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**THE COMPLICATED SELVES OF TRANSCOLONIALISM:
THE TRIANGULATION OF IDENTITIES IN THE ALTERNATIVE
PERIPHERIES OF GLOBAL POST/COLONIALISM**

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Abstract. The paper argues that twentieth-century (post)coloniality was a multi-centric and poly-peripheral space and as such calls for a different, more complex geo-cultural and historical portrayal than the one provided by mainstream postcolonialism. Conventional postcolonialist critiques are ill equipped to address the historical interactions and the conceptual migrations between the discourses of the Second and Third Worlds, or with their “dual dependencies” because, with notable exceptions, postcolonialist studies only focus on the relations between the West and its (former) colonies. I argue that Eastern Europe and the (post)colonies of the West are *alternative peripheries* in the convoluted field of global (post)colonialism and that there were protracted two-way exchanges between these subaltern discourses in their interconnected experiences of (post)colonialism. This interplay, together with their vacillation between the two power centres during the Cold War, complicated not only the global power games, but also the processes of (post)colonial identity formation, and the ideological genealogies of repression and resistance.

This paper first illustrates the historical interpenetration between the (post)colonial histories of these alternative peripheries, then looks at how this convoluted network of discourses and encounters forced the colonial subalterns of the capitalist West and the Soviet Union to generate cultural self-images by means of

a strenuous process of *triangulation*. I contend that colonized subjects negotiated their unstable, ambivalent, and relational positions between a coerced centre, a desired centre, and an alternative periphery. Once we factor in the Cold-War confrontation between the Western and Soviet imperial colossi, we are faced with the hitherto unnoticed reality of transcolonialism which calls for abandoning left-leaning postcolonialist orthodoxy and drawing up a revised, cross-imperial history of oppression and resistance against a complicated and ideologically muddled nexus of colonial relations.

Keywords: postcolonialism, postcommunism, traveling theory, Soviet imperialism, world-system theory, comparative cultural studies, alternative peripheries, triangulation of identity, transcolonialism

With notable exceptions, postcolonialist critique focuses exclusively on the relations between the West and its (former) Third-World colonies. Such reductive accounts typically fail to trace the material and ideological interactions between the Second and Third Worlds or any of the conceptual reflections and migrations between their constitutive discourses¹. The ultimate effect of this oversight is a misrepresentation of modern (post)colonial history especially during and after the Cold War and a biased West-centric description of colonialism in general. In this paper, I will review some of the important historical “entanglements” between the alternative forms of coloniality in Eastern Europe and the Third World and I will describe the way in which their interlaced colonial experience forced them to resort to a complicated identity formation process which the typical self-other model used in mainstream postcolonialism fails to detect. This kind of historical interconnectedness proves the need for a revised cross-imperial history of colonialism during and after the Cold War in order to bring to surface the typically ignored phenomenon of transcolonialism as the result of a complicated nexus of power relations and discursive encounters in the competition between Western and Soviet colonialisms.

On the Interpenetration of Colonial History in the Alternative Peripheries of the Second and Third Worlds

¹ Like Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery (7 and *passim*), I am using the three worlds nomenclature (though not the ideologies or the binary explanatory frameworks) both for expediency and for historical adequacy since I am referring to the twentieth-century confrontation between the competing colonialisms of capitalism (“the First World”) with its dominions (“the Third World”) and the Soviet Union with its own dominions (“the Second World”).

It has been clear for a while now that in recent history colonialism was a truly global phenomenon which took various forms and involved all inhabited continents. Its dynamic in the twentieth century came from the colonialist manoeuvres of capitalist and communist hegemony directly engaged in a power struggle for spheres of domination and/or influence. For that reason, it is imperative to unite the efforts of postcolonialist criticism and postcommunist studies in order to understand global (post)coloniality. This has been convincingly argued in many insightful articles such as, for instance, those by David Chioni Moore (2001), Henry F. Carey and Rafal Raciborski (2004), and Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery (2009). They all document the colonial behavior of the Soviet Union and the postcolonial condition of Eastern European countries. Chari and Verdery additionally propose a thesis that is also highly relevant for my endeavour here: that the Cold War is a more adequate analytical framework to understand how (post)colonialism played out in the twentieth century and how the battlefield between the two colossal contenders (the West and the Soviet Union) intertwined the fates of peoples in their respective spheres of influence and domination. Having introduced that new comparative historical perspective, Chari and Verdery could conclude their article by urging scholars:

to liberate the Cold War from the ghetto of Soviet area studies and postcolonial thought from the ghetto of Third World and colonial studies. The liberatory path we propose is to jettison our two posts in favor of a single overarching one: the post-Cold War (29).

