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The Disintegration of "Power/Knowledge". Post-Socialist Studies as Decolonial Studies? A Personal Point of View. Part 3: Soft and Hard Variants of Post-Colonial Studies

Abstract: The relationship between post-colonial and post-socialist studies is extraordinarily complex. Post-colonialists might argue that it can be approached from different perspectives as well as different power positions of knowledge production. As a result, I have chosen a specific trajectory that intersects and challenges the static power positions and is able to trace the debates and the unfolding of the complex problem over time. As a long-time scholar in this area, and moreover one who has taken many different roads in both fields, I will describe this relationship from the perspective of my own scholarly biography.

However, my professional career has spanned several decades and surpassed the transient trends and fashions within this scholarly field. As such, it can only be depicted as an extensive narrative comprising multiple episodes, published in sequence across the double issue of the journal *Studia Litteraria*, devoted to forms of engagement in contemporary Southern and Western Slavic literatures. Part 3 discusses soft and hard variants of the complex "powers/knowledge".

Keywords: post-colonial studies, post-socialist studies, Baltic colonization, decolonization of knowledge, "power/knowledge" complex, totalitarianism

Abstrakt: Relacja między studiami postkolonialnymi i postsocjalistycznymi jest niezwykle złożona. Badacze postkolonializmu stwierdzą, że można do niej podejść z różnych perspektyw, ale także z różnych pozycji władzy w produkcji wiedzy. W rezultacie wybrałem konkretną trajektorię, która przecina i kwestionuje statyczne pozycje władzy oraz jest w stanie prześledzić debaty i rozwój tego złożonego problemu w czasie. Jako wieloletni badacz w tej dziedzinie, a co więcej, osoba, która obierała wiele różnych dróg w obu podejściach, - postkolonialnym i postsocjalistycznym - opiszę tę relację z perspektywy mojej własnej biografii naukowej. Moja kariera zawodowa obejmuje kilka dekad i wykracza poza przemijające trendy i mody w tej dziedzinie naukowej. W związku z tym można ją przedstawić jedynie jako obszerną narrację składającą się z wielu epizodów, publikowanych w podwójnym numerze czasopisma *Studia Litteraria*, poświęconym formom zaangażowania we współczesnych literaturach południowo- i zachodniosłowiańskich. Część trzecia stanowi omówienie wariantów zależności "władza(e)/ wiedza".

Słowa kluczowe: studia postkolonialne, studia postsocjalistyczne, dekolonizacja wiedzy, "władza/wiedza", totalitaryzm

1. Critique of the decolonial paradigm as applied to socialist and post-socialist societies

In the last part of this series of articles, I intend to critique the application of the decolonial paradigm to socialist and post-socialist societies, a modern approach embraced by several younger colleagues. Although critique is a form of collegial dialogue, it does not appear feasible in this instance. From a decolonial perspective, researchers with liberal positions (like myself) are not considered colleagues; rather, they are viewed as epistemic and political adversaries. Engaging in dialogue with them seems implausible, as their Eurocentric perspectives are seen as reinforcing global neoliberal capitalist colonialism. Whether they realize it or not, they are complicit in the dominant power and knowledge production of the West, indirectly supporting local patriarchalism, nationalism, xenophobia, the ‘racialization’ of internal others, and even extreme right-wing and fascist tendencies in Eastern European societies.

I had the feeling that any potential criticism made by myself would be meaningless, because of my presumed “hostile” location for knowledge production. Thus, I have no choice but to take a reflective step – speak from my own perspective, in order to describe the knowledge production position of my “adversaries.”

Eastern European academic decolonialists are not, and could never be, decision-makers at the political or corporate level, let alone intervenors in major geopolitical struggles. Despite the planetary aspirations of their approach, the place from which they produce their knowledge is micro-political and typically aligns with their own career paths within local and global academic institutions. Frequently, they started out as educational migrants – undergraduates at prestigious Western universities. Attaining the various academic levels – bachelors, masters, and doctoral – they socialize in an academic environment that is undergoing decolonization and which is dominated by scholars and teachers with left-liberal or post-Marxist orientations. Academic authorities in this environment most commonly advocate feminist, transgender, post-colonial and ecological ideas and causes.

Upon completing their education, the position of young educational migrants becomes unstable. They usually secure only temporary positions in projects and research teams, signing fixed-term contracts as post-doctoral researchers or associates in newly established centers and laboratories. Their path is marked by insecurity, competition, and tension, and when applying for positions, they are required to demonstrate not only a profound understanding of the scientific field and its ideas and methods, but also mastery of its trendy jargons – only then do they have a chance of meeting the high expectations of academic employers. Despite their efforts, few of them attain those coveted tenure positions, for which the competition is immense. The majority of them are forced to apply repeatedly to different universities, to live from project to project, and to accumulate a compelling record of positions held, publications in prestigious journals, and recommendations from leading professors. The accumulating years force them to hurry.

All the above complicated factors make such PhD-students and early career scholars receptive, flexible, and uncritical towards the dominant discourses in their environment. In most cases, these discourses already appear as the only option, often internalized since their undergraduate years. The long history of the discipline, with all its paradigm shifts and methodological changes, does not seem important to them. They live in a peculiar academic presentism,¹ and, beyond the latest trends, other scholarly paths are irrelevant; intense competition prevents them from making methodological and historical self-reflections. They need to quickly master the ideas in vogue and the current jargon like academic native speakers. Thus, pressure from the outer environment gradually cultivates scientific and political conformity to the "most current," which is further reinforced by its abstract and powerful conceptual toolkit. Operating with it is easy.

However, the paradox that often occurs for educational migrants in global universities is that their professors often assign them locally specific tasks, typically related to research on history, the economy, the political situation, and the culture of their home country. Yet, they have not historically and systematically studied these topics in local universities, whose provincialism and methodological backwardness they often view with a certain disregard.

This complex position has various practical consequences. The readiness to apply and recite abstract current concepts makes the exhaustive work on specific research less appealing. Educational nomads tend to engage in quick generalizations and improvised comparisons with distant points on the planet. They easily "translate" and adapt local phenomena into their abstract dictionaries, often considering anything lost in this operation as collateral damage.

The second consequence concerns the above-mentioned reluctance to engage in discussions with colleagues from local provincial universities: non-convertible local authorities are not recognized by the nomads (see for example the interesting article but one sided article by Tichindeleanu 2011). The third consequence is more unpleasant. If they fail to secure a permanent position abroad and return to live in their home country for an extended period, scholars like these, despite having prestigious university degrees, find it challenging to maintain their careers. The local academic environment, with far from ideal academic standards, is also unfriendly to them and tends to preserve its insularity. The returning scholars rarely integrate into conservative, sometimes clientelist, local academic institutions and often lose when in competition with local candidates. Consequently, they remain simultaneously isolated, undervalued, and offended – since their former home environment does not provide them with the career opportunities they believe they deserve.

