third World governments searching for alternatives to capitalism and partnerships with Western powers. They also presumed that as proletarian forces gained momentum, bourgeois nationalists might ally with them and turn anti-imperialist revolts into anti-capitalist ones. Hence, the USSR formed ties with numerous postcolonial states, like Nasser's Egypt and Nkrumah's Ghana, which gained Soviet economic and military aid.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, African anticolonial leaders regarded the Soviet Union as "a beacon of progress, an alternative to the much-hated former colonial powers and their capitalist ways."<sup>46</sup> During the Khrushchev leadership, the allure of the Soviet way of modernisation in African states reached its zenith.<sup>47</sup> The Soviet Union's support for national liberation movements also resulted in its intervention during the Congo crisis. The Congolese leader Lumumba accepted help from the USSR, receiving Soviet trucks, aircraft and helicopters that boosted the Congolese army's fight against the Western-backed Katanga secessionists. Although Lumumba's subsequent murder was a damaging blow for Moscow, Khrushchev's military assistance to the Congo and his criticism of the UN's role in the crisis "challenged the West and appealed to the Third World with a clear, anti-imperial stance".<sup>48</sup>

In the mid-1960s the USSR had to alter its strategy vis-à-vis Africa since many postcolonial countries preferred to follow independent paths. Nkrumah's Ghana never transitioned to Marxist socialism and suffered a military coup that ended years of Soviet capital and political investment, while Nasser's Egypt maintained its non-aligned stance and persecuted Egyptian communists. Soviet strategists realised that the transition towards socialism was more complicated than Khrushchev predicted. Nonetheless, the USSR under Brezhnev continued its engagement with the Third World, but directed its support to Marxist-Leninist movements and placed emphasis on "vanguard parties" moving revolutions forward and safeguarding them

from imperialism.<sup>49</sup> Apart from ideological considerations and the desire to test its military power-projection capabilities, Moscow intervened in Africa because of solicitations from African leaders. In fact, after failing to get aid from the Western powers, African nationalists saw the Soviet Union as the sole force that could help them attain their political and social objectives. The Kremlin, therefore, did not wish to miss a chance to influence decolonisation in Africa.<sup>50</sup> This led to growing Soviet economic and military assistance to southern African countries and Ethiopia during the 1970s.<sup>51</sup> Overall, both the NAM and the USSR shared the same aims vis-à-vis decolonisation and supported African liberation movements. The main difference is that the Soviet Union tried to expand its influence in the continent and was able to provide financial and military aid to potential allies, while the NAM remained a coalition of postcolonial states focused on fighting colonialism via diplomacy and fundraising. However, the main weakness of the NAM was that numerous members, including many African countries, were non-aligned in theory, but in practice, they had close ties with either the US or the Soviet Union.<sup>52</sup>

### *The case of Namibia*

A pivotal example of how the NAM and the USSR concurred with regards to decolonisation is the story of how Namibia gained its independence. Formerly known as South West Africa, this country used to be a German colony, but after World War One it was occupied by South Africa. Although after 1945 it was supposed to fall under UN Trusteeship, the white-minority South African regime refused to abandon the territory and so in 1966 the UN declared the South African rule illegal and recognised the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) as the only representative of the Namibian population. This organisation soon started an armed struggle against the South Africans.<sup>53</sup> Sam Nujoma, the founding leader of SWAPO, sought international support for his campaign via the

NAM.<sup>54</sup> He participated regularly in the movement's meetings from 1961 onwards. In 1973, the NAM acknowledged SWAPO as the legitimate mouthpiece of the Namibian people and in 1978 the organisation officially joined the movement.<sup>55</sup> Over time, the NAM became one of the most important supporters of Namibian liberation. It gave SWAPO moral backing and financial help, promoted and defended Namibian interests at an international level and applied pressure on the UN to ensure that South Africa's paramilitary forces withdrew from Namibia. Although critics regarded the NAM's declarations simply as "pious homilies", Namibians saw the movement's patronage as "a profound source of inspiration".<sup>56</sup>

When it comes to the USSR, its ways of supporting SWAPO resembled those mentioned in the previous section. After 1979 it sent military advisers to Angola who gave training to the Namibian liberation movements. Moreover, Soviet bloc countries provided SWAPO with weapons for its fight against South Africa.<sup>57</sup> Simultaneously, "SWAPO developed close ties with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and Nujoma frequently visited Moscow".<sup>58</sup> By 1988, all sides in the Namibian conflict began peace negotiations. The Soviet Union and the NAM tried to ensure "a process whereby SWAPO would have more control over the terms of independence".<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, it was Soviet encouragement for a deal that led to the December 1988 Angola/Namibia Accords, whose implementation was jointly supervised by the USSR and the US.<sup>60</sup> This agreement paved the way for South Africa's withdrawal, the first free Namibian elections in 1989, won by SWAPO, and the achievement of Namibia's independence in 1990.<sup>61</sup> In short, both the NAM and the Soviet Union desired Namibian self-determination due to their respective anti-colonial standpoints. While the methods by which they aimed to reach this goal were slightly divergent, the two entities contributed meaningfully to the campaign for Namibia's freedom.

*Conclusion*

The decolonisation process in Africa would probably not have been the same if it were not for the involvement of the NAM and the USSR. Postcolonial states, mainly from Africa, were partly responsible for the formation of the movement and for emphasising issues related to colonialism throughout the Cold War period. Despite its weaknesses, the NAM represented a platform where newly-independent African countries could voice their concerns and cooperate on matters of mutual interest. The Soviet Union had ideological reasons for opposing colonialism in Africa and in the rest of the Third World more generally which explains its support for emerging African states. Due to tensions with the US, geopolitical motives also spurred the USSR to expand its sphere of influence in the continent by offering economic and military help to friendly governments and groups fighting for national liberation. The modalities in which the aims and policies of the NAM and the Soviet Union coincided were clear in the example of Namibia. Both entities backed SWAPO either via advocacy and funds or with the delivery of arms and military training. Their respective actions guaranteed the legitimacy of the Namibian rebels in the eyes of the international community and allowed Namibia to achieve full sovereignty. By stressing how much the NAM and the USSR had in common in relation to this issue, this chapter sought to contribute to the study of decolonisation in Africa. It also provides an insight that is essential for understanding the legacy of the two entities which still define contemporary African politics and society.

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## 3.2 Yugoslavia's place in the Sun? Modernist architecture and economic relations with non-aligned countries

Davide Denti & Dino Huseljic

With the foundation of the non-aligned movement, Yugoslavia gained not only a diplomatic network of political support, but also new economic opportunities. In Africa and the Middle East, for over thirty years, Yugoslavia exported architectural modernism as a concrete symbol of achieved decolonisation. Conglomerates such as Energoprojekt played a key role in building palaces, convention centres, airports, ministries, universities, post offices, hotels and residential districts across capital cities in Africa and the Middle East. Yet, this attempt at a different and post-colonial relation between a European country and newly independent nations did not escape from the global exploitative political economy of North/South relations, as illustrated by trade and financial patterns. Not unlike Yugoslavia's domestic spomeniks, its modernist architectural legacy remains as a reminder of a country that was stamped out of existence in the 1990s.

When Tito, Nehru and Nasser met in Bandung in 1955 to establish the movement of non-aligned countries, Yugoslavia gained more than a network of political support, but also new economic opportunities. One of the strengths of Yugoslav exports to newly independent countries was architecture. In Africa and the Middle East, for over thirty years, Yugoslav architects built palaces, convention centres, airports, ministries, universities, post offices, hotels and residential districts, leaving a concrete legacy in the sign of Yugoslav modernism.

### *The birth of the Non-Aligned Movement*

Yugoslav architecture in Africa was the exterior representation and the final point of an ambitious project stemming from the country's post-World War II isolation. After the 1948 Tito–Stalin split, when parting ways with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia faced major economic difficulties due to trade dependencies and high military spending (Banac 1988: 131). Tito had to ask for economic assistance from the United States, which came for the first time in 1949 and then on a larger scale in 1950–1953 (Lees 1978). However, this was only a temporary solution for the Yugoslav leader, who aimed to be less dependent on either bloc.

A new opportunity for Yugoslavia came from the international conference held in 1955 in the Indonesian city of Bandung, the first large-scale gathering of newly independent African and Asian countries, representing up to 54% of the world's population (Warnapala 2005). The meeting, aimed at establishing new economic and political ties, ended with a strong condemnation of colonialism and imperialism, censoring both the West and the Soviet Union and laid the ground for an innovative foreign policy, rejecting alignment with either bloc.

Yugoslavia recognised the chance and got involved in the process. In 1956, in the Brijuni islands, Tito signed a declaration together with India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser that certified the birth of the Non-Aligned Movement, based on the principles agreed upon in Bandung. This was only the first step in a political project in which Yugoslavia would play a key role: the first conference would be held in Belgrade in 1961.

Unlike in the first and second bloc, Belgrade's economic and political power among the non-aligned nations was sufficient to play an important role and to create new international relations in which the country would

not be overwhelmed by the partners' strength. In addition, being one of the key nations in the Non-Aligned Movement contributed to Yugoslavia's geopolitical importance. In this way, Tito got involved in the struggle for liberation and equality of the decolonising states and found a platform from which to criticise and differentiate himself from the Soviet and American spheres of influence (Farmer 2020), avoiding the dangerous isolation towards which the country had been sliding.

*Economic relations: new markets and the Yugoslav-African trade*

The Non-Aligned Movement also aimed to foster cultural and economic relations among its members, and Belgrade made an effort to turn the claims of friendship and anticolonialism into practice. 1,600 Yugoslav workers were sent to Africa and Asia to build up local industry through programs of technical assistance, as *Yugoslav Life* reported in 1962, while nearly 1,000 students from developing countries were studying in Yugoslavia in the same year (Farmer 2020). Yet, cultural ties never really took off, as the Yugoslavs kept looking with irony at the exotic kings and leaders that were welcomed in style from time to time in Belgrade.<sup>1</sup>

Economic ties, instead, were carefully cultivated. Even though Tito's propaganda emphasised Yugoslavia's moral effort in the fight against colonialism, linking the support to the newly decolonised countries with their own struggle against foreign occupation during the World War II (Lazić 2020), Yugoslavia had a lot to take advantage of, starting from trade.

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1 In the 1980s, Elvis J. Kurtović, a rock singer from Sarajevo, dedicated an ironic song to the last emperor of Ethiopia, Hailé Selassié, who had visited Belgrade in 1964. In the lyrics, Hailé Selassié was defined as the "emperor of Africa and Asia" and as "a wonderful man, loved by everyone, wise as Gandhi, beautiful, the greatest of our friends".

An article in the June 1963 issue of *Yugoslav Life* listed the goods that were exchanged: “Finished products are dominant on the list of Yugoslav exports. Machines and vehicles, for example, account for 54 percent of all exports. From Africa, Yugoslavia imports raw materials and some industrial products: cotton, phosphates, minerals, coffee cocoa, bananas, and more recently products of the textile and chemical industries” (Farmer 2020). The patterns of trade between Yugoslavia and the newly independent countries were thus not unlike those of other western countries, including former colonial powers.

In the early 1960s, Yugoslavia struggled with a congested domestic market in which “too many enterprises competed for too few export markets” (Wilson 1979). This had led to an increase of living costs, but the “economic ties with the nonaligned countries had the potential to solve Yugoslavia’s difficulties in providing its citizens with a good standard of living” (Niebuhr, 2011; Finucane 2014).

Yugoslavia also offered major credits on favourable terms that could compete with the offers made by the two blocs and could also influence the politics of the new allies (Rubinstein 1970). As Niebuhr (2011, 151) pointed out, “Tito believed that economics had the power to influence political change. [...] He encouraged the Third World leaders not only to adopt Yugoslav products but also to accept Titoism as a credible ideology worthy of imitation”.

Yugoslavia established new ties also through the sale of weapons to revolutionary independence movements such as Algeria’s *Front de Liberation National* (FLN). Yugoslavia’s engagement in favour of the FLN increased its credibility and standing in the Global South, painting the country as a supporter of African nations in the fight for freedom (Lazić

2020). Stevan Labudović, “Tito’s cameraman”, joined the FLN for three years in 1959–1962, chronicling the independence war against France and becoming a national hero in Algeria.<sup>2</sup>

There was an ideological base in the Yugoslav sympathy for these movements, as Tito himself stated in a 1964 interview for the *Borba* magazine: “the Yugoslav peoples sympathised with the Algerian liberation struggle because they, in their recent past, had to go through an equivalent ordeal in their fight for national liberation and independence” (Lazić 2020, 6). Rubinstein similarly notes that “through the FLN, the Yugoslav leaders vicariously recaptured their finest hours” (Rubinstein 1970). Yugoslavia even hosted the FLN’s unrecognised football selection at a friendly match in March 1961, which helped raise international awareness about Algeria’s anticolonial struggle; the Algerian team heavily defeated Yugoslavia for 6:1 (Alegi 2010).

On the other hand, not everything was just about solidarity and ideology. Yugoslavia had already entered the Third World arms market in the early 1950s, when Belgrade signed arms trade agreements with Burma and Egypt (Čavoški 2010; Lazić 2020). The company that was in charge of the arms trade was Jugoimport. Founded in 1949, it began exporting Yugoslav arms in 1953 and was soon involved in the building of military infrastructure abroad (Lazić 2020).

This arms trade helped developing countries, but Yugoslavia also made profits: it could resell obsolete weapons and find new export markets for its own military industries, while cashing-in highly valued foreign currency and expanding avenues for further trade and economic relations. (Lazić 2020, 3)

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2 This is the subject of Mila Turajlić’s latest documentary, “The Labudović Reels” (2021).

Ideological, political and economic factors thus all contributed to Yugoslavia's new foreign policy. New ties helped Belgrade to avoid a dangerous isolation and dependence from either Cold War bloc, while also supporting countries which were breaking away from colonial powers. Tito kept talking about these new international relations in terms of friendship and common anticolonial values: "The policy of nonalignment is the expression of historical continuity of the Yugoslav revolution" (*Politika*, 27.11.1976).

Not all of the claims about anti-imperialism and solidarity were false, but Yugoslav economic profits were also undeniable. Belgrade sometimes applied the same methods as colonial powers. For some countries, the choice of non-alignment allowed them a greater degree of leverage, as Yugoslavia did not have the means to influence their domestic politics and external relations as the USA or USSR (or other European former colonial powers) could do. Yet, Yugoslavia's relations with the new countries of Africa and Asia also carried an exploitative dimension, as illustrated by trade and investment patterns.

### *Yugoslav architecture in Africa*

As early as the late 1950s, Yugoslav, Polish and Soviet construction companies began to compete in the rush for African markets. In the following 30 years, numerous modernist buildings saw the light in the new capitals of Africa and Asia. As the architectural historian Łukasz Stanek notes in the book *Architecture in Global Socialism* (2020), "the Soviet Union focused more on large infrastructure projects: dams, embankments, ports; Yugoslavia was more oriented towards urban projects". Civilian architecture soon became a signature Yugoslav export to Africa and Asia, with a key role played by the Energoprojekt conglomerate (Sekulić 2015).

For many newly independent countries, Yugoslav modernism took on the political significance of a definitive emancipation from the colonial masters (Videkanić 2020).

Already in the 1950s, Yugoslav artists sculpted monuments in Ethiopia, including the Yekatit 12 memorial obelisk (Antun Augustinčić and Frano Kršinić, 1955) and in the 1960s they built Addis Ababa's central post office (Ivan Štraus and Zdravko Kovačević, 1964) and Duke of Harar memorial hospital (1964–1973). In Ghana, Miro Marasović and Niksa Ciko worked with local and international architects in Kumasi's KNUST university complex (1963–1968).

In the 1970s, Energoprojekt embarked on multiple real estate works in Zambia, Uganda and Nigeria, including Lusaka's Mulungushi Conference Center (1970) and Findeco House (Dušan Milenković and Branimir Ganović, 1971–1974). In Uganda, they built Entebbe Airport (Aleksandar Keković, 1973) and Kampala International Conference Center (1975). In Nigeria, realisations included the Lagos Trade Fair (Zoran Bojović, 1974–1977) and the Kano State Ministries Complex (Milica Šterić and Zoran Bojović, 1978).

Among the finest realisations was the *Palais des Conférences* in Libreville, Gabon (Mario Jobst, 1972), with decorations by Miodrag Živković. The most imposing was surely the Congress Center and Sheraton Hotel in Harare, Zimbabwe (Dragoljub and Ljiljana Bakić, 1980–1986).

During the same period, in the Middle East, Yugoslav architects worked on Baghdad's Babylon Hotel (Edvard Ravnikar, 1982) and Al Khulafa residential complex (Zoran and Ljiljana Bojović, 1984), as well as on the Bayan Palace Conference Centre in Kuwait City (Stojan Maksimović, 1980–1986)

*Yugoslav monuments and buildings in Ethiopia and Ghana in the 1950s and 1960s*

Yugoslavia's search for new allies pre-dates the launch of the Non-Aligned Movement. Already in July 1954, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie paid an official visit to Yugoslavia – the first visit by a foreign head of state after Belgrade's expulsion from the Cominform in 1948. Likely not by chance, the visit coincided with a period of Italian-Yugoslav tensions over the fate of Trieste – Italy being also the former colonial power in Ethiopia. During the week-long visit, Haile Selassie met with renowned Croatian sculptor Antun Augustinčić, to whom he commissioned a statue of his late father Ras Makonnen (Orlović 2012: 160). Augustinčić delivered such a statue for Harar in 1959, together with another Monument to the Ethiopian Partisan for the town of Hollet. Earlier on, ahead of the visit of Tito to Addis Ababa on 14 December 1955, Antun Augustinčić and Frano Kršinić completed the bas-reliefs for a memorial obelisk erected in Yekatit 12 Square to commemorate the massacre perpetrated by Italian colonial forces in 1937. As noted by Videkanić (2020), Augustinčić drew from his works on the partisan struggle in Yugoslavia, including for what concerns the imagery of Italian fascists and their civilian victims. At the inauguration, Tito also received honorary citizenship of Ethiopia and the keys to the capital city.

The warm Yugoslav–Ethiopian relations also led to architectural projects: among them, the Central Post Office of Addis Ababa, built in 1964 in the International Style upon the design of Yugoslav architects Ivan Štraus and Zdravko Kovačević. The complex includes “two detached long thin 8-story tall modernist buildings (45m & 65m long by 15m wide) oriented perpendicular to each other” (Niebyl 2020), and remains in use. The Duke of Harar Memorial Hospital in Addis Ababa (today Black Lion Hospital) was also built by the Yugoslav firm Unioninženjering. Works on the massive 8-story, 155m long, 535-bed modernist hospital complex began in 1964

and ended only in 1973. The result was “the largest, technically advanced and most renowned medical facility in Ethiopia” (Niebyl 2020). The year after, in 1974, Haile Selassie’s regime was overthrown by a Soviet-backed military coup.

Ghana’s post-independence government intended to expand the new Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). Yugoslav architects Miro Marasović and Niksa Ciko worked together with Ghanaian and international architects such as John Owusu-Addo, B. Kalogjera and K.M.G. Kirkbride to build five new campus buildings between 1963 and 1968, including the Vice Chancellor’s Lodge, Unity Hall, Africa Hall, the Senior Staff Club and the College of Architecture. According to Stanek (2020), these buildings in an adapted International Style were received in Ghana as a clear break from the architectural heritage of British colonialism: “Their work was part of an intense collaboration between Ghanaian architects, engineers, and construction companies and their counterparts from socialist countries in Eastern Europe and Asia during the first decade after Ghana’s independence.” As noted by Niebyl (2020), the Senior Staff Club reminds of Vjenceslav Richter’s Yugoslav Pavilion at the 1958 World Expo in Brussels, while the Vice Chancellor’s Lodge recalls the Bauhaus design.

*Energoprojekt’s works in Zambia, Uganda, and Nigeria in the 1970s*

The new international relations favoured the opening of new markets abroad and gave a decisive boost to the growth of a then young public company from Belgrade that was set to become one of the most important in Yugoslavia’s history, Energoprojekt. Founded in 1951, due to the scarcity of big projects on the domestic market in the 1960s the company was somehow forced to seek work abroad (Tagliabue 1983) and the new international environment was luckily set to satisfy its needs. Primarily involved in architectural

projects, Energoprojekt was also a sort of Yugoslav Trojan horse used to penetrate the new markets. The Belgrade-based company used to win tenders in the newly independent countries also thanks to Yugoslavia's soft power and political support. Throughout the 1970s, Energoprojekt completed multiple real estate projects across Zambia, Uganda and Nigeria.

One of the earliest projects, the Mulungushi Conference Centre in Lusaka, Zambia, was the result of a last-moment rush to build a venue to host the third summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1970. In Zambia, Energoprojekt was the only European company operating on the market, easily winning every tender. Following a plea for help to Belgrade by Zambian President Kenneth D. Kaunda, Energoprojekt engineers were quickly dispatched on site, and the design proceeded in parallel to construction works. Within four months, an event centre for 4,000 persons and 65 villas for high-level attendees were built. The venue cost Zambia three to four times the normal price due to the short timeframe of its realisation (Tagliabue 1983). The complex remains in use to date (Niebyl 2020).

In 1972–1973, Energoprojekt also built the Entebbe Airport, upon the design by Yugoslav Montenegrin architect Aleksandar Keković (Niebyl 2020). The airport was the site of Operation Entebbe on 4 July 1976, when Israeli commandoes rescued a hijacked El-Al flight, and was damaged in the Ugandan-Tanzanian war in 1979.

Also in the early 1970s, Yugoslav architects Dušan Milenković and Branimir Ganović designed in Lusaka what remains today the tallest skyscraper of Zambia, Findeco House, named after the State Finance and Development Corporation, which controlled the export of copper. Its 90 meters of height and 23 floors “are cantilevered off of a central pillar, giving the structure a gravity defying appearance” (Niebyl 2020). Upon its completion in 1974, the global price of copper fell, leaving Findeco bankrupt and Zambia in

a long-term recession. The building still operates as an office and retail space. Nearby, a second white skyscraper (Zanaco Bank headquarters) was also a project of Yugoslav engineers and architects.