Chari and Verdery point out that much of the evolution of the capitalist West and the Soviet Union was dictated by the ambition to demonstrate the superiority of their alternative modernization models (19-21). This contest between the two gravitational centres in international politics pulled in their respective subaltern dominions. Equally caught up in it, the Second and Third Worlds became involved in this confrontation and their emancipatory policies and fates were affected by it. For instance, Chari and Verdery insist, following the lead of Robert Young in his *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, that anti- and post-colonialism did not rely on Marxism as a disembodied and decontextualized body of literature. In fact, Marxism as a framework for political understanding and conduct was introduced,

promoted, or even enforced upon smaller countries by the Soviet Union either directly or by means of its hegemonic position in such international organizations as the Comintern (6-7). In other words, the Marxist emancipation of Third World nations often became part of the Soviet Union's all too palpable international politics, wherein the communist hegemon perfectly mirrored the capitalist (neo)colonial tactics of the West:

Not only were Eastern Europe and much of the former Soviet Union under a form of colonial domination, but numerous other "Third World" countries — Cuba, Mozambique, Ethiopia, South Yemen, Laos, and so on — had entered the Soviet orbit as part of establishing their independence from one or another western imperial power. To think about these geopolitical peripheries with tools from both postcolonial and postsocialist studies enables thinking critically about colonial relationships together with market and democratic transitions. In this sense, and given actual connections between the legacies of colonialism and socialism in contemporary empires, we neglect thinking between the posts at our peril (12).

The emancipation of the Third World in its decolonial and postcolonial age was intimately related to and often dependent on, relations with the brotherly nations from the communist Second World. This was part of the Soviet Union's strategy of undermining its capitalist rivals while deriving economic advantages and masquerading as a progressive and disinterested champion of anticolonial liberation. On their part, the East European satellites of the USSR used their Third-World connections not only as part of the score provided for them in the Soviet-conducted anti-Western propaganda, but also as a form of independent economic and political manoeuvring. Alongside the political leverage and the ideological trump cards, there were also economic benefits in the relations between the Second and Third Worlds which should not be overlooked, as Zoltán Ginelli, among others, so aptly explains:

Since semiperipheral Eastern European economies suffered from a relative lack of technology and capital, in order to buy Western technology to industrialize, decrease reliance on expensive imports, develop competitive exports and increase incomes, they depended on Western loans, and tended to accumulate indebtedness and trade deficits generated by unequal exchange. In turn, in their "double dependency" under Soviet political and Western capitalist dominance, socialist Eastern Bloc countries strove to

develop trade with postcolonies to decrease their resource dependency on the Soviet Union and to obtain hard currency — since postcolonies held currencies of their former colonizers — in order to finance technology imports and pay back loans (...) They were also more trusted and persuasive due to their relatively small size and similar histories of former oppression, and likewise enabled postcolonies to evade the direct influence of Moscow and Cold War military conflict. In turn, Eastern European “development guidance” in offering education, exporting machinery, technology and experts, and exporting their own socialist models of development could also express cultural superiority, legitimize the successes of their regimes and achieve international political recognition (Ginelli, “Hungarian Experts in Nkrumah’s Ghana”).

In effect, the communist and capitalist (post)colonies evolved in the twentieth century as alternative peripheries which were interconnected economically, politically, and ideologically as part of the power games played by the West and the Soviet Union. Seeing how the fall of communism affected the postcolonies of the West we are bound to realize that there were softer, yet unmistakable colonial relations between the Soviet hegemon and some of the Third World countries whose independence was thought of in communist terms. This part of the Third World was a supplement to the East European satellites and may well be seen as the Soviet Union’s alternative periphery whose fate depended on that of the communist power centre:

The popular uprisings of August–September 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall that November, and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union two years later had dramatic repercussions across Africa. A succession of leftist regimes — Ethiopia, People’s Republic of the Congo, Benin, Angola, Mozambique, and Zambia — either lost power or dramatically shifted their policies (Drew 17).

