

Viewing the Post-Soviet Space through a Postcolonial Lens: Obscuring Race, Erasing Gender

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to contribute to the debate on whether or not the post-Soviet space ought to be included in postcolonial studies. I critique the idea of reverse cultural colonization that suggests that the centers of civilizational othering and colonial domination need not be the same in the context of post-Soviet postcoloniality: a view that fundamentally limits our understanding of the connections between race and nationalism in the post-Soviet world and beyond. Furthermore, this division is also connected with the neglect of gender dynamics of nationalism and racial politics in the post-Soviet region. Therefore, I argue that the postcolonial lens fundamentally obscures our understanding of race in the region and does not allow a conceptual space for a critique of gender outside the nation-state. Therefore, the postcolonial take on the post-Soviet space can illuminate but not encompass the specificity of the former Second World region. If the epistemological approach used in postcolonial scholarship is revised, the post-Soviet region's characteristics can serve to critique established concepts and connections within postcolonial theory. To do so, we need to depart from, but not discard, postcolonial theory. I propose that transnational feminism constitutes a framework that can advance the debate on the adoption of an appropriate epistemological approach that could remedy the silence of the former Second World within theorizing across the social sciences.

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Introduction

In 2001, David Chioni Moore sparked a debate¹ that quickly spanned across disciplines by posing the question whether post-Soviet states can be considered postcolonial.² In his groundbreaking essay, Moore focuses on the parallel material as well as discursive realities that exist between states that used to be a part of the Soviet Union or its satellites and those countries that were colonized by Britain and France, as well as other Western European colonial powers. Moore challenges the negligence of these similarities both in postcolonial studies as well as post-Soviet area studies.³ The debate has since surpassed Moore's initial query about the belonging of post-Soviet states and societies under the term post-colonial, and turned into a wider examination of the concept of postcoloniality and an evaluation of epistemological approaches to the study of the post-Soviet space. Given its relative recency, the debate has not yet been mapped.⁴ As it currently stands, it is both a collection of intertwined meditations on methodological, epistemological and geopolitical issues, as well as an unfinished dialogue regarding the analytical gains and losses implicated in looking at the post-Soviet space through postcolonial glasses. This thesis speaks to the latter, as it addresses the broader question of what is illuminated and what is concealed about the nature of the post-Soviet space, when the entire region is designated as a postcolonial space.

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- 1 In order to be consistent, I refer to the body of texts that responded to Moore's article (both by directly citing him or by taking the question he poses as the main subject of their work) using the word debate, owing to the binary phrasing of Moore's initial question. However, noting that the authors participating in the intellectual enterprise that Moore prompts often steer away from strictly including or excluding the post-Soviet sphere in postcolonial studies, the term debate is thus used in its broader sense.
 - 2 David Chioni Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique," *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 111–128, doi:10.2307/463645.
 - 3 Buckler addresses the complexities in selecting the correct term for area studies of the former Second World. Julie A. Buckler, "The Changing Profession: What Comes After 'Post-Soviet' in Russian Studies?" *PMLA* 124, no. 1 (2009): 255–256.
 - 4 The most comprehensive assessment of the debate can be found in Hladik. However, he focuses specifically on the proponents of the postcolonial lens and does not position his own argument within the context of existing critiques. See Radim Hladik, "A Theory's Travelogue: Post-colonial Theory in Post-socialist Space," *Theory of Science* 33, no. 4 (2011): 561–578.

If one was to take a blank map of the world and color in the areas covered by the majority of postcolonial studies scholars, the former Second World would remain blank.⁵ By postulating the inclusion of post-Soviet space in postcolonial criticism, the debate exposes the extent to which geography constitutes a defining characteristic of the term postcolonial. Some scholars fear that the idea of a global postcolonial effectively dilutes if not destroys the analytical substance of the term alone.⁶ Boyce Davies, a critic of the inflation of postcolonial terminology, states,

Each [use of a term] must be used provisionally, each must be subject to new analyses, new questions and new understandings if we are to unlock some of the narrow terms of the discourses in which we are inscribed. In other words, at each arrival at a definition, we begin a new analysis, a new departure, a new interrogation of meaning, new contradictions.⁷

Boyce Davies captures the essence of the debate, which does not accept the term postcolonial and the subsequent postcolonial approach unproblematically. The scholars participating in the debate explore and challenge the analytical gains and losses accrued in a postcolonial interpretation of the post-Soviet space. However, the debate has not yet addressed certain contradictions and meanings of postcoloniality. In this thesis, I thus stand both within and outside the debate. My aim is not to determine whether the post-Soviet states are or are not postcolonial. Rather, I focus on the analytical blindspots that the debate as a whole has overlooked, and as such exhibits further limitations of the postcolonial framework not only for the study of the post-Soviet realm, but as a holistic methodology applied to the study of all societies.

5 Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?" 116.

6 Vedrana Velickovic, "Belated Alliances? Tracing the Intersections Between Postcolonialism and Postcommunism," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48, no. 2 (May 2012): 164–175, doi:10.1080/17449855.2012.658247; Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?"

7 Boyce Davies quoted in J.D. Sidaway, "Postcolonial Geographies: An Exploratory Essay," *Progress in Human Geography* 24, no. 4 (December 1, 2000): 606, doi:10.1191/030913200100189120; Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994), 5.

Through my analysis, I take a closer look at “reverse cultural colonization,”⁸ whereby cultural critiques are applied to identity formation and the shifting East-West divide in Europe, and critiques of political, economic, and military dominance center largely around the Soviet Union's former member and satellite states relationship with Russia both during and after the end of the Cold War. This double-standard in the use of postcolonial critique in itself constitutes a feature of the post-Soviet region and new epistemological lenses ought to draw on the complex configurations of nation-race-gender, that the region's political history has brought to bear. I argue that the concept of *reverse cultural colonization* privileges the nation as a unit of analysis, and obscures the way in which race is constructed both within and across state boundaries. Furthermore, this division is also implicated in the neglect of gender dynamics both in nationalism in the former post-Soviet region and in relation to racial politics both within the region and worldwide. Therefore, I argue that the postcolonial lens can illuminate but not encompass the specificity of the former Second World region. The struggle to be incorporated into postcolonial studies can effectively cause us to flatten the region's political and social histories in order to accommodate postcolonial analytical tropes. On the contrary, the region's characteristics can actually serve to critique established concepts and connections within postcolonial theory. To do so, we need a framework that is beyond, but yet remains connected to postcolonial criticism. I argue that the transnational feminist framework provides the necessary tenets to move our analysis away from the nation-state, and shift it on the intersections of race, gender, and nation in global politics. It allows us to re-imagine the subject of study in the debate of post-Soviet postcoloniality, and thus center epistemological queries with fewer pre-defined power binaries.

8 I borrow this term from Moore and use it consistently throughout this thesis. Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?,” 121.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter articulates the terminology that is consistently used throughout this thesis, and delineates the conceptual landscape of postcolonial critique to which this thesis seeks to contribute. Furthermore it provides context for the debate, as it traces the roots of the postcolonial-post-Soviet debate to Three Worlds Theory, and analyzes the geographic assumptions embedded in the use of the term postcolonial. The second chapter focuses on the debate itself and demonstrates the analytical gains and losses incurred in the application of a postcolonial status to the post-Soviet region as a whole. Overall, this chapter demonstrates that the debate has not managed to fully overcome the conceptual tropes of Three Worlds theory. Moreover, by reinforcing Three Worlds assumptions, the debate has provided an insufficient lens through which racial and ethnic relations in the contemporary post-Soviet space can be studied. Except for occasional mentions of the gendered nature of European colonial conquests, the debate treats the post-Soviet space as a non-gendered one. The third and final chapter expands on existing critiques of race and nation , and posits that the incorporation of a gender critique can further our understanding of the dynamics of race and gender. Finally, I propose to address the under-conceptualization of race as well as the omission of gender by applying the transnational feminist framework to the post-Soviet region.

Chapter 1: Purpose of Study and Literature Review

1.1 Purpose of Study and Terminology

As introduced above, this thesis is largely concerned with the underlying dynamics of the debate whether post-Soviet states can be considered post-colonial. Many authors that challenge the conceptual notions of different “posts” - postmodernism, postcolonialism, etc. - seemingly engage in a discussion of the precision of definitions. Moore himself admits that the title he selected for his article mimics Appiah's "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?".⁹ For these authors and many of those engaged in the debate in question, terminology plays a special role. Instead of defining a term in the beginning of the article and then proceeding with researching a particular topic adhering to that specific definition, for authors engaged in the debate terminology becomes the very subject of their inquiry. This turns terminology into a double-edged sword, as it is the subject of contestation, yet at the same time it serves to navigate the conceptual terrain.

For the purposes of this project, I too strike a balance between what concepts ought to have static meanings throughout the course of this work, and which ones ought to be fluid and subject to critique. As Moore's question indicates “Is the Post in Post-Soviet, Post-colonial?,” scholars engaged in the debate focus primarily on the concept of postcoloniality. In so doing, they either do not specify what is meant by the term post-Soviet or focus on only a portion of the post-Soviet sphere (e.g., the Baltics,¹⁰ Poland,¹¹ Ukraine,¹² Romania,¹³ or Central Asia¹⁴), or speak of

9 Moore is paraphrasing Appiah's work on the parallels and differences between postmodernism and postcolonialism. Ibid., 124.; Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 2 (January 1, 1991): 336–357, doi:10.2307/1343840.

10 Violeta Kelertas, ed., *Baltic Postcolonialism* (New York, NY; Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006); Kārlis Račevskis, “Toward a Postcolonial Perspective on the Baltic States,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 33, no. 1 (March 2002): 37–56, doi:10.1080/01629770100000201; Epp Annus, “The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics,” *Journal*

Eastern Europe as a whole (including former Yugoslavia, and excluding Central Asia). This inconsistency in the debate has not received much attention, yet the author's choice as to what counts as post-Soviet is often tied to their notion of what counts as postcolonial. The inconsistency in the use of the delineation of the region whose postcoloniality is analyzed itself highlights assumptions as to what constitutes the Second World that is missing from both post-colonial studies as well as certain notions of the global.¹⁵ In this project, I will define what countries constitute the Second World and provide a justification for this geographical specification. In order to contribute to an understanding of postcoloniality, I will not offer an apriori definition, but instead engage the critiques of the term and postcolonial studies throughout the course of this thesis.

1.1.1 What Constitutes the Second World?

I do not use the term post-communist or post-socialist, as those terms identify countries based on the regime transitions they experienced in late 20th century. Although not exclusively, those terms have been utilized in transitology studies, which largely deployed comparativist

of Baltic Studies 43, no. 1 (March 2012): 21–45, doi:10.1080/01629778.2011.628551.

