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Towards a Decolonization of Thinking and Knowledge: a Few Reflections from the World of Imperial Difference

“J’ai de sérieuses raisons de croire que la planète d’où venait le petit prince est l’astéroïde B 612. Cet astéroïde n’a été aperçu qu’une fois au télescope, en 1909, par un astronome turc.

Il avait fait alors une grande démonstration de sa découverte à un Congrès International d’Astronomie. Mais personne ne l’avait cru à cause de son costume. Les grandes personnes sont comme ça. Heureusement pour la réputation de l’astéroïde B 612 un dictateur turc imposa à son peuple, sous peine de mort, de s’habiller à l’Européenne. L’astronome refit sa démonstration en 1920, dans un habit très élégant. Et cette fois-ci tout le monde fut de son avis.”

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry *Le Petit Prince*

“A Russian in Europe is like a cockroach. He is running, moving his whiskers, nervously smelling. He is scandalous for Europe’s clean surface. Europe can contemplate with interest the exotic insects, it would like some kind of poisonous tarantula or a caterpillar, ladybirds are a touching site for it, but there are no good cockroaches...”

Victor Yerofeyev *Five Rivers of Life*

-I-

The two epigraphs preceding this article present two facets of the problematic that in modernity/coloniality terms would be called the imperial and colonial difference and the geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge. There are several definitions of these key concepts offered mostly in the works of Walter D. Mignolo and used by other decolonial intellectuals (Mignolo 2002a, Mignolo 2007, Maldonado-Torres, Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006). In what follows I would try to perform a double translation and look at the world of imperial difference from the view point of decolonial option and also regard the decolonial thinking itself through the perspective of the “vanished” second world and particularly, of the internal other of this world, of someone who by her very positioning and origins does not belong to the high road of modernity and its main dichotomies such as the first world/vs the third one, the colonizer/vs the colonized, the global North/ vs the global South, and whose position becomes a border one not just by choice but also by necessity.

The concept of the second world including the ex-socialist world is a typical product of Western modernity looking at its non-absolute other from outside and, consequently, homogenizing its multiplicity and diversity following the well-known logic of either neglecting the other or misinterpreting it as the same or as the predecessor of the same. Instead of the second world we should speak of the world of imperial difference which would allow to understand its specificity in its own terms and logic and also vis-à-vis the Western modernity marked by global coloniality.

If for Latin America it is the colonial difference that plays the crucial role, then for Russia, as well as for Spain, that lost its dominance in the second modernity, it is the imperial difference that comes forward (Mignolo 2002b, Tlostanova 2005). However on the global scale the imperial difference mutates into the colonial one, which is clearly seen in case of the Ottoman Sultanate and Russia. The reason for this lies in the fact that Spain is an example of the internal imperial difference which does not go beyond the Western European reference system, Western Christianity, Latin-based languages, while Russia is an example of external imperial difference. It’s imperial populace is Slavic, i.e. rather remote from Western Europe, it is Orthodox Christian and even its alphabet does not correspond to European expectations of imperial language and literacy. The Russian empire was never seen by Western Europe as its

part, remaining an Asiatic racialized empire. R. Grosfoguel links the concept of global coloniality with today, when the direct colonialism is over (Grosfoguel 219). In this sense Russia as a paradigmatic subaltern empire has always been in the condition of such a coloniality vis-à-vis the West, and not direct colonialism. This coloniality has not been obvious, yet ubiquitous, manifesting itself mainly in the spheres of being, of knowledge and of thinking.

-II-

The permanent error of the Russian/Soviet empire was its inconsequence. On the one hand, it strove to build its own separate variant of globality/modernity – an Orthodox kingdom and later, a Soviet world. On the other hand, the concrete strategies of building the Russian/Soviet modernity had to be attuned to the Western one and here Russia chose a doomed way of catching up with Europe and proving that it out-wested the West. This wish has alternated periodically with the rejection of everything European and the retreat into the jingoism that we witness today. The Russian imperial discourses demonstrate a Janus-faced nature of this empire which always felt itself a colony in the presence of the West and at the same time half heartedly played the part of the caricature “civilizer” in its non-European, mostly Islamic colonies. The Soviet empire in its subaltern imperial nature was not essentially different from the Czarist one, though it reformulated the main developmentalist slogan in a more radical way, attempting to build a socialist modernity — “to catch up and leave behind”, while also escalating its global geopolitical appetites. As for the relation to the colonies, the Soviet tactic did not change much – it became even more cruel and refined, based on methodical elimination of all alternative thinking and being.

In case of Russia the racial logic of coloniality is hidden and hard to detect. The Russian empire used to copy the Western European capitalist imperial discourses with many distortions and with an awareness of its own marginality within the construct of Whiteness, compensating this inferiority by projecting its caricature racism onto the newly acquired territories. The more so in the Soviet Union which attempted to put to life a marginal and seemingly contesting model of the Western modernity — that of socialism, even if in the form of double standards, where the actual dominance of racial discourses was always masked and complicated by a more intricate ethnic and religious configuration, while the Soviet empire chose to present itself to the world as the empire of affirmative action (Martin).

