

# **Imperial discourse and post-utopian peripheries: “suspended” indigenous epistemologies in the Soviet non-European (ex)colonies**

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## **1. Introduction**

At first sight the political processes in the non-European (ex)colonies of the collapsed Soviet Union are not related in any direct way to the outburst of indigenous movements and the revival of indigenous epistemology in a number of Latin American countries in the last decades, as these locales have quite different histories and imperial-colonial configurations. But a more careful analysis demonstrates that a number of epistemic models of alternative thinking and subjectivities in the Russian (ex)colonies demonstrate parallels and intersections with the dissenting Latin American indigenous models, even if they have not yet had a chance to be sufficiently represented on the level of the state, the public discourse, the social structures. I would like to discuss some of the reasons for such similarities and differences, linked with the different ways modernity manifested itself in these locales, and also mention the possible ways of collective

global resistance to neo-liberal globalization. I am not going to compare the indigenous movements in Central Asia, Caucasus and the Andes just for the sake of comparison in the vein of eurocentric developmentalist comparative studies. Instead I am interested in the underlying global reasons, which in modernity have led to the emergence of multiple and varied groups of “others,” and at the same time inevitably generated the effect of resistance, which, as the Latin American experience demonstrates, can become a powerful political force. The Eurasian configuration was different, its experience of indigenous movements and resistance has been less successful so far. But it does not mean that we should simply ignore it if we want to build a more just and fair world.

## **2. On the nature of the Russian/Soviet imperial configuration**

The Czarist Russia and later the Soviet Union present an interesting case of imperial discourses, quite different from the Western capitalist empires of modernity, and in their secondary Eurocentrism—similar to other subaltern empires, such as the Ottoman empire. If for Latin America it is the colonial difference that plays the crucial role, then for Russia, as well as for Spain, that lost its dominance in the second modernity, it is the imperial difference that comes forward (Mignolo, 2002; Tlostanova, 2005). However on the global scale we can say that the imperial difference mutates into the colonial, which is clearly seen in case of the Ottoman Em-

pire and Russia. The reason for this lies in the fact that Spain is an example of the internal imperial difference which does not go beyond the Western European reference system, Western Christianity, Latin-based languages. While Russia is an example of external imperial difference. It's imperial populace is Slavic, i.e. rather remote from Western Europe, it is Orthodox Christian and even its alphabet does not correspond to European expectations of imperial language and literacy. The Russian empire was never seen by Western Europe as its part, remaining an Asiatic racialized empire. The fatal error of the Russian empire was its impossible to realize wish to catch up with Europe and prove that Russia out-wested the West. This wish has alternated periodically with the rejection of everything European and the retreat into the jingoism that we also witness today. The Russian imperial discourses of the 19<sup>th</sup> century demonstrate the Janus-faced nature of this empire which always felt itself a colony in the presence of the West and at the same time half heartedly played the part of the caricature "civilizer" in its non-European colonies.<sup>1</sup> The Soviet empire in its subaltern imperial nature was not essentially different from the Czarist one, though it reformulated the main developmentalist slogan in a more powerful way—"to catch up and leave behind," while also escalating its global geopolitical appetites. As for the relation to the colonies, the Soviet tactic did not change much—it became even more cruel and refined, based on methodical elimination of all alternative thinking and being.

### **3. Coloniality of power and Eurasian non-European ex-colonies**

Here it is useful to remember A. Quijano's concept of coloniality of power as the underlying logic of socio-cultural relations in modernity, built on the supremacy of Europeans over the non-Europeans (Quijano, 2000), which explains what exactly unites the histories of all ex and present colonies of Russia and the Soviet Union and that of other locales in the world. In case of Latin America and Europe the racial element of coloniality of power acts in its obvious and clear form, while in case of Russia this logic is more hidden and hard to detect. The Russian empire was the second-rate empire in modernity that used to copy the Western European capitalist imperial discourses with many distortions and with awareness of its own marginality within the construct of Whiteness, compensating this inferiority by projecting its caricature racism onto the newly acquired territories. The more so in the Soviet Union which attempted to put to life the marginal and seemingly contesting model of the Western modernity—that of socialism, even if in the form of double standards, where the actual dominance of racial discourses was always masked and complicated by a more intricate ethnic and religious configuration, while the Soviet empire chose to present itself to the world as the empire of affirmative actions (Martin, 2001). In the post-soviet period the flourishing racism going hand in hand with Slavic ethnic chauvinism does not need to mask itself any more, while the previous religious, linguistic and ideological aspects of

othering that were used in the Russian and Soviet empires, step aside. Below I will dwell on the control of labor within the Soviet system.<sup>2</sup> As for other forms of coloniality of power—the control of subjectivity and the production of knowledge, here the Soviet empire did not invent anything new. The monopoly of Western knowledge in the form of Russian or Soviet mediation (today in the form of direct borrowing from the West or choosing a more attractive mediator than the losing Russia, as it happens in case of popularity of the Turkish model in the Islamic ex and present colonies) remains the main manifestation of coloniality and the main impediment for the development of indigenous movements in these regions.