- 11 Clare Cavanagh, "Postcolonial Poland," *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 1 (January 1, 2004): 82–92, doi:10.1215/0961754X-10-1-82; Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez, "Post-colonial Poland - On an Unavoidable Misuse," *East European Politics and Societies* (August 2012): 1–16; Ewa M. Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000).
- 12 Karolina Szmagalska-Follis, "Repossession: Notes on Restoration and Redemption in Ukraine's Western Borderland," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2008): 329–360; Andrzej Szeptycki, "Ukraine as a Postcolonial State?," *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* no. 1 (2011): 5–29.
- 13 Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, "Soviet Cultural Colonialism: Culture and Political Domination in the Late 1940s - Early 1950s Romania," *Trames. Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 16, no. 1 (2012): 77, doi:10.3176/tr.2012.1.04; Adrian Otoiu, "An Exercise in Fictional Liminality: The Postcolonial, the Postcommunist, and Romania's Threshold Generation," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 23, no. 1&2 (2003): 87–105.
- 14 Laura L. Adams, "Modernity, Postcolonialism, and Theatrical Form in Uzbekistan," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 333–354; Adeeb Khalid, "Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 4 (2000): 691–699, doi:10.1353/kri.2008.0032; Deniz Kandiyoti, "Post-colonialism Compared: Potentials and Limitations in the Middle East and Central Asia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34 (2002): 279–297.
- 15 Jennifer Suchland, "Is Postsocialism Transnational?," *Signs* 36, no. 4 (Summer 2011): 842–843.; Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?" 123.

methodology in the study of transitions. Since my research aim is not concerned with the dynamics of regime change, but rather the “geoideological”¹⁶ boundaries that shape research agendas and methodologies in international studies as well as other disciplines. As Chari and Verdery point out, there were several states outside of the geographic scope of the Second World that experienced state-socialism and later on a transition to a market-based economy.¹⁷ I use the term post-Soviet here partially in order to remain consistent with Moore's own terminology and partially due to the fact that it encompasses a large geographic territory that is neglected in post-colonial studies. Choosing the term post-Soviet, rather than Central and Eastern European allows me to include the Central Asian and Northern Caucasus regions in my considerations. In addition, choosing the term post-Soviet as opposed to the term post-communist also allows me to avoid the common tropes of transitology, that associated and often conflated regions with regime change and neglected to thoroughly inspect the broader political context of those transitions.¹⁸

I choose to exclude countries that used to be a part of Yugoslavia in the region whose coloniality I seek to discuss. The reasons for this are twofold. First, the status of former Yugoslavia countries in postcolonial theorizing has not been as controversial as the application of the term postcolonial to the former USSR countries and its satellites. Authors such as Maria Todorova,¹⁹ Vesna Goldsworthy,²⁰ and Bakic-Hayden have drawn on postcolonial theory to understand the construction of difference both in the region and in Europe at large. While the use of postcolonial theorizing for the Balkan region has been largely applauded, its use has also been

16 I borrow this term from Suchland. Suchland, “Is Postsocialism Transnational?,” 848.

17 Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, “Thinking Between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography After the Cold War,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 01 (December 16, 2008): 6, doi:10.1017/S0010417509000024.

18 Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 4.

19 Mariia Nikolaeva Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

20 Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania : The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

quite specific. Postcolonial theory encompasses a broad range of approaches and definitions. Said's Orientalism²¹ has been considered one of the key pieces of postcolonial theory, yet his approach does not speak as clearly to issues of economic and political nature, but rather to the constructions of the Other. This approach has been used by some of the key theorists mentioned above in understanding narratives about the Balkan conflict as well as about constructions of those people as backward and inferior. In fact, Todorova herself argues that Balkan countries cannot be considered postcolonial, as they have never been colonized. She thus focuses on their orientalization.²² As I elaborate below, I do not subscribe to Todorova's definition of postcolonialism as necessitating a particular form of colonialism. However, Todorova, Goldsworthy, and Bakic-Hayden of the Balkan region use the postcolonial toolbox primarily in their analysis of ethnicity formation both within the region and from the outside.²³ Therefore, the “blank” portion of the map (as in the countries that postcolonial studies engage in their analysis) that Moore alludes to is partially “colored in” in the Balkan region.

Second, the gap in theorizing on the former Second World largely results from the legacies that the three-worlds-theory has left on contemporary academic thought and as such provides further justification for the exclusion of former Yugoslavia in the present study. As Suchland shows, the three-world-theory, rooted in Cold War power politics, divided the world's geography into large monoliths and attached a political position to each of those parts of the world. Specifically, Suchland points out that the Second World, especially after the fall of the Iron Curtain is seen as aspiring to become like the West, while the Third World is seen as a source

21 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

22 Todorova in Stefanescu. Bogdan Stefanescu, “Reluctant Siblings: Methodological Musings on the Complicated Relationship Between Postcolonialism and Postcommunism,” *Word and Text, A Journal* no. 1 (2012): 17; Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*.

23 Milica Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia,” *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (December 1, 1995): 917–931, doi:10.2307/2501399; Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*; Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*.

of harsh criticism against the West.²⁴ Lewis and Wigen show in their thorough critique of the political metageography established during the Cold War, point out that not all countries fit neatly into the monolithic categories of three-worlds-theory. Specifically, they state that “the former Yugoslavia occupied an unstable position between the First and Second World.”²⁵ This condition is partially addressed through the work on the cultural constructions of Yugoslavia and the Balkans at large as a region. Since my research question stems from the absence of the former Second World in postcolonial studies and critical theory more broadly, I will include the “undisputed” Second World as Lewis and Wigen define it. The region I speak to thus includes all states that used to be members of the Soviet Union, USSR's former satellites (Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania).²⁶

1.1.2 What Is Postcolonial?²⁷

One of the most common understandings of postcolonialism focuses on the relationship between European colonial powers and their colonies (between the 16th and 20th centuries) after their colonial status had formally ended.

‘Post-colonialism/ postcolonialism’ is now used in wide and diverse ways to include the study and analysis of European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and, most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre- and post-

24 Suchland, “Is Postsocialism Transnational?” 839.

25 Martin W. Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 10.

26 I exclude East Germany and Albania. In the case of East Germany, the postcolonial lens is primarily used for inquiries within Germany after reunification. Formerly East Germany's status as being a part of the West is largely uncontested. I exclude Albania due to its unique geopolitical positioning vis-a-vis USSR during the Cold War.

27 I borrow this question from Childs and Williams, who in their introductory chapter ask the Who, When, Where, What of postcolonial theory. Peter Childs and Patrick R. J. Williams, *An Introductory Guide to Post-colonial Theory* (London: Prentice Hall, 1996), 15–20.

independence nations and communities.²⁸

This rather mainstream definition highlights a temporal as well as a spatial delineation of colonialism, and subsequently postcolonialism. Temporally, we see that postcolonialism is predicated upon an experience of colonialism. Although this may seem trite at first, this linear understanding of time as the defining marker of postcolonialism has been heavily criticized, mainly because a temporal framing privileges a particular form of colonialism over others.²⁹ For example, one of the reasons Russian expansionism was not seen as a form of colonialism was because it occurred largely on land, while British colonies were overseas.³⁰ However, contemporary postcolonial studies have sought to expand the spatial boundaries of what counts as post-colonial. The contestation of spatial limits constitutes the focus of this thesis and will thus be addressed further on. Even within this rather typical definition, disagreement exists as to which histories to include – which colonial conquests count.³¹

As mentioned above, I do not deploy an existing definition of postcoloniality. Rather, I engage some of the critiques of the field of postcolonial studies and the term postcolonial to better delineate the analytical terrain to which this thesis seeks to contribute. Some fear that the inclusion of post-Soviet states in the realm of postcolonial studies would further erode the “analytical bite” the term offers. A strictly conceptual definition of the term postcolonial, a definition lacking any historical (temporal) boundaries would dilute the term so much, that very few relationships could be seen as not being postcolonial, because “[T]here is ... not a single square meter of inhabited land that has not been at one time or another colonized and then

28 Bill Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009), 187.

29 Anne McClintock, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism’,” *Social Text* no. 31/32 (n.d.): 84–98.

30 Waldstein posits that due to its contiguous nature, Russian colonialism was regarded as inferior to that of the West. Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?” 119; Maxim Waldstein, “Theorizing the Second World: Challenges and Prospects,” *Ab Imperio* 98–117, no. 1 (2010): 107.

31 Childs and Williams, *An Introductory Guide to Post-colonial Theory*, 10–12.

postcolonial.”³² This statement aptly illustrates that the term “postcolonial” exists in tension with certain temporal boundaries. If the term was temporally unbound, then it would be applicable to so many different situations, that the key binary of the colonizer and the colonized would cease to see representatives of European colonial powers as the sole perpetrators of colonialism. Ahmad offers a thought-provoking example to illustrate either the risk of conceptual dilution if the term is expanded or its spatial and temporal assumptions.³³ The term postcolonial is surrounded by many boundaries and relies on these boundaries to retain its analytical substance.

One way in which the term has managed to maintain its “analytical bite” was to restrict itself temporally. Anne McClintock famously criticizes the term postcolonial for locating its subject as the events and dynamics that come *after* colonialism.³⁴ The privileging of the colonial experience and its attachment to a linear understanding of time, according to McClintock, leads to the anchoring of Western Europe at the center of academic inquiry, it “re-center[s] global history around the single rubric of European time.”³⁵ Another prominent critic of postcolonial assertions, Shohat argues that the term postcolonial creates a sense of “in-betweenness,”³⁶ as it takes the experience of colonialism as its chief subject, yet obscures the power relations embedded in it. Unlike the concept of neo-colonialism that is able to capture colonial power dynamics occurring outside of the temporal sphere of colonial conquest, Shohat skillfully illustrates the way in which postcolonial analysis may tend towards abstraction, rather than

32 Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?” 112.

33 In a rather facetious remark about Iranian history, Ahmad suggests that deploying a mechanical definition that would cast different periods of Iranian history as equally postcolonial would flatten the context of those time periods. Aijaz Ahmad, “The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality,” *Race & Class* 36, no. 3 (January 1, 1995): 2, doi:10.1177/030639689503600301.

34 McClintock, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism’.”

35 Ibid., 86.

36 Ella Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial’,” *Social Text* no. 31/32, Third World and Post-Colonial Issues (1992): 107.

conceptual clarity.³⁷ She states, “While one can posit the duality between the colonizer/ colonized and the neo-colonizers/neo-colonized, it does not make much sense to speak of the post-colonizers/the post-colonized. ... [T]ranscending such dichotomies, the term post-colonialism posits no clear domination, and calls for no clear opposition.”³⁸ Reading Shohat's work more broadly, we see that the identification of post-colonialism as an era that comes after colonialism positions it more as an “aura” of a particular historical era, rather than a political practice that can be analyzed. Over time, another broad characterization of the term postcolonialism has become prominent, one that is less susceptible (but not immune) to the temporal critiques highlighted above. Rather than being defined as a state of affairs following colonialism, postcolonialism is defined as a discursive phenomenon. As Slemon states,

[T]he concept [of postcolonialism] proves most useful not when it is used synonymously with a post-independence historical period in once-colonised nations, but rather when it locates a specifically anti- or *post*-colonial discursive purchase in culture, one which begins in the moment that colonial power inscribes itself onto the body and space of its Others and which continues as an often occulted tradition into the modern theatre of neo-colonialist international relations.³⁹

The difference between these two broader understandings of the term - the first that relies on temporal hierarchies and one form of power relations being replaced by another; and the other one focusing on a discourse on identity – is reflected in the conflicts regarding on whether or not the term ought to be spelled post-colonialism or postcolonialism. The term post-colonial and postcolonial are often used interchangeably. However, a critique shows that the use of a hyphen more strictly connotes a temporal meaning,⁴⁰ while a non-hyphenated term signals a more

37 Ibid., 101.

38 Ibid., 107.

39 Emphasis original. Stephen Slemon, “Modernism’s Last Post,” *ARIEL* 20, no. 4 (1989): 6.

40 Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Studies*, 189.

discursive approach to the study of identities and power. As Mishra and Hodge state,

When we drop the hyphen, [we then] effectively use “postcolonialism” as an always present tendency in any literature of subjugation marked by a systematic process of cultural domination through the imposition of imperial structures of power [...]. This form of “postcolonialism” is not “post-” something or other but is already implicit in the discourses of colonialism themselves.⁴¹

Throughout this thesis, I use the term postcolonial. In doing so, I do not intend to discard those scholars that choose to compare Soviet territorial expansion with that of Western European powers in order to determine whether the post-Soviet can be defined as postcolonial. Rather, I adopt a broader approach that includes the temporal definitions and engages with authors in the debate that deploy a *post*-colonial definition, but also addresses questions of identity and power that are present in various discourses. In deploying this broader term, I also recognize that it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore both the spatial and the temporal aspect of postcoloniality in the post-Soviet space. In order to assess, I limit the frame of postcolonialism as occurring from the 16th century onwards.⁴² Although the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires fall within this timespan, they do not occupy a central position in the debate, and as such lie beyond the scope of this thesis.