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and with the active expansion of the neo-liberal globalization which has acted until very recently as the only legitimate model of modernity in the world, the post-Soviet space found itself almost overnight in a situation of a new periphery. The defeated enemy was of no interest for the West and had to either vanish or gleefully accept the prescribed role – that of the service countries populated by dispensable lives. The flourishing racism going hand in hand with ethnic chauvinism does not need to mask itself any more, while the previous religious, linguistic and ideological aspects of othering that were used in the Russian and Soviet empires, step aside. The monopoly of Western knowledge in the form of Russian or Soviet mediation (today in the form of direct borrowing from the West or choosing a more attractive mediator than the losing Russia, as it happens in case of popularity of the Turkish model in the Islamic ex and present colonies) remains the main manifestation of coloniality and a serious impediment for the development of any contesting social and indigenous movements in these regions except in the forms of art, cinema, fiction, theater, etc. Examples of decolonial arts would include Uzbek conceptualists Vyacheslav Useinov and Utkam Saidov, an Abkhazian Diasporic painter, poet and philosopher Murat Yagan, a Buryatian artist Zorikto Dorzhiev and Tashkent transcultural theater *Ilkhom*.

Along with being a secondary subaltern empire marked with external imperial difference, Russia is also a curious example of a survived theocratic empire, at least in its intentions and in its mentality, if not in reality. A Russian cultural theorist Andrey Pelipenko includes in this

theocratic imperial consciousness such features as deep statism, which I would add, today acquires ethnic forms both in Russia and its colonies, the sanctification of the state as a “metaphysical principle of sacred cosmology” (Pelipenko 316), the direct correlation between the imperial territory and the religious-metaphysical and transcendental dimension, the idea of providential exceptionalism which adds specific colors to Russian xenophobia, that sees the Other as hostile to the great theocratic project. The territorial expansionism in this empire, taking after Byzantine one, has been motivated primarily not in strategic or military or much less economic terms, but in terms of rather aggressive Russian Orthodox universalist ideal of a particular spiritually, taking over the whole humanity, of the specific oecumenical and universalist Russian Orthodox vision.

The Russian Orthodox civilization strove to build, however unsuccessfully, its *own* global model, and the final realization of the impossibility of its implementation, which became obvious with the collapse of the Soviet Union, was the most crucial and seldom discussed failure of this empire, and not ideology or economy as such. The orthodox civilization in its purely religious or seemingly circular Soviet forms had always as its aim to take a revenge for the lost battle with the mainstream Western modernity. This has been realized differently in different times – in the idea of Moscow as the third Rome where providentialism was expressed as a mission of reviving the true Christianity. Later, the same impulse was expressed in the distorting adaptation of the European enlightenment theses on the Russian soil accentuating once again the Russian superiority. Still later the same sentiment was expressed in the Soviet expansionism and a missionary zeal to convert everyone into the Socialist faith, going hand in hand with a more strategically calculated building of its own model of socialist modernity – parallel to the Western one, sharing its main vices and often parasitizing on its elements, but positioning itself as an independent alternative project. The catching up modernity in Russia/Soviet Union was just an external and not very successful strategy, while the imperial consciousness has remained essentially the same under Peter, Stalin or Putin. Having lost with the collapse of USSR its theocratic element in the form of the Soviet myth, today’s Russia is unsuccessfully trying to change it to a nationalist ideal, but its globalistic imperial origins constantly stick out.

Homo Postsoveticus in its Russian variant is doomed in the conditions of globalization. He cannot join either the world capital or the world labor, he is infected with the imperial complex with all its racist overtones and hence would not see any point in joining the forces with the damnés of the world. It is a person spoiled with the decades of not so plentiful but still acceptable life at the Orwell’s style “animal farm”, where he was fed not just mostly with cheap carbohydrates, but more importantly, with the typically Soviet myths of the Russian-proletarian superiority, which finally made him sure of his own exceptionalism, based on the familiar arguments of Russia’s extensive territory, rich natural resources and the uniqueness of the vaguely defined Russian/Soviet spirit. Today the ex-happy Socialist slave has become unhappy when he discovered that there is no place for him in the labor market – both global and more and more often – local as well. Practically anyone in this situation feels unprotected, but unfortunately it is easier for the insulted and humiliated to buy the xenophobic slogans, circulating widely in Russia, and, by hunting for the enemy in the other, to get an illusory semblance of the protection for themselves.

-III-

If we want to really de-link from the rhetoric of Western modernity and understand how the decolonial option may work in the locales other than the West and its former colonies, we most likely would have to discard the still dominant logic of the “end of history” (Fukuyama), to get rid of the old notion of the three worlds, and the popular yet misleading in its inherent Western derivative logic idea of multiple modernities (Taylor 1999, 2007, Eisenstadt et al, *Daedalus*). Drawing a different genealogy of the world of imperial difference, it is interesting

to look at the “vanished” second world through the prism of the geo-politics and body-politics of knowledge, meaning the concrete local conditions (religious, historical, cultural, linguistic and other, always marked by coloniality) in which knowledge was and is produced, and the concrete bodies and minds, the subjectivities, marked by colonial and imperial difference, resulting in racial, gender, sexual and other differentials. Why talking about this history if the second world as a concept vanished long ago? Because the real place of its inhabitants in the global human taxonomy of Western modernity has not changed much, no matter in what ideological disguise this modernity acted or acts today. It can be a place of a second-rate European (sometimes even honorary European), or a place of an honorary human, or even a permanent under-human, not quite human, as in extreme cases of the Russian non-European colonies.