In fact, in response to this state of affairs, the scholars further isolate themselves. They rarely participate in the presentation of local research, conferences, or discussions, preferring to continue with their scholarly nomadism via both real and digital networks. Since they are usually relatively young (25–40 years old),

¹ The concept of "presentism" has been elaborated by Francois Hartog in his book *Regimes of Historicity* (Hartog 2015, 10–119). His shortest definition of presentism is a "distended, self-contained, and self-assured present, which seemed to have unquestioned and exclusive dominance..." over past and future dimensions of time (ibid., 119).

and most often politically left-leaning, isolation also leads to generational and political controversies. Therefore, in their home country, academic nomads often form their own closed intellectual-activist groups that do not interact with the local academic establishment but strive to be part of more global international networks. Sometimes they publish their own local journals, but more often they try to publish only in English in prestigious foreign journals with global reputations. Their isolationist policy can also be seen in their scholarly communications and citations, since they mainly communicate in closed forums with like-minded individuals, read the same corpus of current Western authorities, often cite each other, and write collaboratively. Isolated locally, they try to participate in global project teams, congresses, and conferences.

Academic nomadism often continues into retirement. Only a few of them ultimately secure prestigious permanent positions; the rest make do with more humble positions in local scientific institutions. The biographical circumstances of prolonged survival gradually transform current scientific paradigms into personal causes, and their jargon becomes a symbol of both their group and individual identities allied to global progressive movements. Thus, such homebred colleagues are ultimately stylized as reactionary political adversaries. Any discussions with such academics rarely revolve around specific scholarly problems, but instead usually turn into profound political and epistemological battles, with activist commitment increasingly prevailing over intellectual labor. Some of these educational nomads eventually abandon the academic environment completely, in favor of one form of political activism or another. This is the final step in the petrification of self-sufficient jargon, transformed into activist rhetorics.

This image of the young scholar-nomad is a typically ideal one. And of course, there are many positive exceptions – brilliant minds, and incredibly hardworking researchers among them.² However, my long-term observations have convinced me that there is indeed a certain type prevalent among such scholars.³ This im-

² I was particularly impressed by the professional historical work of postdocs in Giessen and Leipzig. Within the paradigm, there are also voices of dissent, such as the interesting writings of Vera Sidlova (Sidlova 2013), Epp Annus (Annus 2012), Bogdan Stefanescu (Stefanescu 2022), among others.

³ Within the field I have also observed this issue for a good number of years from a Bulgarian context. Bulgarian educational nomads, often Marxists, activists, feminists, and decolonialists, rarely hold institutional positions in Bulgarian universities. They are typically isolated from the local academic life and its institutions. Instead, they engage in intensive discussions in alternative spaces and networks, create their own circles and seminars, such as the now-disbanded “Haspel,” and publish in alternative left-wing publications such as *Barikada* and *Diversia*. The most successful among them secure teaching positions at prestigious universities and primarily publish in English in left-wing, feminist, or post-colonial journals. Sometimes they manage to publish books with reputable international publishers. However, they do not make an effort to have their research, often focused on Bulgarian topics, translated into Bulgarian or shared with their local colleagues for discussion within the local academic community – for them this is seen as pointless. The dynamics within their own micro-environment are significant; the groups, circles, and networks in the country are not stable and often splinter due to ideological reasons. Most of the educational migrants are still in search of a career path and continue to seek positions in prestigious universities. However, with one or two unusual

pression was finally solidified when I had to self-educate myself in the numerous publications using the decolonial approach in post-socialist studies – a trend that gained momentum after 2010. I was forced to catch up and read a significant number of contributions, in an attempt to navigate the rapidly evolving field. I have undoubtedly missed many names and publications, but I still managed to read a good deal of material by such prominent authors as Madina Tlostanova, Marina Gržinić, Dorota Kołodziejczyk, Cristina Şandru, Katarina Kušić, Polina Manolova, Dobrota Pucherová, Nikolay Karkov, Manuela Boatcă, Zhivka Valiavicharska, Bozhin Traykov, Neda Atanasovski, Danijela Majstorović, Monica Popescu, Marko Pavlyshyn, Inga Iwasiów, Kasia Narkowicz, Vera Sidlova, Marina Protas, Vjeran Katunarić, Rossen Djagalov, and others. They often had the support of their colleagues from the West, South, or North, such as Henry F. Carey, Redi Koobak, Tony Fry, and Jennifer Suchland, among many others.

I had to read most of these East European decolonial contributions consecutively, in a short space of time. What initially struck me the most was the monotony of their scholarly language. With rare exceptions, their conceptual vocabulary as well as their argumentative logic are particularly homogeneous, repetitive and predictable, reproduced with collective momentum. This has already been noted by other reviewers, even regarding Walter Mignolo himself,⁴ with one particular reviewer laconically observing how “decolonisation has become an academic buzzword in the Western academy” (Lobo 2020).

The case of East European clearly demonstrates that the “buzz” in question has controlled not only the concept of “decoloniality” and its definitions, but also the entire decolonial conceptual vocabulary. The scholarly discourse of most of these East European contributions persistently revolves around recurring phrases such as “global coloniality of power,” “colonial matrix of power,” “Empire,” “neocolonialism,” “epistemic hegemony,” “theorizations of the liminal” (with variants such as “border thinking,” “dislocation,” “knowledge production in-between,” “hybridity,” “alterity and ambivalence” etc.). There is almost no individual paper where expressions such as “multi-faceted modernity,” “dialectics of exclusion/inclusion,” “center/periphery,” “settler colonialism vs. internal colonialism,”

exceptions, I have not been able to identify any such scholar who has chosen a career at a university in the decolonial Global South; instead, they all travel to the West and prefer prestigious universities in the global colonial metropolis.

⁴ This is obviously a problem not only for Eastern Europeans, since one of Mignolo’s reviewers, the influential Chinese post-colonialist Ming Dong Gu had written, concerning Mignolo’s definition of the very concept of “decoloniality”: “Although both authors elaborately discuss colony, colonisation, colonialism and decolonisation, the only clear and easy-to-grasp definition of decoloniality that I came across is: ‘Decoloniality, as we argue in this book, is not a new paradigm, or mode of critical thought. It is a way, option, standpoint, analytic, project, practice, and praxis’ (p. 5). This statement has both strengths and weaknesses. Its strength lies in its capacious openness as a way of thinking and living and its weakness is its vague indeterminism... I have found this capacious and vague way of conceiving decoloniality both appealing and a bit wanting. It is appealing because it leaves open the scope of the topic; but it is dissatisfying, because it seems hollow. If decoloniality is a way of thinking and living, coloniality is also a way of thinking and living. So are colonisation, decolonisation, colonialism, postcolonialism and many other human activities. It therefore does not tell us much about what decoloniality is” (Dong Gu 2020, 2).

etc. are not monotonously reproduced. From such general concepts with a simple morphological operation (adding prefixes such as *de-*, *un-*, *re-*, *over-*, etc.) arises a normative program of action. Its philosophical side includes nothing less than “delinking colonial matrix of power,” “undoing Eurocentric Modernity,” “de-naturalizing Cartesian epistemic hegemony,” “learning to unlearn,” “pulverising the secular-liberal story of one-world universalism,” “deconstructing of the Three-Worlds ideology,” “re-writing of the interwoven history of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy,” etc., etc. . . . Its practical institutional aspect is also radical: “decolonizing the university,” “decolonizing curriculum,” “undoing of theory and old concepts,” “decolonizing cultural canons,” “decolonizing library,” “decolonizing public space,” “politics of insurgence, re-existence and resurgence,” “decolonizing ourselves,” and “educating pluriversal imaginaries of protest,” etc.