1.2 Literature Review: Contesting the Spatial Limits of Postcoloniality

1.2.1 *The Spatial Origins of Postcolonial Studies*

The so-called Three Worlds theory originated in the aftermath of World War II,⁴³ and it

41 Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, “What Is Post(-)colonialism?,” *Textual Practice* 5, no. 3 (December 1991): 407, doi:10.1080/09502369108582124.

42 Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial’,” 107.

43 Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998), 146.

was intended to offer a new paradigm for understanding geopolitical relations in the global political arena. Pletsch, one of the early and most prominent critics of Three Worlds theory, describes the political nature and hierarchy inscribed in this particular partitioning of world geography.

First, the world has been divided into its 'traditional' and its modern parts. *Then* the modern portion has been subdivided into its 'communist' (or 'socialist') and 'free' parts. [These terms] derive their meaning from their mutual opposition rather than from any inherent relationship to the things described. ... [T]he Third World is the world of tradition, culture, religion, irrationality, underdevelopment, overpopulation, political chaos, and so on. The Second World is modern, technologically sophisticated, rational to a degree ... and ultimately inefficient and impoverished by contamination with ideological preconceptions and burdened with an ideologically motivated socialist elite. The First World is purely modern, a haven of science ..., technological, efficient, ... in short, a natural society unfettered by religion or ideology.⁴⁴

In their analysis of metageographic fallacies, Lewis and Wigen point out that the borders constructed between the “Three Worlds” dramatically differ in character. The boundary between the First and Third World signifies economic difference, while the boundary between First and Second World during the Cold War was meant to primarily highlight political and cultural differences. Both the First/Third World and the First/Second World axes anchor their comparisons against the West. As such, the relationship between the Second World and the Third World are obscured under the Three Worlds paradigm. Furthermore, as mentioned above, initially the First and Second World were conflated and set against the Third World takes primacy over the division between First and Second Worlds, for it creates a mutually constituted dichotomy between the modern, industrialized parts of the world and their traditional and backward counterparts.⁴⁵ We see, that even the economic distinction between First and Third World

44 Emphasis added. Carl E. Pletsch, “The Three Worlds, or the Division of Social Scientific Labor, Circa 1950-1975,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (October 1, 1981): 573–574, doi:10.2307/178394.

45 Chari and Verdery, “Thinking Between the Posts,” 18.

(sometimes equated with the global North/global South binary) carries with it discourses about culture and progress that privilege a Eurocentric viewpoint.

The Three Worlds theory has been subject to many critiques and few would argue for its conceptual validity or accuracy. However, despite its evident oversimplification and essentialization, the theory has been underlying many disciplinary approaches to specific area studies and beyond. Pletsch argues that during the geopolitical division of the world into three seemingly monolithic part not only shaped but divided social scientific approaches. In what he labels “the division of social scientific labor,” the mainstream work of several social sciences mapped almost exclusively on the three-world scheme: economists and sociologists focused on studying the First World and ascribed universal validity to their theories as well as positioned themselves as the source of scientific legitimacy, political scientists studied the Second World, and the Third World was seen as a realm of otherness, whereby anthropologists went to discover and describe difference and development studies scholars and professionals brought linear understandings of progress as remedies for what they labeled as underdevelopment.⁴⁶ Although disciplines are no longer wed to area studies so tightly, the legacy of Three World theory continues to underlie much of the broader theoretical angles in social scientific and humanities research agendas.⁴⁷ The epistemological differences in methodological approaches to the Second World constitute perhaps the starkest by-product of Three Worlds theory. The Western social scientific gaze onto the Soviet space did not change significantly after the fall of the Iron Curtain, as countries in the region were deemed “*conceptually* [...] uninteresting [by default]” (emphasis original)⁴⁸ and placed at the “*receiving end* of the tidal waves of theoretical and methodological

46 A succinct interpretation of the implications of Pletsch's critiques for academic divisions can be found in Ibid.; Pletsch, “The Three Worlds, or the Division of Social Scientific Labor, Circa 1950-1975.”

47 Suchland, “Is Postsocialism Transnational?” 838.

48 Waldstein, “Theorizing the Second World: Challenges and Prospects,” 99.

innovations”⁴⁹ (emphasis original). Even after the Cold War geopolitical reality that brought the Three Worlds distinctions to life had disappeared, studies of the Second World have largely overlooked the Second World as a source of unique voices.⁵⁰ Waldstein not only mourns this epistemological silence, but decries the fact that unlike the Third World, whose intellectuals as well as “Third World scholars in the First World” scholars engaging with the Third World succeeded in forging a body of critical approaches that enjoy respect in academia worldwide, “the Second World cannot claim any comparable breakthroughs.”⁵¹ Furthermore, even scholars and movements that profess their own global nature omit Second World particularities from their definitions of the global, effectively seeing as a region that ought to be like the West.⁵²

In the context of the postcolonial and post-Soviet debate, the lack of dialogue between area studies and postcolonial theorists has its roots not only in the geopolitical constellation of the Cold War but also in the ideological affiliations of academics themselves. On the one hand, some Third World countries found allies in Second World countries during the Cold War and the breakdown of the Soviet Union produced much uncertainty about its impact on the political situation, particularly in Palestine and South Africa.⁵³ Thus, the formal end of the Soviet Union brought about anxiety rather than solidarity to many theorists of the Third World, and the boundary between the two was strengthened. On the other hand, it is important to note that the Third World has generally been understood as a source of criticism towards the West, while the post-Soviet region to a certain embodied an admirer of the West.⁵⁴ Not surprisingly, the silence between postcolonial studies and area studies focusing on the post-Soviet sphere is reinforced by

49 Ibid.

50 For more information on the general omission of the Second World particularly in literary criticism see the following special issue of the *Common Knowledge Journal* - Peter Nadas et al., “The Disregardable ‘Second World’: Essays on the Inconstancy of the West,” *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2004).

51 Waldstein, “Theorizing the Second World: Challenges and Prospects,” 100.

52 Suchland, “Is Postsocialism Transnational?,” 838.

53 Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial’,” 105.

54 Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura*, 148–149.

the by now historical ideological split among academics themselves, whereby majority of postcolonial critics tend to be left-leaning and/or subscribe to different strands of Marxism.⁵⁵ Thus many postcolonial criticisms often revolve around various types of socialist alternatives to the issues they encounter on the ground. Such projections stand in stark contrast to the “critical standpoint” that emerged in post-socialist countries, namely a sense of profound skepticism towards “the socialist past and possible socialist futures.”⁵⁶

1.2.2 Expanding the Spatial Dimension of the Postcolonial

As mentioned above, during the past two decades, the former Second World has been rendered largely invisible as a source of knowledge, while the concept of the Third World has persisted despite the fact that the political context that produced it in the first place has since dramatically transformed.⁵⁷ Two aspects of the contemporary treatment of the term Third World ought to be pointed out for the purposes of this work. First, the term postcolonial has replaced the term Third World, and in so doing it initially retained the geographical boundaries of the Cold-War constellation of the region. Second, a cross-disciplinary movement has emerged to reclaim the term Third World as a term signifying a spirit of resistance and thus a return to an anti-colonial approach, rather its power-obscuring postcolonial counterpart.⁵⁸ Furthermore, those reclaiming Third World terminology have sought to escape the anchoring of Third World criticism in references to its position vis-a-vis the West. The term Third World is increasingly a

55 Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?” 117.

56 The ideological underpinnings have been present since the emergence of the postcolonial studies canon. Annas points to Sartre and Fanon's support of the USSR which rendered the anti-colonial model of their time inapplicable to the Soviet experiences of oppression. Annas, “The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics,” 23; Chari and Verdery, “Thinking Between the Posts,” 11.

57 Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura*, 147.

58 Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial’,” 105; Xie Shaobo, “Rethinking the Problem of Postcolonialism,” *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 10.

result of an effort to carve out a niche for Third World criticism without reproducing the primacy of the West.⁵⁹ As this thesis largely speaks to postcolonial studies, I do not use the term Third World with its political connotation, instead I wish to acknowledge the rigid commitment both terms – the Third World and the postcolonial – have to geography. The many disagreements and contestations of the term postcolonial leave the question of spatial boundaries of the Second World untouched. As such both postcolonial studies and their largest critics precipitate a Three Worlds theory legacy in their theoretical approaches.

Although the geographic implications of postcolonial studies appear seemingly straightforward, the notion of the postcolonial hardly included all of the countries belonging to the geographical body of the Third World. Similarly, not all states in the First World were thought of as colonizers and this designation was initially primarily reserved for Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Italy.⁶⁰ Since its rise to prominence in the 1980s, the term postcolonial has experienced a set of three intertwined conceptual expansions pertaining to its geographical scope and its capacity to provide an analysis of identity. First, as one of the hallmarks of postcolonial criticism is the breaking down of binaries, and in particular that of the colonizer/colonized, those Western European countries that participated in direct colonization have been designated as postcolonial. During as well as after the colonial era, members of colonized communities migrated to Western Europe. These diaspora communities thus began to relate to their formal colonial masters in new - yet hardly unproblematic – ways, often resembling colonial power dynamics. For example, the African communities in France to this day form social movements that fight for increased self-governance and organize to challenge racialized policies

59 M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, eds., *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1997), xx.

60 Childs and Williams, *An Introductory Guide to Post-colonial Theory*, 10–12.

imposed upon them by the state.⁶¹ The spread of diaspora movements in the territories of former colonial powers (often understood as Third World presence in the First World) coupled with the racial politics following the colonial era has led many to apply the postcolonial lens to these contexts. Thus, the former colonial powers have come to be referred to as postcolonial. In this way, however, the term postcoloniality still retains a commitment to the temporal framework of European colonial conquests.

