



## Editorial

# Postcolonial-Postsocialist Decolonial Investigations: A Programmatic Overture

This Special Issue is borne out of a collaboration between the editors that spans the past three years. This collaboration is part of a growing academic and activist network that has emerged in the last few years, grappling with questions around the possibility of creating dialogues between the post-socialist and the postcolonial. These dialogues, famously encouraged by a seminal article 'Thinking Between the Posts' by Chari and Verdery (2009), have been predominantly taken up by Eastern European scholarship inspired by postcolonial and decolonial thinking about Eastern Europe and Eurasia and led to numerous initiatives, workshops and scholarly outputs (Dialoguing between the Posts network; Todorova 1997; Kušić, Lottholz and Manolova 2019; Gržinić, Kancler and Rexhepi 2020; Mark et al. 2019; Boatcă 2007; Țichindeleanu 2011; Tlostanova 2012). We have ignored our common history for a long time where we, at one point, connected with dreams and plans of alternative globalisations (Mark et al. 2019). Eastern Europe looked not decisively and only towards the West but also joined in solidarity with decolonial forces across the Global South. In the last three decades, Eastern Europe has been on a high-speed train towards Western modernity, moving further away from a critique of global capitalism.

Recently emerging decolonial and postcolonial thinking in and about Eastern Europe (as well as Post-Soviet regions of Central Asia) have raised pertinent questions about how modernity, knowledge, and solidarities across borders are understood today. Recently, postcolonial and post-socialist dialogues have been encouraged across geographies, for example, in feminist theorizing and practice, identifying gaps and challenges in thinking together and across Eastern Europe and the Global South (Koobak,

Tlostanova & Thapar-Bjorkert 2021). But as Indian feminist scholar Nivedita Menon (2021:114) points out in the edited collection, for feminists in India, for example, the priority has been to connect with feminisms across the Global South rather than Eastern Europe because 'East Europe is still in many ways seen to have a very different trajectory from India, a First World one, and there is no immediate way in which that experience resonates with ours, especially as East Europe from our perspective, is very much the "West" with its post-Enlightenment baggage. We in India need first to see East Europe as marginal to Europe when we use the term, only then would such dialogues become possible'. Menon's observations on a certain kind of translucence in the way Global South and East Europe (and other European post-socialist spaces) perceive each other is a major political and epistemological challenge for contemporary decolonial and postcolonial thought.

The reverse of Menon's assertion also holds some ground. There is now a rich body of decolonial and postcolonial literature emerging from post-socialist European spaces. Theories on postcoloniality emerging from the Global South have found an analytical acceptance in this impressive literature. However, there is a case to be made that an engagement with postcolonial lived experiences in the Global South that have led to these theorizations is lacking in the decolonial literature emerging from post-socialist Europe. This gives an impression, maybe also an illusion, that postcolonial experiences of the Global South and post-socialist experiences are fundamentally distinct at an affective level and can only be thought of through theoretical abstractions. To find a remedy for this situation both at an empirical as well as theoretical level, we are making a gesture towards a possible "dialogue of conjunctural affects:" concrete situations where it is possible to share specific decolonial and postcolonial experiences across the regions of Global South and Postsocialist Europe. The aspiration of this issue of *Artha* is to create a space where these specific experiences could be brought together and, in the process, also create a condition for the "dialogue of conjunctural affects."

Our contributors in this Special Issue write from these spaces; the post-socialist, the postcolonial and, in one case, the colonial. By giving them a platform where they can share their own local and

regional histories from a post- and decolonial perspective, we hope to start making these connections that will allow them to then think across these contexts, which will be the next step. This doesn't mean that scholars from Eastern Europe and the Global South will necessarily always find overlaps and connections. There will be tensions, challenges, and differences. As Špela Drnovšek Zorko puts forward in her contribution to this volume: 'we don't need to know in advance the contours of the "dialogues" between the postcolonial and the post-socialist' but, she stresses, we can be attentive to ways in which our postness is narrated.