Only a decade ago, the acquisition of these concepts as conceptual tools had cost a good deal in intellectual effort, and represented a revolutionary reversal of an epistemological perspective, considering how at that time the paradigm had a powerful heuristic potential. Too quickly it had turned into a familiar PhD jargon, not particularly difficult to learn: from being counter-hegemonic, this discourse has since become hegemonic, but only inside universities. It is appealing due to the potency of its abstract generalizations and its planetary scale: in the numerous texts I read, the gaze moved with ease from one point of the globe to another, from Kazakhstan and the Caribbean problems, to Balkan chalga music and Irish dance, quick to “explain” idiosyncratic contexts utilizing the above overarching and hollow conceptual toolkit (in former times it used to be customary for anthropologists to work on such distant worlds for years in order to make much more humbler generalizations), crossing without difficulties the borders between the “First,” “Second” and “Third” worlds. Maria Todorova’s concerns have materialized: the “rocket perspective” has become a universal malaise. And all this has been achieved not by one or another particular decolonial thinker but by the dominant pressure of the leading paradigm itself. The new hegemonic paradigm requires consensus and reproduction rather than differences, scrutiny, and critical thinking.

There is no space in this article to analyze this automated rhetoric in detail: instead, what I aim to create here is a slightly hyperbolic construction. Yet one concrete example will illuminate the automating usage of this language. The special issue of the journal *Decolonial Theory and Practice in South East Europe* includes the ambitious article by Marina Gržinić, titled “Theorizing decoloniality in Southeastern Europe: Vocabularies, politics, perspectives,” where the author formulates her main “thesis” as follows:

My thesis is that a pertinent decolonial turn deploys the constitutive linkages between colonialism, coloniality, capital, power, biopolitics and necropolitics, racism and other forms of dehumanization including exploitation, extractions, and dispossessions, on one side, and, on the other, positions of subjectivities, agencies, and empowerment. Today, racism and the contemporary forms of necrocapitalism and dispossession produce modes of life that are despoiling entire populations of humanity, dying from hunger in thousands, evicted from their homes in millions, secluded and brutalized. However, these experiences also open

possibilities for an inter-linking of decolonial transmigrant and transfeminist conceptualizations of history, life, and agency (Gržinić 2019, 173).

In fact, this is not a scholarly statement in the strictest sense of the term; rather it is a list of abstract, ideologically loaded concepts without any clear reference point. It lacks a factual basis and therefore cannot be confirmed or refuted. Such lists can only exist within a self-sustaining, and highly abstract visionary philosophy (or mythology) of history that requires no verification or falsification. Additionally, Gržinić's "thesis" is not original: it is simply a rephrasing of what Aníbal Quijano said in 1989 and what Mignolo and his followers have repeated since. From a performative standpoint, the statement can merely be seen as an identity mark and expression of loyalty towards a certain paradigm and its activist credo.

However, the decolonial dictionary is not always in such a chaotic, list-like state. Elsewhere, it is organized within a narrative structure that serves as a meta-explanatory framework. Most often, this new trans-empirical Grand narrative reproduces and paraphrases the formulations of Quijano and Mignolo, rarely introducing innovations – which is why I will not repeat its core content – the well-known story of the 500-year planetary and continuous modernity-coloniality, in which the Global North suppresses the Global South militarily, economically, racially, and epistemologically – this has already been mentioned in a previous part of this article. I have already noted that in the past, this narrative was indeed able to change perspectives and reveal insights from the dark side of Eurocentric modernity. Today, its heuristic potential is entirely replaced by its power perspective: it actively displaces everything else in an attempt to become the sole planetary epistemology and discursive power frame for mass academic production. Of course, such an approach distances itself from scholarship because its claims are beyond verification and falsification, and produced in a jargon that cannot be proven or disproven. It has become a machine for decolonial translation, similar to Google translate, and its results are always predictable: a radical change in perspective, hybridity, global decolonial solidarity among countless peoples and cultures of the Global South, anti-neoliberal ideology, and resistance against the Global North. Neil Lazarus's fear that the West would be fetishized as the great global villain has become true. This structural narrative position is always and trans-empirically capitalistic-colonial, eurocentric-racial, and anonymous-systemic – it actually supports the structural framework that provides coherence for the narrative itself, so that it can easily produce an explanation for any new specific case, including it effortlessly within the totalizing planetary perspective. Turning historical facts into illustrations of abstract categories preserves and reproduces its conceptual syntax and its relentless coherence.

Sometimes, however, the decolonial translation task becomes too complex even for this narrative. This is especially evident in the cases of epistemological resistance such as the histories of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, regions filled with difficulties, paradoxes, and anomalies, where translation cannot be automatic.

I will shortly list six well-known difficulties:

1. Lack of formal colonization (Eastern European peoples were not truly colonized by any modern colonial empire), and in their long and contradictory history, they have inhabited disputed territories in the overlapping zones of influence of three other empires (Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian).
2. Historical life with delayed modernization in the overlapping zones of three empires, for which it is difficult to argue that they are colonial, and even more so – that they are modern.
3. The absence of real colonization by some of the major European metropolises, but constitutive Eurocentrism. Among these peoples and cultures, Europe has never played the role of a defining colonial power, and its most essential colonial function remains in the realm of cultural imagination. For emerging local imaginary communities such as the Balkan nations, the French revolution plays the role of paragon of emancipation struggles along with the “absent European civilization,” setting ideal models through which they “self-colonize,” creating hybrid institutions and forms of social, political, economic, cultural, and everyday life.
4. Historical life “between” competing Great Powers. The structurally determining role of the “imaginary Europe” does not prevent these nations and nation-states from having real, long, and complex relationships with competing colonial states and empires. They do not reach full colonial occupations: most Balkan states remain formally autonomous but heavily involved in “spheres of influence” and military alliances that divide the Balkans and Eastern Europe into warring camps.
5. Historical life in the communist Eastern Bloc. After World War II, some of the same local nation-states fell into the Soviet buffer zone and became part of the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist union of socialist states, led by the USSR. The Eastern Bloc was supposed to be a proletarian alternative to the “rotten West,” but it gradually turned into a vast space dominated by the totalitarian USSR.
6. The choice of the “path to Europe.” After 1989, Eastern European and Balkan cultures did not make an anti-colonial choice in favor of the Global South. Quite the opposite – their populations declared their “civilizational choice,” called the “Path to Europe.” From the perspective of the colonized, they make an effort to join the metropolis. However, even on this path, their destinies are diverse; some are already integrated into the EU, while others are still the “Western Balkans,” waiting in line.

Confronting such difficulties, the decolonial narrative is forced to make conceptual pirouettes and acrobatics, to allow deviations, and create conceptual innovations in order to integrate the “anomalies” into its broader framework.