The second shift that the term postcolonial has undergone transmits this diaspora-centered critical lens beyond those First World countries directly involved in colonial conquests. In so doing, the term postcolonial experiences a gradual shift away from the temporally-designated condition of having had the experience of either the colonizer/colonized in the more traditional sense. The term simultaneously designates a chronological as well as an epistemological condition.⁶² The racial critique previously applied primarily to France and Britain spreads to First World countries with large diaspora communities, with inconsistent regard to the factors that led to the presence of those communities. It quickly becomes evident that the application of the postcolonial lens in predominantly white countries of the First World does not follow a conceptually consistent pattern and rather becomes a more general tool for the analysis of racial relations. Owing to the legacy of diaspora movements and an overwhelming focus on anglophone literature in postcolonial studies, the geographical expansion of the term postcolonial entailed the inclusion of the so-called settler colonies. In *Empire Writes Back*, one of the most influential texts in postcolonial criticism, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin include Australia, New Zealand,

61 A. Gueye, "The Colony Strikes Back: African Protest Movements in Postcolonial France," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 225–242, doi:10.1215/1089201x-2006-006.

62 Vitaly Chernetsky, *Mapping postcommunist cultures Russia and Ukraine in the context of globalization* (Montreal [Que.]: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 40, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10424236>.

Canada and the United States under the umbrella of the postcolonial.⁶³ Sharpe aptly states that “[W]hen used as a descriptive term for the United States, postcolonial does not name its past as a white settler colony or its emergence as a neocolonial power; rather, it designates the presence of racial minorities and Third World immigrants.”⁶⁴ In addition to settler colonies, Ireland has also made its foray into the realm of postcolonial studies. The admission of Ireland further challenges conceptual clarity of the term postcolonial, for it does not denote racial relations but rather a condition of cultural domination.⁶⁵ As such, Irish postcolonial authors are conceptually closer to those describing British colonial encounters in West Africa than those applying the postcolonial lens in settler colonies.⁶⁶ Ireland occupies a marginal position in postcolonial studies. The reasons for this marginalization appear to be two-fold. First, it is precisely the identification of colonial experience within the binary colonizer/colonized model as opposed to a racial politic. Second, the term postcolonial still subscribes to the adjacence myth.⁶⁷ This adjacence myth condoned the view that the Russian empire's and later the Soviet Union's territorial invasions ought not to be regarded as a form of colonialism.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the idea that relations between two neighboring states or societies cannot be of colonial nature inhibits postcolonial perspective's ability to consistently analyze many egregious cases in contemporary politics.⁶⁹ With Ireland's marginal status in mind, it is evident that the inclusion of settler colonies has made the postcolonial lens

63 Bill Ashcroft, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, New Accents (London ; New York: Routledge, 1989), 131–133.

64 Jenny Sharpe, “Is the United States Postcolonial?: Transnationalism, Immigration, and Race,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 4, no. 2 (1995): 181, doi:10.1353/dsp.1995.0004.

65 In fact, many Irish people migrated to Africa and India where their racial status afforded them a higher social standing. For a more detailed reading of the Irish postcolonial condition see: Declan Kiberd, “Modern Ireland: Postcolonial or European?,” in *Not on Any Map: Essays on Postcoloniality and Cultural Nationalism*, ed. Stuart Murray (Devon, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1997), 81–100.

66 Ibid., 88.

67 The term adjacence myth is used throughout this thesis. Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?,” 119.

68 Ibid.

69 For more detail see McClintock's argument regarding Tibet. McClintock, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism’,” 88.

fixate on a relational power dynamic largely marked by racial or ethnic difference.

The third conceptual specification of the term postcolonial aimed to address the limitations of the racial lens. By focusing on relationships between Third World and First World *within* the First World, such lens obfuscates the historical realities of settler colonies, namely the relations between the settlers and indigenous population. In order to remedy the invisibility of indigenous communities in postcolonial discourses, the term Fourth World emerged in the 1970s.⁷⁰ The Center for World Indigenous Studies defines the Fourth World as “Nations forcefully incorporated into states which maintain a distinct political culture but are internationally unrecognized.”⁷¹ It is beyond the scope of the present work to fully engage the genealogy of Fourth World terminology. However, the fact that the concept of the Fourth World emerges in response to insufficiencies of postcolonial theory to critique racial relations in settler colonies and at the same time uses the language of nations as a counter-narrative turns out to be peculiar in light of the postcolonial interpretations of the former Second World, where theoretical lenses rarely every manage to articulate identity conflicts with respect to racial differences as well as nationalism.

70 Jace Weaver, “Indigenusness and Indigeneity,” in *A companion to postcolonial studies*, ed. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 225.

71 “Background on the Term ‘Fourth World’,” accessed May 20, 2013, <http://cwis.org/GML/background/FourthWorld/>.

Chapter 2: The Analytical Gains and Losses of a Postcolonial Post-Soviet Space

In this chapter, I address the epistemological impetus that motivated the debate in the first place and evaluate to what extent the postcolonial lens manages account for that silence. This chapter consists of three sections. The first section addresses epistemological issues that stem from the negligence of the Second World in theorizing. The second section then focuses on scholars who argue for the designation of the post-Soviet space as a part of the postcolonial. This section illustrates the double standard in the application of postcolonial theory. The third section focuses on the three conceptual blindspots that the debate raises, namely equating nationalist movements from the former Second and Third World, an inconsistent treatment of race as an analytical category, and the homogenization of Russia as the oppressor.

2.1 Postcolonial Lens as an Epistemological Band-Aid for Post-Soviet Studies?

The debate in question constitutes the latest in a series of contestations of the spatial boundaries of the concept of postcolonialism. In addition, it also seeks to further disrupt the legacy of Three Worlds theory by “dismantling ... the historically generated and geographically bounded divisions that have determined scholarly approaches to analyzing people's experiences in different parts of the globe.”⁷² Moore's question about the comparability of post-Soviet and postcolonial realities Moore has prompted journals from various disciplines to publish special issues on the topic,⁷³ and even delineates the conceptual scope of an entirely new journal in the

72 Hana Cervinkova, “Postcolonialism, Postsocialism and the Anthropology of East-central Europe,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48, no. 2 (May 2012): 155, doi:10.1080/17449855.2012.658246.

73 The Anthropology of East Europe Review published a special issue titled “Global Socialisms and Postsocialisms”, the Journal of Postcolonial Writing and the Central Asian Survey have published special issues focusing on the topic. In the field of Russian history, we witnessed the establishment of a new journal altogether –

field of Russian history. A broad range of perspectives has emerged in response to Moore's seminal piece, yet the debate as a whole may be symptomatic of the field of post-Soviet studies as a whole.

The search for legitimacy in Western academia, in other words “the wish to be heard,” stems from the limitations of the major theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of the post-Soviet region. Most of those approaches conceptualize “theory as a tool,”⁷⁴ and thus contain many assumptions of rationalist epistemology, namely “the assumption that a theory can be separated from the theorist.”⁷⁵ However, approaches that recognize the inseparability of knowledge production from the knowledge producer open the space for epistemological contributions from the voices of people and societies that experienced state socialism in the post-Soviet space. Cervinkova captures the epistemological legacy of transitology when she contrasts the terms post-socialism and postcolonialism, “While postcolonialism was born as a project of indigenous epistemological critique of the persistence of colonialism in the postcolonial present with emancipatory/liberatory implications, postsocialism was developed as an analytical tool by Western scholars to analyze the former societies of the Communist bloc.”⁷⁶ As mentioned in the introduction, the term postcolonial has transformed from its chronological definition to denote a certain epistemology. In post-Soviet studies, the transitology framework cemented the temporal nature of the “post” in post-socialism, leaving it with little to no space for developing a political or cultural project. Transitology understood state-socialist histories of Central and Eastern

Ab Imperio – dedicated specifically to the exploration of Russian history from a (post-)colonial perspective. The contributions to these special issues and journals constitute a large part of the debate and are thus cited throughout this thesis.

74 Marysia Zalewski's theoretical typology. Marysia Zalewski, “‘All These Theories Yet the Bodies Keep Piling Up:’ Theories, Theorists, Theorising,” in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, ed. Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

75 Ibid., 342.

76 Cervinkova, “Postcolonialism, Postsocialism and the Anthropology of East-central Europe,” 155.

European societies⁷⁷ as an aberration en route to a Western style democracy,⁷⁸ as opposed to a source of knowledge. Moore's idea of the global postcolonial thus offers an entry point into a notion of the global from which the former Second World has been excluded across a range of disciplines.⁷⁹

The dimension of scholarly politics and the fact that the debate is yet to generate interest on the side of postcolonial scholars raise a familiar paradox. One of the issues with transitology frameworks was precisely the origin of the framework applied. As mentioned above, transitology theories were produced in the West and then transported to and applied *upon* the post-Soviet space. The former First World academia's ability to define what constitutes legitimate knowledge with respect to the Second World has left a kind of epistemological "void" in scholars of and from the post-Soviet space, many of whom see postcolonial theory as a potential remedy. The postmodern anchoring of postcolonial theory immediately makes it suspicious of apriori defined theories that are applied on a pre-defined subject. Instead, postcolonial theorizing offers ways to approach the subject as the source of knowledge and also provides the tools to deconstruct generalizing narratives shaping the subjects' identity. Stenning and Hörschelmann argue that a more consistent epistemological turn is needed in the study of post-socialism, "before any notion of post-socialist difference is subsumed, without question into our broader discussions of capitalism and globalization."⁸⁰ Within the debate, the epistemological need for formerly Second World voices to be heard is thus fulfilled by the application of a postcolonial lens. But can we hope to import its revolutionary potential? To what extent does the postcolonial lens aid us in theorizing from the post-Soviet region? What analytical tropes do we import by its application?

77 These discourses of post-Soviet transition did not target Central Asia and Northern Caucasus.

78 Burawoy and Verdery, *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World*, 4.

79 Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?," 123.

80 Alison Stenning and Kathrin Horschelmann, "History, Geography and Difference in the Post-socialist World: Or, Do We Still Need Post-Socialism?," *Antipode* 40, no. 2 (2008): 312.

Furthermore, does the inclusion of a postcolonial lens help to diminish the legacy of Three Worlds theory in shaping contemporary academic divisions? The different arguments within the debate reveal the extent to which the terms postcolonial and post-Soviet are attached to their respective geographies.

Postcolonial methodology undoubtedly provides a new lens that can be applied to a variety of cases in the post-Soviet region.⁸¹ However, writers in the debate often argue that the possibility of using a postcolonial theory to analyze different issues in the region grants the region as a whole access into the realm of the global postcolonial⁸² and into postcolonial studies as a discipline.⁸³ The notion of a global postcolonial thus implies that the colonial experience has shaped global politics as a whole. I think it is evident that making a case for a postcolonial status (rather than just applying a lens to illuminate new aspects of politics in the region), suggests that there is a desire to be seen as a part of the global. I argue that the above-mentioned need for epistemological recognition of the former Second World is needed, but perhaps it is only the “global” portion of the “global postcolonial” that ought to be strived for. Those who apply the postcolonial lens to the post-Soviet region, view postcolonial theory as spatially limitless, and in so doing they do not acknowledge the specificity of the post-Soviet experience that may be concealed with the use of a postcolonial frame. Scholars that argue for the equivalency of the “posts” in post-Soviet and postcolonial thus analytically stifle the epistemological project without reflecting on its analytical costs.⁸⁴

81 Ibid., 324.

82 Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?,” 123.