The following year, in 1975, Energoprojekt inaugurated the Kampala International Conference Center in Uganda. Built to host the 13th summit of the Organization of African Unity, the complex has a unique hexagonal shape and is “clad in decorative aluminium panel not only for their attractive appearance, but also to protect the building from the intense tropical sunlight” (Niebyl 2020). Uganda’s dictator Idi Amin used it for his own wedding, as well as infamously as a place of torture for political opponents. It remains in public use to this date.

In 1974–1977, Energoprojekt also erected the Lagos Trade Fair, upon the design of a team led by Belgrade architect Zoran Bojović. With 40,000 square meters, it was deemed the largest marketplace in sub-saharan Africa. The project was based on research on vernacular housing in the Kano region. According to Niebyl (2020), “the spatial planning of the complex is characterised by its circular flow of connectivity and accessibility between exhibition halls, which was a layout Bojović formulated after being inspired by the results he saw from a field research exercise in rural Nigeria where he asked young village children to draw maps of their small communities.” The buildings feature a “playfully ambitious design which invokes a wistful future-oriented design of angular and geometric styles.” The complex has become dilapidated over time, and in the 2010s it used to host the largest marketplace of used car parts in Nigeria.

Another of Energoprojekt’s ventures in Nigeria concerned the 1978 State Ministries Complex for the Nigerian state of Kano, designed by Milica Šterić and Zoran Bojović. The complex made use of local techniques to respond to the sun and the heat, including a bright white colour and lattice screens

over south-facing windows. The use of prefabricated standardised sections allowed construction to proceed at rapid speed. Bojović also claimed that the shape of the building was inspired by stacked bags of peanuts, Kano's main export product (Niebyl 2020).

### *The Palais des Conférences in Libreville, Gabon*

In the former French colony of Gabon, the tender awarded to Energoprojekt for the construction of the *Palais des Conférences* in Libreville – considered one of the most luxurious buildings in all of Africa at the time – took on the political significance of a definitive emancipation from the colonial masters and from the ties of *Françafrique*: “The fact that we were there was the sign that they broke away” (Georgievski, 2020), as later recalled by Belgrade architect Mario Jobst (also the author of the Dejtonka service station and of the YU Business Center in Novi Beograd) who worked on the interiors of the building. Jobst, who had started working for Energoprojekt in 1972, was still a young architect when he found himself working on the site of the future 12,000-square-meter building that was to host the 14th session of the Organization for African Unity. “It was heroic work, and very expensive.” All the materials were of Yugoslav origin, including the dark brown Brač marble to tile the floors (Georgievski, 2020).

The complex was finely decorated. Yugoslav sculptor Miodrag Živković, the author of the spomenik of Tjentište dedicated to the Battle of Sutjeska and of the monument to the martyr students of Šumarice, was commissioned to create a decorative sculpture for the opulent lobby. “I designed a clearite sculpture, African Sun. That block of 7–8 meters and I took an airplane and we flew together to Africa”, recalled the elderly sculptor (Georgievski, 2020). The Conference Palace was razed to the ground in 2014, to be replaced by a new presidential complex.

*Yugoslav architectural projects in Baghdad and Kuwait City*

The engagement of Yugoslav architects in Middle Eastern countries started in the late 1960s, when Zdravko Bregovac and Vjenceslav Richter won the competition for the design of the new building of the National Museum of Aleppo, Syria (Munivrana and Meštrić 2017: 90).

In the late 1970s, Yugoslav Slovenian architect Edvard Ravnikar had designed plans for a ziqqurat-shaped beach resort to be built by the firm Lovćen Inženjering in Budva, Montenegro. When the plans fell through, the design was adapted for a concession for a luxury hotel in Baghdad, Iraq (Kulić 2014). The 284-room stair-stepped-styled complex opened in 1982 as Babylon Hotel, with interiors designed by Indian architect Sunita Kohli, and soon became a local landmark. It remains in operation, despite multiple car bomb attacks in the 2010s (Niebyl 2020).

In the same years, Zoran and Ljiljana Bojović designed for Energoprojekt the 1984 Al Khulafa residential buildings in Baghdad. Niebyl (2020) notes the overt modernist style of the complex, with its two 11-storey towers, as well as the critical regionalist elements, which make reference to the traditional Iraqi architecture, such as “the window screens across the broad faces of the building, along with the arch-shaped windows along the top edge of the structure.” Dwarfing the tiny old Al Khulafa mosque, the two bright white towers have soon become a local landmark.

In 1979, architect Stojan Maksimović inaugurated Belgrade’s Sava Center, which became world-renowned. The following year, Kuwait’s government (also a member of the Non-Aligned Movement) invited Maksimović to present projects for the new conference centre of Kuwait City, slated to host the 5th Conference of the Arab League in 1986. Maksimović’s plan won the competition and work started soon after. The final result however

differed widely from the plans, and the complex was damaged during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991. Repaired, it continues to operate to date as Bayan Palace Conference Center (Niebyl 2020).

*The Congress Center and Sheraton Hotel in Harare, Zimbabwe*

Energoprojekt scored its final home run in Zimbabwe, with the largest project in the history of the company. Only a few months had passed since Tito's death, when Belgrade architects Dragoljub and Ljiljana Bakić were entrusted with the construction of the Congress Center and Sheraton Hotel in Harare, in the recently independent former Southern Rhodesia, led by Robert Mugabe. As Dragoljub Bakić pointed out, "with the country's independence, a new market was open for Energoprojekt and only two months after we were already there" (Georgievski 2020).

Bakić landed in Harare in August 1980, with a scale model of the complex. The competition to build the new venue was strong, with British companies strongly rooted in the former colony. The death of Yugoslav high official Stevan Doronjski offered a chance: Bakić took the Zimbabwean foreign minister aside when he came to sign the condolence book at the Yugoslav embassy, and showed him the model of the building. The minister told Bakić to show up at the prime minister's office. There Mugabe, who dreamed of hosting a summit of the non-aligned movement, told Bakić the day after that he wanted the building, "but twice as big". Bakić was given 10 days to adapt the design for a 5,000-seat conference hall. "I told Ljiljana to come to Zimbabwe immediately, and we worked on the project at the hotel, on the breakfast tables." (Georgievski, 2020).

In those days Slobodan Milošević, then general manager of Beobanka, was staying in the same hotel. The Belgrade-based bank had opened a new branch in the Zimbabwean capital, but Milošević was interested

in the architectural endeavour too. “He came by in the evening to see how we were going ahead with the project, returning from safaris”, Bakić recalls. The reason was simple: “He saw an opportunity for our economy, because all the materials were imported from Yugoslavia. Our country lent credits with which they had to buy our products for those buildings. That is why Milošević was interested” (Georgievski, 2020).

The project was accepted, and Mugabe’s dream came true: in 1986 Harare hosted the 8<sup>th</sup> summit of non-aligned countries at the Sheraton. According to Niebyl (2020), “its merged double-tower form (67m tall and 18 stories high) is characterised by its smooth golden shape, curved beveled summit and huge glass walls on its board faces, features which give the facade a sleek and almost futuristic modern appearance.” The building continues to operate as a conference centre and hotel, the only 5-star and the largest hotel in Zimbabwe, with close to 400 rooms.

*Conclusions: Yugoslav modernism and the persistence of African ties*

Yugoslavia’s turn towards relations with the newly independent countries in Africa and Asia was an attempt to turn a weakness – international isolation following the 1948 Tito–Stalin split – into a new strength. The co-leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement allowed Belgrade to develop an international network of political support, as well as to obtain new export markets for its products, from weapons to civilian architecture. For many newly independent countries, Yugoslav modernism took on the political significance of a definitive emancipation from the colonial masters. Political linkages and ideological affinities – as well as immediate presence on the ground – also helped Yugoslav architectural firms in winning tenders for large-scale real estate projects. The modernist buildings that still dot the landscape of multiple African capitals (palaces, convention centres, airports, ministries, universities, post offices, hotels

and residential districts) stand as a concrete legacy of this attempt to create a different and post-colonial relation between a European country and newly independent nations. It was an attempt that, despite all rhetoric and good intentions, did not escape from the exploitative political economy of North/South relations. Flagship architectural projects in (often autocratic) African and Middle Eastern countries came along with trade and loans patterns in establishing financial flows towards Yugoslavia, as best illustrated in the case of Zimbabwe's Harare Sheraton Hotel. Not unlike Yugoslavia's domestic monuments (known as *spomenik*, see Niebyl 2018), its modernist architectural legacy remains as a reminder of a country that was stamped out of existence in the 1990s.

Yugoslav endeavours in Africa also contributed to the formation of a new generation of cadres that put economic profit first, leaving ideology aside, and that took over the country in the 1980s and the 1990s during its wartime dissolution and market transition (Lazić 2020). Some of these economic ties even survived Yugoslavia. Companies such as Belgrade's Energoprojekt and Sarajevo's Energoinvest remained active in the impoverished successor states, even winning tenders in African countries in the most recent decades. Energoinvest has had better days but the company was involved in 2015 in the construction of an electrical substation in Algeria. Two years later, it won a 53 million dollars procurement in Tanzania for the construction of substations in cooperation with the Indian EMC. On the other hand, despite facing several problems in the last decade, Belgrade-based Energoprojekt won two tenders in Uganda and Rwanda in 2016 (*eKapija* 2016; *Sarajevo Times* 2017). The current political leaderships of Serbia and of Bosnia Herzegovina have also tried to replicate, in small, Tito's non-alignment policy by establishing multiple relations with the main regional and global players including the European Union, United States, Russia, China and Turkey – with limited success. Yugoslavia's global outreach and its architectural legacy remain an irreplicable 20th-century story.

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### 3.3 Finding your way back: A discussion with Madina Tlostanova

Laura Luciani & Valentin Luntumbue

*Pr. Madina Tlostanova (Linköping University) is a professor of postcolonial feminism and one of the foundational figures of the decolonial movement in academia. Her research focuses on both the post-Socialist world and the Global South, and she has been involved in countless projects related to decolonising the arts and the university across the world. She accepted to sit with us for an interview.*

**Both in the West and in the East, decolonial discourse has been gaining steam in the last decade, though it seems that this is restrained to Academia. So, our opening question would be: what are in your view, the differences between decolonisation in Central and Eastern Europe and decolonisation in the West and the Global South. Do you think they differ or converge on some points?**

First, not sure what you mean by decolonisation. For me, coming from decoloniality, I do not use terms like decolonisation, because they are from a different paradigm. I've been working as part of the international decolonial collective for more than 20 years by now and for us decolonisation has ended. You can talk about it as a thing of the past, which was important between the 50s and up to the late 80s, or in the early 90s, when the socialist system collapsed. Then a shift happens and that's why Aníbal Quijano, a prominent figure in decoloniality, comes up with the idea of colonialidad, instead of colonialism. As Catherine Walsh and Walter Mignolo tell in their latest

book on decoloniality<sup>1</sup>, it became clear that the state cannot be democratised and decolonised: that shows a sense of defeat, the realisation that all these postcolonial nationalisms and efforts to build countries in this anticolonial manner did not work. And the socialist utopia, the last grand social utopia of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the dream of equality and social justice also collapsed. At that very dark moment, modernity/coloniality group comes with this idea of shifting the focus from the actual political struggles of decolonisation to *decoloniality*, as a more epistemic thing, from more political struggles to the ways of changing the minds with which people think, perceive the world, as well as their corporeality. And that shift was very important to me. I work in academia and I hate academia, but since this is my way of connecting with reality and changing something in that reality, this kind of epistemic rather than political activism suits me. Although I am constantly thinking about how to change this and how to bridge this gap between academic and real activism – the social movement of the people who are struggling for the rights to their lands, to water, to their languages. This rift has also grown lately. That's why there are internal conflicts in Latin America, in the Andean countries, between social movements who actually make decoloniality happen in their everyday struggles and those who sit in universities and write about it. Even if we try to be nice and inclusive and try not to hijack from them, but rather to work with these movements, listen to them and be humble, still being a part of a neoliberal university forces you to do certain things that are not acceptable if you try to be decolonial.

Decoloniality has become in the last 6–7 years a fashionable term, a new fad, and I find it really unfortunate. 20 years ago, when I was writing about it in Russia, everybody was dismissing it. I remember when I wrote my dissertation about the US multiculturalism, and all my colleagues who had never heard

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1 Mignolo Walter and Walsh Catherine, *On Decoloniality. Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2018.

the word would make fun of me saying “what do you mean *multikulti*, is it about *multiki* [cartoons]?” It was horrible. Then all of a sudden after I went to Sweden, and I have been living here for almost 6 years now, there is this kind of renaissance. People start writing, “we would like to do a conference, and decolonise this and that, decolonise university and museums, decolonize health and sexuality”. But when I start reading all of these calls for papers, I see very often they do not have a clue of what is the genealogy of decolonial struggles, how it connects with very crucial historical events, like the Bandung conference. They just hijacked the term, ran away with it, and use it in a problematic way. Often what these neophyte decolonialists mean is deconstruction or critical thinking, but they say ‘decolonise’ rather than criticise or problematise. In reality, it has nothing to do with the struggle, with the ‘colonial wound’ as we would say in the decolonial movement. For us, the most important thing is where are you speaking from, what is your positionality. And I don’t mean that only people of colour can talk about it. The point is that if you are a privileged white European, you have to think about this positionality in a critical way and connect it with coloniality, this darker side of modernity, and see how you are implied in that. And nobody really speaks in that sense, it’s always “coloniser or colonised”, reductive dualities when the matter is very intersectional, changing and relational. In some ways we are in a better position, in others we are worse off, but this all has to be part of our discourse.

It is interesting you asked about the differences, as I don’t find many between Sweden and Russia. In Russia, it is suddenly very fashionable to write about decoloniality. But when I see who writes about it I am often speechless, because I don’t see how some of those people have the moral right to do that. The same goes for Sweden. They get a huge grant to open some centre for the study of colonial or postcolonial encounters or whatever, but then you see that it consists of white Swedes, who conduct the historical study of colonialism and don’t see the problem with that. They don’t understand the

gist of decoloniality. First of all, it begs the question of the master's tools, and not dismantling the master's house, to paraphrase Audre Lorde. I think that is important. In Russia, it is a bit twisted: there is a lot of discourse that wants to sound critical but in reality, is very supportive of Putin's regime, and they hijack the postcolonial arguments to criticise the West, which I find very problematic. Many of my decolonial colleagues do not get it, we argue a lot. For them, the most crucial thing is that the second-rate empires like Russia are anti-Western and especially they are against the US and that is enough to justify their geopolitical behaviour. For me this is not a real justification, it has to be more nuanced and complex. And I don't see much difference between the US, which has become, at least under Trump, a failed state with still recurring globalist phantom aches, and some smaller but vicious regime like Russia under which many people suffer. I mean, who really cares under which regime you are colonised?

Maybe if we speak of the so-called post-Soviet countries that are not European, this for me could be a genuine source of decoloniality, not brought by books. Mignolo says it also emerges through sensibility, feelings, the links with the ancestors... This is something the post-soviet non-European ex-colonies started reflecting upon 30 years ago and now comes the younger generation that is not brainwashed anymore into believing they were liberated by the Soviet regime, and also is very disillusioned with the West, neoliberalism and what happened in the last 30 years. They are capable of formulating their decolonial stance themselves, which is more important than trying to take some concepts and apply them to your experience.

**Indeed, anticolonial or decolonial discourses are being appropriated by a lot of right-wing governments in Central and Eastern Europe to position themselves against the West, EU or US hegemony, and strengthen at the same time their authoritarian agendas. Do you see any way out of this co-optation?**

Unfortunately, there is no way out, we don't own what we write. People can take ideas and run away, nobody has any guarantee against that. We can continue writing, organising events and talking with people, but it's more important to make something tangible. That's why I'm interested in these communities of change, that can actually do things, better the social, cultural, economic life of communities. Especially now that global problems step in, like climate change, migrations caused by politics but also by said climate change... and there are a lot of things people could do instead of or along with writing books.

Academia works in a way that reinforces this gap between itself and real life, and all disciplines are built on this growing gap. Academic disciplines only write about themselves and deal with their own problems, rather than trying to face real problems and real people. I find it fascinating that in Latin America this gap between academia and social movements is not as tangible as in Europe or in Russia. Of course, there are some people who are comfortably nested in academia in Latin America as well. But the academic bubble is somehow leaking and it is easier to find cases where activists are also academics, very successful ones, and their being activists is not criticised but actually valued. There are cases like that in Latin America, and I know that in some countries in Africa as well.

**How should we reconcile those two slopes of decoloniality? Let us say one is epistemology and the other one is material conditions. Should we all be Zapatistas or *Sem Terra*? Is that a model?**

But that is exactly the problem, not everyone can be that. In Latin America, it can happen, but not in many other places. This is another critique of mine I have been writing a lot about lately, and trying to confront other decolonialists with this issue. It is easier if you have kept your connection with your indigeneity, you can always go back to that, not in the sense of time but of reviving these aesthesis and reconnecting with this existence

– re-existing. But what about others, who have no connection to their indigeneity? What are they supposed to do? I’m an indigenous person, I am Circassian from the Caucasus... but I don’t have many connections to my indigeneity, I am too modernised/colonized. I didn’t have a chance to study my language when I was a child because of forced russification. I was brought up mainly on Western culture and I am an English Major. Even Russian literature is foreign to me, I know American literature better.

How does one find one’s way back to one’s culture? I’m very interested and I learnt a lot about my culture, but I am not affectively connected to it. I can understand it rationally, but I cannot connect. There are more and more people like that: this is how coloniality works, it changes your brain and messes with your ontology and with your corporeality. For example, I love the works of Rolando Vazquez, a Mexican theorist living in the Netherlands, but for Rolando this is easy. He still has this connection to his ancestors in Mexico, other people do not. It would be wonderful if we could all be Zapatistas, but unfortunately, we have to find more complicated ways and entry points into decoloniality. I am also against the idea of authentic communities: when I say communities of change, I include indigenous communities by all means, but I actually mean very mixed communities. Designers, scholars, activists, from all over the world who would gather together to solve concrete problems in concrete place. It doesn’t mean that only people who were born here are allowed to participate. No, this is exactly what allows this neo-colonial or postcolonial nationalism to set in.

What you find in many Central and Eastern European countries is very similar. They will tell you there was never colonialism here, “we never colonized anyone nor were we colonised”, but if you look historically, it was just a different kind of empire that colonised them: the Ottoman, the Russian, the Habsburg Empire... It’s just not overseas colonisation. Despite that, it is very similar in its basic dehumanizing forms, and to explore that

historical resentment they use postcolonial theories. They feel like newly colonised populations that were accepted to become Europeans, but on which terms? They realise now that they are constantly in this position of poor relatives and second-rate Europeans, who always have to out-West the West and prove they are more democratic than the West. And that also causes resentment. If you go to these countries, you see so many people emigrating permanently or seasonally. Take for instance, Latvia or Estonia. A huge percentage of the population is abroad looking for better opportunities. This is not a happy feeling: either staying home being independent but feeling colonised, or being forced to always compete, race and catch-up with somebody. But this is the logic of modernity/coloniality.

**Talking about the North Caucasus, to what extent is the decolonial discourse articulated there nowadays? How does it relate to the colonial crimes committed by the Russian Empire and the Soviet empire, like ethnic cleansing, mass deportations, genocide?**

As you know, the North Caucasus is still a colony, right? They are watched by a big brother three times stricter than people in Russia proper whatever that is. Things you would be okay saying in Moscow are not okay to say or write in the North Caucasus. Friends and colleagues tell me it is very dangerous: activists are arrested, detained, taken to courts, organisations are banned. Recently there was this case of Martin Kochesoko, a cultural activist who was mainly defending the language rights. But he was accused of extremism, the authorities planted drugs on him and put him in prison. People do fight, there are a lot of protests but nothing happens, because the way law enforcement act there in the Caucasus is very different from in the metropolis. They are still treated as a colony and a most dangerous one at that taking into account the most recent Chechen experience. But not only that. This reminds me of the history of the long Russian colonisation of the Caucasus – the war that lasted for more than a century and the Circassian

genocide and then the way the remaining people were treated after their defeat, the way they were disciplined into obedience and forgetting. However, in the last several years there are clear shifts, changes, Caucasians are in quest of their histories and start to see them as histories of colonization and today – as the ongoing coloniality. Now I encounter the younger generation of researchers, activist, artists who use anticolonial and even decolonial concepts in their discourse, but previously and even quite recently, it was still unimaginable. When I first started writing about decoloniality, people in the Caucasus didn't protest but just dismissed it saying they never were a colony: "you cannot compare us with Africa or India" was their argument. They were convinced by the Soviet national politics that they were free and culturally independent. This was an important part of the Soviet brainwashing – to persuade the colonized people that they were liberated, while in fact they were recolonised. In North Caucasus as well as Central Asia and the South Caucasus, there was a very short period of time when these countries became independent from the Tsarist Empire in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They wanted to have their own states, but then the Bolsheviks came and you know how it all ended. Part of the Bolsheviks' story was to say that they liberated these national outskirts of the empire (as the cliché of that time went) and gave them all their rights. But the Soviets largely continued the traditions of the Tsarist Empire in the region.

That lasted for a long time, but now it is changing because there is a new generation of people who think critically, very often know foreign languages, and read texts in other languages including the postcolonial and decolonial works and not just those written in Russian or translated into Russian. Russia is also one of these empires which suffers from colonial amnesia and refuses to see itself in the role of the coloniser. Plus, as I said, it is very hard to imagine any serious organised social movements because when such a movement emerges, people will be immediately persecuted, arrested, even killed. A lot of activism happens outside Russia, and mainly

in the diasporas. The North Caucasus has huge diasporas around the world. My people, the Circassians, are one of the world's largest diasporic group of people. When you tell people about the Circassian genocide, they don't know that today most Circassians do not live in the Caucasus, but reside in Turkey, in Syria, in Jordan, in Israel, and other middle Eastern countries, but also in Europe and in the US. There are several millions Circassians living all around the world, and only half a million living in Russia in three artificially created republics. But this story is largely unknown.