In order to even start understanding such people, to not just give them a voice but also change the view of the world in order to finally make them a real part of it, not a decoration, we would need to shift the biography and geography of reason, which presupposes a movement toward a geopolitical and body-political perspective putting in the center of knowledge production what can be called, reformulating G. Anzaldúa, “the colonial wound”, and not the achievements of modernity (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2007 112). What kind of wound would it be depends on the local history which in case of Eastern Europe or, for example, Caucasus - is a different story from what Anzaldúa draws. We can even say that here it is not only a colonial wound but also a subaltern imperial wound or in some cases – many colonial wounds from different empires, each with its own discourse, coming together and clashing or interacting within the peoples’ trans- subjectivities.

Through modernity/coloniality perspective the world of imperial difference would be dominated by two recurrent motifs – the problematic of subaltern empires (Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Sultanate, Russia) which act as intellectual and mental colonies of the first-rate capitalist Western empires in modernity, and consequently, create their own type of secondary colonial difference; and a forceful socialist modernity which is a mutant, marginal, yet decidedly Western kind of thinking and acting, an emancipatory global utopia, gone conservative and reactionary.

Within the world of imperial difference all modernity discourses acquire secondary, othered and mutant forms. This refers to secondary Eurocentrism practiced by people who have often no claims to it (like the Russians), to secondary Orientalism and racism that flourish particularly in relation to the non-European colonies of subaltern empires such as Caucasus and Central Asia giving them a multiply colonized status and a specific subjectivity often marked with self-racialization and self-orientalizing (Tlostanova 2008). Without these additional categories we cannot rethink humanities, social movements or subjectivities in these spaces, we cannot hope to de-colonize or de-imperialize them. This unstable and blurred world of distorted reflections and Janus-faced subjectivities produces a specific kind of a scholar and humanities marked by only virtual, imagined belonging to modernity, based primarily on intellectual colonization, that in my view is the most serious impediment for any decolonization of thinking, of knowledge and of being in the world of imperial difference. Hence the two questions crucial for decolonial option in general become particularly painful for our locale: 1) what are the decolonial humanities? and 2) What and how should humanities decolonize from?

-IV-

When we speak of decolonial future of the humanities, the attention is drawn intentionally to the logical operation which lies in the basis of de-colonial option. I mean the rejection of both post-modernity and post-coloniality and choosing de-coloniality instead. Why is it important? Because by doing it we reject the very essence and structure of the existing system of knowledge in humanities, we refuse to accept its fundamental logic and methodological

apparatus which is impossible to disentangle from the material, being analyzed. This shift is a qualitative one, not a quantitative as is often the case in postcolonial studies. What happens in the majority of postcolonial studies? They start from the version of history that places the British empire (or sometimes, French) at the center of the modern colonial history, which constitutes one of its limits seen from the perspective of the de-colonial option (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2007 110). On a more meta-critical level, a relatively new material is studied in the postcolonial theories by the (ex)representative of the third world, but by means of the well known postmodernist analytical methods or with a minimal variation/deviation from them. What remains untouched in this case is the fundamental logic of modernity and its humanities and particularly, the understanding of the human typical of modernity.

Postcolonial studies remain blind to a fundamental task of shifting to geo- and body-politics of knowledge and decolonization of knowledge based on arguing from a perspective that comes from the phenomena we seek to define and is often in fact their product. What is at work here is a decolonial thinking which focuses around problems that can be looked upon from different perspectives in dialogue, rather than methods and objects of analysis as it happens in any kind of “studies” and “expert knowledge” as a particular scholarly genre and scholarly persona. What the decolonial thinking and decolonial humanities aim at is a principle of “relational-experiential rationality and building knowledge not outside the essence and existence of being, not by presenting a problem outside of its context, but by practicing community learning as an on-going and never ending open process, based on complexity and relationism, complementarity and reciprocity, the shift from the subject-object relations to the subject-subject model instead of the dominant fragmentation, to the learning-unlearning-relearning path, and from accumulating knowledge to its critical and creative understanding and integration in wisdom) (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2009 forthcoming). Postcolonial studies would not even formulate their task like this, because they remain “studies”, i.e. confined within the typical division into subject and object and taking scholarship basically down to descriptivity. Postcolonial studies do not alter the inherent discourses of progress and development fundamental for the myth of modernity as such.

Postmodernism in this respect seems to be a more interesting project, because even if it is eurocentrically provincial, it at least faces the problem of inadequacy of modernity and strives to work out a new categorical apparatus, the mechanisms and the logic, in contrast with derivative postcolonial studies. As Chela Sandoval demonstrated brilliantly in her *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Sandoval), which is a good example of decolonial humanities, a dialogue between postmodernism and decolonial option is possible and many ideas, intuitions, concepts and frames of the decolonial hermeneutics of love are to find parallels in critical Western postmodernist thinkers, though the latter often do not want to be aware of it. Sandoval’s position is integrating as it aims at a dialogue and understanding and insists that none of the Western methodologies and theories of the 20th century is free from the presence of decolonial element and most of Western philosophers this way or another have experienced the decolonial influence and contributed something to the methodology of the oppressed. Sandoval rejects the asymmetric translation of all *others* into the language of western epistemology and here lies her crucial difference with postcolonial studies or theories of alternative modernities. The basis for a dialogue and comparison in Sandoval’s case lies in the methodology of the oppressed, whose traces she finds not only in third world feminism but also in French deconstruction and post-structuralism or in white feminism. Sandoval thinks that there exists some cross-disciplinary contemporary lexicon and grammar for the expression of oppositional thinking. But this commonality has not yet been used as an intellectual ground for the new academic forms of theory and method and for the creation of a transdisciplinary - in the sense of overcoming disciplines - realm between the European, American and decolonial projects.