Though the economic, military, and diplomatic assistance of the Soviet bloc to this alternative Third-World periphery was no doubt significant, its ideological indoctrination of anti-colonial elites was at least as important, and it span most of the twentieth century. Since the early 1920s, many of the anticolonial elites became imbibed with the tenets of Marxist-Leninist dogma by participating in Soviet-led political and trade union organizations or by being trained and educated in the Soviet camp. It is perhaps enough to mention the Communist University of the Toilers of

the East (KUTV, 1921) and the International Lenin School (1926), which were both established in Moscow by the Comintern and whose combined alumni included, apart from many other important political and cultural personalities, an impressive number of future state leaders of countries from Eastern Europe (Josip Broz Tito, Alexander Dubček, Bolesław Bierut and Władysław Gomułka, Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker), China (Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and Chiang Ching-kuo), and the postcolonies of the West (Hồ Chí Minh, Jomo Kenyatta, Thabo Mbeki, or John Dramani Mahama).

However, in spite of the obvious importance of ideology in shaping identities and political conduct, Soviet-propagated Marxist principles were not the decisive force in the freedom fight of subaltern nations. In many cases, the ideological propaganda was no more than a sham, an opportunistic trump card played by the Soviet Union which readily abandoned its convictions when they interfered with its realpolitik. If it served its immediate political purpose, Moscow had no qualms allying itself with or even supporting, non-communist parties or regimes. The tone for this unscrupulous political attitude was set by Lenin himself at the Second Comintern Congress of 1920 where he openly advocated support for non-communist independence movements (Hager and Lake 125).

Robert P. Hager Jr. and David A. Lake have eloquently explained how “competitive decolonization”, that is, the support for independence movements in a rival empire, was used, among others, by the Soviet Union as part of its power game. Although Hager and Lake’s article focuses exclusively on Southeast Asia, it can serve as an illustration of the general tactics of the USSR to try to steer the decolonization of the Third World either directly or by means of the Communist International which it controlled:

The Communist International extended its activities to Southeast Asia in the 1920s and 1930s. It established schools for Asian revolutionaries, and dispatched agents to Asia to aid colonial revolutionaries. A number of organizations affiliated with the Comintern extended their trade union and "anti-imperialist" propaganda activities to the region. The Comintern also charged the communist parties in the imperialist countries with providing tactical advice, organizational assistance, and other support to colonial communists. The Communist Party of France (PCF) actively recruited and trained Vietnamese expatriates (125-6).

The quote aptly explains the global entanglements in international politics resulting from the clash for world domination between the Soviet Union and the capitalist West. The authors also show that the Soviet Union acted much less on ideological principle than on immediate interests (135). That is why it had no qualms allying itself with its proclaimed enemies: with Nazi Germany in order to acquire a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe or with the Western democratic powers to fight off Nazi Germany. In the latter case, this directly affected the independence fight of Third World colonies:

[t]he Comintern required member parties to drop demands for colonial independence in order to avoid offending Soviet allies (...) Throughout the Second World War, the Comintern's Southeast Asian member parties adjusted their policies to Soviet security needs" (127, 128-9).

Another example of the unprincipled politics of the USSR comes from its African connection, which also had its ups and downs throughout the twentieth century. Maxim Matusevich records the fluctuations from the pre-war internationalist openness (especially to African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans) to Stalin's xenophobic nationalist isolationism immediately after WWII and then to Khrushchev's "thaw" and support for Africa and the postcolonial Third World (329-334). This is proof that, in fact, ideological principles have always been wielded opportunistically as a mere instrument both in domestic politics and in the strategies and tactical (inter)actions of the Soviet Union's international relations. Perhaps this is a better way to understand the relationship between philosophy and action which Marxist postcolonialist critics so fondly reiterate:

Anti-colonialism was never just an idea, a theoretical position, a philosophical view of the world; its ideas were embedded as part of a dynamic input into material political and social organizational infrastructures (...) Unlike some postcolonials, however, anti-colonial intellectuals were not preoccupied by worries about positions of detachment or specularly. They were organic intellectuals, who lived and fought for the political issues around which they organized their lives and with which they were involved at a practical level on a daily basis (Young 427).