Nevertheless, despite such enormous difficulties, decolonial work continues, and the gains made are far from insignificant. The integration of the Second World into the Third World not only provides a new and unexpected explanatory perspective but also enables dialogue between vastly different worlds and cultures, and contributes to building solidarity in activist struggles in the Global South. Last but not least, it grants planetary academic authority to the decolonial

approach itself – a program for planetary expansion on this scale was created by Ella Shohat as early as 1992 and continued by David C. Moore in 2001. Since then, those who manage to achieve such a global synthesis of the post-socialist with the post-colonial gain significant political and symbolic capital, since they contribute to this planetary endeavor. And as we have seen, many have indeed undertaken such a task.

A particular example – with similar acrobatic feats in the decolonial translation – is the article by Nikolay Karkov and Zhivka Valiavicharska, "Rethinking East-European Socialism: Notes Toward an Anti-Capitalist Decolonial Methodology" (Karkov and Valiavicharska 2018). The authors are by no means uninformed or unintelligent – they are well aware of most of the difficulties mentioned. Yet, in the abstract of their article, they clearly state that despite all such difficulties, they will not adhere to the well-known traditional "hegemonic" descriptions of the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and the socialist bloc. Instead, in an act of conscious anti-capitalist resistance, they will replace the "hegemonic neo-liberal narrative" with their decolonial one.

The effect of such an application is, first and foremost, the elimination of a huge number of facts: for Karkov and Valiavicharska, these are no longer relevant and thus they simply do not engage with them. Secondly, there are the tricks involving abstract concepts and the categorical renaming of specific phenomena with new, extremely generalized decolonial labels. In the new narrative, the Balkans are easily declared an "internal colony" of Europe, without specifying what exactly this means, and their imaginary Eurocentrism, deprived of its constitutive emancipatory potential against pre-modern Empires such as the Ottoman and the Russian Empires, is [tantamount to their] declared complicity with European colonialism. "Real socialism" on the other hand, with all of its historically dynamic totalitarian and non-totalitarian features, is labeled an "alternative modernity," but no one bothers to explain what the "alternative" represents and what its cost is. The USSR is an empire that demonstrates, according to the routine decolonial translation, an "imperial difference" (how specific!) – Furthermore, this "specificity" is strengthened and "clarified" with the "clarification" that this strange empire partially contradicts – whilst also partially maintaining – the order of colonial modernity. The reader wonders what to do with such general statements: they always seem to be true. The authors have declared that all aspects of the contradictory legacy of socialism should be taken seriously, yet only certain parts of it deserve to be saved. What might those be? Obviously, it cannot be the Stalinist legacy in these countries, whose well-known crimes against humanity the authors prefer not to mention. Also best forgotten is the era of stagnation, the Cold War, the deficit economy, or the invasion of Czechoslovakia (as these facts are part of the liberal "hegemonic" narrative, so they must be neglected by a "counter-hegemonic" one). The authors choose instead to salvage the possibility of something genuinely positive: an alternative Marxism, differing from the official one, with its social place, influence, and scope in these countries still present, in some form or another, whether publicly acceptable or illegal, underground dissident in form – instead, it is simply declared "dominant." Marxist in nature, the "research" part of the article is based on yet another arbitrary generalization – where, even though

incomparable in scale, influence, and ideology, phenomena in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria are unified under the respective umbrella term. It turns out that something deep-seated connects such incompatible phenomena as the official policy of the Czechoslovak government led by Dubček, the academic Marxist group Praxis in Yugoslavia, and Lyudmila Zhivkova's cultural policy of the "holistically developed personality" (in fact, a crypto-occult program influenced by Agni Yoga). As far as the aims of Karkov and Valiavicharska are concerned, they should all represent "Marxist humanism," and have "emancipatory possibilities" (once again it is not clear what exactly these are).

But even though this alternative legacy may have positive factors, it cannot be directly inherited without being de-colonially criticized and corrected during translation. To achieve this, it is advisable to move to the other side of the world and conduct the critique via Indian "subaltern studies." As a result, it turns out that "Marxist humanism" has dual aspects, with both pros and cons. Like any "universalist humanism," it predictably carries within itself the dark, Eurocentric, racist, and nationalist face of colonial modernity, the source of subsequent nationalist waves in Eastern Europe. Here, historical inconsistencies, false generalizations, and abstract discoveries of "tendencies" are accomplished with surprising ease, and the non-existent genealogies and pulled-out-of-thin-air causal relationships are so numerous that it is not worth listing them.

The attempt to translate the anomalous historical facts into decolonial jargon descends into contradictions. However, the authors do not indicate that they have noticed this; for them, yet another challenging region has been included in the planetary picture of global modernity-coloniality. And the analysis of its anomalies, they argue, contributes to decolonial theory itself. Such contributions are important; they improve career prospects.

I am aware that my own critical perspective on decolonial scholarship in Eastern Europe is too generalized and one-sided to be fair and attentive to each individual case. In this limited space, I cannot fully compensate for this, but I will still conclude with three individual examples. Yet even these will not be examined in the detail they deserve, although I will take the risk of commenting briefly on them. One of these cases can be considered typical, while the other two deviate in different directions from the picture I have described.

The article by Bozhin Traykov, published in the special issue of *Decolonial Theory and Practice in Southeast Europe* (see Traykov 2019), could serve as a typical illustration of what we are talking about. Within an extended passage, Traykov approaches local liberal Bulgarian historians of socialism with an initial bias, seeing them solely as political adversaries and "specific intellectuals ... located within specific knowledge-producing institutions and practices." (Traykov 2019, 112) In fact, their function to "generate knowledge" is merely mentioned out of courtesy, and the vast array of their previously-produced data, research, and interpretations is easily ignored and reduced to their "reactionary" political position;

Traykov claims that these scholars were “formed and functioning as gatekeepers of the common sense carved out by the neoliberal reformers of state and society” (Traykov 2019, 112) – a role that has no other function than to mediate locally and to be complicit in the global advance of modernity-coloniality and its durable Western-centered racialized capitalism – this time with a more recent neoliberal face. We can see here the decolonial Grand Narrative at work.

To analyze in depth the oversimplifications, scanty assortment of facts, and asserted blatant falsehoods of this approach requires much more analysis than I have space to devote to it here. What I would say, however, is that such an approach claims to be a decolonial introspection into the “locus of knowledge production.” Its reading reduces all the work done by its adversaries – i.e., the local liberal historians – to the supposed characteristics of that supposed “locus.” Unfortunately, Traykov does not apply the same methodology to himself. His own “decolonial analysis” is marked with the absence of Saidian self-reflection, and his own strong claims seem to float in abstract space with a powerful pan-perspective, without any reflexive connection to any specific knowledge production location. Thus, they resemble categorical absolute truths, pronounced by some universal, always true voice, but without tackling any locus, interests, and power relations. Such apparent self-transparency is actually blindness – if Traykov had applied the decolonial approach reflexively to himself, he would have seen that he himself embodies the typical educational nomad with a trajectory between global and local universities, struggling for a place under the academic sun.⁵

Consequently, the result is typical: his article strays from scholarly analysis grounded in methodological rigor, dense local knowledge, and empirical inquiry. Instead, it emerges as a political maneuver, aimed at supplanting ideological narratives, and an endeavor that evolves into a contest for supremacy in the realm of epistemological and ideological perspectives.