Decolonial option becomes similar in its goals and extent to postmodernism but lacking its provincialism and self-centeredness, performing its deconstruction and dismantling of modernity in a much wider and deeper sense. It also strives to get rid of its own remnants of epistemic provincialism as it incorporates more and more locales and contesting epistemic traditions into its frame along with the initial Latin American basis. Decolonial option is ready for a dialogue with modernity, the question is that modernity still does not want to dialogue with its *others*.

-V-

For those who occupy the world of imperial difference decolonization of thinking and working towards decolonial humanities becomes particularly important because due to our specific state of intellectual, mental, epistemic colonization, we have been deeply marked by colonality of being (Maldonado-Torres) and of knowledge. Therefore we are in desperate need of a radical decolonial approach, a delinking from modernity that would allow to question the very mental operations and logical structures that comprise the rhetoric of Western modernity which becomes further distorted and intensified in case of subaltern empires and their colonies. The crucial meaning of decolonizing humanities then would be questioning the established philosophy of scholarship, changing the qualitative (the rules and terms), and not just the quantitative (adding new voices) aspect of a dialogue with modernity, not being afraid of touching the deeper mechanisms of cognition and understanding. One can reformulate Lacan's ideas in order to create Homi Bhabha's concepts, but one can also begin his or her path not from Lacan, but from Gloria Anzaldúa or from the Zapatistas, from the Circassian cosmology or from Nakshbandi Sufism.

The second-hand rhetoric of modernity that we find in the world of imperial difference divests and makes obvious many elements that in first rate modernity remain hidden or are presented as something that is self-evident by hiding the locus of annunciation to use Walter Mignolo's term (Mignolo 2002b). In Russian case this rhetoric acts like an ill-starred narrator, according to a formalist Victor Shklovsky, a narrator, who slips in his narrative and accidentally lets the cat out of the bag (Shklovsky). This cat is quite recognizable – it is progressivism, evolutionism, particularly social and cultural, it is the myth of tradition as modernity's dark other, it is the subject/object split and area studies drive grounded in objectification and appropriation of the other, it is the hierarchical view of the world, the monotopic hermeneutics and the explanatory structure based on Archimedean point taken outside of reality. A Russian writer Dmitry Galkovsky expressed this peculiar intellectual stance in his ironic rumination on the nature of Russian philosophy in *Infinite Blind-Alley*: “An idea expressed in Russian is irrational. Even an idea which is rational in itself being expressed in the Russian language and by a Russian thinker, acquires an irrational tint...but it is precisely because of this principal irrationality of our linguistic culture that scientism has rooted itself so deeply in Russian soil. The turning to the Western system of thinking is a result of a blurred realization of unreality of our world of words, of its second-rated-ness. Russian positivism is a vulgar attempt of the ultimate “philologization” of the national essence, the elimination of its mystery due to word expression... The marble chunks of Hegel and Kant are the eternal blame for Russian thinkers...Russians in their nature a weak thinkers because the very language we have is deeply unfit for argumentation. The words mix up, the thoughts become unclear and unfocused. We want to speak lapidary and clearly, in a German way. But as a result we have only aphorisms...”(Galkovsky)

As in case of Shklovsky's narrator, the Russian champion of modernity exaggeratedly demonstrates its “charms”, and by demonstrating them - disavows them, quite unconsciously, because in the line of forced scientism, an intellectual in the world of imperial difference is painfully afraid of any self-questioning, of any conscious self-positioning and self-reflective stance and attracted by the ideal of objectivity as a fetish. I mean here not the postmodernist

self-reflective stance that often comes to just contemplating one's own navel, but a constant critical assessment of oneself as a scholar, an activist and a human being.

-VI-

This brings us closely to the ethical problematic within the decolonial option. Here declarative ethics is not enough, as the ethical moment is always clearly linked to the self-positioning of the decolonial humanist. A scholar then should not be a public intellectual, but a true activist of a contesting persuasion, who would not work for the benefit of the corporate university and who would not be afraid of stressing her or his critical positioning towards this university and herself/himself being potentially bought and sold by such a university. Instead of studying the contesting movements from outside as it is the case in the majority of established western disciplines, the decolonial humanities want to become an integral part of these movements and instead of studying them, aim at studying with them.

What the decolonial humanists should be after is an inter-penetration of serious activism and scholarly work, stressing the painful question of the researcher's and activist's ethical stance, her/his scholarly, existential and political positioning which inevitably leaks into research but is seldom acknowledged. We should be thinking and living according to the very principles we describe. This is a rather rare quality in today's academic world, where too often there is a gap between the wonderful ideas expressed on paper and the real life in its social and political dimensions and the inter-subjective relations, characteristic of the authors.