#### **4. A short history of indigenous movements in Caucasus and Central Asia**

The history of indigenous movements in Caucasus and Central Asia cannot be taken out of the historical context. These movements did not stay the same in some frozen form, but changed together with the changing society and the world. They were in the center of geo-political events of the world history in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, acting as pawns in the struggle of several different types of empires for geo-political power and influence. Both regions played a central role in the so called Eastern question, which was a fight of European powers and Russia for control of the lands of the Ottoman Empire, and also in the Great Game between the Great

Britain and the Russian empire over India. While Russia was unsuccessfully trying to win a better place for itself vis-à-vis Europe, its non-European colonies were simply used to exercise the Russian imperial self-assertion that could not be expressed in the West. The indigenous people of these locales, even if they were and are used by all fighting sides—from Great Britain to the Russian Empire and from Germany to France, from the dying Ottoman empire to the Bolsheviks re-conquering these territories, and finally, by the Americans and the Islamic world and China today, remained completely stripped of human rights and any opportunity of taking part in nation-building, generation of knowledge and social structures. They were and are now the hostages of great imperial games. Their lands were divided and taken without their consent, they were eliminated by millions, deported and later forcefully made to accept unnatural ethnic national divisions.

There are many examples of persistent resistance of these people, such as an Adygean Princes Union of the 1830s—an anticolonial organization of the leaders of all Caucasus tribes, which made an appeal to the Russian authorities, asking them to stop the military actions on the lands of Adygs and offering to organize a confederation of Caucasus lands. Later when their appeal was ignored and the colonization continued in its most cruel forms they organized the volunteer corps to fight against the Russians as a result of which many of these Caucasus small ethnicities were completely wiped from the face of the earth. But the

Caucasus de-colonial movement did not end then, continuing well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century—in the anti-Soviet movements of the 1920—30s, strangled by Stalin, and today—in the Chechen war of the late 20<sup>th</sup>—early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The same refers to the powerful Turkistan National Liberation Movement presided by an indigenous intellectual Zeki Velidi Togan. The movement emerged a little later but was even more dangerous for the Bolshevik empire. It also started with legal and non-violent political actions, but by the end of the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Togan created a Secret Society for the liberation of Turkistan and the anticolonial struggle turned into the military forms (the gorilla movements) on the one hand and the underground struggle and the infiltration of the Soviet structures in preparation of the major anti-colonial war on the other. In Stalin's era this ended with the death and defeat of all of its members except for those who immigrated and attempted to continue their struggle from European capitals. Neither the Caucasus indigenous movements nor those of Turkistan ever stopped their resistance—for many decades and sometimes centuries they continued to generate oppositional ideologies and leaders who were methodically eliminated by various imperial powers. These histories at large remained undocumented, the views of these people were erased, the oral histories (such as the Turkistan Dastan *Koroglu*, a story of the 16<sup>th</sup> century real fighter for independence and freedom, used as a role model and inspiration for the early leaders of national liberation movement) were destroyed, never published or even mentioned in the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup>

Both Caucasus and Central Asian liberation movements included political and social elements, as they fought to construct a Turkistan or Caucasus polity and attempted to open a dialogue with the state, using petitions, declarations, marches, demonstrations that always ended in bloody massacres organized by both Czarist and later Soviet powers. The Bolsheviks when re-conquering Turkistan and Caucasus did not shun any means—first establishing contacts with anticolonial movements and then cruelly destroying them, often with the aid of local feudal and reactionary Islamist forces, as well as international pan-Turkic ones, who in their turn were also eliminated later in the millstones of Soviet history. In the Soviet tradition of double standards which was much more skillful than the Czarist one in the sense of its official liberation rhetoric and the actual repressive and racist acts in relation to the re-conquered colonies, the leaders of anti-colonial movements were often called “the fighters for national liberation against Czarism” by the Soviet historians. But as soon as they turned to Soviet history the same people were labeled the bandits, the brigands, the traitors, the “basmachi,” the “abreks,” whose mass destruction was thus justified. The Soviets were very successful in how along with the massive genocide of anti-colonial movement leaders and members they also generated a massive elimination of indigenous knowledge, cosmology, traditions which are almost impossible to restore, especially that the new governments of independent states are not interested in it either, because the emancipatory liberating spirit of these epistemologies is not safe for the new rulers of these locales.

## **5. Nation-building in the (ex)colonies**

With the end of the communist utopia it seems that several models of nation building emerged on the ruins of the empire, from the comic reproduction of the Western liberal nation-states in the Baltic (even if with some elements of Nazi nostalgia and the discrimination of Russian minorities) to autocratic Turkmenia, to take just the two extremes. It is important that the nationalist ideologies put in the basis of some ex-colonial nation-states also use the Western ideological frame, filled with local content, sometimes lapsing into the ridiculous examples of totalitarian and militant ethnic nationalism, that the new-old leaders borrowed from the Soviet or even Russian system with which they are linked by a love-hate relationship.