In the academic world, Madina Tlostanova holds a much more privileged position than Traykov. Currently, she is a full Professor of Postcolonial Feminisms at Linköping University in Sweden, but in reality, she is a global academic activist, traveling the world from one conference to another, from one global philosophical, artistic, or activist project to the next. In the world of decoloniality, she is exceptionally well-known and cited, having published numerous books and articles in prestigious publishers and journals, conducted interviews, and engaged in intellectually equitable conversations with globally significant decolonialists. She has collaborated with Mignolo himself (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012), and participated in countless academic networks. In short, she is a philosopher, scholar, and visionary who aims high – she does not follow decolonial trends; she creates them.

⁵ Indeed, Traykov embodies the above-mentioned type of “decolonial” young scholar discussed earlier. He holds a sociology doctorate from the University of Alberta, Canada, an institution not known for its wealth of experts in modern Bulgarian history. Currently, he resides in Bulgaria, but, as far as I am aware, without an affiliation to any local academic institution.

Her contribution to the global theory of decolonialism is discernible in multiple avenues, but here I will focus on the provocative concept of the “Decolonial Sublime” (Tlostanova 2018, 25–33). In various contributions of hers, she introduces it by reinterpreting important but well-known ideas of left-wing philosophers – usually neo-Marxists – such as Jacques Rancière, Michel Maffesoli, and Nicolas Bourriaud. Her analysis begins with the well-known problem of the colonization of the lifeworld by the unifying capitalist production of goods, which during the late capitalism era has been replaced by the production of images and sensory dimensions, creating new global consumerist communities unified by their globally shared sensory experiences. This is followed by a description of the neo-Marxist attempts to resist this by creating a different political aesthetics, ensuring an alternative solidarity among those who are willing to resist.

Tlostanova selectively adopts these ideas and subjects them to a decolonial critique. For those who are familiar with decolonial procedures, her objections are predictable: the sensitive worlds of modernity-coloniality have never been homogeneous. Her neo-Marxist predecessors have overlooked its darkness, heterogeneity and multiplicity – the sensory and emotional differences between the colonial worlds in terms of sight, sound, smell, and taste, which have always produced ruptures in the global unification of the capitalist aesthetic. In a colonially uneven world, local aesthetics, epistemologies and cosmologies have always been incomparable and resistant to European practices.

The turnaround that follows, as proposed by Tlostanova, is also predictable. Political aesthetics must first be de-universalized through an initial negative step, followed on the next level by a positive one: the well-known concept of unlearning/learning, delinking/relinking. The sensory-political worlds of the colonized must first free themselves from the global aesthetic colonization and then engage in a dialogic connection with each other. This will not only create new cognitive perspectives and sensory exchanges, but also the possibility of diverse activist programs, contributing to the creation of a planetary community based on a new aesthetic-political solidarity. This time, emancipation will be achieved beyond and against any Eurocentric “universalism,” through an equal polylogue between the colonial others.

Thus, both as unifying force and as an outcome (or better – as a revelation) in this new world, the “colonial sublime” will emerge. It represents a sudden insight into the hidden unity beyond all colonial differences, linking together the countless and infinitely diverse colonial sensitive experiences, sufferings and struggles around the world. The procedure of delinking-relinking gives birth to an inexpressibly majestic vision.

Yet the issue remains that in Tlostanova’s interpretation of the “sublime” (based on a rather risky reading of Kant, connecting it with the ancient category of “catharsis”), its philosophical form does not turn out to be anything new. Her views are reminiscent of the much vaunted, commented upon and critiqued philosophical shock arising from the Holocaust: the bewildering (“how is this possible?” “how did we allow it to happen,” questions asked by Hannah Arendt) confrontation with the historically profound view of the immense and inexpressible suffering in such crimes against humanity. Only this time, European con-

centration camps are replaced by the inexpressible suffering of all of modernity/coloniality over the past 500 years. The authors of this philosophical thought process – Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, and later Jean-François Lyotard – are not mentioned. In addition, Tlostanova omits the fundamental debate on the sublime non-representability of the Holocaust, probably because, for her, it is an “Eurocentric” event, and therefore so too are any discussions about it. She simply borrows and “decolonizes” the figure of the striking, unthinkable, and inexpressible Enormity,⁶ which is rediscovered again and again in various colonial phenomena. In such a planetary vision, even the Holocaust appears provincial.

To the unengaged and skeptical educated reader, this may seem a little odd: essentially, the ideas being discussed are those of Adorno, Arendt, Lyotard, Guy Debord, Rancière, Bourriaud and others. Similar to a new Marx, Tlostanova is left with the task of simply repositioning them – from their Eurocentric head back to their decolonial feet. Unfortunately, this procedure is not dissimilar to that undertaken by academic underdogs such as Traykov.

Tlostanova’s other major ambition concerns the post-socialist world, which she views as only superficially local. She not only follows the decolonial dictum of including the Second World in the Global South but demands something much more significant – the notion of seeing the post-socialist condition as a universal and planetary one. The model is colonial: the heavy colonial legacy affects in a similar way not only the colonized but all inhabitants of the planet, in exactly the same way as the socialist legacy. Unfortunately, in order to arrive at this conclusion, even Tlostanova has to perform semiotic acrobatics in order to portray the USSR as an empire, and socialism as a particularly inheritable aspect that fits into coloniality-modernity. She must invent questionable neologisms or oxymorons – pretentious conceptual tools that establish unconvincing parallels between vastly different colonial and socialist worlds. At times, she uses all-encompassing archetypes such as tricksterism and mimicry for this purpose. But the biggest and most amusing oxymoron here is the notion of a “subaltern empire,”⁷ which she utilizes in order to describe the complex history of the USSR in a mere sentence and a half.

Tlostanova seeks possibilities and positive alternatives inherent to socialism that the USSR and the Eastern Bloc did not truly realize – and within them she

⁶ To quote: “The outcome of decolonial aesthetics is the ‘decolonial sublime.’ This special optic is triggered by the audience’s recognition of the enormity of global coloniality, and through a process of learning to identify it in various phenomena, people, events, institutions and artworks, including one’s own self-reflexive positioning in relation to coloniality” (Tlostanova 2019, 103).

⁷ The introduction of the aforementioned oxymoron is justified as follows: “major discriminating ideological frames of western modernity, recycled and transmuted in the USSR, created a peculiar redoubling effect propagating a schizophrenic unsteadiness and uncertainty. The subaltern empire, even when claiming a global spiritual and transcendental superiority, has always been looking for approval/ envy and love/hatred from the west, never questioning the main frame of western modernity, only changing the superfluous details” (Tlostanova 2012, 136). Within this statement, the entire narrative of historical materialism and scientific communism is reduced to a sentence and a half.

locates a contrast: the subsequent non-alternative neoliberal world is worse, and therefore new planetary visions for a better socialist future are urgently required.

Personally, it remains unclear to me why the legacy of colonialism should be preserved in its negativity, while that of totalitarian and “real” socialism, despite all the catastrophes and crimes it has engendered, should be saved in hypothetically positive alternatives.