The majority of decolonial scholars in this respect are in a privileged position because they mostly come from South and Central America or are connected with it this way or another, i.e. come from a locale that has had a tradition of consciously fighting its intellectual colonization and merging political and social activism with scholarship. But for European (White) scholars it is a more difficult task. Their configuration is often marked with guilt and peculiar complexes that slow down productive scholarship and prevent them from easily merging the personal ethical stance with their scholarly *persona*. In peripheral Eurasia the ethical stance of an intellectual is additionally complicated by what an African scholar Obioma Nnaemeka calls "the politics of poverty and the politics of the belly" (Shu-mei Shih at al 159) and an Estonian poet and intellectual Yaan Kaplinsky defines as going from (Soviet) harem to (neo-liberal) brothel (Kaplinsky). Scholars in order to survive would often write and say not what they are interested in or believe in but what they can get paid for through the Western NGOs and grants or, in case of Russia, through nationalistic imperial state grants and foundations. Predictably, where there is more drive towards the contesting critical decolonial thinking there is less or null opportunities of its realization except in the form of internet projects and few books published in small circulation. And where there are financial opportunities there is seldom such a drive, such an interest in the other. Instead of that we find apathy, a sclerosis of inter-group relations, an absurd disciplinary specialization. For those like me, who occupy not just a position of internal others within the post-imperial Russia, but also, internal others of the Russian model of modernity, the ethical difficulties get still more complicated because outside of Russia we continue to be pigeon-holed as its imperial subjects while in reality and inside Russia we remain its paradigmatic outcasts.

-VII-

In this context, a dialogue between mostly American decolonial scholars and European and peripheral European contesting scholarship is fruitful for both sides. The latter find in decolonial option a long missing meta-theory in a good sense of the word, as the decolonial perspective allows for a analectic (Dussel) rethinking of modernity/coloniality (Quijano) thus setting free many internal impulses and contradictions which remain unclaimed, erased or muted within the frame of the dominant discourses of Western modernity. This is true in case of peripheral Europe and even more so in case of the multiply colonized spaces of the secondary colonial difference, generated by the subaltern empires of modernity. As for the

decolonial option itself, it also could benefit from a dialogue with peripheral Europe and non-European spaces marked by secondary colonial difference because such a dialogue would imbue the decolonial thinking with additional dimensions and allow it to go outside America with its paradigmatic idea of race. I do not mean by any means to belittle the importance of race in the shaping of modern imaginary, as its reverberations can be felt, albeit in distorted forms, even in such countries as Russia and its colonies. But Europe with its long and complex history and the critical view of European scholars, linked with a not always conscious guilt in their reflections on racism and slavery legacy imbues their understanding of decolonial humanities with additional subtle overtones which are not clearly seen in the Americas where the picture of modernity/coloniality is drawn with wide dabs and strokes of the paint-brush and therefore is more obvious and easy for interpretation.

In Russia, for example, we cannot speak of what it means to be a problem as in case of William Du Bois or Lewis Gordon (Gordon 2000), because here a man is not a problem but a nuisance in the eyes of the West, a nuisance that irritates the West because this other looks too much like the same, becomes a caricature of the same (as one political scientist commented several years ago, Russians should have been Black, then it would have explained many things). But here a human being is a nuisance also because he is interpreted as a worm, in Russian Orthodox Christian tradition. Russia chose the apophatic (negative) variant of Christian theology, which slowed down the development of anthropocentric and, later, ego-political culture. This Christianity that did not go through reformation created its own specific anthropology, if the same sees himself as a worm, then one can imagine how would he see the other.

Race here is replaced with ethnicity (often turning into the racism of microscopic differences), and not just a clear juxtaposition of Amerindian languages erased from the Earth and the languages of European modernity, but an array of more nuanced, blurred differences which are no less painful in their consequences. A good example would be Romanian language which is a romance one, hence having a “sacred” language as its origin, but nevertheless belonging to a country and a people that was an Ottoman colony for a while, which stigmatized it forever in the eyes of the West, together with its exotic in the West variant of Christianity – the Orthodox one. According to Manuela Boatca, even if race did not exist as a developed and coherent discourse in Eastern Europe, it consistently surfaced in othered forms in the formulation of “negative terms of internal European oppositions such as civilized-barbarian, rational-irrational, developed-underdeveloped applied to Eastern regions” and constructing inferior others in order to legitimize political interventions, economic exploitation and epistemic patronage of thus constructed periphery (Boatca 372). That is why the task of decolonization of Romanian humanities would be different from that of a German scholar, while the Russian or Uzbek case would present further difficulties based on particular local frames and conditions.

What we encounter here is racism no doubt, but it shows that in reality racial discourses have an indirect relation to the color of skin and are linked instead to the belonging or not belonging to Europe and to modernity, virtual belonging in some cases. The Russian scholars with their specific dubious racial status have an advantage in this sense – a chance of critical rethinking of racial discourses. But they did not and do not take this chance due to the imperial difference marked by the forceful need to always desperately prove one’s belonging to the sphere of sameness.