But all of these models are essentially dead ends because all of them remain completely enchanted with the particular Western idea of the sovereign nation-state, firmly linked with ethnic-national discourses and intolerant by definition. It is not a chance that all confederation projects in Eastern Europe and in Central Asia or Caucasus, that could potentially lead to a more productive way around and beyond the rhetoric of nation-state, quickly failed, giving way to at times maniacal race for sovereignty, the quest for roots (and often their invention), the strive to reinvent their own history and make it more prominent within the universal history in Hegelian interpretation, and consequently, the careful erasing from the collective consciousness and from the official historiography of any alternative models of pol-

ity, any different cosmologies or epistemic systems that did not fit into the new/old idea of the nation-state promoted by the new/old leaders of these ex-colonies. This is particularly sad in case of Caucasus and Central Asia which both had a rich and long going history of indigenous epistemologies and social models, that had little or nothing to do with both Islamic or Christian and circular European modernity, and later with Russian and Soviet modernization. The revival of these models of thinking could give interesting results, which at this point are expressed only sporadically and still, as in Soviet times, mostly in the form of art, literature, theater, cinema, the sphere of the quotidian, but not in politics or nation building.<sup>4</sup>

It is also clear that the nation-building processes in the newly independent states have been controlled from the outside and by the comprador local elites, as it always happened in the imperial times and continues to happen today in the notorious “flower” and “fruit” revolutions (the orange revolution in Ukraine, the tulip revolution in Kyrgyzia, the roses revolution in Georgia). An historical example could be of use here: both Caucasus and Turkistan liberation movements of the mid 19—early 20<sup>th</sup> century were originally local, not precisely religious and dealt mainly with re-taking control of their lands and their future from the Russian/Soviet empire, never venturing in the global pan-Turkic or pan-Islamic direction, instigated later by European emissaries and their non-European helpers (such as an Ottoman general Enver Pasha) to spite and weaken Rus-

sia. Today the logic did not change much, which is clearly seen in the history of the Northern Caucasus anti-colonial movements, quickly usurped by the forces of international Islamism, and at the same time in many cases sponsored by the Western powers. Once again, no one in this situation is really interested in the life and the future of the people who live in these locales.

If the almost 40 million Central Asia (excluding its still Russian parts) chose the forgotten confederative way of unification on the basis of indigenous social and epistemic models, the political life of Eastern Eurasia would have been quite different, the same way as if the initial confederative projects of Eastern and Central European states—the ex-satellites of Soviet Union—would be put to life.<sup>5</sup> However, instead of the revival of really indigenous epistemologies, the liberation movements in these independent states and colonies went in the Islamist direction in contrast with contemporary Latin American indigenous movements. Amerindians struggle mainly for de-colonization from the Eurocentred racist epistemologies in their Creole rendering, while the peoples of Caucasus and Central Asia are multiply colonized and have to de-colonize from the overall coloniality of Western modernity in its Eurocentred Western, Russian, Soviet forms and also—to de-colonize from Islam and particularly Islamism, as an ideology, forcefully imposed on them several centuries ago and re-imposed with the collapse of Soviet Union, when the Islamist organizations used the economic hardships and chronic lack of hu-

man rights in these regions to gain control over the territories vacated by the Soviets.

What makes all of nation-building models in Soviet ex-colonies similar is the neo-liberal and democracy rhetoric, based on the ideology of developmentalism, progress and rational building of society and economics, and also—different ideologically, but similar economically variants of dependency logic, well known in Latin America. However, the Eurasian logic of dependency is again, somewhat different and deserves to be mentioned.

## **6. The burden of dependency?**

In contrast with the Russian empire, which rather marginally but still belonged to the world system, the Soviet empire presented itself as a case of extreme autarchy and implemented an unheard of experiment of socialist economic system as opposed to the capitalist one, a system that would be self-sufficient and insulated from the world market. This ideal was certainly never followed word for word—even in the darkest years of Stalinism, but it was the image of the Soviet Union and the Socialist world that was imprinted into the Western imaginary. Everybody knows today about the fatal shortcomings of ineffective planned economy, but not many people pay attention to the fact that the socialist economic system—even if it looked so different from the capitalist one, in its major tenets was based on the same assumptions of progress, teleology, industrializa-

tion and the cult of technological development. Another neglected fact is how within this system the coloniality of power was expressed in the phenomenon of chronic dependency and lagging behind that was typical for the racialized colonies. After the collapse of Soviet Union it resulted in the initial stagnation of certain countries (e.g. the Central Asian states) and the advantages of others (the Baltics), although in the scale of the world economy of globalization this advantage is minimal, because even the more successful countries-survivors of Soviet Union are still of no use to European Union except in the capacity of the cheap labor force and new markets, and not as manufacturers and sellers of their products at the world market. The hierarchy of colonial economies within the Soviet Union was not framed openly according to racist discourses, but again, through the mediated and blurred Eurocentric rhetoric, so that the more European Soviet colonies (the Baltic states, Ukraine) were also less mono-economic, while the Caucasus or especially Central Asia were deliberately caught into the vicious circle of dependency that is reproduced today on the global scale in their being completely thrown out of the world system. Their condition reproduces on the next turn the imperial-colonial hierarchy that was shaped in modernity. If the Russian and the Soviet empire were caught in the catching-up ideology of “overtaking and surpassing,” the colonies of this second-rate empire turned out third-rate—in comparison with the colonies of the capitalist empires of modernity.