**About the diasporas: when we went to Abkhazia, we were surprised to see a lot of Turkish products in shops. We realised that Turkey was one of the only countries that actually trades with the so-called republic of Abkhazia. Despite decades of Turkification, the Circassian Abkhaz community in Turkey has been emigrating back to Abkhazia since the end of the 20th century. Do you think that the Circassians living in Turkey could support attempts at getting more autonomous? Of course, the case of Abkhazia is complicated, but can the diaspora play a role in the autonomy struggles in some of the regions of the North Caucasus?**

It is a complicated issue because there are so many different political interests that clash here. All of these diasporas live in different specific countries, they all have citizenships of different countries, and they have different relationships with those countries. That's why they have to keep a balance. This urge and activism to support independence movements has been strongly manifested several times in recent years, but the question is: do they really want independence, and on what terms? This is an ideal situation that every anticolonial struggle wants in the end, but if you look at the Caucasus and try to imagine what kind of future they could have, then it becomes more of a problem. They are still surrounded by great powers, just as 200 or 300 years ago, it's like being pawns in the crisscross of several chess

power games. That's what the Caucasus has been for centuries. They had to play against Russia, against Turkey, against Persia, and now it's the EU as well. It is a nightmare, I'm not sure at this point many people want complete independence. They realise it would be very hard for them to survive being independent in the present conditions and in reality they would just change the masters. Although, I do think that if we imagine an ideal future, the Caucasus as a region should be independent but as a whole, not divided by artificially created ethnicities in smaller states. Because I do believe that the nation-state is a very outdated concept. Historically, the Caucasus was this pluriversal entity which did not have a state or states but it had a certain kind of pan-Caucasian identity, that a lot of people argue against today, but I think it still does exist. It's not linguistic, sometimes in the Caucasus they speak different languages from one village to another, but they are all multilingual and aware of each other's traditions, cosmologies, ethics. There is a cultural affinity, an affinity for ancient sources and a common folklore. All of that still somehow exists, but is being destroyed with these artificial divisions that become quickly ontologised. People start believing after a while that "we are different because there's a border between us" but in reality, they are not. I don't really think these small ethnic denominations have a future. The history of many postcolonial nations shows that. I am familiar with diasporic groups living in other countries and it seems that they have gradually changed their tactics. At some point, they were very strict about authenticity and the purity of blood, and refused to mix with other ethnic groups. But then they realised it is not possible in today's world nor good for them to keep on thinking like this. Caucasian diasporas today are cosmopolitan, they are aware of the pitfalls of extreme nationalism. They have many unfortunate examples at hand. Look at India, for instance, and the kind of regime we find there today.

Many of these Caucasian ethnicities have been there for thousands of years. They are indigenous peoples of the Caucasus. And it shapes people

in certain ways. First of all, you can sense it in the way people connect to the land. Once I was reading a very interesting text by a Balkar writer – Balkars were one of the indigenous Turkic speaking ethnicities that were deported by Stalin to Central Asia. The Balkars live very high in the mountains, at altitudes not many people can survive. The types of houses they build, the way they connect with reality is shaped by this fact. So, this writer was born in exile, in Central Asia, and then Stalin died and his parents took him back home when he was already a teenager. And he wrote “*first my parents lived in my motherland, and then I moved to live in their motherland*”<sup>2</sup> because those two landscapes were so drastically different. In Central Asia, they lived in this flat steppe. Old mountain people were going out looking for some stone and saying “*o blessed stone, you remind me of my mountains*”. And then he comes back, well not back, but to the Caucasus, and he sees this vertically oriented landscape. An entire world is organised according to the mountains and their verticality, rather than flatness. It’s a completely different way of looking at things. This is something that probably connects all people of the Caucasus, irrespective of their religion or language. And you can see how it’s expressed in everyday things, even in how we make up metaphors – which would be very different from Russians or Central Asians. For me, that is something that we have to think about much more than we do.

**Academics like Viacheslav Morozov have been talking about Russia as a subaltern empire<sup>3</sup> for a few years now. Some have been getting flak from Caucasian colleagues saying “it doesn’t matter if you are colonised**

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2 The writer is Boris Chipchikov who addressed the trauma of collective deportation and return, and the pitfalls of long-going cultural coloniality in a most complex, aesthetically rich and politically powerful way. See: <http://www.elbrusoid.org/articles/karachay-balkar-lit/358893/>

3 Morozov Viatcheslav, *Russia Postcolonial Identity. A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2015.

**by a subaltern empire, you are still getting colonised”. It gave way to lively exchanges. Where do you stand in that debate?**

First of all, I have been using the term “subaltern empire” since 2000, much before Morozov wrote anything<sup>4</sup> of the kind, but that’s fine. I also pushed this further and suggested to call Russia a “Janus-faced” empire, which is even worse. It’s not just subaltern, it has two faces or masks: one looking to the West, one looking to the East. For me, this is the gist of the external imperial difference. It’s an empire with an inferiority complex in the presence of the West, and also an empire that desperately wants to be in the first league but never succeeds. It is subaltern in how it doesn’t have its own system of values and it therefore dependent on the Western one even when it criticizes it. It is not colonised in the literal sense by the West, but it is completely culturally, epistemologically, aesthetically. It was doomed to be peripheral or semi-peripheral in the world system and, in that sense, Morozov is certainly right, but we look at it differently because I look at this situation from a colonised position and he looks at it from an imperial position even if critical. He uses this argument indirectly to justify what happens with Russia and in Russia, which I don’t really like. I think it’s perhaps even worse when such a subaltern empire with no conceptual core of its own, and constantly looking for the West’s approval while competing with it at the same time in a clearly hopeless way, realises that it doesn’t have a place among the masters and at the same time goes to its own colonies and acts in the most cruel and savage colonialist way, mimicking the original Western colonisers but doing it often caricaturistically. Because that’s what it did, if you look at the policies of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus, in

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4 See e.g. Tlostanova, M. 2003, *A Janus-Faced Empire. Notes on the Russian Empire in Modernity* Written from the Border. Moscow, Blok; and then Tlostanova, M. “The Imagined Freedom: Post-Soviet Intellectuals Between the Hegemony of the State and the Hegemony of the Market” which was published in the special issue of *The South Atlantic Quarterly: Double Critique: Knowledges and Scholars at Risk in Post-Soviet Societies* (No 105/3, 2006, pp. 637-660), that we co-edited with Walter Mignolo.

Central Asia and previously in Siberia, we see it's a mixture of British and French colonialisms with additional local atrocities added in. But what is important indeed is that the Russian empire never questions the terms of the conversation, it just tries to change to content, as Mignolo would say. It accepts the imposed Euromodern terms.

And exactly, as the Caucasian activists and thinkers said, it doesn't matter who was the coloniser, the first or the second-class empire. It does not really matter if the coloniser also felt colonised. For example, take Dostoievski who in the 1880s wrote in his writer's diary about the colonisation of Central Asia: "*In Europe we were hangers-on and slaves, in Asia we shall go as masters*". This is this double-face-ness at its clearest: "I felt like I didn't belong in Europe, but now in Central Asia, I become the real serious coloniser". This is also true about the Caucasus, although it happened a little bit earlier and the tactics were different. When colonising the Caucasus, the Russians were using the rationale of the *Wild West*, and it was very similar to what happened with Amerindians in the future United States. At first, they divided the Caucasians into reservations you were not allowed to leave. You were given specific documents. All these places that exist now in the Caucasus, the villages, small towns, the majority of them did not exist prior colonization. Local populations were reshuffled and the old ancestral places that were connected with traditional memories were destroyed or renamed. New villages were built in reservations where the people could be constantly under surveyance. Similar things continued during the Soviet time. I remember my father telling me that during WW2 and immediately after it in Nalchik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria, his family was perhaps the only Kabardin family living in the main street, and in his class, he was the only Kabardin pupil. So, the capital of this presumably national republic was supposed to be free of indigenous people as any settler colonial city. They had to live in the villages while the Russians lived in the city. The same was true of my mom who went to school in the centre of Tashkent,

Uzbekistan, in its so-called European part. There were three Uzbek girls in her class, the rest were not. She told me that teachers and non-Uzbek pupils always looked at the three girls as if they were some savages, they mostly sat separately. There was obviously some unofficial segregation as well. So, you have to be careful with Morozov's book even if it is very good. The question for me is where does he stand exactly in that argument. But especially problematic for me is Etkind's book<sup>5</sup>, about the so-called internal colonisation, a very problematic and at times overtly racist concept.

**On internal colonisation: in later years and especially last summer, when the governor the Khabarovsk Krai was arrested, people in the Russian Far East started to echo some decolonial talking points, saying that these peripheral regions are colonies, all their resources are shipped away to Moscow and they don't get anything in return. Do you think that this framing is legitimate, considering this internal colonisation, but also the fact that the Russians now saying these things are themselves settlers?**

They are legitimate in the sense that this is what is happening. It's not really connected with ethnicity anymore, rather than with the bad functioning of the Russian state and the way it pumps resources. But I am not sure they should use "colonisation", "colonialism" in this case. Perhaps they can use modernity/coloniality instead. For me, it is something different, and at the same time if we look at this region, not only in Khabarovsk Krai, but also in Siberia, Altai, there are indigenous movements that are against this extractivism. They are against extractivism not just in economic terms, but also regarding their knowledge, the destruction of their languages, of their habitat... and that for me makes more sense, when it comes to connecting it to the decolonial movement and decoloniality. There is an

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5 Etkind Alexander, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience*, Cambridge, Polity, 2011.

intricate connection, a link between the land (land as pedagogy, land as a way of looking at things following Canadian indigenous thinker and poet L. Betasamosake Simpson) and its people, that the modern industrial state is destroying. So that makes sense.

But regarding this particular regionalist political movement, we are talking here about the former white settlers or their children. They have no connection to this land, at least not the same as indigenous people would have. But their reaction on the other hand is very similar to the white settler colonies such as the US that were similarly offended with the British empire and at some point, fought for independence. So, the whole discussion then moves to a more pragmatic and modern/colonial interpretation of the failure on the part of the state and the subsequent revolutions and independence movements. What is important for me here is to never mix white settler colonialism and its anticolonial movements and the racialized dehumanized local indigenous groups and their anticolonial struggles. These are two different agendas. The whole argument of internal colonisation therefore become racist as it erases millions of dispensable lives making only one story important. It is still based on a human taxonomy that was created in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and that dismisses huge populations from being human and incidentally it also follows an old Russian imperial historiographic story launched by Karamzin just decorating it with bits of fashionable postcolonial theory. But what it ignores is this dehumanization, that happened with African slaves, with the indigenous people of the so-called New World, and also with Circassians. What do we find in Etikind's book? It is apparently okay to speak about the peasant population, the serfs, but he is not interested at all in what happened to the actual colonised people. What happened in Siberia, where the majority of the population was simply killed? When the Russian Empire started its march to Siberia, the majority of the indigenous peoples were destroyed or forcefully assimilated. Today they have Russian names and don't remember themselves who they

were – that’s the saddest thing. They can’t go back, even if they wanted to. They have nowhere to go back to. There are no traces left of their ancestral memories because whoever could tell them anything about it, died already, and the Soviet regime was very instrumental in that sense, it was stricter and more purposeful than other regimes. You can often see this apathy, this lack of belief in the future. And internal colonization erases all these complexities, So I think that it is a very problematic concept.

**A question related to your work as a feminist scholar. You argued in a book<sup>6</sup> that most gender and feminist activists in post-socialist Eurasia agreed to apply Western feminist paradigms to the local material, without taking into account the particular socialist experience. Do you think that the precariousness of gender activism in the region we witness today is still linked to this tension between the coloniality, the gender paradigms coming from the West and the legacy of the communist past? Are feminist movements trying to overcome this and articulate a different gender discourse?**

There is no general rule here. In some countries in Eastern Europe you find very interesting, powerful movements. Depending on what kind of situation they had under socialism they have different views on that. For instance, countries of former Yugoslavia had a much more positive experience of socialism, and are sometimes nostalgic of that time, which I can understand because their socialism was very different from the Soviet one. They had dialogues with Western feminists as early as in the late 60s and 70s, and already then they were showing them that “our agenda is different, we have had for a long time many rights that you are just dreaming about. We don’t have to be identical with you, we have a different agenda”.

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6 Tlostanova Madina, *Gender Epistemologies and Eurasian Borderlands*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

If we look at Russia, there is a great gap there between the actual movements and academic feminists, which I find uninteresting. The few who are still working in two-three institutes are critical, but their critique is very conventional, they are very Western in the tools they use. But the movements are great: there is a younger generation of women, people of different genders, non-binary. These are grassroots movements, very rarely connected to academic schools of thought, and they do their own educational initiatives. It's amazing that so many people are coming to these lectures, they are asking questions, they're interested in changing something. And they are also very active politically, they go out and protest, they help women, they organise against violence. This is something which could not have been imagined 10 years ago. It's even more interesting in Central Asian countries, with whom I collaborate now through art initiatives, and there too they discuss decoloniality in gender terms. There is a strong connection between feminism and decoloniality. Most of the artists are women, and they do amazing things. In that sense, the situation is changing.

We just finished writing a book, a collection about postcolonial and postsocialist feminist dialogues... or lack thereof.<sup>7</sup> We were struggling with that book with my two colleagues, Suruchi Thapar-Björkert who is originally from India but works here in Uppsala University, and Redi Koobak, who is originally from Estonia and now is a post-doc in Bergen, Norway. We started with a conference more than 6 years ago and we wanted to invite people from the Global South and former socialist countries. Eastern Europeans were eager to apply postcolonial terms to their critique and see their positionality through this lens. But very few people from the Global South were willing to come. We were really puzzled with that at

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7 Koobak Redi, Tlostanova Madina and Thapar-Björkert Suruchi (eds.), *Postcolonial and Postsocialist Dialogues. Intersections, Opacities, Challenges in Feminist Theorizing and Practice*, Abingdon-on-Thames, Routledge, 2021.

first. We thought it was due to a lack of knowledge about socialism... but the few feminists from the Global South that we managed to get were very socialist, they believed in socialism as an ideal structure of society. For them it was a shock to see postsocialist women criticising what they had, saying “we had our own way, but we are not defending it. We don’t want to be seen as products of belated western thinking, and we don’t want to be homogenised with the global South because our experience was different”. There was this puzzlement and only when putting this book together we started finding more authors from, or connected with, the global South. We also have two wonderful young authors from China, although feminists from China usually don’t take part in these discussions. First, because they still have socialism, even if it is just an empty shell, so they don’t speak about postsocialism as people do in Eastern Europe. But at the same time, in China too they had this influx of Western NGOs and Western understandings of gender studies. At first, they were very attracted to it, but then they realised that they were orientalised: they were seen either as heroes, Mulan warriors, or they were seen as victims of oppression. And there was nothing else. This is how Western feminism interprets this difference, let’s say.

Socialist women were responsible for a certain set of issues within the global feminist division of labour, as Jennifer Suchland convincingly pointed out: marked by their ideological difference, they were responsible for the so-called peaceful co-existence paradigm. Women from the Global South were supposed to deal with racial, religious, ethnic, and cultural difference in the same logic. And women from the North spoke about theoretical issues, equality, democratic forms of governance. But when it all collapsed the socialist feminists were left with no agenda, and they could not join any of these groups. And then there is this awakening: “we need to revisit our own history ourselves, we don’t want somebody from the West to come and tell us what happened to us”. We have to really think hard about it, and not

to romanticise this past. The way the notorious “women`s question” was solved was particularly cruel and partial in the Soviet Union and especially in the Soviet non-European colonies.

Circling back to the beginning of your last answer, what do you think the space for cooperation is between people who fall into decoloniality in the broad sense in Central-Eastern Europe and the same decolonial people from ‘Third World’ countries and diasporas? Is there space for cooperation? And also, is it possible to be decolonial without being anti-capitalist?

I think there should be a space because there is so much in common. These are two different angles of modernity/coloniality and if we look at the population of the world today we will realise that the majority of us are postcolonial or postsocialist... or both, like me, for instance. We cannot erase our history or pretend it’s not there, and not take into account these horizontal links. It has to be horizontal and transversal, not just somebody from the West who comes and says “this is the theory” and then you apply it to your reality. It’s much more interesting what we come up with if we have a dialogue among ourselves without the Western medium. That’s why there are more and more projects like that now and I think they are super interesting. The problem is that some of them are very descriptive and very historical. I don’t like when people just say “oh you know in the Soviet Union there was this organisation of the *Friendship between Asian and African countries and the Soviet Union*, so let’s go to the archives and dig it out!” as a perfect example of racial and social equality. First of all, Soviet archives are problematic. Second, it was a tool of the Soviet soft power, and many of such organizations were actually created to brainwash people from the Global South into socialism. Yet there was also genuine interest, people found each other through such ideologically loaded organizations, and some of them who are still alive remain to be friends, they still remember the time when it was actually possible to have a dialogue bypassing the

Western dominance. We could revive this in interesting ways, but it would have to happen through grassroots activities, not through somebody at the level of the state or international institutions creating an organisation like that again.

About capitalism, as Anibal Quijano writes very convincingly in one of his first overtly decolonial works, capitalism is an essential part of global coloniality. Marxists however tend to overestimate the economy. Capitalism is at the core, but there are other nuances that should be added, and this is why coloniality also has the concepts of race and gender there, which are not often discussed in classical Marxism. But at the same time, this is the easiest way to explain it to the broader population who do not think they are colonised or colonisers, because capitalism is a more mainstream equivalent of modernity and coloniality, with this marketisation of everything at its heart. This is something everybody experiences, and it is also true in academia.

**In your book<sup>8</sup> “*What Does It Mean to Be Post-Soviet?*” you discussed the role of art in decoloniality and in constructing different futures in the post-Soviet space. In Western Europe, we also see more and more efforts being put into decolonising museums as spaces where imperial aesthetics and knowledge are re-produced. Which connections do you see between these movements in the post-Soviet space and in the West?**

I think there are a lot of them. Actually, I find more connections and dialogues in the art world than in the academic world. I found this out long ago, when we first started to write, in my decolonial group, about

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8 Tlostanova Madina, *What Does It Mean to Be Post-Soviet? Decolonial Art from the Ruins of the Soviet Empire*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2018.

decolonial aesthesis. There were several art events, exhibitions in which we were first formulating these ideas, back in 2009, 2011 and later. I found that there were international communities of artists, from the West, from the Global South, from semi-peripheries, they very easily mingled and sometimes created projects together, installations, video-art... for them it was really a borderless world. I started thinking about why it was so easy in the art world, including also the museums and curators, and why it was so difficult in academia. I think that it's partly because academia deals with words, with articles, and when you write an academic article it's boring, it's logo-centric, you have to follow certain rules... And it also affects what you write: you cannot write your dissertation as a poem or you cannot write it from the position of a shaman. You will have to pay for that if you do. So you first have to break yourself, to force yourself to do it in a certain way. While if you are an artist you don't have to: you work with images, with metaphors, with symbols, and often something that cannot be formulated in this logo-centric way can be done in a project, and it would tell much more to the people who would come to this exhibition, they would just grasp it... or they won't, if they don't have this sensibility for coloniality. You don't need to explain anything with words. And it's also universal in the sense that you can bring it to Russia, to New York, and people would just read it. So that was one of the reasons why I wanted to write about art in that book. I thought that in many cases just watching a 10-minute video of Taus Makhacheva<sup>9</sup> is enough to understand how decoloniality works in the Caucasus in the the Dagestani case, as she's trying to work with images and with the ideas of decolonising museums.

In Europe, as you know, this is a very widely spread movement, there are so many curators and museums that work with this, and it's very interesting

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9 Taus Makhacheva is a Moscow-born artist of Dagestani descent. Her performance and video works critically examine what happens when different cultures and traditions come into contact with one another.

that many artists who are Russian originally, or from the Russian colonies I mentioned, work with European museums and curators, and what they do is amazing. I prepared several texts for such artists' books, catalogues, exhibitions and the curators were all Western. But they were very attentive to understanding what they were actually dealing with. There are wonderful examples in Europe, like the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven in the Netherlands, to which the annual decolonial summer school has moved two year ago. So, I think there is a future there, in this kind of collaboration through art across borders.

### 3.4 In search of Basebya Gilbert: Exploring the experience of African students in the USSR through fiction

Sandra Muteteri Heremans

My interest in the geopolitical and artistic relations between the Soviet Union and the African continent, as well as the experience of African students in the Eastern Bloc during the 70s, was triggered by coincidentally falling on a letter from Moscow in my family archives, sent by a family friend, who was a Rwandan studying near Moscow in the 70s. Both the period and this kind of geographic encounter had also previously caught my attention, due to me being a visual artist and filmmaker, as several filmmakers from the African continent had studied in the Soviet Union and carried home the renowned Soviet montage in their films. Illustrative of this is Ousmane Sembène, along with Sarah Maldoror and Abderrahmane Sissako<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, I started my research by exploring both the political, artistic interrelations in all the “layeredness” of the 60s and 70s, trying to gain an insight of the geopolitical dynamics of the Cold War, their repercussions on the African continent after the independences – and particularly on the experience of an individual studying, through a scholarship, in the USSR. This research not only challenged my perceptions about that period in time, being of the generation that was raised after the fall of the Berlin wall, but started to give me a deeper comprehension of this turbulent, but also insightful period for contemporary society. Being born in Rwanda but being raised in the West, had inevitably framed my perception of history, and by extension my imagination and understanding around the Cold War and Eastern Europe.

This essay aspires, thus, to give an insight into the beginning of my (artistic) research which aims to result in an experimental film. This exploration of history helps me to create a fictional character called Basebya Gilbert. A character that is being constructed by archive research, testimonies, fictional (film) characters of that period in time.

The essay will initially provide a general geopolitical and historical context for the period and afterwards it will provide a modest glimpse into the life of the fictional character based on a true story, Basebya Gilbert, a Rwandan student studying near Moscow, with a dialogue, in the form of a screenplay.

### *Historical context*

The rhetoric of Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924) and his ideas around colour-blind internationalism and solidarity among the “oppressed of the world” resonated throughout the globe, including in the colonies, where social and racial inequality were an inseparable part of then contemporary society. Intellectuals from different parts of the world, as in Africa, the Caribbean as well as African Americans, saw the Soviet Union as a meeting point and thus a cradle for many communist-inspired revolutionary ideas.