I intend to return to this notion at end of this article, but for now I prefer to summarize my remarks regarding Tlostanova. Despite her claims, the positive and investigative concreteness and specificity in such a vague decolonial program is poor, and the attempt to supplement specificity through an analysis of several post-Soviet and decolonial artists is clearly insufficient. As a result of the above, Tlostanova’s work remains distanced from the principles of normal scholarly research, as exemplified by Thomas Kuhn: what she in fact achieves are more provocative ideological reversals, insights and visions, yet always predictably based on a familiar decolonial translation.

However, Tlostanova herself would most likely remain unconcerned if someone accused her of not being scholarly – she does not see herself as a boring scholar or pedantic researcher, obedient to the division of intellectual labor, which in her view merely repeats the problems that need to be solved. She sees herself as a revolutionary decolonial philosopher, a visionary and intellectual activist, with a developing imagination and a mission to change the world. Her aim is not to think strictly scientifically and concretely, but rather radically and transformationally, criticizing everything deserving of decolonial critique, including white feminists from the First World and black feminists from the Third World.

Based on this visionary “logic,” in one of her last books, *A New Political Imagination*, co-authored with Tony Fry (Fry and Tlostanova 2021) she is necessarily drawn beyond the decolonial problematic into even more abstract spaces, venturing into the realms of something that closely resembles wishful thinking (even though she repeatedly speaks out against empty utopianism). Together with her co-author she seeks a solution to save the world, facing a near-apocalyptic complex crisis in the Anthropocene era, overlooked by both politicians and traditional departmentalized scholars. She believes that the moral duty of visionaries such as herself is to reflect upon such general planetary problems – the invisible interconnection between eco-issues, financial problems, and climate change (here Bruno Latour is just fleetingly mentioned). The object of criticism and activism is no longer the old one of modernity-coloniality, but rather the contemporary blindness of entire capitalist humanity and its scientific instrumental reason. She argues that the complexity of contemporary problems is so enormous that it remains outside the realm of disciplinary departmentalized science. Thus, transhumanist alternatives are discussed, as well as organisms-machines, nature-culture-technology, and digital techno-colonialism, as well as the production of knowledge that is excluded from science and which gives birth to new corpopolitics of knowledge. The boundaries of normal, departmentalized academic science seem narrow to her (Frye and Tlostanova 2021, 33; 55; 99).

With my admittedly limited competence, I found myself unable to follow her reasoning. I am weak in planetary visions, and I still belong to ordinary sci-

ence. However, I cannot understand why, after such revolutionary declarations, Tlostanova has not left her place in the departmentalized production of scientific knowledge – that is to say, the Swedish university where she works, nor why she publishes books successfully sold within the mass academic and scientific marketplaces. How does the radical criticism of specialized science's blindness to the crisis fit with her own privileged scientific position within the academy?

Unlike Tlostanova, Epp Annus is not a so-called visionary but a researcher. Her interests are not planetary but focused on what is happening in the Baltic countries and in particular, Estonia, which she studies in detail. For visionaries, her goal would seem too narrow – to create the possibility for post-colonial Soviet area studies, even if only for the Baltic part of this vast region. The problem of whether there are in fact any colonial aspects to be found in Soviet governance remains for her an open question.

This is an important divergence from the mainstream decolonial movement, where, for most of its activists and ideologists, changing the perspective and the power perspective is an imperative act of political resistance through which they seek to unveil the dark underbelly of modernity/coloniality. We have already seen how this counter-power gesture mobilizes countless incomparable post-colonial communities and creates global solidarity.

For Annus, the decolonial approach remains primarily a heuristic tool for detailed and specific research rather than a grand political gesture. It should provide a new perspective on the specific Soviet legacy – and is, as she writes “one way to make sense of this network of Soviet history” (Annus 2018, 5). Such a new perspective should reveal certain aspects of the Baltic situation; however, it is implied that, if needed, this cognitive lens could be replaced with another one that will reveal different aspects altogether.

Similarly, Epp Annus's practical mode of research is connected to the context of her knowledge production. Although she is active in several post-colonial networks, she is not a nomad; she works as a senior researcher at the Museum of Estonian Literature and, to my knowledge, is not involved in activist campaigns. She typically plans her research financed by local research funding, leads projects and research groups, participates in international and local conferences, engages in methodological debates, and sometimes engages in debates with colleagues with different political and scientific beliefs. Political solidarity with the Baltic peoples and other colonized nations worldwide is not her explicit goal, and the decolonial approach, for her, does not have an imperative and pivotal character as a fateful political choice.

Annus is fully aware that the research objectives of her own approach are relative, at least partially constructed by her own methodological perspective, and that the concepts-tools of this perspective cannot be mechanically applied. In fact, they need to be contextualized and adapted to Baltic realities, and when they are inadequate, should be refined or new objectives should be invented. She even suggests that there may be many kinds of “colonial matrices of power,” thereby

implicitly challenging Mignolo's central political category and undermining the comprehensive solidarity claims of the decolonial paradigm.

Of critical importance is the fact that Annus does not engage in easy illustrations of abstract decolonial concepts with local realities, but rather explores the processes of Baltic colonization specifically, through numerous sources and constellations of facts at different social levels. The scope of her concrete analysis covers a wide spectrum – from why the Baltic countries in the USSR cannot be declared *de jure* colonies, to seemingly essentialist Baltic nationalisms, to the formation of subjective positions and their specificity (Baltic elements in trickster imitations, parodies, and mimics). She analyzes two key differences: how colonization is carried out in an already established national state like Estonia, and the specificity of the relations between the structural positions of “colonizer/colonized” with the cultural dominance of the colonized Baltic peoples over their Soviet colonizers. This also leads to more intimate issues – the peculiar “rupture” in the experience of the individual biographical path of each colonizer, and the “discursive confusion” that occurred in the Estonian population after the occupation. She further examines the cartography of permissible freedoms of the “colonial others,” hybridization in types of emotions, a special national nostalgia, and even phenomena such as the Estonian “appropriation” of Soviet popular theater, the characteristics of local “decolonizing laughter,” Estonian uses of Lenin and Stalin portraits, the pioneer “rewriting of landscapes,” and the nature of military training in Estonia. Annus asserts that “colonization” in the case of the Baltic does not always occur within local realities but is sometimes born from the binary organization of a specific cultural imagination that has experienced the upheavals of changing official discourse. She assumes that her research goes beyond an individual endeavour, and that collectively accumulated research results on the Baltic region will make discoveries capable of “refining and advancing theory.”

However, what in my opinion is missing, even from her specific approach, is an epistemological comparison. Although she applies the postcolonial paradigm heuristically and experimentally, for her, as for many others, this fashionable approach to the history of the USSR seems to be practically the only one possible. Its cognitive potential is not compared and measured with other possible research approaches – does it work better or worse than the totalitarian, modernization, and revisionist paradigms? It remains unclear not only what the epistemological gains of its application are, but also what the losses, limitations and blind spots might be. This necessitates a general critique – not only addressing Annus but also the decolonial approach as a whole. I will try to formulate it in the last section.

2. Conclusion: the Disintegration of Power/Knowledge (Macro and Micro Variants)

I conclude this series of three articles with an attempt at a summary. My initial two articles lacked a specific analytical focus on a particular problem; instead, they were more connected through something akin to a narrative of how paradigms and problematic horizons have changed in post-colonial studies.