Although we are familiar with the Latin American unsuccessful experience of development and modernization programs, in Russia and in its ex-colonies alike not many people take this into account—not just because of the lack of knowledge, but also because of the imperial Russian/Soviet snobbishness in relation to Latin America and the ex-third world in general. Practically all newly independent states, including Russia, bought into developmentalism in its neo-liberal form which soon turned into various ethnic-national models when all of these states realized that they cannot find a place in the new global capitalist market, that nobody really wants them there. The latter is important because while preaching the gospel of market economy as a global panacea, the West does a lot not to allow the ruins of the Soviet Union to enter the world market in any capacity, except for the cheap labor force or raw resources. Thus, the countries of the Eastern Europe are quickly becoming “service countries” for Western Europe. The non-European (ex)colonies are interesting to the West and first of all to the US only as the springboard for the military bases, necessary for the preparations of the next righteous wars for oil. This results in devastating consequences for the economies of practically all ex-soviet colonies and satellites—from Central Asia to Central Europe, including Russia itself. Some Central Asian leaders already realize that and hastily reorient from the West to the East or even back to Russia, attempting to build economic coalitions and regional agreements of various kinds, in this respect resembling Latin America once again.<sup>6</sup>

In this context it is clear why dependency theory re-emerged quite soon in the post-soviet Russia and the ex-colonies. One can often hear today the well known ideas of protectionism, economic nationalism, boycott of WTO, banning of natural resources export, etc.—sometimes even in the radical a lá Amir Samin form of dependency discourse. The seemingly populist Putin administration never takes this into account in any serious way, except for political and economic nationalist slogans in order to calm the people, but seldom if ever changes its major economic direction of neo-liberal capitalism. In the conditions of completely discredited socialism and any left ideologies in the ruins of the Soviet empire it is not surprising that only sporadic recipes of rather ridiculous thinkers within the dependency logic find their way to public.<sup>7</sup>

The national economies in the ex-colonies have been developing in accordance with their different roles within the socialist economy, which was discriminatory, eurocentric and quite diverse in its methods of discrimination. It seemed standardized and homogenous only to the Western outsider. Economically more developed European ex-colonies copy the neo-liberal economic principles, desperately trying to erase their difference with Europe, as it happens in case of the Baltic states and less with Ukraine and Georgia. These countries also reproduce the double standards of the Western civilization in relation to human rights, dividing people into first and second-rate. The economy in this case once again crashes against culture and ideology, when the ex-Soviet colonies follow the well known Soviet slogan—“socialist in its essence,

national in its form.” Today it changes into “market or developmentalist in its essence, ethnic-national in its form,” which does not alter the logic of the formula itself. In the less developed non-European ex-colonies the ethnic-national element is more pronounced in the nation-building discourses, accompanied with some ideas of dependency theory and at the same time with extreme authoritarianism of the ruling elites. A good example of this is the Uzbek President Islam Karimov’s rhetoric that attempts to justify the still centralized economy and authoritarian power of the Soviet type with the appeal to the mythic ancient ethnic solidarity and the construct of “uzbekness” that are largely the Soviet products, invented and imposed onto these people by the imperial ideologues (Karimov, 1993). The really existing institute of *makhalla*—the local community—is effectively used by the Uzbek state in its attempts to justify the repressive policies and lack of respect for the individual by comparing the state with the family and with the local community, while its leader becomes a recognizable and not very appetizing “father of the nation.” In these conditions no models of alternative thinking, no revival of indigenous epistemologies and social and political structures are possible.

## **7. Why indigenous epistemology and indigenous movements are not a strong political force in Eurasian ex-colonies?**

I have pointed out above that the alternative epistemologies and decolonial thinking existed in non-European Eur-

asian colonies, in some cases, for many decades and even centuries. What are then the reasons for their absence from the political discourses and nation building today? Here a comparison with Latin American indigenous movements could help. In a number of Latin American countries, such as Ecuador and Bolivia, in the last 15 years at least, as a reaction to the multiple failure of both developmentalist projects and dependency theory, there emerged an alternative model of *interculturalism* which was connected with the questioning of the socio-political reality of neocolonialism as it manifests itself in the present models of the state, democracy and the nation (Walsh). Interculturalism is linked with decolonization as the goal of indigenous movements, and particularly, CONAIE, in whose political project there emerges the idea of plurinational state, based on “the full and permanent participation of the peoples and nationalities in decision making” and in “the exercise of political power in the Plurinational State” (CONAIE, 1997, p. 11). What is interesting here is that this initiative is born not on the level of the nation state, but higher or lower, on a more global and on a more local level, although it attempts to change the state and the national imaginary according to its needs. As Katherine Walsh points out, “interculturality marks and signifies the processes of construction of an ‘other’ knowledge, an ‘other’ political practice, an ‘other’ social power (and State), and an ‘other’ society; an ‘other’ way of thinking about and acting in relation to and against modern-

ty/coloniality, an ‘other’ paradigm that is thought through political praxis” (Walsh). On the ruins of the Soviet Union one can find many examples of neocolonialism, discrimination, racism, lack of willingness to hear the voices of many groups of indigenous peoples. But indigenous NGOs do not play any significant part in the life of these republics. If there are such organizations at all, they usually play the role of the maskers and ritualistic characters, who cannot really influence the political life and who manipulate their handful of slogans to sustain the minimum political prestige and sometimes, if they are lucky, join the higher power elites.