83 Dorota Kołodziejczyk and Cristina Șandru, “Introduction: On Colonialism, Communism and East-central Europe – Some Reflections,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48, no. 2 (May 2012): 114, doi:10.1080/17449855.2012.658242.

84 Hladik, “A Theory’s Travelogue: Post-colonial Theory in Post-socialist Space,” 563.

2.2 Viewing the Post-Soviet Space through a Postcolonial Lens

Majority of those who apply the postcolonial lens to the post-Soviet space thus strive to justify the “epistemological adequacy”⁸⁵ of the comparison, and treat that as the entry point into postcolonial studies. They draw two fundamentally different postcolonial parallels between the post-Soviet region and the former colonies in the Third World. In classical postcolonial theory, knowledge and power were mutually reinforcing, thus this colonized/colonizer binary mapped onto the narrative constructions of the civilized/barbaric.⁸⁶ In postcolonial analyses of the post-Soviet region as a whole, the civilized/barbaric and the colonized/colonizer binaries are not applied to the same configurations of center/periphery – a phenomenon that Moore labels “reverse cultural colonization.”⁸⁷ In this section, I focus on two ways in which the postcolonial lens is applied by those who wish to draw direct comparisons to the post-Soviet space and histories.

First, there is a broader community of scholars who use postcolonial theory to analyze the East-West divide within Europe. Those scholars primarily use the orientalist lens to critique cultural constructions of group identity.⁸⁸ It is important to note that the “Orientalism within Europe” scholarship developed independently from the debate. However, some of the key authors of this approach lay the theoretical groundwork for those in the debate who argue for Central and Eastern European postcoloniality on cultural grounds. The broader orientalist scholarship disrupts the narratives embedded at the heart of transitological approaches. Larry Wolff traces the origins

85 Ibid.

86 Waldstein, “Theorizing the Second World: Challenges and Prospects,” 108.

87 I borrow this term from Moore and use it consistently throughout this thesis. Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?” 121.

88 Attila Meleg, *On the East-West Slope: Globalization, Nationalism, Racism and Discourses on Central and Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006).

of the culturally constructed East-West divide to the Enlightenment era.⁸⁹ In so doing he challenges the transitological tenet that Western liberalism is a natural system that Eastern Europe diverted from and ought to return to.⁹⁰ Neumann identifies the the East as an unstable but everpresent phenomena, “[T]he ‘East’ has been cut loose from its geographical point of reference and has become a generalized social marker in European identity formation [...]”⁹¹ In the same vein of thinking, Melegh too identifies the East as a constant signifier of otherness, and argues that the East-West distinction maps onto a civilizational slope, whereby collective groups always compare themselves with relation to the Western center and to an ever more Eastern other.⁹² Melegh highlights that the civilizational slope does not map neatly upon nation-state societies, but is applied to minorities within the state as well. For example, the Roma in Hungary are seen as “too Eastern” and are vilified for their migration into Western Europe prior to the country's accession to the EU.⁹³ However, Melegh does not provide us with a conceptual lens that would allow us to see whether the ways in which the Roma are constructed as Eastern differ from the ways in which national societies geographically situated as being East of the location of the society whose discourse is studied.

Within the debate itself, orientalist analysis is used in a similar vein. For example, Velickovic argues that Central and Eastern European societies as a whole and Eastern European migrants are often orientalized in Western European discourses.⁹⁴ However, she does not allude

89 Larry Wolff and American Council of Learned Societies, *Inventing Eastern Europe the map of civilization on the mind of the enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.05073>.

90 Stenning and Horschelmann, “History, Geography and Difference in the Post-socialist World: Or, Do We Still Need Post-Socialism?,” 320.

91 Iver B Neumann, *Uses of the Other: The “East” in European Identity Formation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 207.

92 Melegh, *On the East-West Slope: Globalization, Nationalism, Racism and Discourses on Central and Eastern Europe*, 106–107.

93 Ibid., 94.

94 Velickovic, “Belated Alliances?,” 170–171.

to the Soviet Union as a former colonizer to justify the parallel between the postcolonial and the postcommunist.⁹⁵ Unlike the majority of proponents of a postcolonial designation for post-Soviet states, Szmagalska-Follis does not argue for the epistemological similarity of postcolonial and post-Soviet contexts, and aims to use the postcolonial lens for its analytical richness.⁹⁶ She argues that the European Union's physical border also reinforces its civilizational characteristics as “an area of freedom, security and justice.”⁹⁷ Two participants in the debate use the orientalist methodological approach to examine relationships *within the state*. Cooke does so in order to examine the cultural constructions of East Germans after the reunification of Germany.⁹⁸ Focusing on Poland, Buchowski shows that notions of civilized and barbaric are no longer based on ethnicity, but rather are embedded in contemporary social relations within the state.⁹⁹ Buchowski argues that economic class is now the chief other in Poland, however, he does not expand upon how such otherizing notions of class and rural origins transcend the state.¹⁰⁰ However, one must be skeptical of Szmagalska-Follis and Buchowski, for they reproduce and reify the conceptual shortcomings of “Orientalism within Europe” that Neumann himself warns against. Neumann acknowledges that “[t]here are many 'Easts'¹⁰¹ in the world” but that his own work focuses on Europe and its “geographically immediate Eastern others.”¹⁰² The relationship between Eastern European others and other orientalized subjects is thus obscured. This both reinforces and redefines the Three World partition. It reinforces it because it further reinforces the

95 I use the term postcommunist here in order to be consistent with Velickovic's own terminology.

96 Szmagalska-Follis, “Repossession: Notes on Restoration and Redemption in Ukraine’s Western Borderland,” 336–337.

97 Ibid., 330.

98 Paul Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification from Colonization to Nostalgia* (Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Berg, 2005), <http://public.eblib.com/EBLPublic/PublicView.do?ptiID=513983>.

99 Michal Buchowski, “The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (July 2006): 463–82.

100 Ibid.

101 Neumann, *Uses of the other*, 15.

102 Meaning Russia and Turkey. Ibid.

idea that the Second and Third World are not related or interconnected. As I discuss in the following chapter, such characterization also redefines the legacy, as it marginalizes the role of Central Asian experiences of socialism. Such epistemological approach although undeniably more open than transitological frameworks creates and rests upon its own others.

The second set of arguments, largely in response to Moore's call for postcolonial analyses of the post-Soviet space, revolves around analyses of the relationship between Russia and the former Soviet states and satellites. In so doing, they seek to replicate the center (metropole)-periphery framework that is often used to analyze relationships between former Western colonial powers and their colonies overseas.¹⁰³ These perspectives often focus on the military, economic, political, cultural, and linguistic effects of Russian policies on their nation-state societies, as well as on the resistance movements that emerged in response to Soviet repression. From a political standpoint, authors point to Russia's imposition of a particular regime. Economically, they emphasize the way in which being a member of the USSR or a Soviet satellite meant an appropriation of a particular regime of production. The cultural case for Soviet colonialism is less clear-cut and becomes a point of contention amongst the critics of a post-Soviet postcolonial designation. In her case study of Romania, Fatu-Tutoveanu argues that the Sovietization project constituted a form of cultural colonialism. She too, makes this claim by arguing that she is able to *verify* the conceptual consistence of Sovietization and colonialism (emphasis added).¹⁰⁴ Unlike other authors, she also argues that “The Stalinization principle [...] was based on the idea that the colonized (or Stalinized) culture *benefits* from a positive, civilizing or freeing influence from a superior culture.”¹⁰⁵ Fatu-Tutoveanu does not take into account the concept of “reverse cultural colonization,” that is particularly apparent in Russia's constructions of Central Europe and are

103 Kołodziejczyk and Șandru, “Introduction,” 113.

104 Fătu-Tutoveanu, “Soviet Cultural Colonialism,” 84.

105 Ibid., 87.

discussed in the following section. From a linguistic standpoint, authors often posit that the use of Russian as a lingua franca and the associated policies that mandated the use of Russian language in various respects throughout the Soviet Union resemble anglophone and francophone effects on former colonies.¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, the linguistic element of colonial oppression is emphasized primarily but not exclusively by scholars of the Baltic region. Another similarity drawn between the Third and Second World experiences is that of independence movements, namely the emergence of nation-states and the end of communist regimes in the satellites as an example of decolonization.¹⁰⁷

Racevskis combines all of the above-mentioned factors as he applies the colonizer/colonized binary to Russian-Baltic relations and argues perhaps most strongly for the postcolonial labeling of Baltics. He states “Clearly, even after the collapse of the Soviet regime, Russia has not given up an ambition traceable back to Peter the Great, which was to displace the [Baltic] populations in order to open up a new and wider window to the West.”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Racevskis asserts that “While the troops are gone today, the presence of Russian nationals is not only evident but could even be considered oppressive today. ... [In Riga] the former colonizers are everywhere in evidence, in terms of their numbers, their economic power, and their ownership of Riga's best real estate.”¹⁰⁹ Racevskis overlooks the effects of Latvian policies on ethnic Russians, such as the denial of citizenship, otherization of Russian speakers in society and limited language rights.¹¹⁰ This excerpt aptly demonstrates what is present in many other

106

Aneta Pavlenko, “Russian as a Lingua Franca,” *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 26 (October 25, 2006), doi:10.1017/S0267190506000055.

107 Adeeb Khalid, “Introduction: Locating the (post-) Colonial in Soviet History,” *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (December 2007): 465, doi:10.1080/02634930802017895.

108 Račevskis, “Toward a Postcolonial Perspective on the Baltic States,” 41.

109 Ibid.

110 Jean-Bernard Adrey, “Minority Language Rights Before and After the 2004 EU Enlargement: The Copenhagen Criteria in the Baltic States,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 26, no. 5

proponents of the post-Soviet as a part of the global postcolonial – a focus on the nation as a homogeneous group and the nation-state as a successful project of Soviet decolonization. The risk of casting Russia as the “center” of the Soviet empire not only flattens our perspective in accessing the contemporary racial and ethnic politics in the region, but it vilifies the Russian society as a whole.¹¹¹

The problem of “reverse cultural colonization” constitutes one of the greatest points of disagreement in the debate. Before I move to the counter-arguments, I would like to present the way in which reverse cultural colonization is peculiarly articulated as non-problematic by some of the proponents of postcoloniality in the post-Soviet region. Clare Cavanagh's piece titled “Postcolonial Poland” aptly illustrates the way in which this differential application of the postcolonial toolbox becomes conflated. Cavanagh points to Joseph Conrad's Polish origins and argues that Polish people, artists and writers in particular, possess “a postcolonial sensibility” which ought to grant them access to contribute to postcolonial scholarship. Interestingly enough, in Cavanagh's term the postcolonial sensibility stems from their experience as “colonized subject[s],”¹¹² yet she maintains that they can contribute by critiquing issues of civility and barbarity. Specifically, she states “[People from] the Second World have [...] proven [to be] adroit interpreters of imperial power and its aftermath.”¹¹³ Within this broad characterization, postcoloniality is understood as a global if not a universal phenomenon, for an experience of any kind of colonialism equips one with epistemological tools to interpret it elsewhere. Both applications of postcoloniality, however, call for the entrance into postcolonial studies, by highlighting the similarities as points of justifying the comparison between the postcolonial and

(September 15, 2005): 454–455, doi:10.1080/01434630508668416.