The 1950s, more specifically from 1953 on, following Joseph Stalin’s death (1878–1953), had been characterised, under his successor Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971), by a growing interest on the Soviets’ part towards developing long-term relationship with several countries on the African continent. These stimulating interactions between the Soviet Union and the expanding independence movements on the African continent culminated in the symbolic organisation of the 6th World Festival of Youth and Students in 1957 where several delegations of African students were welcomed. The festival attracted 34,000 people from 130 countries.

Subsequently, on February 5<sup>th</sup> 1960, the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University) was established. Soon the university was renamed after the murdered Congolese politician Patrice Lumumba. It aimed at giving students from Asia, Africa and Latin America an opportunity to receive education and to transform themselves into specialists in various fields in order to contribute to the construction of their newly independent countries. In 1961, this need for education was confirmed during the Conference of African States dedicated to education in Africa that took place in Addis Ababa. The delegates stressed the importance of education for the economic and social development of their respective young countries. Consequently, in the early sixties and during the Cold War, faced with a shortage of cadres in the aftermath of independence, a large number of students, seeking for themselves a socialist experiment, an anti-imperialist experience (e.g. Egypt, Algeria, Tanzania, Congo-Brazzaville, Mali, Guinea, Ghana) or coming from national liberation movements (e.g. ANC, MPLA, FRELIMO, SWAPO) became students in the URSS and popular democracies, such as China and Cuba. Until the mid-1970s, the Soviets developed relationships with radical strands of the independence movements in Angola, Benin, Ethiopia, and Mozambique, some of whom fought for their independence with the support of Soviet militias.

### *A fictional dialogue as a mode of insight*

As mentioned earlier, the essay seeks to give an insight, based on testimonies, into the experiences of a Rwandan student in Moscow and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The interactions between Idrissa and Gilbert are fictional, but the information told is real. The starting questions in developing this dialogue are: *“What would their experiences be? How do these geopolitical realities impact their daily lives? What were their thoughts about their surroundings? How was the contact with the other students?”*

## Studying in Voronej (Russian SFSR) and Odessa (Ukrainian SSR) 1974–1979

### 1. First encounter with the weather

*Two African students sit face to face being visibly tired at a dining room table. The light is off. The radio is on. A voice seems to read the latest news in Russian.*

**Gilbert**

Idrissa! You still look hungry!

**Idrissa**

It's only the food that manages to warm me up.  
It's so cold outside.

**Gilbert**

Oh, this snow... So white... but so cold.  
It is so beautiful. I've never seen anything like it.

**Idrissa**

Winter has barely begun and it is already -15°C

### 2. Meeting the Soviets

**Gilbert**

Oh yeah, what are your impressions of the Soviets?

**Idrissa**

They drink a lot

**Gilbert**

Ha, yes so true!  
But most of them seem to be nice.  
Especially to foreigners.

**Idrissa**

The Soviets, some of them  
are closed and others are obsessed  
by everything that comes from abroad:  
clothes, songs... even watches.

**Gilbert**

Yes, I noticed that too  
 But you have to understand:  
 on the radio, on TV...  
 In the newspapers, they only talk about  
 the Soviet Union and the socialist states...  
 It's normal, isn't it?

3. The grading system at university**Idrissa**

How do they evaluate us?  
 Does it have repercussions on our scholarship?

**Gilbert**

The Soviets rate all the works on 5 points, 5 = YB, 4=B, 3=AB, 2=M. The Russian students normally have a scholarship of 40 roubles – when a student always receives 5 points during a year, the scholarship is increased to 100 roubles. When a student receives 4, he passes but his scholarship is not increased.

If a student receives 3 points, he passes, but does not receive a scholarship and is kicked out of the university residences. So all the Russian students work a lot for fear that their scholarship will be cut.

But I have to admit, I like this system very much  
 I think that such a system would stimulate the students' work.

Here, everything is provided for the students to study well.  
 Books cost almost nothing. Books that cost 2,000 francs at home do not cost even one rouble here. And every night there is a teacher available for students.

4. Learning Russian**Idrissa**

How does it go with learning Russian? And what about your friends?

**Gilber**

I am making sensational progress in the study of Russian. We can already follow a lecture or a course in Russian (with difficulties of course!). Many Russian words are similar to French or English words. The declensions are very similar to Latin declensions. We adapted much more easily than others who do not know these languages.

We learn Russian via the radio, the TV; we also have language labs where the teacher only speaks to you in Russian (and most of them only know Russian), even for the first lesson! We also live with Russian students. To understand them, we have to speak Russian. Everything forces you to speak Russian here.

I really hope that by the end of the year we will be ready to enter university.

5. Religion in the USSR**Idrissa**

What about religion? Do you go to church?

**Gilbert**

You know, the Soviet youth is taught from an early age – and they are all convinced without exception – that God does not exist!

But the contradiction is that old people believe in God and they go to church often. I went to church once, and there were only old people there. I decided not to go back there anymore, because there are only orthodox churches here and I find it is very difficult to follow in this crowd of old people.

6. New Year party with other students**Idrissa**

Happy New Year, Gilbert!  
What did you do for the New Year?

**Gilbert**

Thank you very much for your New Year's wishes!

We have started the new year very well. We celebrated the New Year, all Rwandans together with friends we met here. This is one of the good things about studying abroad. It's the possibility of getting to know other people and living with them. Here I have friends from Vietnam, the DDR, Latin America and Asia. At parties, like New Year's Eve, we have the opportunity to talk and I have noticed that their problems are not different from ours.

## 7. Traveling while living in the Soviet Union (September 1976)

*Coming back from Belgium*

**Idrissa**

Gilbert, how was it coming back?  
Your return from your trip to Belgium?

**Gilbert**

How was my trip to Belgium?  
Everything went well. My return was very tiring.  
The trip lasted two days and two nights.  
Fortunately, I was able to rest in Moscow  
Where I spent the whole day of August 20.  
I was a bit annoyed at the customs in Brest.  
While searching, a soldier had come  
across a book I had been given by a  
friend in Belgium:  
"The Failures of Marxist Economics".  
He had it read by interpreters,  
and it was refused to me,  
saying that it was bourgeois propaganda.

**Idrissa**

But didn't you protest?

**Gilbert**

Of course I did! I protested and  
 I claimed my right:  
 Freedom of conscience and reading!  
 But the Soviets are so so obstinate!

Already before my departure,  
 what a story with this Soviet currency  
 which is not convertible!  
 Do you know that it pushed some people  
 to turn to the black market to get dollars.  
 It's really not safe, this approach!

*Wanting to travel to Rome*

**Gilbert**

Ah, those Soviets! I couldn't go to Rome.

**Idrissa**

How come?

**Gilbert**

They refused my exit visa!  
 I tell you, they control us too much

## **Feeling stuck in the USSR, Odessa (Ukrainian SSR) 1976**

### The Student Strike

*March 1976*

**Idrissa**

What are you doing?

**Gilbert**

We, the Rwandan students,  
 are preparing a big strike.

**Idrissa**

Why?

**Gilbert**

We have been asking for a long time  
the Rwandan government to grant us  
vacations to the country,  
until now the government has been silent...

I don't know if you understand,  
how difficult a situation we are living in!

To spend six years in  
the USSR without returning home!

Can you imagine?

**Idrissa**

But is it difficult for everyone?  
Your compatriots? What do they think?

**Gilbert**

Everyone agrees!  
It's very difficult to bear and  
many people become  
mentally deranged.

**Idrissa**

But what are you going to do?

**Gilbert**

We are thinking of going on a general strike  
until our demands are met.

**Idrissa**

But how are you organizing?

**Gilbert**

On the whole territory of the USSR  
Rwandan students have held  
meetings to study  
how the strike would be conducted

**Idrissa**

But the Soviet authorities,  
how will they react?

**Gilbert**

I don't know. We'll see.

*June 1976*

**Idrissa**

So how did it go  
with your ideas to invade  
the Rwandan embassy?

**Gilbert**

Yes, our plans to invade  
the embassy and chase the ambassador away?

Look, our plans were aborted.  
The Soviet authorities noticed  
the uneasiness that reigned among us  
and to stop any enterprise of the students  
against the embassy of Rwanda,  
armed militiamen were placed.

**Idrissa**

So you gave up?

**Gilbert**

No, no! Listen to what we did.  
We decided to go through the laws  
and asked the  
Soviet Ministry of Education  
for permission to send a delegation to the embassy.

The delegation was received  
by the ambassador,  
who answered that he had

not received any order  
from Kigali and that our requests  
were still under consideration.

The delegation returned  
unsatisfied and  
we started the strike.

The Rwandan students refused  
to attend classes,  
until their demands were met.

**Idrissa**

But how did the Soviets react?

**Gilbert**

Oh those Soviets!

The Soviets threatened to expel  
all the leaders of our organization  
if we didn't calm down.

So, on the request  
of the central committee,  
we stopped this strike.

But you know,  
we will start again  
if the Rwandan government  
continues to keep silent.  
We have decided, however,  
to start again.

*Closing reflections: The metaphor of the snow*

First, I want to address the symbolic potential of the encounter of snow in this context. The director Abderrahmane Sissako makes use of this metaphor as an encounter of both worlds and the complications that comes with it in a long scene in his film *'October'* (1993, 37 min.). This film tells the story of a Mauritian student, Idrissa, living a tumultuous relationship with his Muscovite girlfriend Ira. At one point the young Idrissa is depicted on the ground in a park, taking his hands full of snow to his face. The scene seems like a baptism of sorts: an immersion into a new world. This scene, among many others, conveys Sissako's symbolic suggestion of what a "socialist friendship" inherently entails. Although the film explicitly addresses the historical fact of an interaction between Africans and the USSR, it leaves the cultural and political implications radically open<sup>2</sup>.

Jean-José Maboungou's article "*Voyage en Brejnevie: Vie « Rêvée » des étudiants du Tiers-Monde en Russie soviétique*" published in 2017 gives us interesting insights into what life might have been like for foreign students over there, as interactions with Africans was still a novelty. Until the end of World War II, the Soviet Union had remained largely closed to the West and to large parts of the world. Although many African communist anticolonial activists had attended the Comintern or Cominform training schools as well as the important university named after African leader Patrice Lumumba, and the Africa Institute of the USSR Academy of Science (established in 1959, it had already published more than 620 books on Africa by 1974), it seems that relations between Africa and the Soviet Union were of a fairly recent occurrence. It follows that in 1974 many Soviets had never met an African<sup>3</sup>.

Since the Soviet Union had remained largely closed to the West throughout a period, students, as mentioned in the dialogue above, noticed a certain fascination in their interaction with the Soviet students. This is

well mentioned in Maboungou's article, along with the Soviets' genuine curiosity about the foreign students' lives abroad, their tastes and their visions of the world. This often led to great discussions when students met in the dorm, such as in the dialogue above the discussions about religion.

Also palpable in the study is a sense of isolation, of extreme loneliness, a need to be outside the university or doing anything else than studying. It feels like this growing isolation throughout the years of studying abroad pushed foreign students to find solace in alcohol. I encountered many testimonies echoing that upon returning to their country of birth the alcohol consumption of some African students often did not go unnoticed. According to Maboungou this tendency toward alcoholism wasn't a simple reflection of Soviet society, but rather the expression of a generalised existential malaise that was connected to the aforementioned sense of isolation<sup>4</sup>. This could also have been a tangible motive for the organisation of student strikes, and explains such a mental need to go home. In fact, Gilbert mentioned a lot of his fellow students started to feel "mentally deranged".

What is also worthy of mention here is the perhaps simple but also very human notion of opportunity. Not all students who left for the URSS defined themselves as communists, but rather as eager to learn young adults who wanted to discover something new and, above all, contribute to the construction of their country. Asked in an interview why he went on studying in Russia, Abderrahmane Sissako answered as such: *"First, not only in this time but also now, the big problem for young Africans was we didn't have the opportunity to choose something – not where to travel, or where to study. If we got an opportunity, any opportunity, to do something different or to go somewhere... for me, is the most important thing for a human being. When I was 19, I got the opportunity to go to Moscow to learn cinema, and only the Soviet Union gave me this opportunity. And sometimes people think, "It was*

*because you are a Communist.” No. Any young guy is a Communist in some way. And that is not a problem, to have the concept of sharing what we have. That is important for me, this vision. But I got this opportunity to go to Moscow to learn, and it was a big chance for me.”<sup>5</sup>*

This brings us back to the human experience, the lived experiences, with all the complexities that go along with it, that I have the freedom to explore in the construction of a fictional character. The administrative surrounding of Gilbert Basebya has an undeniable impact on his life and his experience of the world. What I mean by administrative surroundings is the state and its administration, the geopolitical negotiations and its very impact on people’s lives. This creation of this character reconnects, in my eyes, the ‘neutral’ historical texts that I have been reading with the very human experience of it, the ‘truth’ told and the ‘truth’ felt, the ideology and his embodiment.

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### 3.5 Black Poland: History of the Polish Black Community, current status and perspective

Żaneta Kubicka

The Black community is not something that immediately comes to mind while thinking about the people of Poland. It may seem surprising that there are Black people living or even originating from Poland. Such reaction is generally justified, as there is a relatively small number of the Black Poles compared to the White Poles. At the same time, the assumption that the Black community does not exist in Poland is not correct. The Black community has been in Poland for centuries. There are notable Black Poles, including politicians and athletes. Moreover, NGOs and other initiatives serving the interests of the Black community are present in Poland. Recently, the activities of the Black community in Poland contributed to the change of discourse related to the terms that Black people should be called cancelling the racist and archaic word *Murzyn*. It is definitely a step forward in a direction of anti-discrimination and inclusiveness.

#### *Black Poland: A historical outlook*

The history of the Black community in Poland might seem to be relatively short due to the countries' lack of colonies and imperialist ambitions. In fact, according to the historians, Black people were present in Poland since medieval times.

At that time, Black people were brought to Poland as servants in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. It happened mainly in royal courts and estates of magnates. At first, only men were brought.<sup>1</sup>

Even though the slavery almost did not exist in historical Poland, there is some evidence regarding Black presence in different noble and royal mansions. For the most part, they were servants brought from abroad for entertainment purposes. Some of the examples include a Black lady in the royal mansion of Sigismund II Augustus<sup>2</sup> in 1563 and a Black servant of Marina Mnischez, a Polish noblewoman and later a Tsaritsa of Russia<sup>3</sup>. John III Sobieski had *ethnic* servants, as can be concluded from the letters written to Marie Casimire Louise de La Grange d'Arquien (queen consort) on October 10, 1683<sup>4</sup>. The governor of Spis<sup>5</sup> Teodor Lubomirski (1683–1745) had a Black accompany, according to the chronicle by Andrzej Komoniecki<sup>6</sup>. The governor is also believed to have had more Black servants in his mansion in Przemyśl<sup>7</sup>. Hieronim Florian Radziwiłł, a Polish-Lithuanian nobleman, is believed to have imported Black slaves. He brought 12 Black slaves in February 1752 to his manor in Biała<sup>8</sup>.

There is some evidence for the presence of Black people in the royal manor of Stanislaus II Augustus in the description of king's court and servants "*Laufrow było czterech. Był także u dworu murzyn Ledou i turek nazwiskiem Kirkor*"<sup>9</sup>.

Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746–1817), Polish national hero and military leader, had a Black butler – Jan Lapiere, also known as Domingo. He is also believed to have been Kościuszko's comrade in arms. Later on, Lapiere served Dominik Radziwiłł, a nobleman.<sup>10</sup>

There were two most notable Black men in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Poland. One of them was Aleksander Dynis, the 17<sup>th</sup> century servant of Cracow's bishop who married a Polish woman and became a governor of Koziegłowy village.<sup>11</sup> The other one was Władysław Jabłonowski, brigadier general of

the Polish & French army, born in Gdańsk in 1769.<sup>12</sup> He fought in the Kościuszko Uprising and became brigadier general in the Polish Legions, leading the Danube Legion (3<sup>rd</sup> Polish Legion serving Napoleon's France).<sup>13</sup>

Władysław Jabłonowski was not the only Black man fighting in Polish uprisings. In fact, there is at least one other story, that of August Agbala Browne also known as Ali. He came to Poland from Nigeria and became a famous jazz musician in Warsaw during the mid-1920s. When the Second World War broke out, he volunteered to fight for Warsaw's Ochota district, and then was an insurgent within the "Two" battalion of major Jerzy Antosiewicz.<sup>14</sup> He was a member of a communication platoon and was known for riding a motorcycle with a red-and-white armband.

In contemporary Polish history, there are many notable Black people, including naturalised athletes and politicians. In the 2000s, soccer player Emmanuel Olisadebe was glorified as he contributed tremendously to the advance of Polish national team in the 2002 world cup in Korea & Japan. Wilfredo Leon Venero, one of the best volleyball players in the world, became a Polish citizen in 2015 and is currently a leader of Poland's national volleyball team. When it comes to politics, so far there have been only two members of parliament who happened to be Black – John Godson and Killion Munyama. Godson is of Nigerian origin and was sworn into office in December 2010 holding two terms as a parliamentarian. Currently, he plans to run for President of Nigeria in the upcoming 2023 general election<sup>15</sup>. Munyama comes from Zambia and came to Poland in 1981 for studies. He was elected an MP in 2011

*Current status of the Black community in Poland*

Poland is mostly a homogenous country, meaning most people are of the same ethnicity – they are White Poles. In the 2021 national census, no question regarding ethnic origin was included, therefore there are no estimates on the number of Black people living in Poland.

For the most part, the Black community in Poland consists of people coming from other countries (especially African countries) for work and studies, as well as their children. The presence of Black people in the public sphere might still cause strange looks and reactions, especially outside of main Polish cities, such as Warsaw, Cracow, or Gdańsk, as the number of Black people in Poland compared to the entire population is relatively small.

Due to the fact that the community is relatively small, there are not many NGOs related to the Black community. Yet, there are some that are notable, including *Nigdy Więcej* (Never Again), founded in 1996, with a mission to promote multiculturalism and tolerance. They build a broad and diverse movement against discrimination in various areas of social life and also initiated a successful campaign to put a ban on fascist and racist organisations in the Polish Constitution (Article 13).<sup>16</sup> The organisation has an archive of the incidents committed by neo-fascists and the extreme right as well as racist, xenophobic and discriminatory incidents in Poland called *Brunatna Księga* (Brown Book).

Another popular NGO, widely followed in social media is *Ośrodek Monitorowania Zachowań Rasistowskich i Ksenofobicznych* (Center for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behavior). It's an NGO whose main mission is to fight racism, xenophobia and endeavour broadly defined tolerance. Their day-to-day activities include reporting cases of racism to law enforcement, help and assistance for the victims of hate crimes,

monitoring the scale, scope and trends of behaviour caused by hatred. Moreover, they conduct educational activities and raise public awareness of the danger of hate crimes. However, the way they conduct their activities may be perceived as quite controversial as they post publicly the personal details of private individuals who are accused of racist behaviour.

Another NGO, *Fundacja Porta*, has been conducting anti-discriminatory workshops since 2004. The vice-president of the organisation, Arinze Nwolisa, is the father of the girl behind the *Stop Calling Me Murzyn* slogan, Bianka Nwolisa.

#### *What does it mean to be a Black Pole?*

Black Poles are a small community, coming or originating from many different countries. Black Polish culture differs from family to family or even from person to person. Most of the Black Poles are simply identified as Poles or mixed Poles, or as their original nationality, based on the country of origin. When it comes to mixed Poles, in the situation when one of the parents is an ethnic Pole, the other one is Black or mixed, the factors influencing the identity is the relationship with foreign family members and their presence in the life of a child. The culture of a parent or family member who are present in the process of raising a child influences the future identity of said child. Due to the complexity of these relationships, Black Polish identity is as various as the people who identify themselves as Black Poles. Also, it is worth noting that there are Black Poles who identify simply as Poles.

#### *Challenges for the Black community of Poland*

Not that long ago, racism in Poland was usually associated with incidents in soccer stadiums where hooligans yelled racist slogans or hung offensive

banners and single incidents of attacks by people associated with subcultures, usually some neo-Nazi who are growing stronger in Poland in recent years. Currently, as Poland becomes less monogenous and more and more people are coming from different countries and start living in Poland, racism is more present than ever. Often, non-White people are treated with prejudice. Between 1987 and 2008, there were 2500 racist and xenophobic incidents registered in Poland, in 2009–2010 over 400, and in 2011–2012 – 600.<sup>17</sup> Even worse, in some very serious incidents, racism and hate crimes caused the death of people of colour.

An infamous incident happened in 2010 with Polish citizen of Nigerian descent Maxwell Itoi.<sup>18</sup> He had a stand in the market close to one of Warsaw's train stations. The police came and tried to arrest one of the tradesmen. A quarrel started and Itoi was shot dead by the police officer when he tried to intervene. He bled to death before the ambulance came. Despite the fact that there were witnesses to Itoi being shot by the police officer, the evidence was insufficient to stand trial. The investigation conducted for 2 years was discontinued. No one was held responsible for the death of a Black man.

Another outrageous situation happened in one of the stores in a shopping mall in Warsaw. Two citizens of the Congo bought a jacket. They came back to the store because the safety tag wasn't removed by the seller. They had a receipt, but still the store assistant accused them of stealing. The police came and the men spent a night in detention. The cost of the jacket was PLN 79 (around \$20). Even if it had been stealing, it would have been a misdemeanour since the value was small (less than 500 PLN), yet they were treated as criminals.

*Black identity in Polish language – “Stop Calling Me Murzyn”*

During the wave of Black Lives Matter protests following the death of George Floyd in May 2020, special attention was brought to the word “Murzyn” – a pejorative substantive describing a Black person in Poland. During a protest in front of the United States Embassy in Poland, a Black girl named Bianka Nwolisa brought with her a sign with, on it, the phrase *Stop Calling Me Murzyn*.

The etymology of the word *Murzyn* comes from a German word *Mohr* derived from a Latin word *Maurus*, meaning an inhabitant of Mauretania<sup>19</sup> – and related to the English word *Moor*. Many non-Black Poles believe that this word has no negative connotations and perceive it as rather neutral.