Analyses like those by Matusевич or Hager and Lake offer a more balanced and disenchanted look at the actual political actions and machinations of decolonization. Such studies show how, for the better part of the twentieth century, a good deal of the Third World communist and anticolonial elites danced to the tune of the USSR which was often relayed by the Comintern. In other words, they acted as *alternative comprador elites*. If Marxist and postcolonialist theories speak of compromised classes or elites and assign the “comprador” label to the local bourgeoisie and to the local intelligentsia, respectively, then in this enlarged comparative perspective on global colonialism, the local or diasporic communist elites of these alternative peripheries must be judged as equally compradorial as they compromise their position in the anticolonial fight for independence by serving the interests of the Soviet Union as an alternative colonial power.

Having sketched the complex nexus of historical interconnections between colonial centres and peripheries, both prime and alternative, it is time to consider the cultural impact of the interplay between the alternative peripheries of the Western and Soviet imperial domains. I will especially deal in the following section with the tortuous way in which the cultural identities of Second and Third World subalterns re-emerged in their decolonizing and postcolonial efforts.

The Triangulation of Colonial Identities

It has become painfully clear that the political and cultural map of global post/colonialism since the victory of the Bolsheviks can no longer be fully construed if postcolonial critics continue to artificially dislodge and ignore the Soviet bloc and the Second World from the recent history of colonialism and thus generate an amputated atlas of modern colonialism. For a number of astute critics, the problem is that mainstream postcolonialist critique is too often entrapped in the binary logic of radicalized narratives of colonizer/colonized, West/East, or white/black (Hofmeyr 587, Gill 171, Shih 144). In this section of my paper, I will attempt to show how, as a result of the complicated network of discourses and encounters I have illustrated so far, the alternative colonial peripheries had to generate cultural self-images by means of a strenuous process of *triangulation* (Ștefănescu 108-11). In order to secure their geo-cultural location as (post)colonial cultures whether of the Second or of the Third World, peripheral colonial subalterns had to negotiate their unstable and relational

positions against three cultural others: the coerced and desired centres of their “dual dependency” and the alternative periphery.

In view of the complexities of twentieth-century colonial power games I have surveyed in the first part of this article, it becomes clear that global (post)colonialism at least since the early twentieth century has been a *multi-centred* and *poly-peripheral* field. Some scholars of postcommunism help us understand that by providing problematized and sophisticated accounts of coloniality which illustrate the co-presence of the overt Soviet and more or less covert Western domination in Central and Eastern Europe. Starting from Wallerstein’s core-semiperiphery-periphery scheme, Sławomir Magala proposes a “double peripherization” of socialist countries like Poland under two rival “attractive forces”: the capitalist world-economy core and the socialist world-system political core (139-40). In somewhat similar terms, József Böröcz talks of a “dual dependency” — political towards the Soviet Union as an imperial centre, and economic on the capitalist core states (82). Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek also departs from the comfortable binary schematics of postcolonialism when he talks of (East) Central Europe’s colonial status as “in-between peripherality” in relation to both the West and the Soviet Union (13 and *passim*). Ewa Thompson similarly proposes that the USSR was the overt political colonialist hegemon in Poland, but that surreptitiously Polish elites embraced the West as a cultural “surrogate hegemon” (Thompson 1, 5).

One reason that simplistic binary relations do not work in accounts of Central and East European coloniality is that the region was historically allotted an unstable location between the West and the East as a no-man’s-land, a historical reality which was amply documented by Larry Wolff (*Inventing Eastern Europe*) and by Maria Todorova (*Imagining the Balkans*). Even in the early 2000s, the invocation of a “core Europe” by Habermas and Derrida (“February 15, or, What Binds Europeans Together”) echoes the centuries-old colonialist rejection of Central and Eastern Europe from the patrimony of European high culture and civilization and its uneasy location in an undecided neither-nor type of space. Having been once more denied access to the West European temple of universal values, the “other” Europeans are forced into an identitarian conundrum.

Twentieth-century history produced an additional reason for which binary schemes will not work — it is the interference of the Soviet Union *as a rival and inverted colonizing power*. Tötösy de Zepetnek’s “(post)colonial in-between

peripherality” and Thompson’s “surrogate hegemon” conceptualize that Central and Eastern Europe had to confront *two* contending metropolitan Others in negotiating its cultural identity. However, these interpretive models disregard the *third* referential Other which operated in the shaping of (post-)Sovietized European identities: the (post)colonial Third World as the simultaneous alternative periphery of the Soviet empire, a periphery with which the Second World countries were, as shown in the first section of this article, in direct and close if ambiguous relations.