### Articles' Overview

**Špela Drnovšek Zorko's** contribution reflects on the methodological possibilities of "postness" as a space for the convergences of post-socialist and postcolonial encounters in individual stories. Drnovšek Zorko is interested in the aftermath of the two "posts" and how it slips through to present-day encounters. However, she is not prescriptive of what the dialogues should look like, neither is she keen to compare and contrast the postcolonial and the post-socialist. Instead, drawing on intimate migrant narratives, she is alert to how the diasporic space occupied by post-socialist migrants in the UK mobilises narratives of 'postness' through material objects. She exemplifies these through narratives of post-socialist migrants and the way they spoke of the past through material objects, such as 'communist chairs' and contrasted it through encounters with 'colonial objects' in Britain but also 'African masks' in a post-socialist Bulgarian apartment block that brought back memories of convergence of the post-socialist with the postcolonial during the time of state socialism in Eastern Europe. By being attentive to individual narratives of 'postness' by both postcolonial and post-socialist diasporic subjects, Drnovšek Zorko concludes that this has the potential of producing conditions for 'dialogues between the posts' as well as open spaces for migrant resistance to racialised nationalism.

**Irena Šentevska** situates her article in the global context of 'thirdworldization' through tracing the genealogy of Serbian turbo-folk - a genre of popular music that emerged in Serbia in the context of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Šentevska argues that

turbo-folk was once a 'despised' form of entertainment only to later be appreciated as a cultural phenomenon that was significant to the post-socialist context. After initially being pushed aside as 'primitive' in postwar socialist Yugoslavia, turbo-folk was reinvigorated in the 1960s at a time when the region was opening up globally, not least through its involvement in the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM). Šentevska then traces the development of the music genre throughout the post-socialist years and its continued role in the political landscape in the country. In the West, turbo-folk was considered as not meeting the standard of European culture and shunned as something 'alien, unwanted and deeply disturbing'. In contrast, it became popular in the East as an antidote to Western culture that was not always willingly adopted. In this, turbo-folk represents the suppressed voices of those left behind, the subaltern, semi-rural population where modernity hasn't yet arrived. In the Balkans, Šentevska argues, the insistence on high culture shaped by the West actually gave way to something else that was previously considered 'illegitimate' as the new dominant culture. In that sense, Šentevska teases out the decolonial potential of music as a tool that voices suppressed histories and pushes against Western European ideas of what is considered as legitimate culture.

**Eszter Szakács**, in her article, provides a well-grounded critique of decolonial thought that operates analytically at the epistemological and thematic level. She does it by immersing herself in the practice of artistic creation as well as building autonomous institutions of artistic practices away from state control. In a detailed study of OFF-Biennale Budapest and Nafasi Art Space in Dar es Salaam, Szakács meticulously documents the processes through which artists and curators create autonomous creative institutions in the face of an illiberal regime in Hungary where state-owned artistic and cultural spaces and infrastructure became a tool to consolidate state power. In the case of Tanzania, artistic and institutional processes, on the other hand, seek to create autonomous cultural spaces in a situation where there is a distinct lack of such infrastructures provided by the government. Through the concept of "unsteady states" and their relationship with art and culture, Szakács provides a rich empirical and theoretical site for dialogue between postcolonial and post-socialist conditions where the

emphasis is placed, rightly, on common material grounding instead of a quest for an overarching theoretical framework seeking to explain the complexities of the two conditions.

**Elżbieta Kwiecińska**, in a direct attempt at the convergence between Eastern Europe and South Asia, looks back historically to connect India's colonial experience under the British Empire with that of Poland's under the Habsburg Empire. Both countries were considered as 'backward' by their imperial rulers and in need of a 'civilizing mission'. Focusing on the multicultural region of Galicja in particular, the poorest and most stigmatised part of Poland, the author makes the point that British colonial discourses on India were appropriated onto the Polish region of Galicja, describing it as 'worse than in India'. Polish elites, inspired by the British colonial rule in India, aimed to 'civilize' Galicja out of their 'barbaric helplessness'.