One of the crucial differences between the Northern Caucasus and Central Asia and the Zapatistas or CONAIE today lies in the religious sphere which brings us back to the question of imperial and colonial difference. Militant Islamism acts as the main banner of resistance in Eurasian colonies today, but it is a new Post-soviet phenomenon, as even in the Caucasus War in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Jihad banner was not the main element of anti-colonial movements, and most of them in all non-European colonies were decidedly pre-Islamic or rather beyond Islamic, while at the same time shared a wider than Islam anti-colonial sentiment that was subsequently lost. Thus the Turkistan National Unity was not in the least interested in the struggle between socialism and capitalism or in the creation of Islamic state. They declared in 1921 that they “did not want to sacrifice the future of the old Turkistan to plans in preparation for the deliv-

erance of the Islamic world and to the yet unknown outcome of forthcoming struggle between capitalism and socialism” (Paksoy, 1995a).

The growing militaristic nature of anti-colonial movements in Caucasus and Central Asia and their consent to Islamism can be explained through the colonization by the Russians and especially by the Soviets, that created and intensified the culture of violence in these regions. It pushed the great masses of people out of their previous social hierarchy, legal and civil system, it destroyed the traditional economy and imposed the colonial one, leaving no choice for the large groups of people than either join the colonizers or the gorilla movements. But the Caucasus and Asian Robin Hoods, as they were often presented by the Russian propaganda, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century turned into the well-organized and often quite educated strata of local elites, who envisioned the future of their homeland as rather circular and egalitarian (albeit not in Western terms, but rather in the sense of reviving the indigenous social relations). However this stream of anti-colonial movements was strangled by the 1940s and never regained any force later. The growing islamization of anti-colonial movements from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and up to the war in Chechnya and the Islamist uprisings in Central Asia, is a direct result of the refusal of the state to establish a dialogue with indigenous movements, in fact, a result of state violence. However, the same way as in the 1920s the contemporary Islamist leaders of the local movements remain the pawns in someone else’s great game, while their real attitude to religion and their in-

terest in the future of their people—remain questionable at best. It is not a chance that the majority of the people living in Northern Caucasus refuse to take the side of both Chechen insurgent troops or Russia, the so called field commanders or the federal troops, the corrupt presidents of Northern Caucasus republics or Moscow.

Today the historical phenomena of both *basmachi* and *abreks* (Bobrovnikov, 2000) anti-colonial movements, originally far from religion, are revived in Islamist forms and in the creation of networks with international Islamism, while the anticolonial resistance and possible coalitions with anticolonial movements of not fervently religious nature are ignored or downplayed. This is again a situation completely different from the American indigenous movements where Catholicism comes from the colonizer and is not used today as the inspiration of anti-colonial movements<sup>8</sup> as it happens with Islam, whose expansionistic nature is symbolically forgotten in this case and even forgiven, in the larger dimension where it lost to Christianity and Western Modernity and started to be used as the banner of the global anti-colonial movement. However, in the complex imperial-colonial configuration of Eurasian ex-colonies, in order to revive indigenous movements as a source of viable epistemic models and decolonial struggles, it is crucial to de-colonize from Islam and particularly Islamism, to remember that Islam here was a result of rather late Arabic invasion, the erasing of indigenous epistemologies and the long struggle against the forceful islamization.<sup>9</sup>

### **7.1. *Indigenous neo-colonialism?***

The newly independent Central Asian colonies are an interesting case of what can be called an indigenous neo-colonialism. Here it is not the equivalent of the white Creole elites (the Russians) that are in power today, as seemingly Central Asia is in the hands of indigenous people, while the Russian ex-colonizers find themselves often discarded from society and economy. But the local regimes that are presided today by the representatives of indigenous people turn out indistinguishable from the Russian or Soviet powers. They reproduce the logic of coloniality, though in contrast with Latin America, it is a coloniality with respect to their own people and not to racialized others, which is a result of external imperial difference with its secondary Eurocentrism as the constitutive element that spreads over the colonized as well as the colonizers. Consequently, when these independent ex-colonies needed a new constitution, they consulted not the local elders, but the Western experts, particularly the ex-sovietologists who quickly turned into the specialists in Eurasia. The majority of the projects that refer to the study of indigenous legacy in these regions are of exclusively Western origin and financing, such as the Eurasian programs and centers in Harvard, Princeton and other top US universities (e.g. the Central Eurasia Project), and in Europe—mainly in Denmark and Sweden. Their study of Central Eurasia is aimed among other things at educating the local elites as the champions of neo-liberal ideology, who would not be interested in the least in the future of

their own people. This was also an important tactic of the Russian and Soviet empires, whose psychological and ethical mechanisms of forging new political identities have not changed much under the turning from socialism to capitalism.

The Russian empire's primitive accumulation of capital was done at the cost of the lives of Russia's own ethnically same peasants and not the African slaves or Amerindians. In the Russian (and later Soviet) empire such a paradoxical tactic was justified by the elites' claims at belonging to Europe/communist ideology and by the efforts to build a Chinese wall between themselves and the Russian people who did not belong there in the minds of the elites. This logic was borrowed by the ethnic elites of the ex-colonies who continued the economic, legal and cultural genocide of their own people, hiding behind the neo-liberal values and marked with suicidal intellectual dependency on the West, even if masked as the revival of ethnic-nationalism.