111 Snochowska-Gonzalez, “Post-colonial Poland - On an Unavoidable Misuse,” 4–6.

112 Cavanagh, “Postcolonial Poland,” 83.

113 Ibid., 92.

the post-Soviet.

2.3 Resisting the Universalization of the Postcolonial Condition¹¹⁴

The orientalist lens, when applied within Europe alone, has yielded new insights into the study of identity. On the other hand, the characterization of Russia as an equivalent to the traditional colonial centers such as France or Britain has come under much academic scrutiny. In addition, “reverse cultural colonization” has come to the center of critiques of the postcolonial lens in the post-Soviet space. It is the concept of “reverse cultural colonization” that, if unchallenged would grant too easy of an access to the global postcolonial, and would narrow rather than widen the intellectual horizons that the debate brings.¹¹⁵ In particular, the fact that the post-Soviet region shares a common, although not undifferentiated, legacy of a specific state regime that brought about a range of social, cultural, political and economic conditions. How does the geographically-rooted post-Soviet experience in its material as well as discursive ways influence and interact with various facets of people's identities? While some of the critics of integrating the post-Soviet into the global postcolonial critics do comment on the topics of whether or not Soviet imperialism is equivalent or a variant of colonialism,¹¹⁶ most do not choose to tackle this issue on grounds of epistemological adequacy. Rather, various critics – both those interested in nuancing the analytical lens proposes and those completely opposed to it – focus on

114 This is a paraphrase of Moore's idea of the pervasiveness of postcoloniality in the global arena. Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?,” 123.

115 Ibid., 116.

116 Hladik argues that this is the primary issue with Moore's call for a global postcolonial critique. Such discussions usually hinge upon whether or not the post-Soviet experience can be framed to fit a particular definition of colonialism. Annus discusses the differences between colonialism and an occupation and argues that the former Soviet states and satellites were initially occupied and gradually colonized. Lazarus argues that colonialism and Soviet invasions constitute dramatically different processes, and as such the post-Soviet ought not to be seen as a part of the postcolonial. Hladik, “A Theory's Travelogue: Post-colonial Theory in Post-socialist Space,” 568; Epp Annus, “The Conditions of Soviet Colonialism,” *Interlitteraria* 16, no. 2 (2011): 442–443; Neil Lazarus, “Spectres Haunting: Postcommunism and Postcolonialism,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48, no. 2 (May 2012): 117–129, doi:10.1080/17449855.2012.658243.

assessing the analytical gains and losses and point to the perspective's limitations.

In this section, I summarize the major conceptual blindspots that the application of a postcolonial lens to the post-Soviet space engenders. The revolutionary impact of postcolonial theory lay largely in its synergy of human experience, critique of power, culture and race. In particular, postcolonial theory as a whole has enabled intersectional analysis that accounts for gender, race and class.¹¹⁷ Although some post-Soviet scholars in the debate aim for “a rethinking of agency in the production of historiographies and global discourses about the nature of the world,”¹¹⁸ categorizing of the post-Soviet realm as a postcolonial space has sparked much critique, instead of an epistemological revolution that would both address the silence of the Second World, yet evade the danger of reifying Three Worlds theory. The critiques presented below unveil some of the epistemological limitations, yet they do not offer a coherent alternative to the postcolonial lens. I argue that the critiques point to but do not resolve the way in which a postcolonial lens in the post-Soviet space has so far obscured the relationship between the nation-state/nationalism and race. Furthermore, despite the significance of feminist postcolonial thought both within and outside postcolonial studies, the theoretical contributions of feminist thinkers have been mentioned but not incorporated into the application of the postcolonial lens in the post-Soviet space. This is peculiar at best, as the nation-state and nation-building constitute the building blocks of postcolonial interpretation as well as its critiques, and gender tends to lie at the center of nationalist discourses.¹¹⁹

The first of three conceptual blindspots surrounds the question of nationalism. Although nationalist movements in Third World countries differed significantly from those in the former

117 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 64.

118 Jill Owczarzak, “Introduction: Postcolonial Studies and Postsocialism in Eastern Europe,” *Focaal* 2009, no. 53 (March 15, 2009): 12, doi:10.3167/fcl.2009.530101.

119 Jamie Munn, “National Myths and the Creation of Heroes,” in *The “Man” Question in International Relations*, ed. Marysia Zalewski and Jane L Parpart (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998), 143–161.

Second World, this difference is rarely ever accounted for in postcolonial categorization of the post-Soviet.¹²⁰ The difference, according to Annus is that in the case of the former Soviet union the subordinated groups already had a state or formed a national consciousness at the time of Soviet occupation,¹²¹ which dramatically distinguishes them from the former colonies. Broadly speaking, Annus argues that a nation-state cannot be colonized in the classical meaning of the term and converges with Lazarus who argues that independence movements “enabled formerly colonial societies to represent themselves as nation states in a world of nation states.”¹²² Rather than arguing whether a nation-state can or cannot fit the definition of a colonized subject, Velickovic turns our attention to the analytical cost of not distinguishing the forms of nationalism in the post-Soviet space and those in the former colonies. When the postcolonial designation is assigned, particularly when it seeks to designate Russia as the colonizer and the former Soviet states and satellites as their victims, the “positive aura of [anti-colonial nationalism]”¹²³ in the former Third World is transported into the post-Soviet world to legitimate forms of nationalism that are far from positive.

Second, directly transporting the postcolonial resistance lens this way misses a crucial difference in the forms of oppression inflicted on societies in the Soviet space and the former Western European colonies. In the latter case, casting a racial group as uncivilized provided political legitimacy for Western powers to invade and dominate the local society. Therefore, oppression in a broader sense was inflicted on the basis of race and through racialized discourses. While in the context of socialist regimes, as Tlostanova argues, “[R]ace and racism have been

120 Chari and Verdery, “Thinking Between the Posts,” 17; Hladik, “A Theory’s Travelogue: Post-colonial Theory in Post-socialist Space,” 576; Velickovic, “Belated Alliances?” 167.

121 Annus, “The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics,” 34.

122 Lazarus, “Spectres Haunting,” 121.

123 Velickovic, “Belated Alliances?” 167.

supplanted [...] by class or ideology, seldom by ethnicity.”¹²⁴ Hladik goes on to highlight that socialist regimes did not distribute power along racial lines “Can a Party membership card truly function in the same manner as white skin?”¹²⁵ In so doing, he looks within the nation-state itself and begins to unravel the ways in which the importing of a postcolonial lens has led to the purging of its potential for racial critique, and as a result a concealing of racial and ethnic politics within contemporary post-Soviet states. As highlighted in the previous sections, orientalism has been used as a lens to critique constructions of ethnicity within the state. However, the debate as it presently stands hinges upon nation-state borders and struggles to conceptualize multiple identities in transnational terms. Pavlenko notes the political implications of the term Russian diaspora as opposed to a Russian national minority, as the first denotes the group's connection to Russia and allegedly diminishes its belonging to the state in which they presently live.¹²⁶ But is the classification of a Russian diaspora really bad for the community itself? Or is the transnational aspect, the idea that a community does not follow the territorial borders of the state, a threat to the nation-state? Without accounting for the specificity of the historical experience of ideology, subsuming the post-Soviet experience under the postcolonial umbrella gives way to “right-wing, nationalistic narratives.”¹²⁷ Making the imposition of a political regime parallel with the racist enterprise of colonialism does not advance our understanding of the post-Soviet politics, for it glorifies its nationalist movements at the expense of racial critique. This analytical hurdle cannot be overcome without a thorough challenging of “reverse cultural colonization,” which relies on orientalizing as occurring in accordance with nation-state boundaries and lacks a conceptualization of race in the contemporary global context.

124 Madina Tlostanova, “Postsocialist ≠ Postcolonial? On post-Soviet Imaginary and Global Coloniality,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48, no. 2 (May 2012): 132, doi:10.1080/17449855.2012.658244.

125 Hladik, “A Theory’s Travelogue: Post-colonial Theory in Post-socialist Space,” 578.

126 Pavlenko, “Russian as a Lingua Franca,” 92.

127 Snochowska-Gonzalez, “Post-colonial Poland - On an Unavoidable Misuse,” 709.

The third blindspot appears to lie in the implications of postcolonial post-Soviet theorizing on our understanding of Russia. The framing of Russia as the oppressor and the other states as its victims fundamentally misses the fact that Russia imposed oppressive policies on its own people.¹²⁸ As such they can hardly be said to have benefited from the Soviet expansion the same way the British or the French did from their colonies. Therefore, instead of building an epistemological framework that would no longer reproduce the silence of the Second World, those who strictly propose a postcolonial framework only shrink the Second World silence to Russia itself, and homogenize it in a similar way that postcolonial discourses used to homogenize the West.¹²⁹ The “Orientalism within Europe” critiques have demonstrated the cultural othering of Russia, and Snochowska-Gonzalez argues that this otherization is reproduced in some of the postcolonial interpretations of Central and Eastern European states.¹³⁰ Neumann's notion of “many Easts” helps us highlight the limits of the application of the postcolonial lens. It is acknowledged that the European “East” is not orientalized in the same way that many other Easts are, namely that “Eastern Europe serve[s] as the West's intermediary 'Other,' neither fully civilized, nor fully savage.”¹³¹ Our understanding of Russia is only partially illuminated by postcolonial critiques in the debate, and Central Asia's specificity is rarely ever incorporated into the analyses of the post-Soviet world in postcolonial critiques.

Together these blindspots demonstrate that the specificities and the diversity of the post-Soviet space is not fully accounted for by the postcolonial lens so far. Snochowska-Gonzalez suggests that at times that while at times that can be attributed to shortsighted research, it is also a legacy of postcolonial reasoning itself, that further complicates the development of an

128 cite
 129 Lazarus, look up pg no.
 130 snochowska-gonzalez
 131 Owczarzak, “Introduction,” 4.

epistemological lens that would incorporate a notion of post-Soviet legacy without disconnecting other facets of identity (race, gender, class) by thinking without nation-state and Three Worlds borders.¹³² I argue that the emerging critique of race needs to be expanded, as to account for the global nature of racial relations, as well as to better understand the role race played within the (post-)Soviet space itself. Furthermore, the focus on the nation and nation-state does not take into account the gendered nature of nationalist movements, and as such is prone to romanticizing regime change in the post-Soviet Space.

In the closing paragraph of this chapter, I offer an example that captures the confluence of race and gender in the study of post-Soviet space and highlights the need for a more critical lens for the study of race, gender, and nation in the region. Thompson's book *Imperial Knowledge* has attracted a wide range of critics, of which Snochowska-Gonzalez is perhaps the most fervent one. However, it is interesting that despite the negative attention that Thompson has received, the chapter in which she claims to deconstruct postcolonial theory, in fact the closing chapter of her book, has not generated any critique. This is symptomatic not only of the blindspots that the particular application of postcolonial theory in post-Soviet realm has produced, but also of the shortcomings of the debate. Thompson embraces the postcolonial theoretical tenet in which imperial literature disperses the Center's power position by otherizing the periphery. Interestingly enough, the chapter in which she discusses this phenomenon touches upon Central Asia as the periphery of the Soviet Union as well as women as the ultimate Other. Thompson analyses the works of Russian writer Petrushevskaja, who she understands to be a Russian postcolonial author.¹³³ Petrushevskaja is the epitome of the complexity of *reverse cultural colonization*, as she disagrees with Russia's imperial behavior towards so many ethnic groups, yet her writing also

132 Cite snochowska-Gonzalez

133 Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*, 218.

expresses an adoration of Central European nations.¹³⁴ In so doing she does two things – does not theorize Petrushevskaja's own identity as an ethnic Russian as a position of power vis-a-vis Central Asians, and instead designates her gender as the status of her postcoloniality.¹³⁵ Thompson's claim thus carries a dangerous implication that all women are somehow postcolonial, as long as they speak against the Center. This goes against one of the core claims of postcolonial feminist theory – intersectionality – namely that identities and the power they signify cannot be separated. The problematic nature of Thompson's analysis of Petrushevskaja reflects the issues that the debate as a whole struggles with, namely the undertheorization of racial otherization and non-theorized link between gender and other forms of identity within the post-Soviet space.