Within the frame of secondary eurocentrism and intellectual racism, Russian humanities tend to condescendingly regard any projects alternative to modernity as exotically marginal. They do not pretend to fake any interest in such others. The less European these intellectuals remain the more diligent become their efforts to defend modernity. This is the imperial difference inferiority complex pure and simple, which has been compensated by projecting it

onto the non-European colonies who were harmfully infected by the same Orientalist ideologies and self-humiliating stance. There were many historical emanations of imperial difference complex among the Russian intellectuals. But all of these claims always remained on paper and in the hot minds of the elites. While Russia itself gradually turned into a paradoxical country with a highly imperial collective consciousness which at the same time is zombified and enchanted by Western modernity. Sometimes this complex is expressed negatively in waves of nationalistic, primordialist, ethnocentric, or even theocratic quasi-scholarly hysteria which is still grounded firmly in the rhetoric of Western modernity and argues with it in modernity's terms, thus inevitably losing.

-VIII-

Within modernity there rules yet another fetish – that of newness and originality, based on the logic of successive changing one ruling ideology to another. This is why the adepts of modernity are not capable of understanding the decolonial idea of coexistence of multiple worlds. We can again find interesting parallels between the colonial subjectivities in the Americas, in Africa, in peripheral Europe and in multiply colonized spaces of the secondary colonial difference, e.g. in Caucasus and Central Asia. Here there is no simple successive change of one epistemology to a next one. All models continue to exist and remain viable as sources and targets of criticism. This mode is perfectly expressed in Zapatistas' principles, where there is no place for Western agonistics, for monotopic games based on rivalry and opposition winner/loser, where there is an ideal of many worlds existing side by side and interacting but not linked to each other by any hierarchical relations. Within this mode life is organized in accordance with the dynamic use of parity instead of egalitarianism, duality in which the binary oppositions are not mutually exclusive, where there is no need in Western individuation because there is a specific category of inter-subjectivity expressed even on linguistic level, where there is a special understanding of participatory democracy based on collective subjectivity as manifested in the idea of ruling as obeying.

If we look at the non-European colonies of Russia from the perspective of what it means to be a problem, we will see that many layers of colonization generate also the necessity of several distinct layers of decolonization in each of which a human being needs to be rehabilitated in different ways. Decolonizing from Islam means one set of issues, decolonizing from the Russian and Soviet variant of modernity means a different thing, decolonizing from the mainstream western modernity today means a third thing.

Decolonial option so far has concentrated more on the colonial difference while the imperial difference would bring its own configurations. For instance, in those locales where the projection of modernity was not direct but mediated by the presence of a secondary empire which created its own distorted, doubling ineffective variant of modernity, the history, the genealogy of humanities and the ways of their regeneration would be quite specific. The humanities the way we know them are indeed responsible for the shaping of the Western imperial reason, but in certain locales this formula would have to be complicated. For example, in Russia this knowledge would be not quite Western but imperial and its non-western nature would not save it from the discriminatory stance towards its own internal and external others.

Within the genealogy of knowledge traced by the decolonial humanities Western modernity acts as the main target for criticism and so far more attention has been paid to the colonial difference. This picture should be enriched with the engagement with other religious, cosmological, cultural traditions, such as Islam or Buddhism. Western modernity in the forms of Christianity, liberalism or socialism imposed its dictate over the world, but it was not the whole story. It is crucial to reconstruct the genealogy of internal hierarchies within these other spaces, their particular power relations with each other, their own logic of coloniality of power and of being which clashed against that of modernity. Thus, in peripheral Eurasia Islam originally acted in a similar unattractive role to that of Catholicism in the New World.

However, in both locales the indigenous peoples elaborated specific strategies of domesticating the imposed religions (be it Catholicism or Islam), by means of preserving their outward look but changing the meaning and introducing these religions into the indigenous cosmologies as only their small part, hence shifting the geography and biography of reason. The Amerindian religious duality, the peculiar symbiosis of Islamic and indigenous beliefs in Caucasus and in Central Asia and even the Russian “double faith” that was preserved during several centuries after its official Christianization are all examples of this essentially decolonial sentiment that was later recast in secular terms and today can be recast once again in the rethinking of humanities from the perspective of these locales.

-IX-

In the last several years gender has come more to a focus in the works of decolonial scholars who realized that it is not possible to understand modernity and particularly coloniality of being without deconstructing the coloniality of gender. Working gender into the decolonial apparatus is regarded as one of the crucial tasks for the future. Gender means among other things, sexuality, a concrete body if you wish that together with racial markers constitutes the basis for the body-politics of knowledge. The most important contribution in this respect seems to be so far Maria Lugones’s several articles (Lugones 2007), as well as a more specific text by Freya Schiwy in *Cultural Studies* (Schiwy) and a few valuable comments in the work of Nelson Maldonado Torres in the same journal (Maldonado-Torres). However gender requires much more attention and complication within the frame of decolonial humanities which can help to reframe the accepted hierarchy of disciplines and build promising bridges between them, like the bridge with the third world feminism which already did a lot in the dynamic and multi-logic analysis of the intersections of gender, race, class, religion. However theoretically third world feminism seems to lack the overarching pluriversality of the decolonial option and often grounds itself in the already existing approaches or their mixtures like Marxism, postcolonial theory, etc. There is nothing wrong with this of course, but these approaches are still based on the inherently Western modes of thinking, studying and perceiving the world and tend to drag with them the locality of the approaches named above, even while claiming at universality (Jayawardena, Mohanti 1991, Alexander and Mohanti 1997). Bringing together the empirical research of the third world feminism and the methodology of the decolonial thinking may also allow in the future to introduce back into analysis the forgotten spaces and people of the world of imperial difference and secondary colonial difference erased from contemporary humanities and social sciences, by means of the tools and categories lacking in feminist thought but offered by the decolonial option. Such specific gender-oriented concepts would include the paradox of the colonial femininity and masculinity viewed through the coloniality of gender and of being, which in the world of imperial difference would be further complicated by doubling and at times, self-negation; and also the decolonial conceptualizing of gender colonial hierarchies – real and imagined, once again, acquiring in subaltern empires and their colonies an array of additional dimensions and meditative elements which stand in between the extreme oppositions of a European man and a multiply colonized non-European woman (Tlostanova 2009 forthcoming).