What I propose, then, is that colonized identities in Eastern Europe were the outcome of a triple ambiguity as a result of the complicated relationship between the various self-images that the Sovietized European subject had to accept in relation to not one, but three differently perceived cultural others. The simultaneous operation of the capitalist West, Soviet communism, and the Third World called for a triangulation of East European identity against these three clashing yet interconnected instances of the Other which were felt to be both adversarial and contaminating. As a result, the cultural identities of the Sovietized Europeans became riddled with ambiguities and insecurities in their hesitant and unsettled positioning against this veritable Bermuda triangle of cultural others.

Triangulation may sound like a concept that is commonly restricted to other sciences (geography, mathematics, psychology etc.), to the practice of field orientation, to calibration and measurements, and sometimes to political discourse and social studies. Since 1999, however, the term has been adopted by some cultural critics of identity representations such as Claire Jean Kim and Shu-Mei Shih. They have claimed that minorities in multicultural America are evaluated by triangulation alongside the usual white/black dualism in a “field of racial positions” (Kim 105-6) which may include Asian, Latin, Native, or even Arab Americans and that some of these racial groups are more triangulatable than others, which tend to fade into the background (Shih 144-5).

The concept of “racial triangulation” detects a more complicated relationship among blacks, Asian Americans, and whites in the United States. In Kim’s view, this triangulation supersedes “the traditional trope of ‘two nations, Black and White’” by noticing how the dominant white society grants Asian Americans “relative valorization” over blacks, while at the same time submitting them to “civic ostracism” (Kim 105-6). Shu-Mei Shih rallies behind this claim and observes its epistemic benefits:

Racial triangulation, in this usage, is an effective heuristic device to bring into view relationalities that conventional binary models obscure or displace. If one places three related terms under the pressure of triangulation, new insights emerge (Shih 144).

While the critical insight from both Kim and Shih is highly valuable, I think we need to adjust this theoretical lens in order to better understand how alternative colonial peripheries function. Kim and Shih are rather interested in the way American consciousness produces comparative *social* valorisations from a *moral* point of view. From their analyses one derives the feeling that the racial groups in the American cultural mix are settled and secure in their respective identities. There is a significant variance when it comes to the Sovietized European identity which is predicated on different criteria (regional and ethnic identity, rather than race) and is also *structurally more complicated* than that of the three races in the United States.

One may wonder why Central and East European identities should be more complicated than those in the United States, one of the most impressive examples of racial and multicultural diversity, where the co-presence of Latin, Native, Asian, and (debatably) Arab Americans as part of the racial mix in the United States alongside the more prominent black/white duality warrants not just one, but several competing racial triangulations, as Shih correctly advises (144-5). However, theoretical complications arise in the triangular comparative identifications of East Europeans who display a higher degree of existential predicament as their identities are constantly challenged and questioned against their three cultural others. In the North American assortment of cultural identities, Asians and other races enjoy a reasonably stable selfhood, even though they may be “relatively valorised” against the more prominent conflict between blacks and whites — in simpler words, they may sound socially less relevant, but are psychologically more secure knowing who they are. But the Sovietized Europeans were cursed with a precarious cultural profile as compared to the solid and therefore stronger identities of the capitalist West, the Soviet Eurasia, and the “primitive” Third World. In such a confusing identitarian landscape, Eastern Europeans were beleaguered by ambiguous, continuously changing, and reversible relations with all three cultural others at the same time. Consequently, in the construction of its self-image, the post/Sovietized subject felt cast in a three-fold marginal position, experiencing simultaneously three different

types of inferiority and ambiguity. The West, the USSR, and the Third World could all boast unequivocal self-images and historical achievements unlike the Central and Eastern Europeans: the Western and Soviet hegemonies both provided alternative modernizing models for humanity, while the decolonized Third World nations, though just a non-hegemonic identity centre to the East Europeans, could still claim ascendancy because they had won their formal independence unlike the satellites of the USSR. As a result, all three forms of alterity were felt as both repulsive and hypnotically powerful by the Sovietized European whose self-appraisal by comparison yielded at best ambivalent results.