## ***7.2. De-linking from developmentalism***

We are risking to fall into the well known mistake of developmentalism if we assume that there are also certain stages in the development of alternative models of thinking and epistemic de-colonization on the global scale, that some time needs to pass before these problems will be understood, as it happened in Latin America, which went a long way of colonization and a long way of independence, that in

Central Asia or Caucasus in due time and on the appropriate stage there will emerge the analogues of indigenous movements in other parts of the world. It is very hard to avoid the temptation of such developmentalist logic. In fact the difference here lies not in the stages but once again, in the imperial-colonial configuration, burdened by complicated religious and ideological factors, some of which I will mention below.

In the ex-soviet colonies, the same way as in Russia, the idea of civil society remains just an idea, and not the most popular one. The local organizations cannot make the state and the local government hear them, while the more global coalitions are not possible (except for the Islamist ones) due to the “zombification” of the social and political imaginary, that is tailored to see the ethnic-national project in the Herderian sense of the unity of the people, the territory, the ethnicity, the language as the only possible one, which does not allow for the emergence of the intercultural idea of uncoupling of the state and one nation.<sup>10</sup> It does not mean that in the ex-colonies and Russia there are no examples of other thinking. But the very social-political system is constructed in such a way that they remain sporadic and doomed to stay unheard, unless some global social cataclysm takes place. The latter however is highly problematic due to the extreme fatigue, apathy, depolitization of the population, which is sick and tired of any reforms and social projects. The people are skeptical about the power but they also do not believe in the possibility of any effective struggle with the power, us-

ing peaceful political ways. Hence the culture of violence that alternative movements mostly resort to, the culture that unfortunately has long going historical roots in Eurasia.

### ***7.3. The success of Soviet “zombification”***

The lack of models similar to interculturalism and plurinational state in the Soviet non-European (ex)colonies is linked among other things with the “success” of the Soviet empire’s modernization, with its carefully elaborated strategies of zombification of indigenous peoples, with the Jesuitical nature of Soviet ideology, that surpassed in this respect the clumsy and under-reflected double face-ness of the Czarist empire. The cynicism, resourcefulness and many-faced nature of the Soviet ethnic-national ideologies is hard to match, the same way as the repressive mechanisms of the accelerated and cruel Soviet modernization, as a result of which even the traces of indigenous cosmologies and ethnics were irreparably erased from the collective memory and replaced with either Soviet eurocentric progressivist discourse or today—by the ersatz ethnic nationalism. For the external world and mainly for the West there was the well developed rhetoric of proletarian internationalism which was manifested e.g. in the affirmative action Soviet quota system in the so called national republics. The metamorphosis of the local elites into the soviet nomenclature led to the elimination of all links with any remnants of indigenous epistemologies and to the purposeful elimination of

these ideologies themselves. The children and grandchildren of these elites are largely still in power today, even if they turned from the faithful communists into the enlightened Caucasians or neo-liberal Central Asians. The nature of this zombification was rather complex—in the West people assumed that we were all zombified by Marxism. But in reality the communist ideology was just an external shell, while the essence remained eurocentric, chauvinistic and based on the Western progressivist idea of modernization, while the resistance shaped itself as anti-colonial, anti-modern and anti-Russian. By the mid 1970s the mutating Soviet regime in its major elements was already difficult to distinguish from Western developmentalism, only dusted with exhausted socialist rhetoric.

Another important difference between Latin America and the Soviet ex-colonies which also is a result of specific Soviet colonialism, is that the latter are alienated from each other. They lack the sense of unity, which the empire gave them before, but they also lack the sense of community of the “damnes,” because they are repeating thoughtlessly the ethnic-national discourses, the nation-state mantras and market and democracy as the magic words that can secure a place for them, as they hope, in the global world. This prevents them from the coalitions with each other and with other others. The cultural and epistemic community of non-Soviet (and also non-Islamic and non-ethnic) type, which clearly existed in Caucasus and Central Asia before, their linguistic continuum similar to the Caribbean one, were

completely erased from the social, political and cultural imaginary in the Soviet years. The empire was afraid of the pan-Turkist or pan-Caucasus unification on any grounds and this was the reason for Islam being the most persecuted religion in the Soviet Union, for the borders drawn by the ruler which prepared the future ethnic conflicts, for the well conceived linguistic and alphabetic reforms of russification and Cyrillization which deprived these people of the continuity of their traditions and today of the possibility of having a dialogue with others of similar cultural, religious or linguistic heritage.

#### ***7.4. An unexpected independence?***

Finally, we cannot ignore the very fact that the ex-colonial states of the post-Soviet periphery started their independent nation-building not of their own accord, not as a result of revolution or a national liberation movement. They were just informed about their new status by Boris Yeltsin and the other two Slavic leaders, who decided to get rid of the Soviet Union without consulting the subaltern Central Asian or Southern Caucasus leaders. This collapse in itself was an important step in the change of the global geopolitical order and the final (at least at this point) victory of the neo-liberal globalization, which did not have to prove any more the advantages of market economy. These specific conditions also worsened the situation for the non-European Soviet ex-colonies. From dependent colonies within the Soviet Union they turned into the spaces, mostly ignored by