-X-

The decolonial option is essentially an open and unfinished intellectual modality which presupposes not just the inclusion of more and more new voices and local histories, although this is in itself an important task, because, e.g. the simple knowledge of Eurasia in both America and Europe is minimal and biased and stands outside of the problematic of racism or colonialism. This can be illustrated with a simple example – even the most advanced scholars within the humanities seldom see a link between the famous Atlantic transit which brought death and misery to millions of Africans, and the forced exodus of North Caucasus peoples

into the Ottoman empire after their lands were taken away by Russia, which resulted in their own Black Sea transit and the death of the hundreds of thousands of mostly undocumented people and the tragedy of Circassians most of whom now live abroad. But more importantly, it is the fundamental change in treating other peoples' worlds, while traveling to and in them, in Maria Lugones's terms, "as a way of identifying with them by traveling to their world and understanding what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes" (Lugones 2003 97). Thus knowing becomes part of loving.

The decolonial discourse practiced by scholars like Chela Sandoval or Maria Lugones seems promising to me in one more aspect - they strive to overcome a typical for many alter-modern theorists negativist stance of criticism and refusal to define a positive future ideal. Indeed, it is important to unveil the racial and patriarchal principles behind modernity, but along with criticism and negation there should be also an affirmation of something different. We have to think more closely of how exactly are we going to build a new non-racist and non-patriarchal future. Without having an access to the decision making which is the case of most academics, it is a difficult task if only we do not attempt to change the previous forms of engagement and shift to different ones - the spiritual, the aesthetic, the virtual practices that would slowly change the consciousness instead of attempting to change the power structure. Changing the terms and not just the content of the conversation, to quote Walter D. Mignolo (Mignolo 2007), we must also change the tactics of fighting modernity. We can attempt to move this fight outside the system of values, coordinates, rules and conditions that modernity created for itself and in which it feels comfortable. In the world of imperial difference and secondary colonial difference it is a very difficult task, though some locales have managed to preserve the contesting subjectivity that was not completely erased or tamed and therefore have more potential for the future.

The fact is that any social and political initiative in the ex- and present colonies of subaltern empires would be strangled immediately by the strong state both in Russia and in neocolonial newly independent countries. For this reason it is often the Diasporic intellectuals from these locales living in the West that present more interesting and independent examples of decolonial thinking and truly trans-epistemic, trans-value, trans-modern and not just trans-cultural humanities and arts. The difficulty in comparison with Zapatistas or indigenous movements in Andean countries, is that digging out the erased history is not sufficiently paired with the continuing living tradition when we speak about multiply colonized Eurasian spaces and such Diasporic peoples as, e.g. the Adygean (Yagan). In other words, there is a crudely interrupted indigenous legacy due to multiple colonizations and also the violent nature of Soviet modernity, in this case, which often makes any dialogue difficult. And yet there are individuals who make a spiritual or aesthetic link between the erased history and the subaltern modernity.

For the "heart of Europe" shifting the geography and biography of knowledge is also a difficult task. Because a European scholar risks to slide into postmodernism or attempt to occupy an area studies seemingly disinterested observer standpoint. It becomes crucial in this case to observe carefully the subtle difference: not to incline to a well known vein of comparative philosophy comparing, e.g. Europe and China but to create or open up a philosophy which would be inherently trans-epistemic, pluri-logic and pluritopic (Mignolo 1995 12-13) and turn from comparative to imperative philosophy, to quote R. Panikkar (Panikkar).

-XI-

One has to be particularly careful in these new decolonial humanities because practically the whole conceptual apparatus of the previously existing humanities is ideologically biased. Let us take a seemingly innocent term "transcultural humanities" that has become popular today. It can easily slide into a typical for modernity and almost meaningless "dialogue of cultures".

However, we know that the word “culture” itself and all its derivations carries the birth marks of coloniality of being and of power. Because the cultures of other spaces have been studied, exoticized or demonized for centuries but always from the inherently European colonialist position as a norm and besides with an additional notion that culture is inferior to philosophy, to knowledge production. In many ways we know that culture is synonymous to race today or, to put it differently, race dissolves in culture. Cultural interactions almost always are still conceptualized in assimilationist terms, cultural categories are still formulated by the West and then imposed onto the reality of other spaces. This raw cultural experience is conceptualized either by the westerners or by their local zombies while the monopoly of knowledge remains safely in the hands of the West.