However, this word is perceived as offensive for the Black Poles due to the racist context the word has been used in. Often, Black people in Poland are approached very directly by being called *Murzyn* instead of their real name or simply *proszę Pani/Pana (sir/madam)*. The experience of many Black people in Poland related to this word is traumatic. The word has been used as offensive, indicating inferiority in relation to non-Black people. In Polish schools, there are no classes on the topic of non-discriminatory language. It is very challenging to find one Black person who grew up in Poland and was not called *Murzyn* in a pejorative way.

A famous poem for children by Julian Tuwim, “*Murzynek Bambo*” is commonly known in Poland. Many argue that it should be analysed in the context of its time, yet it perpetuates stereotypes and implies the inferiority of an African child. What contributes more to the reinforcement of stereotypes is the fact that in elementary and junior high school, there are neither classes nor workshops tackling anti-discrimination and inclusiveness when it comes to race.

For years now, the Black community in Poland has been calling to quit using the word *Murzyn* to describe Black people. The majority of Black community treats this word as a Polish equivalent of the English word *Negro*. The word is treated as defamatory. Given the fact that *Murzyn* is used in many negative phrases, the word becomes more and more negative as the language evolves. Some of the phrases where the word *Murzyn* is used include someone forced to work hard (usually physically) or a person executing tasks of someone else's.

Historically, the word was used to describe a Black person and in fact did have a neutral meaning. As of now, the meaning of the word has pejorative connotations.<sup>20</sup> Following the assessment of Marek Łaziński for Council of the Polish Language, the word has been used in media outlet on both sides of the political spectrum rather rarely; yet, when this word is used, it usually creates disputes<sup>21</sup>. Further, Łaziński mentions that *Wielki Słownik Języka Polskiego* (The Great Dictionary of Polish Language) denotes the word as offensive.<sup>22</sup>

Also, he stretches the fact that all words change connotations as the public awareness naturally evolves, as in the 1980s and 1990s the word was rather neutral and not used by people in a negative context<sup>23</sup>. Currently, based on the author's analysis, the word is not only offensive but also archaic.

The Council of the Polish Language brings attention to one interesting matter – in most Western languages, the name Black people were called during slavery has changed.<sup>24</sup> It is seen especially in English and French, as these societies were involved in the slave trade to a high extent. The change was visible in other languages as well, however the extent and timeframe of those changes differed. What's interesting, it states that Polish is one of a kind when it comes to using phrases that enhance the stereotypes related to Black people. The scale of this phenomenon is much greater than in

any other language.<sup>25</sup> Worth mentioning is the fact that even though the pejorative phrases related to other ethnic groups exist, they don't have such a strong connotation. The word *Murzyn* strongly emphasises the historical ties between Black people and colonial slavery.

Of a greatest importance is the fact that people of colour in Poland (either people of Black descent or internationals coming to Poland) treat this word as offensive. Often, the word *Murzyn* was translated in English & French dictionaries as *Negro* – a highly offensive word, associated with the times of slavery. In this matter, the way Black people take it should be the main indication whether or not the word is offensive.

The word *Murzyn* can simply be replaced by the ethnicity/nationality itself (African, Senegalese, etc.) or simply the word *ciemnoskóry* (dark-skinned), *czarnoskóry* (Black-skinned) or simply *czarny* (Black). The word *czarny* (Black) might have seemed offensive decades ago, yet it is acceptable by Black people. *Afro-Polak* (African-Pole) is not a typical noun in Polish language, so is not a preferred alternative of the word *Murzyn*. At the same time, many Black Poles find this particular alternative acceptable and encourage using it.

Thus, even though the etymology of the word might indicate neutral meaning, the usage and evolution of the language indicate otherwise.

### *The testimony of a Black Pole*

Growing up Black in Poland made me absolutely hate the word *Murzyn*. Being Black was the reason why I did not have many friends and did not get along with my peers. I was constantly called *Murzyn* instead of my actual name. I grew up in a small town in 1990s Poland where people kept staring at me. At first, I was not really sure what is the reason for it, but

when I was about 5 years old, I realised that I did look a little bit different than the rest of the kids in the neighbourhood. One of the events that made me recognise this slight discrepancy was the fact that my neighbour turned his dog on me. I was bitten and traumatised which resulted in years of stuttering and anxiety.

As I grew older, I realised that standing out in a crowd can be an advantage. My skin colour makes me easy to remember and people find me more approachable, which might have something to do with peoples' curiosity. At the same time, my faults or any wrong doings are judged much more strictly because of being Black. One of my main issues with living in Poland is the fact that my boundaries are not respected; I often get many personal questions about my origin that a non-Black person would never be asked about. What is more, people often try to touch my hair without my permission. Apart from that, I still get verbal insults from random people due to my skin colour. That never happens when I spend time abroad.

At times, I don't feel safe walking down the streets in my own country. In 2018 during the Polish Independence Day, far-right organisations staged the march in Warsaw. While trying to get home, the police officers advised me not to cross paths with the crowd for safety reasons.

Every year, there are more and more internationals coming to Poland. Even though the history of Black community in Poland is not extensive, the public sphere becomes multicultural and the Black community is growing. The estimated number of Black people in Poland is much lower than in Western Europe, yet, there are multiple organisations and initiatives that serve the Black cause. The recommendation of the Council of the Polish Language regarding the use of the word *Murzyn* is definitely a step forward, however there is still a lot to be done when it comes to inclusiveness and anti-racism.

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## 3.6 “Look East”: the Zimbabwean Reaction to Neo-Imperialism

Malaika Newsome-Magadza

### *Circumstances leading to the introduction of the Look East Policy*

In the 2000s Zimbabwe was condemned to British, American, and European sanctioning as punishment for its land redistribution programme and human rights violations. The former British settler colony had fought a brutal, decade-long war of independence against the white supremacist Rhodesian state. Upon independence in 1980, Britain pledged to fund a land redistribution programme from white settlers to the indigenous people after ten years’ ‘de-escalation’. Twenty years later, 4,000 white farmers held as much land as 800,000 peasant farming families (Mkandawire, 2020), and resisted government proposals to negotiate on the land question. While black Zimbabweans remained in the reserves and infertile areas they were forced into pre-independence, the British government repeatedly refused to honour its agreement. By 2000, rural black Zimbabweans refused to keep waiting, and organised themselves alongside veterans of the independence war, occupying white farms in what became known as ‘farm invasions’. A ‘Third Chimurenga/Third Revolutionary War’ was declared- the final push to restore the land that had been the central focus of the independence war (Hanlon et al., 2012). The government, held accountable by the grass-roots for failure to deliver land, and sensing mutiny should they turn against their rural support base (Moyo and Yeros, 2007), came out in support of the occupations, and announced the ‘Fast Track Land Reform Programme’ to structure the movement already in action on the ground. White owned land was

expropriated, and redistributed to the indigenous peasant class. Naturally, the process was not without violence; many white farmers refused to leave, and continued to refuse the government's offers of land share (Blair, 2001; de Castella, 2007). Rallying behind them, the West introduced harsh sanctions on the country, crippling it as punishment for the redistribution while using the discourse of human rights as a political dog whistle. Within years the economy had collapsed and there was an exodus of millions of Zimbabweans (Dillon, 2013) fleeing political tensions and starvation caused by sanctions alleged to be aimed at their government (Ogbonna, 2017; OHCHR, 2021). In response to this, Zimbabwe's government shifted focus 'East' to countries like China.

The Zimbabwean case is important to understand and dispel myths of fraternal relationships between previously colonised and coloniser touted by Western governments. The Commonwealth is described as a 'family' (The Commonwealth, 2021) despite working to facilitate the interest of global capital that further weakens states (Power, 2009), while the CFA zone sees a loss of state sovereignty to the French Treasury and the perpetuation of underdevelopment (Taylor, 2019). It is not revolutionary to point out how exploitative and oppressive these relationships are; all parties involved are aware of this (Dearden, 2017; Nkrumah, 2021). However, it must be faced that this dynamic is finite- the economic ties between these South and West must be significantly appraised and decolonised should they endure. While it is a fact that countries in the global South have retained significant trade relations with their colonisers; although pragmatic, these relations are counterproductive. Existing ties to colonial powers grant access to markets, but at the expense of interference in internal affairs and policy.

While China is this decade's villain in Western rhetoric, the country has been a long-standing friend to decolonising forces across Africa – in colonies that Europe refused to give up without a fight. Zimbabwe is no exception.

The relationship between China and guerrilla fighters had arguably won Zimbabwe's war of independence: Maoist training of ZANLA guerrillas had influenced nationalists' politicisation of the peasantry (Griffith, 2015), cleaving the black population from the colonial state. Nationalists forged close ties with the Eastern bloc and its allies (Alexander et al., 2017; Moyo, 2016), receiving political and practical training in countries such like China, Yugoslavia, Romania, the USSR, and Tanzania. Unified against white supremacy and colonial violence, with equality and liberation-oriented ambitions, anti-colonial fighters and their rural supporters allied with Eastern countries, who naturally sought to expand their sphere of influence, but lay in ideological opposition to Western traditions of colonialism and imperialism.

Despite this, independent Zimbabwe had not rejected Britain as might have been expected; President Mugabe steered the country down a Western-aligned path (Chipaike and Mhandara, 2013). Britain was able to continue its extractive relationship with the country, which joined the ranks of the Commonwealth. However, even at this heyday of British–Zimbabwean relations, the dynamics were far from equal. The power imbalance and coercive dynamics between West and global South were never far from the surface. Zimbabwe was pressured to take on a structural adjustment programme in 1990 (Mkandawire, 2020; Moyo and Yeros, 2007) that disastrously saw the dismantling of the welfare state, harsh austerity measures, and entrenchment of non-indigenous land ownership (Monjane et al., 2019). As the land question returned to the fore, contempt for Zimbabwe and for indigenous peoples was communicated clearly in Short's infamous response to repeated requests to the British to honour their agreement to facilitate land restoration to the indigenous (Hasu and Patel, 2006).

*British construction of enmity*

In response to its decision to unilaterally pursue redistribution, Zimbabwe was made an example of. Britain and its allies punished a symbol more even than the state itself: the country was martyred to practice communal discipline to sympathetic countries across the region that similarly experience racialised land hunger and social hierarchies (Moyo, 2007). Zimbabwean redistribution simply could not be allowed to happen, and later, to succeed, lest a precedent be set for practical decolonisation in other independent African states. Zimbabwe is a significant cog in a global disciplinary regime that seeks not only to protect Western interests, but protect Whiteness within former colonies, whether in the distribution of resources and internal power hierarchies or through political muscle.

The economic crash that followed the sanctioning of Zimbabwe was framed in the West in the same victim-blaming language as the coverage of the land reform. The country's suffering was tied to redistribution and the government that allowed it, with Britain's part in the story erased. The indigenous Zimbabweans occupying and receiving land were reduced to caricatured native figures, spoken of in the language of 'mobs', 'invaders', or 'squatters', while only white people were consistently referred to as 'farmers' or 'owners' by British media (Newsome-Magadza, n.d.). Western media and the British government's language featured deeply paternalistic discourse, constructing black Zimbabweans as chaotic, destructive, and ignorant, and Crisis portrayed as an "African pathology" (Moyo and Yeros, 2007). Rural people, when mentioned at all, were portrayed as the regime's pawns, unable possess their own political judgements or moral sensibilities. Imperial narratives prevailed of indigenous people being inefficient, incapable of using land (Moyo, 2007), uneducated and therefore unknowledgeable, apathetic unless led, but still dangerous and volatile. Western action was portrayed as necessary to "correct" behaviour (Talbot, 2002), acting on behalf of powerless Zimbabweans needing Western saviourism.

Conversely, economic collapse was framed as the result of incompetence and mismanagement by leadership rather than sanctions, and linked to a failure of land redistribution. Simply put, Zimbabwe was shot in the leg, blamed for it, then critiqued for being unable to run. The refusal of the country to preserve colonial dynamics and defer to British judgements provoked a siege response, underscoring the constancy of Western imperialist mentalities. The millions of black Zimbabweans who starved or became economic refugees were considered collateral, the responsibility of a non-compliant government. With Western nations self-authorised to act illiberally to police and isolate 'disorder' (Abrahamsen, 2005), the suffering of these black bodies was considered a rational means to an imperial end. Healthcare support and funding was denied on political grounds (Ogbonna, 2017), and hospitals collapsed at the height of a cholera outbreak (Hungwe, 2008), leaving Zimbabwe with one of the world's lowest life expectancies by 2010 (BBC News, 2010). Black Zimbabweans and other Africans were cognisant of their collateral status (Motaung, 2018), severely undercutting Western narratives of human rights concerns, and causing pushback. This tension was seen when Britain attempted to exclude Zimbabwe from the 2003 Europe-Africa Summit: in defiance of Britain, African nations refused to participate without the country represented (Tull, 2008), and "supported Zimbabwe... to chair the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development in 2007, allegedly to show African solidarity against Western opposition" (Zengeni, 2016, 5).

The actions of the Zimbabwean peasantry in taking matters into their own hands offered a better way to see poorer countries – and poorer social classes – after colonialism: agential. Specifically, the land reform, however unorganised and corrupt at times, showed a real threat to Whiteness and enduring colonial status quos, overturning narratives of white indispensability and black gratitude. The response in the West of evoking images of savagery and chaos (Abrahamsen, 2005) was instrumental in

constructing a defensive, reactionary picture of decolonisation painted with moral panic. Black anger and black pain were equated to Black Threat, incursions on British power itself through white farmers that “locally represented” British dominance (Chigora and Dewa, 2009, 94). Similar to Anderson’s imagined communities, (post)colonies represent imagined *captive* communities to Britain, outliers but affixed to a central power, therefore punishable; barbaric, but still a responsibility to codify. As Schwarz (2011) notes, neither Empire nor decolonisation are considered external processes in Britain. With Whiteness considered home, and settler outposts replicating that familiarity, perceived attacks on white farmers were inflammatory. Britain as a metropole is imbued with coloniality, bolstered by the Commonwealth- this is reflected in its poor observance of sovereignty and lack of real decolonial commitment. Despite narratives of mutual respect, the country actively protects colonial hierarchies within independent states.

Indigenous people were constructed as alien to their own land- outsiders rattling the gates of order, productivity, and legitimacy. In their rejection of land redistribution and decolonial justice, Western powers perpetuated the displacement of the indigenous physically and normatively. White colonialists gatekept ‘the native’ (Schwarz, 2011), so they translated Zimbabwe’s crisis to the metropole, capturing narratives of authenticity and victimhood for themselves over black generations’ pain. The othering and silencing of indigenous people and black discourses allowed for their subsequent construction as villains, and the state as rogue, “illegitimate and irrational” (Talbot, 2002). This is emphasised by Britain’s prevention of SADC countries speaking in support of Zimbabwe at the 2003 Commonwealth meeting (Hasu and Patel, 2006).

Britain simultaneously removed itself from Zimbabwe’s story (ignoring its colonial atrocities, land theft, and commitment to land reform) and

reinserted itself as a defender of human rights and order. While condemning the supposed instability caused by the Zimbabwean government, Blair's own government attempted to create conditions sparking unrest within Zimbabwe. Meanwhile, the perception that land reform and binding agreements could be delayed or unilaterally dismissed by Britain is testament to deeply paternalistic attitudes to former colonies by Western countries. Britain took on the right to pronounce on the land question over Zimbabweans themselves (Palmer, 1989), enabling itself to dictate terms without honouring those agreed upon independence. It is unsurprising that alongside the revival of wartime language, vice signalling and siege mentality, Zimbabwe turned once again to wartime ally and 'all weather friend', China (Gu et al. 2016).

*Zimbabwean agency in surviving sanctions*

Zimbabwe's Look East Policy, while never strictly formalised, emerged in about 2003 in response to the British-led siege. As the situation became increasingly desperate, the government sought allies and trade partners outside of the Western sphere of influence (Chigora and Dewa, 2009) such as China, Malaysia, Iran, and Russia (Zengeni, 2016). Citizens were urged to 'look East' for business, tourism, and education. Conversations shifted: a relative began importing Chinese eyeliners; newspapers listed winners of scholarships to Iran; we greeted Chinese couples visiting Mosi Oa Tunya; my high-school began offering Mandarin classes. This doesn't seem to be slowing, either. Even after the dust settled after land reform, and President Mnangagwa's Second Republic's efforts to court the West, Zimbabweans are still looking East. Many Zimbabweans study in China, Malaysia and Russia and one regularly encounters people returning from business in China on flights home. I still see the yellow and red hardwood pencils in stationary tubs in shops, first imported on a mass scale when Zimbabwe ran out of pens, and then out of paper.

Zimbabwe's stand against neo-liberalism and discourse of pro-poor black empowerment resonated with other African states. Thus, Zimbabwe's pariah label and weakness were reappropriated as advantage and allowed the state to project African leadership through a politically productive martyr identity nationally, and the elder figure of Mugabe individually. These maintained the solidarity of SADC and much of the AU, who condemned British interference as an "extraordinary sense of superiority... backward and reactionary" (Mlambo and Raftopoulos, 2010). This impacted European cohesion on Zimbabwe, as the leverage of these blocs pressured European states to go against British will (Chafer, 2005). More widely, Zimbabwe became symbolic of global threads of discontent about the unequal global system, and could manipulate this position creatively to survive (Chigora and Edson, 2011). Britain internationalised its bilateral conflict with Zimbabwe intending to create a universal villain, but drew the attention of the global South to the illogicality of Western institutions hurting poorer nations to 'help' them (Ogbonna, 2017). Shielded by China in the UN, Zimbabwe kept its battles on home territory in African institutions, where countries like South Africa refused to be Britain's 'stone-throwers' (Mlambo and Raftopoulos, 2010).

China and other Eastern nations have been portrayed as outliers in the international system, powerful and vaguely threatening. However, this role again assumes the West to be a centre from which legitimacy flows and can be withheld. This is displayed in jibes made at China's extractive tendencies, and language such as "resource-hungry China" being juxtaposed against positive portrayals of the USA's military-heavy initiatives (Smith, 2012). Discourse places Western powers as underdogs being overtaken by China- this portrays Western influence as a lesser evil, non-threatening, or altruistic. The logic of trade between the East and African nations, however, is conveyed in language of complicity in human rights violence—'see no evil'

terms (Tull, 2008). Power imbalances and extractive, often exploitative aspects of the relationships are stressed and scrutinised, casting Eastern powers as inherently unethical against implied Western benevolence.

However, it is simplistic to attribute deepening Sino-African engagement to complicity between rogue states. This allows for a narrative of abnormality to rise around othered states in the East and global South, obscuring the logic of these relations. Most of the world's population exist in the global South- this population has also been the victims of colonialism and imperial violence. Countries like China and India have developed more recently, overcoming colonial pasts. As such, parties can build relationships on mutually empowering discourse of South-South co-operation: Chinese interest in Africa is framed as 'the poor helping the poor' (Tan-Mulin et al, 2010). As disingenuous as this seems, it is no more inauthentic than the West's claims to democratic commitment, and holds significant narrative strength. Constructing a turn to China as abnormal or irrational suggests a reality where the continuance of Western threats, interference, and violence is normal. The invalidation of poorer countries' efforts to seek alternatives fails to acknowledge the continued damage wrought on their societies and economies by Western institutions in the name of 'nation building'.

Sino-African trade first developed in the 1950s, based on political solidarity (Scoones et al, 2013), with the 60s onwards seeing military partnerships with anti-colonialists rise in importance (Debongo and Wu, 2020). For Zimbabwe, cultural exchanges and scholarship opportunities hark back to the war, when a number of nationalists studied and trained in China (Alexander et al., 2017), or encountered those who had. With many nationalists now political leaders (Ismael, 1971), as well as parents and grandparents of the generation studying in China at the present, Eastern links are a longstanding feature in Zimbabwean lives. Chinese aid

only shifted from ideological to economically motivated post-1995 but is more continuous and multifaceted than given credit for (Bräutigam, 2011). Internally, a continuity of Chinese rhetoric that emphasises fraternity and references African support in securing China as a UN member (Bei, 2019) highlights mutuality in Sino-African allyship.

Building on this, the Zimbabwean government could subvert some sanctions economically, but also through the transformation of trade into a performative cultural-political symbol. Where the West attempted to discredit the state, it in fact drew credibility from its outsider status, juxtaposed against neo-imperial coercion. The 'sloganised' Look East Policy (Chipaike and Mhandara, 2013) allowed the government a framework to perform resistance and agency, as well as access aid. Chinese state media emphasises anti-colonial legacies and respect for sovereignty (Zhang et al, 2016), communicating allyship but also Zimbabwean choice, allowing for a show of equality where the conditionality of Western aid overtly undercuts Southern assertions of autonomy, and disempowers governments.

It must be noted that China's presence in Africa is considerably less entrenched (Bräutigam, 2011; Bräutigam and Zhang, 2013) than the USA and the former colonisers, but this must not be taken for granted. Focus on Chinese aid being solely economically-driven has understated the pursuit of soft power (Shambaugh, 2013). Zimbabwe's land reform coincided with the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, strengthening Chinese ties to African nations under the diplomacy-oriented Ministry of Foreign Affairs. State support for firms entering Africa (Gu, 2011), and the establishment of the China-Africa Development Fund, indicates a long-term commitment to relationships, while concerted efforts to engage diplomatically on pan-African and national levels work to communicate China's authenticity as a "voice of the developing world, critical of traditional donors" (Gu et al. 2016). Importantly, African governments

stand to gain forms of soft power internally from these interactions by displaying autonomy from the West and performing anti-colonial discourse. After the failures of Western-imposed structural adjustment programmes, China's development model offers a means to develop without weakening the state (Scoones et al, 2013), while Chinese Official Development Assistance is shown to effectively stimulate recipients, of which Zimbabwe ranks in the top five (ChinaPower Project, 2021). Debongo and Wu (2020) found a broad range of Africans believed China did not threaten internal decision-making, and that there was greater opportunity for equal partnership with China than the West, with only 8% viewing the 'One Road, One Belt' FDI initiative negatively. Notably, Chinese efforts made to communicate with locals is contrasted to Western immigrant workers, perceived to live overtly luxurious lifestyles (Bräutigam, 2013) in the Western aid industry with fewer efforts to interact locally- visually reminiscent of coloniality.