The Soviet Union, the coerced hegemon of Eastern Europeans, had a dual identity in these cultures. On the one hand, it inherited the role of a political villain from pre-communist anti-Russian sentiments and, after occupying Eastern Europe, it was presented in resistance discourses (and even in the national-communist propaganda of several Eastern European states, though only obliquely) as the ultimate Nemesis — a criminal oppressor and an uncivilized tyrant that destroyed the more democratic and spiritually accomplished national cultures of Central and Eastern Europe. On the other hand, the USSR was also acknowledged as a dauntingly massive and sly victor, as well as a beacon of emancipation for the masses, the self-appointed champion of the poor and of the unexceptional many in Marxist-Leninist narratives. Either way, European satellite nations felt belittled in relation to the Big Brother whom they had to unconditionally obey and praise.

As for the West, a desired centre and the alternative or “surrogate” hegemon of Eastern Europeans, it also elicited mixed feelings. They both coveted it for its freedom and opulence and vilified it for its betrayal and naiveté. In modern history, the close-range Orientalism of the West forced Eastern Europe to internalize the notion that it was no more than a muddled collection of minor and (half-)backward cultures. As a result, during the Cold War and in the post-1989 transition period, Western capitalism and democracy were secretly viewed as the desired alternative to the political oppression and economic scarcity of communism. Yet, at the same time, the capitalist West acquired a negative image before, during, and after communism. Since the nineteenth century, traditionalists and Slavophiles had been promoting an anti-Europeanist/Occidental discourse which was compounded at the end of the second world war with additional animus at the Western powers which were accused of having “sold out” Eastern Europe to the USSR. Sovietization further styled the

West into a despicable oppressor and archenemy in the propagandistic narratives wielded by the communist authorities.

Finally, the Third World, the alternative colonial periphery, was an equally ambivalent reference, alongside the West and the USSR, in the comparative triangular self-identification of Sovietized European cultures. On the one hand, the Third World provided for them a partially positive self-image as modern Central and East Europeans partook in the stereotypes of Western Orientalism and looked down on the primitive Third World, fancying themselves a part of the racially superior West. This is proved by the fact that, contrary to the anti-racist propaganda, Third-World students in the USSR or Eastern Europe had to suffer the racism of their enlightened communist brothers (Matusevich 339, Velickovic 171-2, Popescu 184). Besides their partial identification with Western colonialist assertiveness, the Sovietized European countries were simultaneously engaged in an alternative, softer and disguised colonial relationship with the Third World in which they felt superior as lesser alter egos of the “progressive” Soviet Union:

On the other hand, their rapid modernization from agrarian to industrial economies and growing state centralization already in the interwar era, as well as their well-trained experts and acquaintance of Western knowledge made Eastern Europeans lucrative partners for the modernization projects of postcolonial countries (...) In turn, Eastern European “development guidance” in offering education, exporting machinery, technology and experts, and exporting their own socialist models of development could also express cultural superiority, legitimize the successes of their regimes and achieve international political recognition (Ginelli, “Hungarian Experts in Nkrumah’s Ghana”).

But the (post)colonial Third World also triggered negative self-reflections. For the East Europeans it was a spectral half-conscious reminder of their own Orientalized image as barbaric and backward in the eyes of the West. The Third World nations were former subalterns who gained their freedom just as the East Europeans were losing theirs – a reminder of historical failures and of their own subalternity to various empires, including the Soviet Union. At the same time, and as a derivative result of Orientalist imagination, East Europeans regarded the distant cultures of the Third World as native to a romantic paradise of exotic opulence and innocence. Compared to the powerful and secure image of the Orient/Third World, East

Europeans were neither successfully decolonized, nor exotically attractive, and they were seen as a mongrel identity, part Western and part Eastern.

The historical encounter between the Soviet bloc and the Third World as an alternative periphery was, therefore, profoundly ambiguous and disappointing². The Sovietized European subjects saw themselves as partial failures in comparison with the West, the USSR, and the Third World alike. In addition to this triple bitterness, they were also profoundly befuddled as they could be counted neither a clear winner, nor a clear victim, neither Western, nor Eastern, neither entirely civilized, nor utterly primitive (noble savages). Whereas in navigation and science, triangulation is meant to increase precision, in identity construction it is rather a confusing process whereby self-images become fuzzy from the multiple pulls or attraction forces in the complex field of “dual dependency” relations and also because of the unsettled position of both centres/cores and peripheries. What obtains from studying the triangulation of cultural identities is a broader comparative perspective on a phenomenon which should more appropriately be named *transcolonialism* — the subject of the final section of this article³.