134 Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*, 215.

135 Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*, 214–216.

Chapter 3: Viewing the Post-Soviet through a Transnational Feminist Lens: Connecting Nation, Race, and Gender

In this final chapter, I demonstrate that *reverse cultural colonization* cannot reconcile the concepts of nation, and race without binding itself to a specific continent or region. Therefore, the post-Soviet space's admission into the *global* postcolonial that some advocate for is made global through the symbolic inclusion of all nation-states, but ultimately based in obscuring the links between them. In severing these links, the postcolonial post-Soviet rubric blocks any space for theorizing gender beyond the nation-state (a critique that is not done, but nevertheless made possible within the conceptual bounds as they are currently set up). However, since the USSR promoted a specific gender regime, a gender-blind approach reinforces the partitioning of the post-Soviet space into its European and Asian parts. The postcolonial lens thus carries within it analytical tropes that significantly limit epistemological approaches to the post-Soviet space. Therefore, I propose that scholars that wish to create a coherent framework through which the epistemological silence of the Second World can be reconciled, ought to strive for inclusion in notions of what constitutes the global, without falling prey to analytical categories that have been conflated in postcolonial theory. I propose that the transnational feminist lens is better suited for engaging with the post-Soviet space, as it can more openly admit the specific configuration of nation, race, and gender in the region and connect it to transnational processes. The transnational feminist lens remedies two conceptual drawbacks that the debate has struggled with - plurality and positionality (quote women and the nation). It is through this lens that the specificity of the post-Soviet experiences can not only be included, but viewed in the context of global identity politics that are influenced by but do not follow bordered divisions, be it Three Worlds theory or the nation-state. Transnational feminism draws on feminist postcolonial criticism but moves

beyond some of its foundational categories and is thus conceptually more malleable. It is this malleability, the ability to problematize the conflation of the West with “white” and the East and South with “color” (cite the book), that allows us to bring the Second World configuration whereby racial privilege does not map neatly on the East-West divide.

This chapter is further divided into two sections. In the first section, I build on the critiques of race and nation that the debate has already brought up. I argue that the post-Soviet context cannot accommodate the simultaneous use of postcolonial criticism to its nation-building and racial political histories. Therefore, the applicability and consistency of the postcolonial lens in the post-Soviet space depends upon maintaining an East-West (First World/Third World) boundary within the post-Soviet space itself – between “European” post-Soviet experiences and “Asian” post-Soviet experiences. The very dependence on this border suggests that the postcolonial lens, while opening doors to new epistemological approaches, cannot be used to effectively solve the epistemological silence of the Second World. In the second section, I highlight the complex nature of gender in the post-Soviet space and emphasize the way that women and men have experienced socialism and post-socialism cannot be divorced from their national, racial and ethnic identities. Neither the gendered nature of nationalism or the socialist regime and the subsequent post-socialist politics can be captured by a lens that privileges the nation-state and obscures transnational linkages. Then, I move to articulate the basic tenets of transnational feminism and articulate the ways in which this lens can be applied to the post-Soviet context. I show how centering our analysis on the individual allows us to consider but move beyond the state. Investigating the post-Soviet space through a transnational feminist lens forms the channel through which the transnational lens itself can benefit.

3.1 The Problem of Race and the Nation

Although the postcolonial lens is not an inherently state-based lens and allows us to investigate questions of difference by focusing on the individual and their multiple identities, that is not the way in which it has been applied in the postcolonial post-Soviet scholarship. The fact that the postcolonial lens is selectively applied to either critique racial constructions of entire nations and within the bounds of the (not any less constructed, constantly shifting) European continent, or looks at nation-state relations with former Russia suggests that the post-Soviet context runs up against significant conceptual challenges. While the methodological value of postcolonial approaches is certainly illuminating, it also limits our understanding of the role that a post-Soviet past may play as an element of identity in the global context. Given the conceptual struggles it might indeed be the case that transporting the postcolonial lens, while disrupting the linearity of many transitological approaches, may not provide an epistemological window wide enough to capture the specificity of the context. In other words, the very transportation of postcolonial analytical tenets covers the specificity of the post-Soviet context and further reinforces the bounded thinking embedded in Three Worlds theory. The ability of postcolonial theory to investigate processes of othering within the state as well as across the continent is thus profoundly limited.

3.1.1 The Racialized Underpinnings of the Marginalization of Central Asia

When it comes to postcolonial theorizing of the post-Soviet space, the case of Central Asia does not present the issue of *reverse cultural colonization*, as in fact it fits the “customary opposition of civilized metropolis and barbaric or primitive periphery typical of the traditional view of colonial relationships.”¹³⁶ Khalid suggests that the characteristics of Central Asian history

136 Račevskis, “Toward a Postcolonial Perspective on the Baltic States,” 38.

lend themselves to a postcolonial framing rather easily, since

[...] Central Asia was a region conquered by a European empire in the 19th century [...]. It was easy to see the emergence of the five new states in 1991 as delayed decolonization, with the experience of the new states *directly comparable* with those of the 'Third World', and the Soviet Union *directly comparable* with other European colonial empires.¹³⁷ (emphases added)

Therefore we see that Central Asia was invaded at a time when national consciousness has not been established, a precondition often invoked in Third-World-driven definitions of postcolonialism. Kandiyoti demonstrates that reverse cultural colonization does not appear in the context of Central Asia, "Any ambiguities in self-perception the Russian empire may have experienced in relation to the 'West' disappeared entirely when its gaze turned southward toward its own 'Orient.' Soviet policies in Central Asia [can be] unambiguously defined as a vigorous modernizing drive in 'backward' societies."¹³⁸ Based on analyses of Russian literature, it appears that Central Asians were in fact orientalized in popular Russian culture.¹³⁹ Despite the myriad of conceptual similarities of Central Asian and Russian relations to the basic tenets of anti-colonial and postcolonial theorizing, Central Asia occupies a marginal position in the debate. This occurrence is peculiar, as most advocates for the application of the postcolonial lens argue precisely on the basis of the resemblance of Russia's behavior to that of England or France in the colonial era. So how come the arguably "easiest" example of post-Soviet resemblance to

137 Khalid, "Introduction," 465.

138 Deniz Kandiyoti, "The Politics of Gender and the Soviet Paradox: Neither Colonized, nor Modern?," *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (December 2007): 606, doi:10.1080/02634930802018521.

139 Thompson analyzes Solzhenitsyn's work and argues that he portrays Uzbeks as "immature human beings." She suggests that the contemporary Uzbek perceptions of the Russian minority mirror the views that formerly colonized peoples have of their colonizers, "At the end of the twentieth century in the capital of Uzbekistan, a hospital owned by Moscow would be perceived by the local inhabitants as a *foreign* hospital, one serving the Russian minority, a reminder of the colonial domination or (most unlikely) one established by a Russian charity. By imposing a Russian perspective on the land of the Uzbeks in the 1960s Solzhenitsyn placed himself in the same imperial camp that houses those English and French writers who presented Africa with paternalistic arrogance." Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*, 124.

postcolonial realities does not figure in the most prominent calls for the region's postcoloniality? The marginalization of Central Asia within a discourse that departs from the point of postcolonial *similarities* signals that a difference is at play. Namely, that many scholars of Central and Eastern Europe see their (post-)Soviet experience as fundamentally different from that of Central Asia. Therefore, a consideration of the Central Asian experiences does not offer them the conceptual similarity they need in order to claim a postcolonial status.

This conceptually odd privileging of Central and Eastern Europe as the defining region of the post-Soviet experience signal a profoundly racialized East-West divide within the debate itself.¹⁴⁰ The reluctance to engage with Central Asia and Northern Caucasus in the debate reflects a broader societal phenomenon. While scholars argue for the postcolonial status of some countries with respect to Russia, they openly acknowledge that they do not think the term postcolonial will gain much power on the ground, as Central and Eastern European national societies do not want to see their processes of colonization as equivalent to those of Third World nations. Proponents of the postcolonial labeling of the post-Soviet region do acknowledge that the people in the Baltics themselves are not interested in a “global postcolonial,” but rather in the ability to assign a binary colonizer-victim label to their relationship with Russia. As Kelertas states, “Preferring to think of themselves as superior to other colonized peoples ..., the Balts find being lumped together with the rest of colonialized humanity unflattering, if not humiliating, and want to be with the 'civilized' part of the world.”¹⁴¹ Such sentiments are informed by orientalizing and racializing the “non-European” regions. Therefore, Orientalism within the post-Soviet sphere itself is not addressed, and the debate thus perpetuates Eurocentric tropes postcolonialism as a

140 Suchland, “Is Postsocialism Transnational?,” 856.

141 Kelertas, *Baltic Postcolonialism*, 4.

whole is often criticized for.¹⁴²

3.1.2 Race and Ethnicity in the Service of the Nation

In order to move away from the Eurocentric bias of the post-Soviet postcolonial debate, a closer interrogation of the role of race in Soviet and post-Soviet histories is necessary. In this section, I seek to highlight the racial diversity of the post-Soviet space in light of the role of race in predominantly white societies of Central and Eastern Europe. Viewing them side by side enables us to see that race plays an undeniable role in the sustenance of nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe. As such, a race-conscious analysis of the post-Soviet space can bring enriching critiques to light, as it can show the role racial difference played in the experiences of the Soviet rule. First, I will look into the racial diversity of the former Soviet Union and look at ways that postcolonial theorists have approached it. The Soviet Union, despite its proclaimed celebration of nations was profoundly racialized.¹⁴³ As Sahadeo shows, the Soviet Union itself privileged the whiteness of Central and Eastern Europeans in their representations of Soviet ideals.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, the lived conditions of Central Asians and Northern Caucasians who migrated into the Russian ‘metropolis’ were profoundly impacted by the ways in which their identities were profoundly racialized.¹⁴⁵ While there are parallels between Central Asian, Northern Caucasian, and Central and Eastern European nationalisms – namely the vilification of the Russian ‘metropolis’ – the presence of white privilege within the former Soviet Union itself as well as in its post-Soviet follower cannot be subsumed. Postcolonial theory provides us with tools to capture this racialized nature of the debate itself, but it does not allow us to resolve it. The marginalization of Central Asia, as suggested by Kelertas’ assessment of Baltic public

142 A worry that McClintock expresses throughout her piece. McClintock, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism’.”