the rest of the world, the spaces which are inhabited by some kind of unrecorded people whose future is not taken into account by the new architects of the world. These countries did not become the object of “symbolic/ideological strategies” of the West, in Ramon Grosfoguel’s definition (Grosfoguel, 2000, p. 369), as it happened with many Latin American countries, which were used for the demonstration of the market economy advantages. The ex-Soviet colonies can be attractive as a source of cheap labor or resources not even to the rich North, but mostly to the pro-Western Asian semi-peripheries, such as Turkey, Taiwan, Malaysia, South Korea, etc. As for the North, it uses these countries only as tokens of geo-strategic dominance, which does not even require the capital investments. It is enough to organize flower and fruit revolutions to push out the previous Soviet bosses and now presidents, replacing them with neo-liberal zombies. In post-Soviet Eurasia an Evo Morales would not be possible today. Instead we have the ex-Soviet bosses, the mercenary champions of the Western neo-liberalism, the representatives of mafia structures, or more often, a combination of all three. The corruptive influence of Russia/Soviet Union later picked up by the West, turned out to be fatal for these ex-colonies. It is clearly seen that a new global system is being shaped with a much more complex hierarchy than just a center, peripheries and semi-peripheries. The number of under-humans and their chronically under-developed countries, which are never even regarded as objects of developmentalist programs, grows every year. They are assigned different functions and are placed on different stages

in the revised world system. If Russia itself became a periphery, then again, its ex-colonies are something even lower than peripheric.

### ***7.5. The defeat of the indigenous movements and their invisibility to the world today***

The failure of anti-colonial indigenous movements in Caucasus and Central Asia and subsequently, their invisibility for the rest of the world have an ideological explanation as well. During the Cold War the West did not see the anticolonial element concentrating entirely on its anti-Soviet project. That is why when the émigré leaders of the indigenous movements attempted to get some help from the US and Western Europe, they faced the lack of understanding on the Western part. For example, the West near-sightedly ordered the Turkistan liberation leaders to work in Western European centers under the Russian and Jewish dissidents, which of course they refused to do because for them these dissidents were yet another manifestation of Russian imperialism with a different ideology (not Czarist, not Bolshevik, but liberal). Today the North continues to use these movements in its political opposition to post-Soviet Russia, quickly reorienting from anti-Soviet to anti-imperial rhetoric in the study of Russia and its colonies. But the arguments in this case remain the same, based on persistent stereotypes and old phobias, and the Russian empire is demonized as the only empire discriminating its people, while the West is exempt from the picture. Once again, the

true needs and interests of those who are involved in anti-colonial movements or live in those locales are simply ignored. If on the other hand we take a look at the third world intellectuals and leftist thinkers from the West we find another kind of blindness—for them the Soviet element of the Russian empire over-clouds everything else and some of them still believe that the Bolshevik revolution de-colonized the Czarist empire and liberated the colonized people. In reality the Bolsheviks wanted to keep the empire and have communism too. Hence the massacres in all ethnic national republics, hence the persecution of anti-colonial movements, labeled by the soviets the “bourgeois nationalism,” hence the artificially organized famines and economic policy based on the hidden logic of coloniality of power, that perpetuated chronic underdevelopment and dependency of Soviet non-European colonies. Today it is necessary to finally get rid of the mythic notions of communism and grasp the real meaning of the Soviet empire precisely from the point of view of colonial-imperial configuration of modernity. This can be done through restoring the erased histories of resistance of the colonized people and by establishing their dialogue with similar movements around the world.

## **8. Conclusion**

In peripheral Eurasia the task of reviving of indigenous epistemologies, alternative to both religious and national fundamentalism and neoliberalism, is a hard one, even if the

Eurasian space itself is a paradigmatic example of transculturation, where for centuries different traditions coexisted, mingled, argued and hybridized. Due to the specific reasons and mainly to the still fresh in the collective memory mutant forms of Soviet colonialism, superimposed onto the previous cultural and religious configuration, it is more difficult here than in case of the struggle between the White Creole elites and the indigenous people in Latin America, to even detect who and what one has to fight against or for. In the idea of the pluri-national state the anti-colonial struggle merges with anti-capitalist. But for the majority of the ex-colonial subjects in Eurasia the anti-capitalist pathos cannot be popular by definition. In their minds the only alternative to capitalism is still socialism, which was discredited forever for those who had to survive in it. The existence of other alternatives to neoliberalism, not necessarily socialist or Marxist, remains unknown to the people of peripheral Eurasia. The mutant paradigm of colonial-imperial discourses continues today, when the regimes that we find in the majority of ex-Soviet colonies only pretend to be neo-liberal. So one of the important tasks for the indigenous people there is to de-colonize precisely from these mutant forms of local neo-colonial thinking and acting.