We must therefore go beyond perceptions of African states as passive partners and acknowledge their assertiveness in pursuing ties with China. This looks to heighten as the African Union increasingly focuses on BRICS countries (Gu et al., 2016). African states exercise considerable agency in pursuing and utilising Sino-African interactions, and are able to ensure largely beneficial outcomes (Mohan and Lampert, 2013; Scoones et.al, 2013). In being pressured into seeking new opportunities, and opening as a new market as trade with the West faltered, Zimbabwe strengthened relationships with countries outside of Britain's sphere of influence, able to leverage its vulnerability. There is a positive correlation between the prospective size of the market and Chinese investment (Chen, Dollar, and Tang, 2018; Maswana, 2015) – with its own manufacturing failing, Zimbabwe became a fairly attractive prospect. Chinese request-based funding allows for governments to exercise agency and decide their own priorities (Bräutigam, 2013). For the Zimbabwean government, this meant

the ability to perform anti-colonial discourse, and position new trade within a continuum of resistance that affirmed Zimbabwe's political trajectory as in line with its revolutionary history, with China an ally against Britain both pre- and post-independence. True to its role as decolonial partner, Chinese projects such as Zimbabwe–China Wanjin Agricultural Development Ltd (equipping new farmers to train in commercial agriculture (Gu et al, 2016)) and Tian Ze's tobacco outgrowing, have been a lifeline to the rural economy (Scoones et al, 2013), normalising and assisting black ownership.

### *Conclusion*

Overall, the success of the Look East Policy is open to analysis on multiple levels. Zimbabwe is still far from wealthy – far even from secure – and it could not curb mass emigration. After decades of sanctions, it is difficult to tell what the country's trajectory would have been, and how much the current economic woes can be attributed to these sanctions (Ndakaripa, 2020), ineptitude, or the outcomes (or lack thereof) of an Eastern focus. An estimated 54% of Zimbabwe's productive potential was lost between 2000 and 2010 (Magure, 2012). One may assess it in terms of the practical and the existential.

Practically, the policy was a lifeline in some of the country's hardest times. It developed new opportunities and established new trading routes, especially for small businesses. Zimbabwe's power, mining, and agricultural sectors received impactful infrastructural and mechanical assistance (Chigure and Dewa, 2009, Mude, 2016), alongside loans. Many ordinary Zimbabweans travel regularly to and from China and the Emirates to buy products for resale, and Chinese investment has provided crucial injections of capital and infrastructural assistance. However, undercutting of local industry by the influx of Eastern product has been a significant problem. While these products were beneficial in the years where Zimbabwean industry

folded, these have hindered their revival (Chipaike and Mhandara, 2013; Gukurume, 2019; Kushata, 2017). Further, scholars like Lorenzo (2007), Maswana (2015), and Moyo and Mdlongwa (2014) have raised concerns of neo-colonialism, highlighting exploitative dynamics.

Employing a more constructivist view, the policy was important in battling disengagement within Zimbabwe. Presenting Eastern countries as exciting new opportunities and willing partners, the policy gave ordinary Zimbabweans options at a time when doors seemed to be shutting to them. It provided a discourse of progression and momentum as conditions within the country seemed to stagnate, tying Zimbabwe to the rise of the East. It signified the agency of the country in refusing to bow to external pressure. An assertion of sovereignty, the Look East Policy was extremely important in communicating a commitment to land reform, and therefore a certain government strength and assertiveness, even as the country struggled greatly in the face of Western pressure.

For all the efforts to discount Sino-African trade, in this case Britain handed China the narrative tools to maintain an anti-colonial face, and draw on a positive history of decolonial aid. It is necessary for European governments to take real steps to remedy the paternalistic, colonial dynamics prevailing to the present-day (Bräutigam, 2013) and allow African countries to exercise their sovereignty and agency to follow actively decolonial processes that will allow them to grapple enduring inequality, and grow forward (Korkmaz, 2019; Sylla, n.d.). The sense that agreements made with African countries are less binding, or that the will of indigenous people is dismissible, must be challenged if Europe and African countries are to have healthy, mutually beneficial relationships. Likewise, if European countries are going to maintain power in the global system, there is an urgent need to rebrand, as China looks to grow in influence and power not only through its industries and productivity, but through Western countries'

dogmatic replication of colonial discourse and norms. As Namibia and South Africa both grapple with a volatile land question (Chigora and Dewa, 2009; Mubecua and Mlambo, 2021; Progress Namibia, 2018) with calls for colonialists to “face up” (Melber, 2017), Western discourse is again negative around the issue. With South Africa one of China’s biggest partners in Africa, and deals with China most numerous in Southern and East Africa (Chen, Dollar, and Tang, 2018), it would be unwise to pursue the same alienating discourses that would push these countries into closer ties to China.

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## 3.7 Russia-India BFFs? – A Conversation on Popular Imagination

John Alulis

“Russia is India’s best friend.”

“Sure, but only because they’re not your neighbour!”

This essay came about because of conversations between an American with Lithuanian roots and his Indian girlfriend, conversations that caused both to spend time thinking about how and where and when they had grown up and what they had learned about some of the same things along the way. I am an American and do not pretend to be anything else, but Lithuania is my second home, where my family still lives and where I return whenever I can. I did not grow up in a Soviet country, and I did not live through the tumultuous aftermath of the Union’s collapse – something nevertheless seen as an overwhelmingly good thing in the eyes of the Balts. But I have spent a substantial portion of my life trying to understand that specific part of the world and the fears, hopes, and dreams of its people, my relatives and friends. I can never be precisely one of them, but perhaps I can be a useful intermediary from time to time.

What this essay is about, then, is really how both of us grew up thinking about Russia and the United Kingdom, their relationships with our respective “homelands”, and the stark differences in our perceptions we discovered quite by chance when the subject arose. What does India’s relationship with the United Kingdom offer by way of example to Russians and Lithuanians, as distinct from the states of Russia and Lithuania? What roles are played by language, culture, and ideas of status? How do Russia and Britain

feature in popular imagination? Hero, villain, something in between? This essay does not pretend to have found any answers, but perhaps through honest dialogue it can propose helpful questions and demonstrate why such dialogue is good for its own sake at an individual level.

In the beginning, it is important to note that when I use phrases like “Russia” or “Britain” I am not actually referring to Russian or British citizens or even necessarily to the Russian or British governments and states. Instead, what I intend is more the individualised, imaginary personification of a country which each of us produces and carries in our own minds. This imaginary personification, or archetype, does not have to be “real” in order to influence how we think. In fact, it is the imaginary which often seems to exercise a greater weight on both our rational thinking and our emotions alike regardless of how well it may match concrete reality. They are not the extent of our knowledge about something, but rather, what comes to mind first when we think of something in the abstract, carrying the greatest emotional weight. Archetypes are ideal types, and even though the archetypes each person holds in their minds about specific things will be different in some ways from those held by everyone else, it is still possible to discuss archetypes as being shared, albeit imperfectly. Models, as they say, are always wrong but sometimes useful.

At present, the Lithuanian archetype of Russia is unlikely to assist in producing positive change in the currently fraught political relations between the two countries. Russia is a malevolent figure, untrustworthy and malicious. There was real fear in the aftermath of Russia’s invasion of eastern Ukraine in 2014 that Lithuania might be next. The government published a small booklet telling citizens how to survive in the woods, find food, and make shelters, a throwback to the partisan war of the 1940s and 1950s against the Soviets. Conscription was reintroduced, defence spending was greatly increased, and military exercises with NATO allies multiplied.

I was part of one of those exercises in 2014, Operation Atlantic Resolve. I remember walking through Vilnius past the presidential palace at one point. There is a large square in front of the entrance, with three flag poles. In 2010, these had all held national flags. Now in 2014, they flew NATO and EU flags, while the square had been filled with large free-standing frames containing photographs of various world leaders (Barak Obama and Angela Merkel were especially prominent) shaking hands with the then-president of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaitė. The message was clear. Back off, Russia, or you can expect to hear from our friends.

One of the things we did a lot of during our time in the Baltic in 2014 were airborne operations – parachuting out of planes carrying weapons and gear in order to land and conduct follow-on missions, like airfield seizures. One friend, whose job it was to survey potential drop zones, related the following story to me, as told to him by a Lithuanian soldier accompanying him. He was warned to watch out for a tall, spiky plant called Hogweed. If touched, the plant had small spines that produced an enormous and extraordinarily painful rash. The Lithuanian soldier said that they had not had such plants in the past, and that they were a recent arrival from elsewhere. “It came from the east,” he said. “Like all bad things.”

This negative association with Russia is deep-rooted, and not especially unreasonable, given Lithuania’s history with its neighbour. Over the last 275 years, Lithuania has been invaded, occupied, partitioned, annexed, or some combination of all of the above at least eight times by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union alone (1768, 1792, 1794, 1830, 1863, 1918, 1940, and 1944). Suspicion seems justified, under the circumstances, particularly as the current Russian Federation has done little to allay the omnipresent fears of Lithuania or any of its neighbours that it may not choose to repeat the past again at the drop of a hat. Its most recent actions in Ukraine have firmly cemented the distrust of its neighbours for yet another generation.

The Indian experience with the United Kingdom and the resulting archetypes it produced shares many similarities. When Indians think of “Britain”, much like the Lithuanians thinking of Russia, they think of violence, Partition (with a capital letter, in this case, referring specifically to the events of 1947), humiliation, large-scale theft, grandiose rhetoric about civilisation that masked selfish and mean-spirited aims, insidious and omnipresent racism, and cultural and linguistic hegemony. “Britain” is wily, duplicitous, always seeking an advantage, and never to be trusted.

Some excellent portrayals of this archetype can be easily found in contemporary Bollywood to illustrate the point. My personal favourite is the 2001 film *Lagaan*, which translates as “Tax”. Set in 1893, a group of villagers appeal to their Raja for a tax reprieve, as the monsoon rains have failed and they are unable to grow enough crops to pay. The Raja is initially busy watching the local British garrison play a game of cricket, which the villagers do not understand and make fun of from the side lines. A particularly villainous British officer, Captain Russell, who speaks atrociously-accented Hindi overhears them and challenges them to a match in three months, saying that if they win, they will not have to pay taxes for three years, but if they lose, they will have to pay a triple tax this year. The film’s hero, played by Aamir Khan, accepts the challenge despite having no idea how to play the game but certain the villagers can learn in time. Secretly coached by the officer’s sister (who falls in love with Aamir Khan’s character in the process), the village team eventually wins in a nail-bitingly close finish. The story concludes with the officer who made the challenge having to pay the missing taxes himself and being transferred to a posting in Central Africa, with the British garrison itself leaving a few years later.

What made the film so interesting to me was first and foremost the way in which the British officers, particularly the villain, Captain Russell,

were portrayed as almost cartoonishly evil. Even as a non-Hindi speaker, listening to him speak I could tell that he sounded ridiculous in Hindi. But this is made even more interesting because at the same time other British civilians and officers, beginning with Captain Russell's sister but also including most of Captain Russell's superiors, are portrayed as being much more sympathetic to the villagers. Even if we discount Captain Russell's sister's actions as being due to love, his superiors are extremely unhappy with his conduct and berate him for it, even sympathising with the villagers at different points throughout the final cricket showdown. On the surface, the story seems very straightforward, as the heroic villagers defeat the arrogant British at their own game and everyone lives happily ever after. But scratch the surface, and even though the general picture remains the same, some of the details are subtly different. Humanity and sympathy are found at times from specific British characters and they individually are often portrayed positively, but the final scenes of the film showing the British garrison's departure show these same individuals leaving alongside the especially unpleasant British characters. This appreciation for individual positive moral behaviour which is nevertheless overshadowed by a larger-scale pattern of negative moral behaviour perfectly encapsulates India's complicated relationship with the idea of Britain and the legacy that the colonial past has left.

Moving to a real-life example of this nuance in the present, my girlfriend was able to compete for and win a scholarship offered by the British government to students from Commonwealth countries to read for a DPhil at Oxford. Yet we have gone to the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum together on various occasions, and she has been able to point out item after item to me and explain how each was stolen, appropriated, or otherwise acquired through morally and legally dubious behaviour by the British in India. The United Kingdom today is seen in India as a prestigious place to study or work, but at the same time

it is still a thief and an untrustworthy entity. The positive attributes Indians ascribe to Britain are certainly not shared by Lithuanians looking towards Russia.

Racism is another area in which British-Indian relations have reached a strange middle ground. Although the sort of British to Indian racism depicted in *Lagaan* was both very real and very persistent, today it would be difficult to find someone like Captain Russell shouting things like, “You bloody slaves will remain under my boots!” and getting away with it. Though racism unquestionably still exists and plays out today, the way it manifests itself has changed, and the perpetrators can just as often be culturally anglicised Indians speaking to less culturally anglicised Indians as it could be “white” speaking to “brown”. In a very strange way, this goes to show just how successful the British were at influencing certain parts of Indian culture and causing many Indians to internalise and emulate completely external value systems, something which is rightly resented by many other Indians today.

Returning back to the idea of British and Russian archetypes compared side by side, we find a great many commonalities between the Lithuanian and Indian experiences with external domination. I deliberately use the term external domination here because of the problems inherent in trying to blend the two concepts of post-socialism and post-colonialism together.

Both peoples came to experience a sense of loss, debasement, and missed opportunities as a result of their interactions with their respective invasive states. During my master’s fieldwork in Vilnius in 2017, a theme that was repeated back to me, again and again, was that Russians – Soviet Union, Russian Empire, didn’t really matter – were uncultured and their primitive notions of economics, particularly under communism, had taken Lithuania from being one of the wealthiest and most advanced countries in

Europe and reduced it to the ranks of the poorest and most economically backwards. The Russians had a reputation for stealing absolutely everything not nailed down, and if left alone long enough even the things that were. Likewise, my girlfriend explained to me how the British siphoned off the wealth of India for not just decades but centuries, a fact easily verifiable by a visit to practically any major London museum. Since the idea of colonialism was the economic benefit of the colonising country, regardless of the economic outcome for the colony or colonies, this makes perfect sense. Yet I think the Indian experience with the British never really struck me with the same kind of intensity as the Lithuanian one with the Russians until I learned more about it from my girlfriend, despite the practical similarities. The saying in India was that the British had brought “the English language, cricket, and the railroads”, but took everything else in exchange, a poor deal if ever there was one and one that I can only now begin to properly appreciate the resentment for. After Lithuania declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1990, Gorbachev attempted to coerce the country into returning to the Soviet fold by arguing that the newly-independent state owed the Soviet Union £21 billion for all of the infrastructure investments Moscow had made there since 1940. The parallels at times can be striking; Moscow and London both built the “railways” for their own benefit, but after the fact it was easy to chalk up such things to being done out of altruism instead.

Apart from economics and material wealth, there is also the cultural imposition and domination which came with it. In India under British rule, English became the primary language of instruction in almost all formal education. Indian languages, literature, and sciences were actively demoted and devalued as compared to their English counterparts. Lord Macaulay, the author of the now infamous “Macaulay’s Minute” from 1835 which ultimately came to describe the official plan for the future of the Indian education system under British control, stated “A single shelf of

a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.” He went on to say, “We must do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, words and intellect.” This attitude and this ambition have quite obviously had a lasting impact on Indian education as well as Indian social hierarchies. Up to the present day even in an independent India, English is still perceived as the language of those who possess social status. To speak it fluently, particularly with a suitably “British” accent, is more prestigious than to speak any number of Indian languages. An Indian who speaks sufficiently “British” English is in a position to socially put down one who does not. As I have personally witnessed, it does not even matter how well the English language is actually spoken and comprehended – the cachet of simply sounding British matters more to many.

Lithuanian experiences with Russian linguistic and cultural domination are similar enough to be worth comparing, though for a variety of reasons the legacy of Russian language and culture has played out differently than in India. Lithuania being much smaller and dramatically less heterogenous linguistically and culturally than India, there has been a more clear-cut pushback against all things Russian because there was a single alternative supported by the vast majority. In contrast, in India one reason that English continues to be widely spoken, apart from global economic considerations, has to do with regional linguistic politics – South Indians would rather speak English than the Hindi (or indeed any other language) of North Indians. Lithuanian press bans in 1865 under the Russian Empire lasted until 1904, and then after the Soviet annexation in 1940, Russian was made the language of all official business and the education system began to strongly emphasise learning Russian, though teaching was still mostly carried out in Lithuanian. These long-running practices helped to establish a stark contrast between the languages and a reflexive repugnance for the

imposed Russian was inculcated into generations of Lithuanians. Following independence in 1990, there was a dramatic shift away from Russian, which can be easily observed today: most Lithuanians in their late 30s or older can understand and often speak Russian as a foreign language, but anyone younger than that tends to speak and understand English instead. However, even those who can understand and speak Russian often refuse to do so absent a specific and pressing practical need. Speaking Russian is seen as being supportive in some way of the Soviet Union or the current Russian Federation, something that is undesirable to most.

Having discussed the many similarities, it's important to take note of some very important differences too. The first and most important of these have to do with the relative locations of Lithuania and Russia on the one hand, and India and the United Kingdom on the other. Lithuania and Russia share a border in the form of Kaliningrad, a heavily militarised Russian exclave. Lithuania's eastern border also abuts Belarus, an authoritarian ally of Russia's, whose military is heavily integrated into that of its larger neighbour. India by contrast is more than 6,000 kilometres straight line distance away from the United Kingdom. By any route one might physically travel, it is even further away.

Second, Lithuania has a population of 2.7 million, compared to Russia's 146 million. On the other hand, India has 1.38 billion compared to the United Kingdom's 68 million. The distances involved combined with the respective population disparities help to demonstrate why Lithuanians live with a very specific and concrete fear of re-invasion and their own cultural erasure that Indians do not. This dynamic of fear and tension cannot help but colour their archetypal view of their neighbour.

Finally, the outcomes of the independence of the two countries set different kinds of dynamics in motion locally. The collapse of the Soviet Union was

largely peaceful; although many newly independent states emerged from the rubble, Russia remained as the biggest and most powerful country by far. Indian independence and Partition, on the other hand, was intensely bloody and traumatic. Perhaps as many as 20 million people were displaced, and up to two million were killed in waves of ethnic cleansing. The creation of Pakistan and the wars fought between the two states starting just months after their official beginnings – four as of 2021, not counting violent skirmishes – meant that the most important threat was no longer the British, but a neighbouring state. Now, three generations later, the British may still be the archetypal enemy and be blamed for causing the Partition in the first place, but Pakistan is the practical threat and the one who actually carried the Partition out.

So, what do India and Lithuania have to say to one another when it comes to dealing with the legacies of domination and the continued, more or less mandatory interactions with the states that did the dominating? Russia for my girlfriend was a place that produced great literature and beautiful childhood stories, a source of scientific and industrial inspiration and technological know-how, and an eager consumer of Indian popular culture. For me, Russia was a freezing steppe packed full to the brim with slave labour camps staffed by Eastern Europeans who'd been mercilessly kidnapped, starved, and tortured. For me, the United Kingdom was an inoffensive country full of overly polite people, a beautiful island with bland food, unpleasant weather, and an interesting history. For my girlfriend, it was the source of most of her home country's misery, imperial, condescending, rapacious, humiliating, and casually brutal behind a mask of supposed Christian civilisation. I do not believe that any of the archetypes that we hold of these countries, good or bad, are precisely wrong. States are made up of millions or billions of individuals, and compressing all of those actions and intentions down into a truly representative archetype is effectively impossible.

The value in these archetypes, as I see it, is that they allow us to have these sorts of conversations between individuals in the first place even though no archetypes can ever be truly representative. The archetypes we hold within ourselves represent tentative starting points rather than the sum total of our understanding of the world around us. They're the inherited homes that we eventually learn to leave behind as we go out into the world on our own and experience more and more of it, eyes and ears open. The true worth of an archetype lies in the dialogue with others that it allows us to begin. Through the process itself, we can come to appreciate one another's perspectives, especially when these are dramatically different from our own, and appreciate the reasons why they are different in the first place. This makes it possible for us to have serious discussions about things we may disagree on, or at any rate initially see very differently. Listening to my girlfriend and trying to put myself in her shoes, my own archetypal portrait of the United Kingdom became at least a little more nuanced and less blindly positive. She in turned was shocked by many of the things I told her about Russia and found Solzhenitsyn especially compelling reading. Both of us, through honest and respectful conversation, added a little more detail to our respective archetypes. Our feelings towards Russia and the United Kingdom became just a little more complicated, coming just a little closer to a truer reflection of reality. In the meantime, we're both studying Russian together.

## 3.8 From Mapping to Meaning – Visual Perspectives on Postcolonialism

Stephan Raab

### *A selfie from and for mankind*

On Christmas Day 1968, a special Christmas Card was sent to mankind. This day, the picture “Earthrise” was taken by US-astronaut William Anders. For the first time, a whole picture of planet earth was shown. According to the crew of Apollo 8, who has taken this picture, the whole universe seemed to be dark, just one coloured spot in the middle, emphasising, that Earth really looked like just one planet, or to be more poetic, to speak with the words of commander Frank Borman: “*It was the only thing in space that had any colour to it. Everything else was either black or white, but not the earth*” (Borman, 1988, p. 212). Appealing to that magical moment, author Norman Cousins argued in 1975, that the historic moment could be found less in mankind setting a foot on the moon, than setting an eye on Earth (NASA, 1976, p. 44). Consequently, it could be argued that on Christmas day 1968 mankind was taking the first group selfie, embracing all human beings, mirroring who we are and who we want to be.