**Nikolaos Mavropoulos**, in his essay on Japanese colonial occupation and rule over Taiwan from the late 19th century to the end of the Second World War, clearly demonstrates the structure of power, material and discursive, on the indigenous population on the island. In perhaps what is one of the more unique ways of legitimizing colonial power, Mavropoulos shows how Japan arrogated the role of a benevolent arbiter in the friction between Chinese settlers and the indigenous population. This process created a complex network of education, exploitation of both Chinese and indigenous labour, and extraction of natural resources. Mavropoulos also documents the fierce resistance that the indigenous population mounted against Japanese colonialism. This article brings into focus the varied geographies of colonialism and is an invitation to ground our theoretical and empirical analysis of postcolonial and post-socialist conditions on the variegated experiences of colonialism and decolonization.

**Rachid Benharrouse** brings to the fore the complexities of decolonizing the academic curriculum in the postcolonial condition of Morocco. In doing so, he challenges the canon of postcolonial literature. Undertaking a close reading of Naguib Mahfouz's *The Thief and the Dogs*, Ahmed Sefrioui's *La boîte à merveilles*, and Mohammed Khair-Eddine's *Il étaitunefois un vieux couple heureux* in the best tradition of contrapuntal reading, he claims these texts

get canonized as decolonial texts within a peculiar matrix of colonial and postcolonial power. While these texts may resist the overt colonial power, they could be used by the postcolonial regimes to legitimize their push for a Western-styled modernity and developmentalist agenda. In a sense then, this article poses in certain senses an aporia inherent in certain postcolonial works. Much like colonial education, the agenda of postcolonial education then becomes producing pliable citizens. In fact, Benharrouse's paper poses a challenge and forces us to think about the processes of making the canon of postcolonial and decolonial literary practices.

**Neema Ghenim**, like Benharrouse, analyses the French colonial policy of Crémieux Decree that granted French citizenship to the Jewish population in French Algeria in 1870 as a decisive moment of a schism in the Jew-Muslim relationship within Algeria. Ghenim meticulously and empathetically chronicles the sense of exile and alienation that can embed itself within and between communities as a result of colonial policies. The cultural processes that get ruptured as a result of colonial interventions become contemporary fault lines of contemporary postcolonial societies. The challenge that Ghenim poses for the decolonial enterprise through her essay is to both recognize the schism created by colonial intervention and also to address that schism through intellectual and artistic practices. The essay is a detailed discussion of the role historiography and novels play in this enterprise.

In contrast to the earlier contributions writing from post-socialist and postcolonial contexts, **Anaïs Duong-Pedica** writes from the colonial context of Kanaky/New Caledonia, a French settler colony currently in the process of decolonization. While other contributions to this Special Issue speak from a perspective of post-and decolonization (India, Algeria, Morocco, Taiwan) and from Eastern Europe that was never formally colonized but in colonial relationships with both the West and Russia, this paper brings a new perspective that challenges the starting point of contemporary postcolonial/decolonial approaches as "after" decolonization. Duong-Pedica takes the reader right to the centre of a decolonization process, starting from her own identity in relation to the settler-colonial context by exploring tensions and

incompleteness when attempting to answer the common first question upon encounter in Oceania: “who are you in relation to me/us?”. In a settler-colonial context, making one’s positionality visible is essential to the exploration of the colonality of relations because identity forms the basis upon which injustice and pain are organized. The author then traces through the tensions of modernity/coloniality between Western ways of knowing and Pacific ways of knowing, the former focused on erasure and the latter centring on the communal. The decolonial perspective posed by Kanak activists is a relational one where independence is not separation but where the settlers instead are challenged to ‘unthink themselves in order to rethink themselves relationally’. Duong-Pedica puts forward the argument that the Kanak way of thinking decolonially is pluriversal, inclusive and interdependent, ‘creating cracks in the colonial, racist and capitalist concrete that has been poured over the land’.

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