Every narrative is framed from a certain perspective, which gave me grounds to use the most obvious one – my own, as a researcher in the field of Bulgarian studies, Balkan studies, and post-socialist studies. Through this specific location of knowledge production, I attempted to retell the fate of the post-colonial field over a period of about 30 years – transformations that I have observed and, to some extent, personally participated in.

My goal was for my narrative to create a detailed picture of what is seen from the Eastern European angle. However, such a biographical perspective has its defects; therefore, it was employed not only for its insights but also for its blind spots. To an external observer, the contexts which are missing are probably quite evident. I lack the competencies and research experience to encompass distant societies and cultures; hence, I have not expressed opinions on Latin America or Africa, the Caribbean, the Philippines, or Bangladesh, nor have I claimed the right to assess how well the decolonial paradigm functions in those respective circumstances. Let the specialists there do that. I have confined my reflections to the effectiveness of the post-colonial paradigm concerning the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and post-socialist countries.

However, despite its limitations, I hope this perspective can still reveal something more universal, at least in one respect. From such a viewpoint, it is possible to trace how the field of post-colonialism evolves (or degrades?) from specific scholarly analyses to overarching generalizations and grandiose planetary visions. Maria Todorova was wary of such a "rocket perspective" from as early as 2005. In the two decades that followed, specific and careful analyses were gradually replaced by airy generalizations reproduced through a closed repertoire of abstract concepts and ideological constructs. The process, which was supposed to be mirror and counter-hegemonic to colonialism, easily integrated the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and post-socialist cultures into a new, hegemonic and global Grand Narrative, with all the advantages and disadvantages that followed from such an epistemological procedure. As we have seen, in this narrative, there is a single drama – a 500-year sublimity of modern-colonial and post-colonial suffering.

I hasten to declare that I do not deny the historical reality of such suffering, although I admit that it probably has many different variations in different parts of the world, and its scholarly investigation would accordingly require more specificity and respect for differences.

Yet, whatever criticisms may be directed at the decolonial paradigm and its invasion outside the historical colonial world, in Eastern European, socialist, and post-socialist studies, the external observer must also point out one undeniable achievement. This approach has indeed revealed certain (albeit limited) similarities between the capitalist First, colonial Third, and socialist Second worlds, uniting them, albeit thus far too broadly, in both planetary and mutually entangled processes of modernization. This has made visible the systematic analogy between the "unbreakable proletarian union" of communist states and colonial empires. It has also helped direct attention toward something that was previously barely acknowledged: the hidden racialization of non-European peoples within the seemingly "international" socialist community. Thanks to the decolonial ap-

proach, it became clear that the suppression of these “internal others” in the Second World was executed using governance techniques akin to colonial practices. It also became evident that the colonized, in turn, reacted with similar survival and resistance tactics (mimicry, tricksterism, etc.).

However, from my viewpoint, this achievement often consumed the attention of “decolonialists” to the exclusion of all else, and thus risked overlooking not just minor details but indeed crucial differences between the Third and Second worlds. Concentrating on the “internal others” flattened the traumatic complexity of the communist legacy, making it just another example of the “legacy of a racist and eurocentric Empire.” It overlooked precisely the “totalitarian” aspects, for instance, not even mentioning mass terror over its own “European” and “white” populations.

The typically positive emphasis in decolonial studies on this alternative socialist Modernity successfully concealed its unsympathetic totalitarian traits – its self-destruction of democracy, totalitarian surveillance, concentration camps, and the Iron Curtain, etc. As a consequence, the concept of totalitarianism has frequently been carelessly omitted from decolonial studies of Eastern Europe and the USSR, despite the ongoing debates within historiography and persistent efforts to revise it in numerous authoritative historical works (see Menze 1981; Bracher 1981; Gleason 1995; Siegel 1998; Geyer and Fitzpatrick 2008; Devlin 2021; Gray 2023). Most probably unaware of these debates, the majority of decolonialists have unquestionably adopted its already outdated revisionist critique of totalitarianism from the end of the Cold War. The result is somewhat paradoxical: while in the revisionist critiques of the 1980s and 1990s, comparing the Soviet experience with Nazi Germany often brings the accusation of abstract over-generalization, nowadays no one hesitates to make such frivolous comparisons and empty generalizations. It now seems “proven” that it is necessary to invariably link the legacy of the Second World with the colonial suffering of the Global South.

What is seldom recognized is that post-socialist trauma is specific. It is not solely about the Gulag, Holodomor, or the misguided path of modernization, but also about the collapse of leftist utopia being transformed into state ideology, ultimately leading to “life in a lie” and the total symbolic surveillance exercised by the public discourse itself. This was a crucial implosion in communist symbolic power, which undermined common trust and the habitual ethos of everyday life (see Kiossev 2011).

For decolonial studies and numerous other disciplines within the humanities, the possibility of utilizing this traumatic specificity for revising the programs of the global left remains a blind spot. The far easier reduction of socialist heritage to an over-generalizing lexicon of Modernity-Coloniality is preferred – even in cases where this leads to significant losses of specific historical knowledge. Focused on its own issues, the decolonial paradigm risked, in my opinion, missing what is most specific to the Second World. It observed but did not seek an answer to a simple yet difficult question: why did the Soviet “empire” never develop an overt imperial ideology? Unlike the traditional colonial empires of Western modernity, the USSR never propagandized with overt pride either the “burden of the white man” or his racial superiority and higher imperial-civilizational mission.

The strange proletarian "empire" would never have admitted any kind of continuity with the colonial policy of the Russian Empire, even in visible cases of continuity. The USSR always masked itself as an anti-racist and anti-imperialist union of the Soviets, a global leader of national-liberation and anti-colonial movements from all over the planet. At least officially, the Soviet regime did not aim to be a metropolitan Center and hegemon, privileging white Russians, but propagated that its mission was to be a first among equals, a precursor of solidarity among all proletarians, an ideological unifier of all oppressed colonial peoples, and an inspiration for a planetary struggle for equality, peace, and friendship among nations.

The Empire with an anti-imperial ideology?

The reason for this anomaly, which was so easily overlooked by the decolonial paradigm, was not only hidden within its ideological content (direct imperial propaganda would, of course, contradict Marxist-Leninist doctrine). Deeper and more clearly defined reasons lay elsewhere, leading to the unprecedented symbolic structure of life in Soviet society. In its historical development, the official communist ideology (from an early utopian phase to mature Stalinism, then to an era of stagnation and "real socialism"), had slowly been drained of content, its utopian charge had cooled, and step by step, it had turned into an automated, empty discourse which no one believed in anymore, and yet somehow it provided official legitimacy for absolutely everything. This pan-discourse could no longer be challenged – not only for content-ideological reasons but also for structural reasons. In the late stages of these societies, it had been completely emancipated from facts, leading Václav Havel, as it was already mentioned, to call it the "language of lies." Although the lies were not intentional but rather a repertoire of automatic and almost formalized untruths, it had become a defining factor in social life in general – its total symbolic mediator, a "clue" to its social fabric.