That is why it is more appropriate to talk about trans-value and trans-epistemic humanities (not simply trans-cultural ones) -- in order to stress the radical shift from mere cosmetic repairs – the addition of other cultural features for the sake of their description within the frame of Western humanities; and switch to the interpretation of other cultures and cosmologies in their own terms and preferably, by the representatives of these cultures, who were not first turned into zombies. What is at work here is of course the fundamental categories of the decolonial project such as the shift of geography and biography of knowledge, the conceptual denaturalizing which questions the generally accepted terms and disciplines, drawing attention to their links with the rhetoric of modernity. This denaturalizing is best performed in multiply colonized spaces with a developed trickster subjectivity.

When we start thinking of the array of meanings behind the term “transcultural humanities” and “trans-epistemic humanities” we in fact venture into the important sphere of elaborating the language and discourse necessary for these new human sciences. No matter how many categories are already created by the decolonial project, they are not enough to rethink the humanities globally. Often the decolonial project has to express its ideas using still a number of western philosophic concepts which causes misunderstanding because these categories and concepts are inevitably reshaped when they are used by the decolonial humanists, but for the audiences they still mean what they used to mean within the generally accepted frame. The misunderstanding of the words “transcultural” and “transculture” are one of such examples. What happens is an active appropriation of this fashionable term by the mainstream humanities far from contesting modernity or decolonizing the minds. This is as we know one of modernity’s strong points – it has been always very successful in appropriating the other, in its plasticity and skillful ability to tame alternative thinking by making it part of modernity.

Demarcation from modernity and its discourse in the epistemic sense is necessarily connected with the change in the apparatus of concepts and this is one of the important tasks of de-colonial humanists. Each concept carries with it an array of ideological associations and is not innocent and no one understands this better than the decolonial thinkers who are already doing a lot in this direction. It is crucial to keep this process alive. Otherwise the semantic fake similarities as in case of “race”, “transculture” or the meaning of the “colonial” may lead to a dead end and endanger decolonial option by making it dissolve in the well known and already digested by modernity theories and approaches.

-XII-

The crucial aspect of decolonization of humanities is getting away from the strict disciplinarity in the form of disciplinary decadence or apartheid, to quote L. Gordon (Gordon 2006) and Ch. Sandoval (Sandoval 152-153), and venturing into the areas that are traditionally not taken seriously by modernity, thus making philosophy or sociology equal to various marginalized forms of knowledge. It can be the aesthetic sphere of arts or literature, cinema or theater, it can be the realm of the occult, the esoteric or the non-rational knowledge, which might seem, in Sandoval’s words, “limited in the eyes of analytical reason, thriving in the practices of carnival, scandal, pun, buffoonery” (144) and, at the same time, be more flexible

in expressing the decolonial ideas and approaches as they'd be less bound by the imperial canons of academic disciplinary formations. A good example is Sylvia Marcos' *Taken from the Lips: Gender and Eros in Mesoamerican Religions* (Marcos) which is not only an interesting anthropological study, but in many ways, a contemplation on the future of anthropology as a discipline and a model of a new type of anthropological research likely to emerge in the 21st century as part of the major rethinking of humanities and social sciences.

Marcos changes the point of reference and the geography of knowledge, moving in the direction of trans-disciplinarity, understood as overcoming the self-indulgent disciplines and their rigid taxonomies. She works for the creation of de-colonial humanities re-thinking and re-working her discipline and the modes of cognition at its base. Marcos describes her interpretative method as an "adaptive and creative resistance", which is embodied in the Zapatistas's project of the "re-appropriation of a spirituality rooted in their soil" (Marcos XV). Here the subject, the mode of the study and the subjectivity of the author (who looks at the material she studies not as a detached and objective scientist would do, but regards it as a "part of her own ancestral past") form a unity, which leads away from the assonances, silences and voids of subject-object relations, typical of Western disciplines, and towards a powerful and persuasive, truly pluri-logic result.

The most attractive element in this model of thinking is the attitude to indigenous tradition as to a living, changing, variable within itself and not fixed, given once and for all, not as something which one has to go back to. This cosmology is presented by Marcos as slipping out of the Western logic of either/or, assuaging what the Western culture would interpret as contradictions in the all-penetrating act of balancing the change and the continuity which the book itself is also based on. This is precisely what Western disciplines are often unable to understand, being fixed within the paradigm of modernity which juxtaposes itself and its myth to the constructed idea of tradition, taken outside of modernity seen as the norm.

Marcos's book is spiral in the temporal sense, not because of its link with Hegelian dialectic of synthesis, but due to its connection with and a conscious recreation of the specific mode of cyclical motion with a variation, characteristic of Mesoamerican culture, the state of "extreme dynamic tension and not a pragmatic compromise between the opposites" (Marcos 25), which is multi-logic by definition. She revisits in the spiral mode the many versions of the past which are unstable, changeable and yet also retain certain recurrent and always recognizable and reconstructable elements. The concept of homeorrhexis, i.e. "the balance of conjunctions in flux" (Marcos 25) refers here not only to the equilibrium of Mesoamerican cosmology, but also to the book itself in which there are several points of confluence or major nerves which hold together the non-linear structure of this work that rejects the vector logic of the written discourse and attempts to reconstruct on paper a completely different logic of the oral tradition. Marcos's approach is based on a strive to understand the past and the present in their own terms, with their own world views, their own sense of gender and gendered spaces and times. We can call her method a trans-epistemic pluritopic inter-penetration and dialogue. And this is just one of many possible definitions of decolonial humanities.

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