An epistemic revolution is possible in these (ex)colonies, but to initiate it, it is necessary to combine the local and the global levels, to stop thinking in the limits of our own countries or even continents, to dismantle the chronically peripheral position of Central Asian or Caucasus people in

the world, to make them part of the informational and political space of alternative thinking and being on the global scale. This is precisely what the leaders of the newly independent states (and Russia) are afraid of, imposing the patriotism of the ethnic community/clan kind instead, and plundering these countries, while using anti-colonial impulses to their benefit. To build coalitions and open a dialogue with other “damnes” of the world the Eurasian ex-colonies would have to shape the new non-comprador elites, who would base themselves in other epistemologies, including the indigenous ones, and would try to apply the principle of multiple translation (Mignolo, 2003) between the indigenous, the Western, the Islamic epistemology, as it happened in case of Zapatistas in Mexico. In the conditions of continuing zombification of the people, the extreme poverty, the lack of basic human rights and informational isolation we cannot really hope that this will happen in any foreseeable future. At the same time we cannot ignore the way the people who live in these (ex)colonies see and feel the world. Their mentality still carries the traces of other thinking and the ideal of other trans-cultural world of harmonious and just social structures and relations. Today, as before, this sensibility has no political manifestation, being restricted to the allegorical language of the arts or to the illusive culture of the quotidian. And yet this gives me a small hope that the voices of these people will at some point be heard in the global chorus of others, that they will finally gain a right of true participation in deciding of the future of

the world and their own future, maybe not in the form of the nation-state, whose artificial nature is especially obvious in this region, but in other forms, which are only beginning to be envisioned and shaped today.

## Notes

1. I am not speaking here of those colonies of the Russian and Soviet empire which could claim their own European descent or links with European tradition, thus playing the role of the second-rate Europeans. They saw the Russian invasion as barbarian and preferred to be a colony of more civilized Western European empires. This logic is still valid and manifests itself in the national discourses of many Eastern European newly independent states, who are caught into the tenets of eurocentrism, which they use as the main slogan in their fight for independence from the not sufficiently European Russian colonizer.
2. See part 6 of this article, "The Burden of Dependency?"
3. The usual tactic was to collect the oral histories as if for the future publications and then hide them in the inaccessible archives and kill their reciters (the ozans or shamans), to attempt to buy them into socialism by asking to write odes to the tractor and kolkhoz, or later, to publish the *dastans* in the distorted form, where the liberatory heroic impulse was amputated (Paksoy, 1995).
4. The resistance tactics of the Central Asian peoples were and are similar to those of the Caribbean intellectuals who also resorted to fiction instead of forbidden historiography or philosophy, to tell the truth and to preserve the link with the past, with the ancestral beliefs, with their freedom-fighting legacies. It was resistance in disguise of fiction that we find e.g. in the works of Alisher Ibadinov and other Central Asian writers of the Soviet time, most of whom perished in Stalin's purges. Unfortunately today after the Central Asian states became independent and it is seemingly the indigenous people who are in power there, the same logic of repression

persists. A telling case is the fate of Mamadali Mahmudov, a writer who having suffered in Soviet times, received a prize for his resistant literary works after the gaining of independence, but then in the 1999 was imprisoned again, this time, apparently by the new government, which promotes its freedom-loving and democratic image (Paksoy, 2002).

5. The divided Caucasus in this sense is different, as Northern Caucasus still presents a case of internal colonialism within Russia. The revival of indigenous thinking in this relatively small region with a long history of resistance, could contribute to the liberation on a non-Islamist platform.
6. Russia also is beginning to understand that, but it does not have any language except for the imperial one and wants to be the leader even in such regional coalitions and agreements because it is still burdened with the persisting superiority complex which is impossible to eliminate even under the so called pragmatic course of the present administration.
7. Examples of such highly patriotic (on the verge of jingoism) and often racist books (a skillful anti-advertising in order to present developmentalism as the only natural and possible form of social, political and economic theory) include A. Parshev's *Why Russia is not America* (Parshev, 2003), arguing for the creation of an alternative to the world economy—now not a Soviet but a Russian market with recognizable ideology of the besieged camp, I. Bestuzhev-Lada's *Alternative Civilization* (Bestuzhev-Lada, 1998), nurtured by the urge to build a fantastic autarchic society that would not share the problems of Eurocentric civilization without enjoying its advantages, A. Goryanin's *The Myths about Russia and the Spirit of the Nation* (Goryanin, 2002), appealing to the ideal of the monolithic and yet multicultural Russian empire as presumably a protector of its subjects. It goes without saying that a subject here means a Russian male and not a colonized non-European individual, whose sensibility of an internal other, rejected along the ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious lines is not taken into account by this Slavo-centric author.

8. Although there were links between religion and social movements in Latin America in the past, for instance, in the Peruvian anti-colonial movement of *Aky Onkoy*.
9. In fact we can see here the two historical roads of indigenous peoples with the common proto-Asian-Amerindian ancestors who arguably originated in the territory of Sayany and Altai, partly stayed there and partly migrated to Americas, as is demonstrated by the recent research (Zakharov, 2003). The subsequent clash with Western Christianity and capitalism—in case of Amerindians, and with Islam and only much later with mostly circular Russian and Soviet modernization—in case of indigenous people of Central Asia, offer two different configurations of resistance. For the anti-colonial movements in Central Asia the memory of recent Russian/Soviet colonization erased the memory of forced islamization, while the contemporary attractive image of Islam as the loser of modernity easily makes them forget the older history.
10. Particularly catastrophic results of the ideology of the nation-state based on one dominant ethnicity are demonstrated in Russia which used to be a multiethnic empire, but today practices a strange combination of imperial superiority and ethnic chauvinism of the Russian majority, which is expressed in the discrimination of migrants, foreigners and internal others, with Russian citizenship, but with non-Slavic faces.

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