On Transcolonialism

It has hopefully become clear by now that the complex and ambivalent network of relationships involved in triangular identity formation exceeds the explanatory power of critical concepts such as Magala’s “double peripheralization”, Böröcz’s “dual dependency”, Zepetnek’s “in-between peripherality” or Thompson’s “surrogate hegemon”. The methodological edge of the concepts of identity triangulation and

² Even the Soviet metropole, a teacher to Third-World political elites, occasionally felt it could learn from this alternative periphery. While it hoped to mould the young Africans who came on cultural or educational trips starting with the Moscow Youth Festival of 1957, the Soviet Union was itself impacted and changed by the Third-World visitors who “introduced a population steeped in parochialism to modern aesthetics, new art forms, and the liberation political discourse” (Matusevich 333-4).

³ Naturally, the triangulation process I am describing may be further complicated by other types of power relations which affect the social status and the identity formation of subaltern communities. Such is the case of the phenomena of “nesting Orientalisms” (Milica Bakic-Hayden) or of the “double colonization” suffered by the working classes (see Carla Lipsig-Mummé 139) or by the females of colonized populations (see Haunani-Kay Trask 4 and passim, Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford’s collection, as well as the counter-concept of “half-colonization” proposed by the racial critique of Robin Visel).

Andrei Terian also uses the term “(cultural) triangulation” to describe how three intellectuals in communist Romania record their encounter with Chinese culture in their travel writing. Terian surveys three individual representations of China, but does not address the broader context of power and political interactions against which cultural identity formation processes occur in what I describe here as the multi-centric and poly-peripheral field of power relations typical of transcolonialism.

alternative peripheries comes from introducing the (post)colonial Third World as an additional reference point for the self-representation processes of Sovietized subjects. The (post)colonies of the West can thus be seen as both an alternative periphery for the Soviet world and a non-hegemonic third centre in the construction of (post)communist marginal identities.

My theoretical proposal rests on the historical evidence that the Second and Third Worlds were constantly aware of and in contact with, each other in their different but interconnected experience of dual dependency. They felt that they shared the experience of subalternity, but they were also weary not to replicate each other's mistakes and wretched experience. The Second- and Third-World subalterns often conceptualized their experience of colonial oppression and postcolonial dependency in comparative terms. The colonial domination of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe and communist atrocities were called out in open session at the 1955 Bandung conference by Ceylon's prime minister John Kotelawala (Ginelli, "Hungarian Experts in Nkrumah's Ghana") and, animated by the same spirit, some of the participating states introduced a resolution which condemned "all types of colonialism":

Think, for example, of those satellite States under Communist domination in Central and Eastern Europe, of Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania, Czechoslovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland. Are not these colonies as much as any of the colonial territories in Africa or Asia? And if we are united in our opposition to colonialism, should it not be our duty openly to declare our opposition to Soviet colonialism as much as to Western imperialism? (Rajagopal 75)

The comparison started as early as the 1920s and throughout African decolonization and postcoloniality leading voices like those of Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Sedar Senghor, or Sekou Toure kept cautioning against "balkanisation" which was alleged to cause political weakening or even disintegration (Neuberger 523 and foll.). In symmetrical fashion, the wars in Yugoslavia were sometimes discussed in terms of a supposed "Africanization" (*Afrikanizacija*), that is, being provided with a fragile independence against the context of neo-colonialism which created "in Africa numerous military dictatorships and unliveable hell-holes, while maintaining extraction economies for the benefit of the global capitalist order in tandem with

local compradors” (Mayer 55) and which eventually led to political instability and civil wars during the 1980s and 1990s. The term was floating around at the time in international politics. In a December 1988 report submitted to the Congress of the United States, the U.S. Commission on Security and cooperation in Europe assessed that Gorbachev would probably want to treat Eastern European countries more as sovereign states than as components of the world socialist system, which could lead to the “‘Africanization’ of Eastern Europe”, as predicted by some in Western Europe (*Reform and Human Rights in Eastern Europe* 11-12).