Building upon this little spacefaring story, attitudes and behaviours towards others, other people, other countries, other cultures... are mostly based on how we perceive the world. Already Plato’s Allegory of the Cave emphasises the importance of visual behaviour. In this cave the difference between things as they really are and as they appear to us becomes visible (Plato, 2009, p. 198). Based upon this allegory, the pictorial turn – a scientific focus on the influence of visual artefacts – was coined by art historian William

Mitchell, who invented the famous slogan: “*You can hang a picture, you can’t hang an image*” (Mitchel, 2009, p. 320). Here, the different features of pictures and images become obvious. The picture presents the object, as it is, according to its materiality, such as for instance a marble sculpture or a painting, simply put the item as it is. Conversely, the image stands for the virtual abstraction of mind, referring to the allegory of the shadows of the visual (ibid. p.321ff.). This distinction can be found in the two diverging terms of visibility and visuality. Visibility appeals to the social construction a certain visual artefact presents, conveying its meaning. Visuality is a feature, addressing the emotions, ideas, and images that are triggered in the mind of the observer, being active in doing something. Put in other words, visibility deconstructs, meanwhile visuality creates (Callahan, 2020, p. 19). Doing research on visual artefacts and their effect is more than setting a frame, but also have a look at what is invisible (ibid. p.25). Discussing cartography in the context of colonialism raises the question of what is shown on the map, as what is not shown on the map. This contribution approaches mapping from two sides. On one side the first part will look at the history of cartography as a constitutive aspect of colonisation. On another side, the second part will focus on mental maps, including a discussion about visual education as a path for the decolonisation of the mind.

Building upon this introduction into visual literacy, this chapter is structured as following. The first part will present the evolution of maps as a tool for visualising the world and worldviews of power. The second part will introduce the concept of mental maps, as individual representations of cultural attitudes. The third part shows the importance of nation branding as a tool for getting attention from a global audience. The fourth part will discuss some educational proposals that might support the decolonising of mind. Concluding an outlook from outside towards inside into the visuality of globalisation will be given.

*Mapping as the first framing of the world*

*“We are living in a global world”*. This statement is claimed by politics, economics, science, education and many more sectors alike. For that reason, some conceptions or pictures of globalisation are needed to grasp the essentials of the visible/invisible process called globalisation. This part will show that historically cartography has been less about depicting a certain landscape through science but revealing certain concepts about power and superiority.

When doing research for this contribution, I suddenly stumbled over a fascinating video called *“World in the last 200 years!”*. This video showed the evolution of countries from the year 1800 until today. However, when showing this video to a colleague he attentively noticed that it seemed like no African countries were shown on the map until the period of decolonisation starting in the 1950s. Watching that video, it seemed that especially Africa did not exist until the moment foremost European colonisers have put it onto the map, neglecting the long history of African culture, taking the profound history of kingdoms such as Abyssinia, which apart from a short period of Italian colonialism (1936–1941) existed from 980 BC to 1974 AC.

Human beings have the power to create meaning out of nothing (Léon, 2016, p. 85). According to an analysis of 30 textbooks from various countries for students between 16 and 19 years, globalisation was mostly depicted in the terms of information and technology. Mostly, those are the tools needed to explore, discover, and civilise the world, presented as a naturalistic inevitable process currently taking place (ibid. p. 86). Visualising information through the technology of maps traces back

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1 For getting your own impression you can find the link here: UHD world in the last 200 years!; retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWKU5gbmR6w>.

towards a long history. However, maps never just presented a depiction of reality. Conversely, cartographers used a very anthropomorphic approach, through revealing a deeper meaning by symbols and allegories, often included as an embellishment at the frame of the map. This to be said, maps could be considered less a representation of the world, but rather a representation of power, showing who governs those worlds. Having a look at the first maps of the world designed in Europe the world was not presented according to the geographical knowledge of that time, yet, rather providing a deeper and hidden meaning through the use of symbols and allegories. Here, Europe was put in the centre as a “symbol of culture and civilisation” (Barron, 2008, p. 445). In contrast to that, medieval Arab maps for instance put the Arab world in the centre, depicting the world as a bird with the Arabian Peninsula as a head Asia and Africa as wings and Europe as the tail (Tibbetts, 1992, p. 91).

For a long time, maps of the world were formed through literature, where visual depictions only served as some form of supplement. Mostly people relied on narratives and stories for orientation in unknown territories, where even the Quran provides a wide range of geographical descriptions (El-Sayed, 1992, p. 158). During the Golden Age of Islam, ranging from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Arab scholars established the fundamentals of modern cartography by combing the projections of Ptolemy with mathematical skills, coming from the scientific tradition of India and Persia (Tibbetts, 1992, p. 92). The most iconic artefact is the *Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq* (“The Excursion of One Who is Eager to Traverse the Regions of the World”) in the West mostly known as Tabula Rogeriana conceived by the Arab Scholar Muhammad al-Idrisi (1100–1164). Al-Idrisi was born in what today is Morocco and travelled throughout Europe and the Middle East, presenting the most comprehensive map known in European and Arab world during that time (Bacharach, 2006, p. 140). Along with the

colonisation of the world, methods of cartography constantly improved, new regions and countries suddenly appeared on the map complementing the picture drawn of the world, getting a better understanding of the globe.

During the political turbulences of the 19<sup>th</sup> century satirical maps first *“brought people and leaders onto the map, like actors on a stage, and then absorbed them into the very map itself”* (Barron, 2008, p. 446). Looking at the map shown beyond, some general aspects of mental maps as a tool to express attitudes and worldviews become obvious. Mental maps do not present the world according to geographical patterns but through personal cultural impression. Those will be discussed in the next part. Probably those satirical maps could be considered as a prototype for nowadays memes, commenting on current politics, mocking people in charge. The map beyond depicts the turbulence of the year of revolution 1848 when the popular demands for more democratic participation of the people came to an end. What makes



Figure 1 Rundgemälde von Europa im August MDCCCXLIX (1849)

by Ferdinand Schröder in *Düsseldorfer Monatshefte*. 1849

it striking for this paper are the stereotypes presented here by depicting Germany through the personification of a Prussian soldier or other regions through certain stereotypes of European countries depicted in the form of military uniforms as a symbol of power and conflict.

Hereby, it is less what is seen on the maps, but rather what is not seen on the maps, that makes critical cartography fruitful for decolonisation studies. Taking for instance medieval maps, the focus was put less on practical use for navigation as to reveal concepts, such as foremost the Christian mission to conquer and civilise the world (Bellone et al., 2020, p. 21). Science and technology, as shown above in the example of textbooks, were never neutral but a tool for legitimising power. Visually spoken, this claim became obvious with Flemish mathematician Gerardus Mercator in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Mercator projection became a standard for designing globes. However, as a side effect this method led to a distortion exaggerating the size of the Northern Hemisphere while belittling the Southern Hemisphere. Greenland incorrectly appeared to be the same size as Africa. In 1973 eventually, German historian Arno Peters presented the Peters projection, respecting a more equal representation of the world, meanwhile envisaging to overcome some eurocentrism manifested in previous maps (ibid p.24).

Referring back to the concept of maps as a two-dimensional depiction of geographic phenomena can be found in the conception of Globalisation according to Wallerstein, providing the following definition: “*Globalisation represents the triumph of a capitalist world economy tied together by a global division of labour*” (Wallerstein, 1974, p. 11). Building upon that, the new world system could be distributed into three different categories. There is the Core, referring to the older industrial centres in North America, Europe, and Japan. Transnational corporations have their headquarters located here. Secondly, the Semiperiphery describes centres, which are industrialising

fast such as Mexico, Brazil, or Korea. Finally, there is the Periphery, what seems to be left from global economic chains. Such areas comprise the Ural, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, and parts of Africa. There, only little industry can be found, the economy was defined as mostly determined by agrarian production. The status attributed to a country within those networks might determine the potential for development within this global world (Friedmann and Wolff, 1982, 310ff.). Nevertheless, this concept appears to not be fitting anymore for an ever more digital and global world to emerge through interconnected networks.

### *Mental Maps as a meaning of the world*

A common English saying states that seeing is believing. According to what we see, everybody draws certain conclusions, contributing to the forming of impressions and beliefs. Having discussed physical aspects of cartography and colonisation, this part will focus on the psychological aspects along the concept of mental maps for the (de)-colonisation of the mind.

Amongst navigation systems, maps are considered accurate devices to depict geographical phenomena on a two-dimensional scale. However, this argument is not applicable to medieval maps. Those *mappae mundi* contained more information than modern maps, telling stories about history, traditions, religion, and myths revealing conceptions about earth, cosmos as the position of mankind within (Choubey and Bansal, 2017, p. 41). Put in other words, those medieval maps give an overview of how people of that time viewed the world ought to be. Appealing to those maps of the world as views of the world, the Brazilian born Israelian philosopher Marcelo Dascal defined the term of colonisation of mind. Besides taking control of the land, as seen on maps of the colonial empires, the purpose of colonialism was to take control of the mind of the people. Imposing new forms of seeing should make people unconsciously relinquishing their own

cultural norms, considering those inferior to patterns of seeing the world, tradition and norms brought by the colonisers (Dascal, 2007, p. 1). The goal was to alienate the colonised from their identity, imposing the colonised identity of the colonisers (Biko, 2004, p. 45).

This brings us to the concept of mental maps. According to the French urbanist Henri Lefebvre every space can be distributed into three categories. *Isotopy* describes space simply as spatial extension without any difference. *Heterotopy* distinguishes certain spaces from each other as for instance two different cities. *Utopia* eventually reveals what a certain space should become. Here people endow certain values such as home to it (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 39). Mental maps are individual tools for sense making, enriching certain spots with values, history, culture, and identity. Those maps reveal how each individual person is emotionally attached to a certain spot. Giving a clarifying example, American psychologist Stanley Milgram asked passersby to draw a picture of their Paris. Conversely to a tourist map, those locals draw pictures of their neighbourhood emphasising aspects like the local café, shops, parks, or places of work (Milgram, 1976, p. 93). Every reader is invited to draw a personal mental map after reading this chapter, making visible what might be characteristic for your country, region, or city, wherever that might be. Mental maps emphasise identity and emotional attachment to a certain place.

Nowadays, facing the digital means of our millennium; “*Globalisation is a compression of time and space*” (Harvey, 1989, p. 284). Taking digital nomads, just in time production or instant news coverage through social media, it seems that space and time are losing their importance. Traditional maps used for navigation seem to have lost their power, as nowadays everybody has access to them. However, those were replaced by new types, this time mental maps.

Looking onto a map seems like looking onto a picture. There is a perspective to look at a scenery as there is a centre and a periphery. However, appealing to the renowned Information Society, what is striking, so more information so less knowledge. According to Fleck 's Law, every new knowledge reveals just more things that are still unknown. However, information is not equal to information: "*Information is reported, Knowledge is produced*" (Krohn, 2003, p. 100). Knowledge depends on the given context, consequently, facing the rise of information, there is no centre anymore, yet different perspectives from various networks looking onto the world.

*"There is no "top" to the World-Wide Web. You can look at it from many points of view"*. Those word were among the first to be published at the first website, launched on 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1991<sup>2</sup>. This corresponds to Manuel Castells proposal of a *network society* Globalisation is shaped by the corporation of space of flows and space of *place*... The space of flows consists of investment, ideas, persons not bound to a certain place. Those are hovering around searching for a spot to land, as there is no place existing by itself within those flows (Castells, 2010, p. 442). Nevertheless, those spaces of flow meet the space of place, or to be more precise the space where people spend their daily life. Space of flow embodies aspects like investment or skilled workforce in search for the place that seems to provide the best infrastructure for their demands (ibid. p.458). Attracting spaces of flow countries promises lucrative outlooks, why regions as space of place search to become a landing strip or nodal hub in those networks.

At this point, mental maps are retrieved as tools for navigating through an ever more complex world. The Japanese urbanist Takashi Machimura emphasises: "*No global city story can be understood without reference to the local processes, which give it its substantial form*" (Machimura,

<sup>2</sup> For further information visit: The first website; available at: <http://info.cern.ch/>.

1998, p. 184). Consequently, individuals, regions, and nations are confronted with the challenge of asking what is their position in that network, who do they want to be? Reminding to the video mentioned in the previous part, it seems that Africa just did come into existence, when suddenly it appeared on the minds and maps of European colonisers. Similar to dealing with mental maps, it seems that certain regions come into existence on those maps, when there is something interesting worth remembering. Therefore, regions and countries have to attract global attention so as not being forgotten. Here, the challenge seems to consist in balancing the demands of global competition and the heritage of local traditions, ensuring local and global integration alike (Brenner and Keil, 2014, p. 13). Every spot eager to benefit from Globalisation has to offer something for being part of the network. However, adapting to global competition while preserving certain cultural norms and identity is not an easy task. The figure beyond, adapted from urban research, gives an idea of these challenges taking the case study of the medieval city of Nuremberg and its evolutionary branding over time (Raab, 2018).

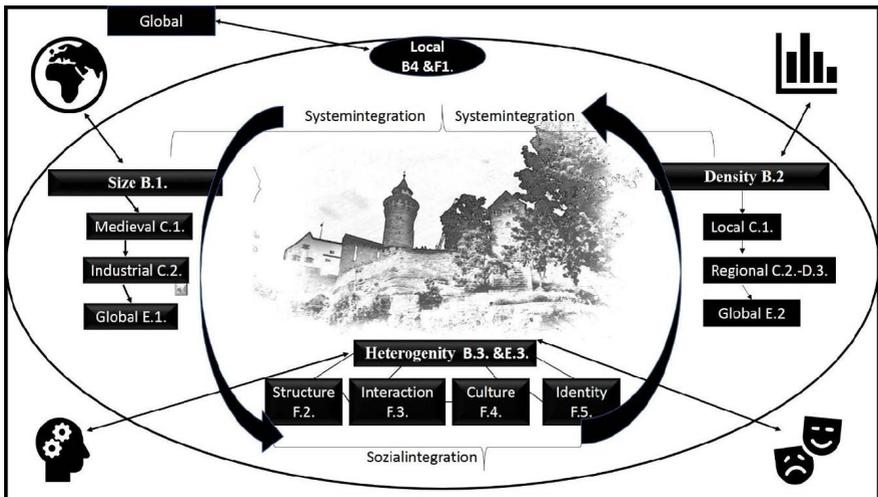


Figure 2 Challenges of local and global integration (Raab, Stephan 2018)

Here, the city is facing two challenges. On the one side there is the global system (Systemintegration), where every city and country searches to be part of for being part of the global world. On the other side, there are the local patterns (Sozialintegration) defined through the political system, economic conditions, and culture as foremost identity. The last aspect determines whether people are emotionally attached to a certain space, willing to contribute to shaping this identity. Transferred to the global level, this identity, or more precisely what the global audience assumes to be the identity, determines how the city is perceived and assessed, evaluating chances for investing attention or even moving there. If there is a particular identity there might be a spot on the mental map, otherwise to put it quite harshly for the global audience of politics, economics, and culture this place might not exist, might be neglected.

### *See to be seen or Nation Branding*

*“Imagine”* is a famous song by John Lennon, cherishing the dream of a mankind united in sharing just one world despite differences in wealth and culture. Referring to the concept of “Imagined Communities” by Benedict Anderson, based on common history, culture, norms and values, members of a certain network define their membership through sharing an “imagined world” (Anderson 1983, 6f.). Until now the difference between physical maps as visual depictions of the world and mental maps as a psychological representation of individual world views has been discussed. This part will elaborate more on the mental maps, discussing aspects of how to appear on those maps through Nation Branding.

Through lenses of culture, perceptions, attitudes, and images of the world are shaped. A classical centre-periphery is no longer applicable to our global embeddedness in various networks. Nowadays, it is rather about the perspective from where Globalisation is perceived and shaped.

According to Indian geographer Arjun Appadurai, global image flows can be described along five dimensions. Technoscapes reflect the high interconnectedness of complex modern technology. Financescape depicts the international flow of capital. Ethnoscapes describe images of certain spots created by migrants, business travellers or tourists. Together with Ideoscapes and Mediascapes, they determine certain ideas about a country or a region, making it either interesting or rather uninteresting for further observation by global eyes (Appadurai, 1990, pp. 296–300). Depending on that perception, decisions for attention, migration, or investment are taken. A country with a good reputation such as Switzerland might have less trouble in attracting global attention, meanwhile smaller countries located more in the south are facing more challenges for being taken into consideration by a global audience (Anholt, 2020, p. 8). The attractiveness of a certain branding has been measured by the Nation Branding Index since 2005, giving an overview of which countries are perceived best globally, in terms of values, norms, aesthetics, relevance in the world as the technological advancement (ibid p.26).

Regarding the importance of images there are two questions to be answered. How does a country see the world? What is there to show the world to be seen? Here, bigger countries might have an advantage, as countries such as the United States or Germany are known for something. Conversely, rather small countries in the global south struggle to build their own identity, which can be shown to and seen by the global eyes. Often stereotypes such as a “poorhouse Africa” still shape the perception of whole regions. Dissociating from the rather capitalist perception Simon Anholt offers an alternative perception. In “*The Good Country Equation*” he argues that Globalisation should be seen less through the eyes of competition but rather by looking for corporation, facing global challenges ahead (Anholt, 2020, p. 2). Instead of looking at what every country can take out of globalisation, this equation looks at what every country might contribute to the global

challenges. Bhutan, a rather small country in the Himalayan Mountains is a great example. Probably, a lot of people do not know the first thing about its history, but they do know about the Bhutanese Gross National Happiness (ibid. p.58). Consequently, this index pledges for a dual mandate of every nation, thinking about its own citizens, meanwhile what they can contribute to solving global problems (ibid. p.166). Eventually, this comes along with the idea of integrating global and local patterns together, trying to balance both dimensions.

### *Memes and their message to the world*

“Countries that aren’t powerful need to be interesting. They need to exercise attraction if they cannot exercise compulsion and the source of that attraction can only be their unique, individual identity, their culture, their history, their land, their tradition, their genius, and their imagination” (Anholt, 2020, p. 41). Having discussed the various implications of (mental) maps in colonisation, this part will discuss certain ways, how it might be possible to encourage a decolonisation of mind after having started decolonising the maps.

Addressing the decolonisation of the mind starts by addressing languages aspects to raise consciousness. Mental Maps are formed through impressions, through experiences as through communication. According to the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o language is decisive:

“Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves and affects how they look at their culture, at their place’s politics and at the

social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world” (Ngugi, 1986, p. 16)

In his book “*Decolonising the mind*” he argues that the choice of language is essential for creating an own identity (ibid. p.4). Ngũgĩ became famous for criticising the fact that the term “African literature” meant African literature mostly in English, French, or Portuguese yet, not in African native languages (Ngugi, 2018, p. 3). Decolonising education is a tough challenge, requiring consciousness of one’s own role and responsibility in setting up respectful intercultural relationships without replicating power and control dynamics of a coloniser vs. colonised perspective (Absolon, 2010, p. 29). Decolonising education requires educators to unlearn, reread and relearn history behind the purview of colonialism (Lopez, 2021, p. 36). “*Practice can be transformed through the process of learning, unlearning, rereading, and reframing*” (ibid. p.37). This process comes along with the constructive theory presented by educationist Kersten Reich. Education takes place through the process of construction, reconstruction, and deconstruction (Reich, 2004). But what are the tools necessary to start such an education process, promoting new perspectives and decolonisation of education?

Discovering a flourishing creative culture of social media, could serve as an inspiration for a valuable tool in education, talking about Memes. In recent years, memes have played a decisive role in several major electoral campaigns, taking for instance the USA, Brazil, or India. Political memes are about making a point and participating in a normative debate about how the world should look like what is the best way to get there (Shifman, 2014, p. 120). Having analysed the Brazilian case, three types of memes could be defined. Persuasive memes used by campaign teams aim to persuade an electorate of a political message, dealing foremost with content of proposals.

Grassroot action memes cover content produced by supporters often sharing their content for free. Public discussion memes address common topics such as the personality of person, corruption, or ideologies, being rather broad and situational (Chagas et al., 2019, np). Memes are flexible, interactive and to be used by everyone. Nevertheless, this democratisation of shaping perceptions requires more democratic competencies to discover stereotypes and manipulations (Plevriti, 2013, p. 42).

Decolonising the mind consists of three steps. Those are firstly *naming*, giving a name to certain events such as oppression, shame, or inferiority. Secondly there is *reflection*, beginning to question the colonial narratives involved. The third step consists in taking *action*, translating the new conclusions into concrete change (Strobel, 1997, p. 69). Applying those decolonial education onto constructive didactic, those steps are reflected here. Construction is the first step, inviting us to experiment and to explore. Taking the pictorial basis of a meme reveals the visual perception of a person or a group regarding a certain topic or region. Reconstruction combines old knowledge with new, as here adding a text message to the picture, Deconstructions eventually open the way for a critical reflection of the own mental map, setting it into relation with other concepts presented through visual artefacts such as media coverage or own experiences (Reich, 2004, p. 106). Through this process, meme creators become aware of how certain images are produced, as how they can be used for a beneficial purpose, however also revealing why certain stereotypes must be overcome for decolonising the mind.

A central piece of colonisation was not just taking the land, but also conquering the minds, depriving people of their own identity. Having a look at the map, many areas, landscapes are named after certain foremost Western people who claimed to have “discovered” those spaces. Decolonising gives access to new perspectives on globalisation, worldviews, and the use of

indigenous knowledge. A first step is opening the window of opportunity for bringing back native terms for areas and space, in academic terms called native toponyms. “*Toponyms are an integral component of the cultural identity of a people*” (Uluocha, 2015, p. 180). Giving a particular name to a place tells the story of a place, emphasising the significance of a certain culture tied to it. Conversely to rather material cartography, indigenous cartography is based more on oral traditions, inheriting knowledge and tradition as histories through narratives and storytelling (ibid. p. 182). Consequently, changing the physical map, by bringing back indigenous names encourages retelling the trajectory of certain places and the people endowing emotional and cultural value to it. Making those changes visible could also stimulate discovering new spots on each mental map. Taking for instance renowned world heritage sites, “*there is a need to think about how Indigenous peoples can use maps and stories for interpretation of UNESCO cultural landscapes*” (Palmer and Korson, 2020, p. 184). Through declaring certain places world heritage sites those can become lighting points on the physical as mental maps. This way awareness-raising for the local trajectory of a certain spot and its people can be encouraged. Appealing to the dual mandate one contribution from indigenous traditions could enrich the perspective of critical cartography, focussing less on environment as a resource, but rather conceiving mankind as part of an interrelated system (Shaw et al., 2006, 269f.). Although indigenous people represent only 5% of the world’s population, according to the UN Report on Biodiversity at least 25% of global land mass is owned, used, managed or occupied by indigenous communities (IPBES 2019, S. 16). Empirical findings prove that giving land back to these indigenous communities is beneficial for the whole environment. In the USA, several areas were repatriated to First Nations. Applying old indigenous knowledge due to management or co-management by indigenous communities from California to Alaska,

biodiversity could be improved. Based on those traditional perspectives, indigenous mental maps can provide a contribution for measures against climate change (Robbins 2021).