143 Kandiyoti, “The Politics of Gender and the Soviet Paradox,” 606.

144 Jeff Sahadeo, “‘Druzhiba Narodov’ or Second-class Citizenship? Soviet Asian Migrants in a Post-colonial World,” *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (December 2007): 561, doi:10.1080/02634930802018463.

145 Ibid., 560.

opinion, can thus be interpreted as relegating Central Asia to the realm of the Third World. Such framing would merely reinforce Three Worlds theory and attempt to account for the Second World silence by partitioning the Second World to fit the First World/Third World binary that is so central to postcolonial studies.

The overall debate casts issues of postcolonialism largely in an international lens – as relationships between monolithic nation-state societies. Although some authors have opened the lid of the state, they did so in focusing on the local and in so doing, drew borders around the state.¹⁴⁶ The racialization of minorities, while often occurring with national politics can hardly ever be considered a phenomenon confined to the state. It is important to note that the public discourse surrounding race in Central and Eastern European countries has been very biological and simplistic, and has thus centered discussions of difference around ethnicity rather than race.¹⁴⁷ In a powerful critique of Central and Eastern European nationalisms, Imre argues that nationalism is rooted in the pursuit and claiming of a stable territory and narrating its enemies as either not being of the territory or emphasizing their transnational links.¹⁴⁸ Imre too posits that the denial of race, only serves to perpetuate racial differences and justify them through other narratives, she gives the example of the Roma in Hungary, “Hungarian nationalism has to insist on the act of territorial settlement as a distinctive event and on locking Gypsies into stereotypes that characterize them as 'still' nomadic, backward, and genetically averse to 'progress'.”¹⁴⁹

Therefore, the maintenance of whiteness plays an essential role in the constitution of

146 Melegh, *On the East-West Slope: Globalization, Nationalism, Racism and Discourses on Central and Eastern Europe*; Buchowski, “The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother.”

147 A. K. Alamgir, “Race Is Elsewhere: State-socialist Ideology and the Racialisation of Vietnamese Workers in Czechoslovakia,” *Race & Class* 54, no. 4 (March 28, 2013): 73, doi:10.1177/0306396813476171.

148 Aniko Imre, “Whiteness in Post-Socialist Eastern Europe: The Time of the Gypsies, the End of Race,” in *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*, ed. Alfred J. Lopez (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005).

149 Ibid., 88.

national consciousness of Central and Eastern European nations.¹⁵⁰ Imre's argument fits into the broader transnational feminist framework that articulates the nation as follows, “[I]t is through racialization, sexualization, and genderization that the nation is able to ... become a timeless homogenized entity.”¹⁵¹ The post-Soviet space as well as the global environment as a whole is characterized by transnational communities that cannot be separated, as many identities converge within the same subject. Imre's analysis of whiteness in Eastern Europe, together with the racial diversity of post-Soviet spaces highlights the need to conceptualize minority issues outside of the nation-state framework. As Khalid states, race remains under-researched in post-Soviet studies, “We know rather little about how ‘race’, as was constructed in practice, how interethnic relations took place in the everyday life, and how Soviet citizens experienced ethnic and racial difference.”¹⁵² Racial relations and racialization remain to be under-researched in the post-Soviet region, and the application of the postcolonial lens cannot serve to capture the transnational nature of race. It is therefore evident, that a postcolonial lens conceptually sanctions nationalism in the post-Soviet space and in so doing conceals the negative effects of nationalism within as well as outside the state, prompting migration movements and condoning discrimination. The discourse so far has positioned the post-Soviet citizens as having a single identity (not allowing for a *plurality* of identities), and only that of the nation.¹⁵³ Furthermore, the postcolonial lens in the post-Soviet context prohibits us from accessing any notion of *positionality* beyond locating someone on the East-West slope either between states or within the state itself.¹⁵⁴

150 Ibid., 80.

151 Daiva K. Stasiulis, “Nationalisms, Racisms, and Feminisms,” in *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, ed. Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, and Minoo Moallem (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1999), 7.

152 Khalid, “Introduction,” 470.

153 I adopt the term plurality from Stasiulis' notion of transnational feminism. Stasiulis, “Nationalisms, Racisms, and Feminisms,” 183.

154 The term positionality is also adopted from Stasiulis. Ibid.

3.2 Transnational Feminism: A different ‘global’

Driven by an epistemological silencing of the Second World, the debate as a whole seeks to determine an approach that would capture the specificity of the region without isolating it from the global. In theorizing this silence through a postcolonial lens, the scholars in question have privileged the ‘postcolonial’ at the expense of the region’s history of socialist regimes. The postcolonial lens has been applied in selective ways. Proponents of the postcolonial lens do not see this selectivity as grounds for finding an alternative lens, but rather embrace the concept of reverse cultural colonization, implying that the postcolonial nature of the post-Soviet space is specific yet does not warrant exclusion from the global postcolonial. I understand this selectivity not as an exception to the rule,¹⁵⁵ but rather as the point of departure for new epistemological approaches. The transnational feminist framework also claims to include the entirety of the globe’s geography as the subject of study. I argue that the transnational feminist notion of the global provides a more open, albeit not unproblematic epistemological lens to the study of the post-Soviet space in the global context, than what the notion of the global in global postcolonialism offers.

Transnationalist feminism does not have an unproblematic relationship with the Second World. The socialist regimes in the former Soviet Union have been undeniably gendered in character. Western liberal feminists (similarly to their interpretations of postcolonial contexts) rushed in to compare the situation during and following state-socialism against the backdrop of liberal feminist tropes. Three Worlds theory can be detected in Western feminist approaches to the region in the first decade following the transitions. Western liberal feminists have carried the liberal bias and often approached the situation of post-Soviet women in a patronizing manner.¹⁵⁶

155 Waldstein, “Theorizing the Second World: Challenges and Prospects,” 113.

156 Frances Elisabeth Olsen, “Feminism in Central and Eastern Europe: Risks and Possibilities of American

Consistent with the idea that the East is waiting to become like the West, which is positioned as the standard, such approaches framed post-Soviet women in deterministic transitological terms, neglecting the way in which the experiences of women from the region could provide new insights for feminism as a whole.¹⁵⁷ The status of women in post-Soviet states offered a less favorable picture of the political transformation that was so welcome in the West. The fact that with the transition the conditions for women in post-Soviet states actually worsened¹⁵⁸ and that some of the policies under the Soviet Union could be labeled as “women-friendly”¹⁵⁹ contradicted the image of vilified socialism and glorified liberalism. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully engage the complexities of women’s lives under socialist regimes, as the chief concern is rather the development of a lens that can detect these experiences. However, the widespread reluctance to feminism as a political category in post-Soviet spaces does not signal backwardness as some would argue, but rather fundamentally different conditions in which gender issues in the post-Soviet realm are embedded in.¹⁶⁰

Although transnational feminism has not managed to evade Three Worlds theory itself, I argue that it is more suited to accommodate the regions epistemological specificity and break away from Three Worlds theory than the postcolonial lens does. Suchland attributes the analytical remnants of Three Worlds theory to transnational feminism’s ties to postcolonial theorizing in US feminist movements.¹⁶¹ Transnational feminism allows us to simultaneously engage a critique of race and nation. A gendered critique of the nation alone, would not be sufficient, as nationalist movements can both benefit or harm women. The experience of nationalism thus largely depends

Engagement,” *The Yale Law Journal* 106, no. 7 (May 1997): 2218.

157 Ibid.

158 Ibid., 2217.

159 Krassimira Daskalova, “How Should We Name the ‘Women-Friendly’ Acts of State-Socialism?,” in *Aspasia* 2007., ed. Francisca De Haan, Maria Bucur, and Krassimira Daskalova, vol. 1 (Berghahn Books, 2007).

160 Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism a Comparative-historical Essay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 117, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.04390>.

161 Suchland, “Is Postsocialism Transnational?” 850.

on the gendered positioning of the subject vis-a-vis nation, a positionality that is often informed by other identities such as race or sexuality.¹⁶² As the example of Thompson's interpretation of Petrushevskaja highlighted, some feminist lenses rest on a notion that womanhood is global and that all women are connected through their experiences of patriarchy. Transnational feminism does not center its analysis on the gendered body, but rather at the intersection of race, nation, and gender. As Stasiulis states, "The recognition of the power relations reflected in the racial and ethnic multiplicity of women ...[challenges] any attempt to universalize the category 'woman.'"¹⁶³

162 Stasiulis, "Nationalisms, Racisms, and Feminisms," 182.

163 Ibid., 183.

Conclusion

The academic debate on the admissibility and desirability of locating the post-Soviet space within the context of a global postcolonial has generated a debate about the role of geographical subjectivity in postcolonial theory. Although the debate has led to numerous critiques regarding the conceptualization of nation and race within a postcolonial post-Soviet framework, such critiques tend to merely denounce the use of the postcolonial lens without providing a cohesive lens that could serve to address the silencing of the former Second World. By furthering the critiques of race and nation, I demonstrated that the fact that the post-Soviet space when articulated in postcolonial terms rests on the nation-state as a unit of analysis, and cannot move beyond the local-global dichotomy. Within this frame, race becomes visible either as a characteristic of nations as a whole and the relationships between them, or as an identity characteristic within the state. This division is political in nature as it diminishes the transnational nature of identities by ultimately subscribing to the nation-state as an ideal-type of social organization. While the breakdown of the Soviet union is generally understood as a positive landmark in the histories of post-Soviet societies, a gendered reading of the fall of the Iron Curtain demonstrates that the democratization process as well as nationalist movements was far less uniform. A solely gender critique of the nation would likely not take into account the differentiated experiences based on race and ethnicity. Therefore, in order to move beyond the nation-state, a lens that can connect race, nation, and gender without privileging any one of those components over the others is needed. Therefore, I propose that the transnational feminist lens ought to be used to theorize from the post-Soviet space.

The transnational feminist lens allows us to focus on the post-Soviet world without isolating it from the global context, which is in itself affected by transnational racial and gendered linkages.

Therefore, it allows for a notion of the global that can capture the historicity of the region without forcing it into preconceived conceptual confluences of what constitutes the West, the East, whiteness, etc. In this way, transnational feminism is not conceptually indebted to Three Worlds theory as strongly as postcolonial theorizing is. By decentering the category of the nation-state in theorizing, transnational feminism focuses on the individual as the subject of inquiry and views the nation as only a facet of identity. Transnational feminism cannot be immune from some of the counter-arguments against the use of postcolonial theory, such as a negligence of including Second World women in the notions of the global or the imbalanced relationship between First World and Second World scholars in academia. However, these obstacles are not inherent to the theoretical tenets of the framework itself.

Further research ought to consider the ways in which transnational feminist methodology can be utilized more frequently in the study of the post-Soviet space, and how it could serve as a cohesive epistemological lens for capturing the region's specificity in the global context. I do not suggest that the postcolonial post-Soviet debate has somehow been closed or finalized with the inclusion of transnational feminism. Rather, I hope the inclusion of a framework outside of postcolonial theory could further expose the analytical gains and losses different lenses engender. Moving the debate beyond the binary of Moore's initial question will allow for the formation of approaches that the region's characteristics can serve to critique established concepts and connections within postcolonial theory. To do so, we need to depart from but not discard postcolonial theory. I hope that further research would thus continue to forge a dialogue between postcolonial theory and other approaches.

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