But what are the consequences of understanding the interdependency between Western and Soviet (post)colonialism or between the Second and Third Worlds as alternative and interconnected peripheries? One way of answering this question is that when we factor in the Cold-War confrontation between the Western and Soviet imperial colossi, we are faced with the hitherto unnoticed reality of transcolonialism as part of a cross-imperial history of colonial oppression. It is my contention that twentieth-century coloniality was shaped by a multi-centric and poly-peripheral field of power relations and as such it calls for a different, more complex geo-cultural and historical portrayal than the one provided by mainstream left-leaning postcolonialism. With notable exceptions, postcolonialist critique focuses exclusively on the relations between the West and its (former) colonies and such reductive accounts typically fail to trace the historical interactions and the conceptual migrations between the discourses of the Second and Third Worlds as they took on both their prime (or real) and their alternative (or “surrogate”) centres/cores. I take these regions to be *alternative peripheries* in the convoluted field of global transcolonialism and I draw attention to the protracted two-way exchanges between these peripheral discourses in their interconnected experiences of (post)colonialism. This interplay, together with their vacillation between the two power centres during the Cold War, complicated not only the global power games, but also the processes of identity formation, and the ideological genealogies of repression and resistance.

I would, therefore, advocate renouncing analyses of bilateral colonial relations between metropolis and periphery, or the flattened portrayals of a singular and uniform Western colonialism or of an equally homogenized colonial subalternity. By contrast, to acknowledge the reality of transcolonialism in the twentieth century and to examine it from a broader comparative perspective, to notice the multiplicity of colonial centres and peripheries, whose economies, politics, cultural profiles, and

ideologies may be fundamentally unlike, and to investigate the entangled relations between them will yield a double benefit: it will offer a more accurate picture of colonialism and, at the same time, it will prompt researchers to find the genuine nature and defining traits of coloniality, rather than settle for the incidental and particular features of a particular instance of modern colonialism and produce unwarranted generalizations.

However, the way in which I use the term transcolonialism differs from that of other critics. In a gloss on Homi Bhabha, Harish Trivedi takes the transcolonial to be the transformation of the postcolonial by means of “transnational translation” and of “the movement in space from the colony to elsewhere which defines [the ‘unhomed’] rather than the passage of time from when the colony was a colony to when it ceased to be one” (270). By contrast, Couze Venn proposes “a transcolonial genealogy of political economy” which implies “the dynamics linking forms of political rationality to systems for the appropriation and accumulation of wealth and to biopolitics” as part of “a more general economy of inequality and violence” (208-9). Françoise Lionnet uses the term transcolonialism to refer to transcultural and translinguistic relations between subaltern cultures, but not to trans- or cross-systemic relations, that is, not across the boundaries of world-systems or colonial systems (29, 31 and *passim*). Yaejoon Kwon describes the racial identification (“formation”) of Koreans by the U.S. military occupation in the late 1940s as “transcolonial” for being relational and nonlinear, to wit, for adopting/adapting, for instance, the colonial experience of the British towards the Irish since, according to Natalia Molina, “racialized groups are linked across time and space” and, therefore, racial scripts can be recycled. Starting from Trivedi, Ewa Łukaszyk understands transcolonialism as a *Verwindung*, a stage in the breaking away from both colonialism and the postcolonialist status quo in order to achieve “the final healing of the colonial wounds” (“On the double assertion of the term ‘transcolonial’”).

As far as I can tell, none of these critical uses of the term “transcolonial(ism)” escapes the binary logic of colonizer/colonized, civilized West/backward East, coloniality/independence etc. What I propose is to see transcolonialism as the interplay between the discursive practices of dissimilar forms of colonialism and as the multidirectional and simultaneous connections between prime/alternative centres and prime/alternative peripheries during globalization.

Such a cross-imperial and cross-colonial historical perspective should be mindful of the unsettled, dual, or ambiguous nature of such interrelations. Moreover, it must come from having internalized the need for a dynamic and continuous flow between postcolonial theory and postcommunist studies. Otherwise, in their inertia and parochialism, both mainstream postcolonial studies and mainstream postcommunist studies risk turning into mere provincial disciplines with little scientific claim to understanding the nature of coloniality and the evolution of colonialism in recent history. They would still be relatively large provinces, to be sure, but no more than that.

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