*From mapping to meaning – a concluding message*

The message of “*Imagine*”, inspired by John Lennon, could also be conveyed by “*Give me hope Joana*” by Eddy Grant, from Guyana, singing: “*Maybe pressure can make Jo’anna see how everybody could live as one!*” Concluding this introduction into visual perspectives on postcolonialism, it could be shown, that Globalisation once started with the evolution of proper maps, supporting explorers, traders to find their way through the wide world, Nevertheless, those maps never simply represented reality, but always reflected a certain concept of power and people possessing those powers. Nowadays, connecting people through the power of media, those maps were supplemented by mental maps, supporting people all over the globe to navigate through the complexities of Globalisation. However, mental maps are never neutral but shaped by the mutual process of how we are seeing the world, as the world sees us. Thus, mental maps might give an orientation yet, stereotypes and prejudices can lead to rather conflictive and dangerous territories. Here, education can provide valuable approaches showing how to deconstruct stereotypes, relearning history of mankind from different perspectives, opening new future windows of opportunity.

Based on that, it was pointed out that Globalisation today seems to be shaped less by thinking in categories of centre and periphery but rather in networks. Being a member of a certain network determines the perspective on looking at the world. Attraction is an asset, determining where global attention in the form of investment, migration, and tourism will be located

towards. Consequently, countries are facing the challenge to adapt to the demands of global attention, meanwhile keeping the attention of what about them is unique to be shown to a global audience.

Once, mankind developed maps to show their imaginations of the world. A long time after that, mankind had a chance to prove their assumption, by taking a group selfie, including all mankind, however, the proof still seems to be pending. Nowadays, this analysis has shown, globalisation takes place through the process of visualisation. On the one side there are physical maps like globes or GPS systems as depictions of the world. On the other side there are mental maps as representation of how each person perceives the world. Addressing the cultural multi-perspectives on mental maps could contribute to answering questions about where mankind comes from as where it is going, in a global and constantly more interconnected future. Concluding maps are more than depiction of geography, as mental maps are representations of how we construct the perception of the world all mankind, opens up to sharing and bringing this diversity together. A constructive quote by South African singer Zenzile Miriam Makeba will conclude this contribution. Mama Africa reminds us: *“Be careful, think about the effect of what you say. Your words should be constructive, bring people together, not pull them apart.”*

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Valentin M. Luntumbue is a Belgian civil servant, independent researcher, and writer. Graduated from the Natolin campus of the College of Europe after studying history, sociology and international relations, Valentin is also an EEAS alumnus and a former academic assistant at the College of Europe's Bruges campus. An advisor within one of Belgium's many federal entities, he also teaches African history in a Congolese diaspora school and acts as the IGE's editor-in-chief.

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Philippe A. Lefevre is a British and French national and Chair of the Institute for a Greater Europe. Graduating from the College of Europe in Bruges after studying international relations, he also formerly studied medieval history and international politics. He has been working with the Institute for over three years and has worked in several other youth organisations since with the Youth Association for a Greater Europe.

### *Stephan Raab*

Stephan Raab is a contributor and editor at the Institute for Greater Europe. He holds a Master in Political Science and a Master in Adult Education/Continuous Education from the Otto-Friedrich-University Bamberg as a graduation from the European Academy of Diplomacy Warsaw. His interests are located in digitisation, global education, educational development and the development of democratic dialogue in civil societies.

*Ruxandra Seniuc*

Elena Ruxandra Seniuc read for an MSc in Russian and East European Studies at the University of Oxford and holds a bachelor's degree in Criminology from Durham University. She is mainly interested in transnational security threats and asymmetric threats, with an ever-growing passion for the field of strategic studies. As an avid history reader, she is eternally fascinated by her country's multicultural inheritance and its tumultuous national-communist past.

*Adrian Waters*

Adrian Waters was born in Rome in 1996 and has lived and studied in both Italy and the UK. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in History and Politics from the University of Kent (Canterbury, England), a Master of Arts in History from University College London and a second-level master's in International Public Affairs from the LUISS Guido Carli university in Rome. In 2018–19 he worked as the secretary of the Institute for a Greater Europe, for which he continues to contribute articles on topics related to European politics. At the time of publication (July 2021), he is completing a traineeship at the Democratic Governance Division within the Council of Europe.

*Nadya Kamenkovich*

Nadezhda Kamenkovich holds a BA in International Relations from Moscow-based HSE and she is currently reading for MPhil in Russian and East European Studies in Oxford University. Apart from her studies, Nadya is a theme section editor for St. Antony's International Review (STAIR), the only peer-reviewed international affairs journal in Oxford, overseeing a section that focuses on energy politics. And along with other REES students, she has launched the Perspektiva Society in Oxford, a platform for dialogue between post-Soviet and Western perspectives.

## Part I. Authors

### *Thomas Yaw Voets*

Thomas Yaw Voets is a graduate of the University of Antwerp, who holds a master's degree in Law (with a specialisation in Sustainable Development and Global Justice) and another master's degree in International Relations and Diplomacy. He is currently doing a traineeship with Member of the European Parliament Kathleen Van Brempt, and also writes for the Institute for a Greater Europe.

### *Nupur Patel*

Nupur Patel is a third-year DPhil student at Lincoln College, University of Oxford. Following a bachelor's degree in History and French, and a Master's Degree in Medieval and Modern Languages, she is now pursuing her doctoral research which considers networks of collaboration and responses to modesty in the printed works of four sixteenth-century French women. Alongside her DPhil work, she plays an active role in equality and diversity initiatives within her college and the wider University.

### *Robin Schmahl*

Robin F.C. Schmahl studied MENA studies, philosophy, political science and history in Munich, Cairo and Berlin. He received his MA at LMU Munich in Islamic and Arabic studies in 2019 with a focus on critical IR theory and human rights in the Middle East. He has worked for the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, the German Orient Institute in Beirut and the German Embassy in Abu Dhabi. Currently, Robin is a PhD candidate at FU, Berlin and a member of the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies, he holds a research position at the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient in the *Historicity of Democracy in the Arab and Muslim Worlds* research program.

*Ibrahim Sultan*

Ibrahim Sultan is a graduate from Florida International University with a degree in International Relations and a regional focus on Latin America. He was born in Miami (USA) but is of Honduran and Pakistani descent. His research interests include Latin America, indigeneity, nativism, international development, and neocolonialism.

*Han Asikbia*

Hannah is a MA student and writer. Her work focuses on black feminism as a site for future possibilities. She is the creator of three zines all of which were made to raise money for Black-owned charities. Her work can be found in publications such as Black Ballad and RaceZine.

*Jessica Gosling*

Jess Gosling is a public policy professional, entrepreneur, public speaker, and PhD student at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London (UCL). Her research focuses on how nation-states brand themselves through the lens of cultural diplomacy, public policy, and soft power, with a core focus on Mexico, Georgia and South Korea. She has a deep passion for how we can come together with the use of technology and digital skills, which her PhD project draws upon. Jess previously worked for the United Nations, the British Government and other civil society organisations for over seven years abroad.

*Hilary Koum Njob*

Hilary Koum is an Msc International Relations graduate from the London School of Economics. Her academic research is centred at the intersection of race, gender, and political violence. In this work she seeks to advance a critical lens that draws attention to narratives and experiences typically left out of the discipline.

## Part II. Authors

### *EastEast*

Biography is in the article, “Post-Colonial Offerings for Post-Soviet Beings: Tools and Tactics for the New World”. Their website is <https://easteast.world/en>. In 2021, EastEast is launching an Arabic version of their platform.

### *David Saveliev*

David Saveliev grew up between Russia and the US and graduated from Johns Hopkins University with a degree in International Relations and Film Production. He is currently pursuing an MPhil in Russian and East European studies at the University of Oxford. His dissertation will focus on protest movements in the former USSR and their international impact; as a journalist and filmmaker David covered war and protests on the ground in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, USA, France, Hong Kong and more. David's research interests are leftist politics, revolutionary movements, cyberspace, and paths to improving the US-Russia relations. In his free time David likes to read, travel, draw and collect obscure memes.

### *Jonas Lammens*

Jonas Lammens was born in Ghent, Belgium and moved during infancy to East Anglia in the United Kingdom. His academic interest surrounding Nazi Europe was sparked by the epic stories of his Great Grandfather, Marcel, who experienced first-hand everyday Nazi Imperialism in Flanders. Jonas studied History and Politics (BA) at Exeter University, where he discovered postcolonial theory, before rekindling his native roots by studying International Politics (Msc) at KU Leuven. A keen and vocal activist, Jonas now lectures in modern history and politics at The Colchester

Sixth Form College. Jonas frequently enjoys contributing to the Greater Institute for Europe on issues of global and regional politics, geopolitics and anything in between.

### *Olga Burlyuk*

Dr. Olga Burlyuk is FWO Postdoctoral Fellow at Ghent University (Belgium) and Visiting Lecturer at the College of Europe (Bruges campus). Olga's research interests are situated at the intersection of EU studies (with a focus on EU external action) and East European studies (with a focus on Ukraine). Her latest work includes book projects on unintended consequences of EU external action (with Gergana Noutcheva, Routledge, 2020) and civil society in Ukraine post-Euromaidan (with Natalia Shapovalova, Columbia UP, 2019). She is currently editing a book on migrant academics' narratives of precarity in the Global North (with Ladan Rahbari) and writing a monograph on motherhood. Olga can be contacted at: [olga.burlyuk@ugent.be](mailto:olga.burlyuk@ugent.be)

### *Jakub Stepaniuk*

Jakub Stepaniuk is a young researcher and language analyst working for Western Balkan markets. At the moment of this publication, he is graduating from the University College London marked by the delivery of his thesis on alternative identities in ethnically divided cities. So far he lived, worked and studied in Poland, England, Serbia, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Austria. Jakub is a huge enthusiast of foreign languages, studies of nation and nationalism and constructivist geopolitics.

### Part III. Authors

#### *Davide Denti*

Davide Denti holds a PhD in International Studies from the Università degli Studi di Trento and an advanced master from the College of Europe. He has published several book chapters and peer-reviewed articles in international journals on issues of European integration of the Western Balkans and memory politics.

#### *Dino Huseljic*

Dino Huseljic holds a MA in Italian Studies from the Università degli Studi di Pisa and a BA in Humanities and Modern Literature from the Università degli Studi di Milano. He speaks Italian and Bosnian, and writes for *EastJournal.net* and *Gli Stati Generali*.

#### *Laura Luciani*

Laura Luciani is a PhD Candidate at Ghent University (Belgium), working at the intersection of critical international relations and political sociology. Her research examines the EU's 'promotion' of human rights and gender equality in the South Caucasus, with a focus on its negotiation by domestic activists and NGOs. She is also an editor with *East Journal* and co-author of *Kiosk*, two Italian media outlets focused on Eastern Europe.

#### *Sandra Muteteri Heremans*

Sandra Muteteri Heremans (°1989, Rwanda) is a Rwandan-Belgian visual artist. She received a master's degree in Art History and later in Social and Cultural Anthropology, both at KU Leuven in Belgium.

She explored in previous work her (family) archive. This archive embodies an (abandoned) life in Rwanda and turned out to be a materialised testimony of larger political stories. This re-visiting of familial archive

was incorporated in a first installation, 'Becoming the Other' and later in a the experimental short film 'La Mazda Jaune et Sa Sainteté', in which she explored the political and intimate potential through a very solid and rhythmic editing of photographs, archival material and the missing image: the black image. She is currently working on Gusubira Imuhira: tales of a Rwandan student in the USSR. She investigates through the experiences of a Rwandan student in the USSR, the geopolitical realities in the 70s and the relationship between the cold war and the African continent.

### *Żaneta Kubicka*

Żaneta Kubicka is a Black Polish woman, born and raised in Poland, currently working as an analyst for a financial institution in Switzerland. She is a graduate of Mississippi College (Cum Laude, BS-2016), College of Europe (MA-2017) and Southeastern University (MBA-2019), and winner of the Alan Jones Award and Outstanding Student in Political Science Award. Her interests include international politics and culture. She is a huge fan of basketball and her Samoyed dog.

### *Malaika Newsome-Magadza*

Malaika Newsome-Magadza is a Zimbabwean researcher with a master's degree in Conflict Studies from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her research interests lie primarily in Southern Africa and Palestine, with a specific focus on anti-colonial action, the intersections of race, land, and indigeneity, and the mechanisms of Western media in constructing narratives of threat in these regions.

### *John Alulis*

John Alulis is the Research Manager for the University Consortium, an inter-regional training program for outstanding students from the US, Europe, and Russia. He completed his MPhil in Russian and East European Studies at St Antony's College, Oxford, graduating with distinction in 2018.

His thesis topic was on contemporary Lithuanian collective memory about 1940 to 1953 and the impact this has on present-day Lithuanian society. Previously, John served as a cavalry officer in the US Army's 173rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), achieving the rank of captain. During his time with the Army, John deployed to Afghanistan and participated in a variety of exercises and NATO missions in Germany, Italy, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Georgia, among other countries.

# Partners

## The Institute for a Greater Europe

The Institute for a Greater Europe is a non-profit youth-led think tank based in Brussels, Belgium with members and interests all over Europe and Beyond. Founded in 2018, the Institute has members and writers from over 30 countries in Europe, North America, Middle East and North Africa, and Asia. The mission of the Institute is to generate challenging new ideas, bridge cultural divides and foster a community based around shared values across a wider European scale.

The Institute decided to become involved with the Europe Lab through the initiative of its Editor-in-Chief, Valentin, and began to work on its core project, “Places in the Sun” in early 2021. It has been an important project for the Institute and one of its first major grant-based projects. Following the Europe Lab, the Institute will continue to work with the themes and ideas generated from the book into its further work across the following years. You can find more information about the Institute on its website: [www.InstituteGreaterEurope.com](http://www.InstituteGreaterEurope.com)



## The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (Forum, or CSF) is a network of thematically diverse non-governmental organisations from Russia and the European Union, established as a bottom-up, non-partisan civic initiative. The Forum serves as a platform for members to engage in joint activities, articulate common positions, provide support and solidarity, and exert civic influence on policy- and decision-making on the (inter)governmental level. Driven by a vision of ‘the civil society beyond borders’, the Forum brings together organisations and people and therefore contributes to the integration between Russia and the EU, based on common values of pluralistic democracy, rule of law, human rights and social justice.

Members and supporters of the Forum are driven by a vision of ‘the civil society beyond borders’ – a joint future with a common political, economic, and cultural space. They share a belief that strong and vocal civil society plays a key role in peaceful and sustainable development of the European continent and in addressing common challenges and issues of public interest topical to both Russia and the EU.



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## Europe Lab 2021

Europe Lab is a programme initiated by CSF and implemented with various partner organisations. It unites young people from over 30 European countries, unlocking opportunities for dialogue and common learning. Participants work on cross-sector topics, share best practices, network, develop partnerships and start common international initiatives. Over the last five years, the Europe Lab community has grown to include young activists, cultural practitioners, researchers, artists, NGO and media actors, (social) entrepreneurs and representatives of many more sectors.

Every year, the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum invites active people aged in their 20s and 30s from the EU, Russia and other European states for the annual summer Lab and various other activities. Common projects developed during the Lab, get the chance to receive follow-up grants. Since the creation of Europe Lab in 2015, participants have had the opportunity to visit Lithuania, Croatia, Poland, Romania, Italy, and Slovenia each time with a focus on a specific issue relating to European historical memory. Dozens of projects have been supported and hundreds of participants have learned, engaged, and discussed.

The current, 2021 edition of Europe Lab, focuses on the topic of Decolonial Encounters and features online events as well as local European activities.



The projects from the 2021 Edition of the Europe Lab can be found below:

### *Places in the Sun*

Places in the Sun (PITS) is the overarching name for the Institute for a Greater Europe's project, featuring a core book and spokes of other events relating to the themes and ideas inside the book. As well as the book itself, featuring 23 chapters across three different parts, PITS organised two podcasts to discuss with members from the other project (Bodies Unbound), and with the CSF to discuss their themes. It also organised an event with academics on "The Legacy of Empire for Russian Foreign Policy" with renowned Professors Viacheslav Morozov (University of Tartu) and Vladislav Zubok (LSE) and Dr. Aude Merlin (ULB). PITS will also be launching an event in September to promote the book, which will be available freely with donations, and organise a way to discuss and disseminate the book more widely.

To get a copy of the PITS book in print, do consider emailing [chair@institute-greater-europe.com](mailto:chair@institute-greater-europe.com) and we will happily work with you to deliver a copy to your institution. You can find more information about PITS projects on our website <https://pits.europe-lab.net/>.

### *Bodies Unbound*

Combining archival research, documentary poetry, and performance art, Bodies Unbound connects Europe's colonial history of sexual regulation to the contemporary policing of the bodies of women of colour. Laws regulating women's labour or sexuality have curtailed freedom and maintained patterns of racism, fetishism, and surveillance from Europe's colonial past to the present day.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many doctors assumed non-European women were prostitutes and thus vectors for venereal disease.

Seen as threats to family integrity and society's morality, such women were easy targets for sexual regulation. Cities required sex workers to register their place of residence, use an identification card, and undergo frequent medical exams (many of which would be recognised as rape today). Such laws, ostensibly aimed at stopping disease, served to control the bodies of women of colour and the working class.

This violence reverberates today in the fearful climate of the pandemic and in the literal policing and murders of women of colour (such as the March 2021 shootings of six spa workers in Atlanta, Georgia). Until we reckon with this racist and sexist history, authorities will continue to enact harmful immigration and vice raids while ignoring the economic precarity and fetishisation that truly endanger sex workers and women of colour.

Missing from historical accounts of these abuses are the voices of the women. We start by breaking apart texts such as parliamentary debates and police reports. Drawing from public archives (e.g. legislation, medical records, news articles) on prostitution in Europe and its colonies, we use methods from docupoetry to transform these primary source materials into lyrical works that illuminate and transcend trauma. The texts are then reinterpreted through performance to create an embodied conjuration of monologues from today's Myanmar, Vietnam, China, and Morocco that is capable of carrying the weight of these women's stories.  
—Lena Chen, Elise Hanrahan, and April Yee

*Yesterday was Warmer than Today*

The territories of Ossetia were annexed to the territory of the Russian Empire as a result of cruel punitive expeditions and acts of genocide. In Soviet times, for the convenience of administration and management of territories, a single ethno-geographical community of Ossetians was divided into North and South Ossetia. The northern part went to the

RSFSR, and the southern part to the Georgian SSR. Despite the short period of indigenisation (korenizatsiya) – the development of the national culture and language, the united people was subjected to cultural assimilation in different ways: from the translation of writing into the Cyrillic and Georgian alphabets, to the prohibition of teaching in their native language.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the fact that the right of territorial self-determination of the Ossetian people was not realised: Georgia refused to recognise itself as a federal state, and to give South Ossetia the status of a Republic or autonomy. Zviad Gamsakhurdia's policy was aimed at compulsory assimilation of the non-Georgian population, and the region of South Ossetia began to be referred to by the Georgian side as Samachablo, thus ignoring the history of the Ossetian population living in these territories. "The Ossetian people are garbage that must be swept out through the Roki tunnel". A huge number of people fled to North Ossetia, receiving refugee status.

Until now, even after a series of open military conflicts in 1992, 2004 and 2008. the Ossetian-Georgian conflict is unresolved and is in a frozen state. In contemporary Ossetia, in recent years, a discourse has been formed about the genocide of Ossetians by Georgia, shifting the emphasis from the territorial issue to the issue of interethnic confrontation. Unfortunately, nationalist rhetoric ignores centuries of peaceful coexistence and mutual cultural exchange between two peoples.

The project "It Was Warmer Yesterday" offers a new representation of the relationship between the Georgian and Ossetian population. The project will abandon political definitions and base on atypical forms of representation of these relationships: the stories of ordinary people who, for various reasons, find themselves on different sides of political borders.

The project team will tell the stories of Ossetians who found themselves in Georgia due to various historical circumstances and the stories of Georgians living in Ossetia. On the one hand, this project is about the migration context of representatives of the once fraternal peoples who, by someone's political will, find themselves in a war situation with each other, and about their families separated by borders. On the other hand, it is about confused identity, when it is difficult for characters, some of whom were born and raised in mixed families, to clearly and unequivocally determine who they are – Georgians or Ossetians, “whose side they are” on, and where their real home is.

Circumstances force one of the characters of the project to pass through this inhuman choice – Alexei Buchukuri, a Georgian who has lived his entire life in Ossetia and declared an “enemy of Georgia” after negotiations with Gamsakhurdia. There is no place for hatred in these stories, but only annoyance and dreams of a once stable, but – now – such a fragile peace.

“Yesterday Was Warmer” – is a project about today. About breaks and raptures that somehow inexplicably appear overnight. What happens in these gaps of the night when loved ones become strangers and when the memory of a once warm relationship turns into nightmares of war? What, why and when breaks down? In these spaces “in between”, when the mind falls asleep. When consciousness is dreaming.

The project is designed to contribute to the processes of building peace in the region using the methods of cultural diplomacy, and to hear unrepresented voices.

This volume explores and confronts two flourishing and neighbouring intellectual traditions in a timely manner. First, the decolonial and post-colonial movements of the Western World, with their long legacies of struggle and activism still relevant today. And second, the emerging academic trend of decolonialism in the wider post-Socialist space, that is slowly gaining a foothold in mainstream discourse. The volume's many contributors (researchers, academics, writers, activists, artists...) discuss a multiplicity of issues related to the decolonial movements in Europe and beyond, through a variety of formats ranging from essays to fiction. Not content to be only examined separately, both traditions are brought into a dialogue, to find where they diverge and where they meet.

Places in the Sun is a multidisciplinary and mixed-media project led by a team of writers and editors from the Institute for a Greater Europe, in partnership with the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum.



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