Thus, the concept of "totalitarianism" in the late stages of the Second World no longer manifested itself solely in the traditional political and economic features of the state, described by the totalitarian paradigm of Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski (single-party system, cult of the leader, command economy in the industrialized mass society, unified ideology, secret police, terror, and mass surveillance). It had a far more comprehensive dimension and encompassed more than one totalized sphere of life. The hegemony of the "language of lies" encompassed everything – all spheres of life. Through this formalized pan-language, control, supervision, fear of terror, and unfreedom seeped capillarily-like into each of them. The automated clichés added a coefficient of empty ideological falsehoods to childhood and medicine, to science and sports, to arts, education, publicity, and the media, but also to the intimate sphere, biopolitics, rituals of birth and death, growing up and initiation, friendship, love, even to the joy of the sky and landscapes. After the visible and horrific totalitarianism of mass terror, the Gulag, and the Holodomor, came the later totalitarianism of a new generation, whose impact was less visible but allowed less room for resistance. It was capable of "internally" controlling every individual and every social relationship. Its inher-

ent trauma – the trauma of a total and claustrophobic “life in lies” with seemingly no visible means of escape, without happening on a micro-level, made it different from both the brutal terror and colonial governmentality dictated by the overt idea of white Eurocentric superiority. This specificity of the “Second World” and its “alternative modernity” was missed; in its planetary reductions, the decolonial paradigm refused to see it.

However, it could not be reduced to the “colonial Sublime” because everyone in Second World societies suffered differently, not just the internal others, not just the mass populations, but even the secret agents and highest party cadres; “living a lie” was an all-encompassing trauma. As a result, similar to the colonial experience or the Holocaust, and following Tlostanova’s model, it should produce an effect of “post-socialist Sublime” – that is to say, the trauma should be valid not only for the former Soviet republics and Eastern Europe but for the entire world. It deserves to be one of the many traumatic legacies of the entire planet: the paradoxical fate of the communist utopia, transformed by tragic historical reality into its opposite. The global Left, busy saving the “positive in alternative socialist modernity,” refuses to acknowledge its tragic dimensions – perhaps because it does not wish to take responsibility for it.

For me, these key omissions that necessarily followed from the application of the decolonial paradigm to the Second World, are symptoms. They demonstrate that, in fact, “decolonization” is not a scientific but rather a political procedure. It rarely seeks the specificity of the phenomena under study, rarely introduces corrections based on research and specific knowledge. In fact, it shows little interest in the problem of historical truth and its contextual specifics because it is concerned with expanding the power of its own paradigm, as we saw from Moore’s analysis.

This gives me cause once again to return to the question that prompted me to write these articles and which concerns me the most. I fear that in many cases (of course, not in all), the decolonial narrative actually becomes a substitute for research. It seeks easy, planetary generalizations, skips specifics, and settles for recitations of activist clichés. Its scientific vocabulary turns out to be so closed-coherent, summarizing, and reductionist that it simply does not require real investigation-verification. And if that is the case, it questions the very scientific principle of hypothesis verification/falsification: global generalizations do not need proof because they always appear fundamentally true.

For over two decades, I have had the opportunity to observe the growing imposition of these attitudes, step by step. The political battle for hegemonic/counter-hegemonic perspectives have gradually removed the very need for specific, validated, research-based knowledge that is endorsed by the collegial scientific community. Today, with the present generation of educational nomads, this process appears to have come to an end, as far as I am aware. For many activists, Foucault’s power/knowledge coupling has, to all intents and purposes, disintegrated, leaving them only with power games.

The power games are real. However, practitioners of decolonialism do not realize that they have shifted significantly from the macro to the micro level. In a multicentric world, they are no longer so concerned by global (and actually imaginary) constructs – West and East, North and South, empires and colonies.

Today, they have shifted to what Foucault calls the "micro-physics of power": that is to say, the academic policies described above, scientific trends, and leading fashions of world universities that govern knowledge production and exert strong pressure on the "nomads" from Eastern Europe, compelling them to uncritically adopt and apply the corresponding scientific jargon.

Educational emigrants from Eastern Europe make career efforts to integrate into existing projects, laboratories, research teams, and departments along with their globally-decolonial agenda. In this micro-physical process of hidden and internalized coercion, many of them develop uncritical conformity and begin wholeheartedly to "recite" the clichés of dominant activist jargons and methodological fashions. They are no longer motivated to conduct genuine, detailed research that might take years – as if they are freed from the need to subject their assertions to serious scholarly checks and potential corrections. They are convinced that their assumptions are fundamentally correct and politically right: that is enough. And if in certain cases, as young scholars they are institutionally obliged to conduct specific research, what they offer is often at such a level of abstraction that it only "proves" their own assumptions.

This vicious cycle creates various problems in scholarly communication when educational nomads return to local universities and engage collegially with previous scientific generations, who have grown up in other traditions. But even this is not the biggest problem. What is happening with the "nomads" from Eastern Europe, for me, signals a general danger for social and humanitarian sciences. In the context of ever-increasing political confrontation and a public sphere increasingly fragmented by social media algorithms, the chaos of information streams, escalating geopolitical conflicts, and propaganda manipulations linked to hostile and disproportionate ideologies, with the loss of scientific and expert authority, the academy is also fundamentally affected. Universities are on the verge of ceasing to be a collegial environment for scientific discussions among different positions. Scientific teams are disintegrating into political and activist bubbles. Within these bubbles we find an absence of research, accumulation, hypothesis formulation, verification, and falsification – all the normal procedures carried out and then verified by the entire scientific community, by the "academy," despite any political or methodological differences – precisely in the name of science and scientific truth.

Today, political conflicts, predestined as epistemological, the great oppositions between the West and the East, the global North and the global South, have now transferred to the faculty level. Geopolitical and cultural wars have shifted to departments and scholarly teams – a shift that has discredited the scientific notion of "truth." For many faculty members "truth" no longer appears merely as a function of an ideology from one or another powerful methodological perspective (West-East, North-South), but also from the very specific, local power conjuncture of the respective scientific unit. This fractures the academic environment, reducing it to diverse factions of politically divided, isolated echo chambers. Yet, while still notionally scientific, they cultivate irreconcilable epistemological certainties and antagonistic methodological jargons, based on unmeasurable, antagonistic premises.

The scientific ethos vanishes, as does the principle of collegial solidarity in the name of truth. Members of such communities no longer see their role in fact-checking and hypotheses, in interpretations and theories: beneath the surface, they are solely concerned with confrontation, fighting solely for their epistemological (in fact, academic and institutional) power. As such, scientific communication itself is now threatened with disintegration, transforming from a dialogue of arguments and evidence into a conflict and struggle for dominance, uncompromisingly rejecting foreign assumptions.

Positions no longer remain scientific but become “right” or “left,” “Eurocentric” or “decolonial,” neo-liberal or conservative. Edward Said would be rather astonished: nothing remains of knowledge production except its political place and perspective. This is another way of saying that the very *raison d’être* for the existence of science has been rendered meaningless. Only the war of assumptions remains, while the possibility of achieving shared knowledge simply no longer exists. Everything said above is, of course, hyperbole and sounds like anti-utopia. I would be happy to be proved wrong. But one thing I am sure of – the danger is visible.

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