

Introduction to Special Issue: Global Socialisms and Postsocialisms¹

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*Everywhere there is something to overcome or to bridge: disorder, death, meaninglessness.
Everything is a transition, a bridge whose ends are lost in infinity, beside which all the bridges
of this earth are only children's toys, pale symbols.
And all our hope lies on the other side.*
Ivo Andrić (1992: 27)

*Ordering a diversity of forms as a field of variation does not in itself induce any theory of
process, of possible mechanisms that generate this range of form – though it does cry out
for such theories. If not to comparative insights, where might an analyst turn for ideas?*
Fredrik Barth (1999: 86)

Socialism and postsocialism

The 2009 Soyuz Symposium was dedicated to “Global Socialisms and Postsocialisms.” The organizers intended to focus discussions on the orders, configurations, and processes emerging from or among former socialist areas of the world in order to “understand the flow of people, objects, concepts, and linguistic and cultural forms among and out of socialist and postsocialist states, rather than simply into them from “the West.”² While some of the presentations and discussions drew on examples from outside Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, most of the contributions stayed within the “traditional” focus area of Soyuz, the Research Network for Postsocialist Studies. Participants in the Symposium encouraged us to rethink socialism and postsocialism as global, international, or transnational formations, to reconsider the continuities and contrasts between the two periods, as well as to imagine new frameworks for comparative research. Most importantly, such an approach shifts analytic attention from the socialist past and the transformations after socialism’s collapse to the ideological constructs and knowledge practices emerging under socialism but continuing to structure our contemporary worldviews and academic practices.

The theoretical turn suggested by this year’s theme appears more important when realizing the boundedness of classical models of socialism made visible by the passing of time. Based on fieldwork in the few areas open to ethnographic research in the Soviet bloc but engaging some of the theoretical constructs of native scholars (Kornai 1980, 1992; Konrád and Szelényi 1979; Câmpeanu 1980), theorizations of socialism incorporated the politics of knowledge during the Cold War. Scholarship on the socialist societies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union had been structured by the “Three Worlds” conceptualization of the globe after

1950: “the First World” (generically, “the West”) – dominated by science and utilitarian thinking, was to be studied primarily by the theoretical social sciences (economics, political science, sociology), “the Second World” (most of the totalitarian socialist states) – dominated by ideology, was to be approached by area studies (such as Sovietology), while “the Third World” (Africa and other parts of the underdeveloped world) – the world of culture, was left to the idiographic and a-theoretical anthropology (Pletcher 1981:578).

As the Cold War prompted a growing interest in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, American anthropology transgressed this academic division of work between the disciplines concerned with the Third and the Second World. While the anthropology of East Europe emerged as a quasi-autonomous subfield at the time,³ the tense international relations and the influence of the Cold War – not only a political confrontation, but “also [a] form of knowledge and a cognitive organization of the world” (Verdery 1996:4), meant that Western scholars doing research in the area did not enjoy full freedom of movement or of choosing one’s object of study (Verdery 2004). As Katherine Verdery points out, the Cold War influenced her (and others’) choice of topics of research, of overall approach, or of the level of reality to be addressed. The Cold War was responsible for the almost obsessive interest in the socialist state and the political-economic processes constituting it, as well as for the more superficial understanding of social meanings, personal experiences, and values. This aspect was subsequently criticized and remedied by more recent evaluations of postsocialist ethnographic experiences (Dudwick and DeSoto 2000; Lampland 2000). At the same time, the constant engagement with political-economic categories facilitated not only a more theoretical understanding of the systemic traits of socialism but also set the ground for further critiques of capitalism (Verdery 1996: 9) conceptualized in relation (opposition) with the socialist system.

What theoretical models of socialism were not able to do was to set “actually existing socialisms” in a more comparative perspective or to render the multiple relations between socialism and postsocialism open to reflection. Although explaining quite profoundly the workings of socialism in the Soviet bloc, anthropological theorizations based on ethnographic research in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are less helpful in explaining the persistence of socialist societies such as Cuba, the cohabitation between political communism and market economy in China, or the revitalization of socialist movements in Latin America. Where such theories could still prove useful – something emphasized by several presenters at the 2009 Soyuz Symposium, is in showing how the former Cold War politics of knowledge are resilient and continue to shape our perspectives on the world we live in.

The blooming of ethnographies of Eastern Europe after the collapse of state socialism was due not only to the revitalization of the local anthropological schools⁴ but also to an increased interest of Western anthropologists in the area. Many researchers conceived Eastern Europe (and the former communist bloc more generally) as a “laboratory” (Kubáľková 1992; Kurti 1996, 2000) where epochal social and political changes associated with the “second great transformation” (Burawoy 2000) could be studied closely.

Emerging as an analytic category soon after the end of socialism and used by many social scientists as an alternative to the teleological notion of transition, postsocialism has been transformed by the interaction between academic practice and fieldwork encounters, becoming itself an ethnographic object.⁵ Used initially adjectivally (“postsocialist”) or to denote a particular period of time, postsocialism later stood either for the diversity of social formations emerging after socialism or for a particular style of doing ethnographic work. This ethnographic style was more attentive to meanings, values and local experiences (focusing on themes like memory, consumption, identity, nationalism, etc.) often in reaction to the political-economic approaches that characterized previous scholarship on socialism. Thus, postsocialism incorporated all the ambiguity inherent in processes of social change and made room for approaches bringing “micro-level insights into particular processes of transformation” (Hann 2002:xii)

Socialism and the Cold War episteme continued to exert their influence over Eastern European studies not only through the biographies of the senior anthropologists of the area, the lasting institutional structures meant to support the study of “the Second World” in American academia, or the (still) influential theoretical foundations laid before 1989. As it happened under socialism (Kurti 1999), ethnographers and anthropologists of Eastern Europe had to negotiate and continuously reflect on their relationships with informants and friends (Dudwick and De Soto 2000; Herzfeld 2000; Lampland 2000). Indeed, the focus of ethnography was not so much the nature of the state–subjects relations (Ries 2000) but mainly the understanding of transformations taking place in the personal and social lives of Eastern Europeans and citizens of the former Soviet Union (Herzfeld 2000:220). Under such circumstances, the ethics and responsibilities of research came to the fore of ethnographers’ concerns (Dudwick and De Soto 2000:6; Herzfeld 2000:228, 231).

As anthropologists of former socialist societies seemed less inclined to understand politics as a series of abstract and institutionalized processes and were more attentive to the reconstitutions of moral orders or local understandings of politics (Lampland 2000:209-210), this theoretical shift had multiple and profound implications for the ethnographic practices in the region. In conceptual terms, the category of transition was deconstructed and replaced by the more nuanced and non-teleological postsocialism (Ries 2000; Dudwick and De Soto 2000; Hann 2002; Lampland 2000). At the same time, as local understandings of broader political processes became of primary concern for anthropologists, it also became important how ethnographers managed a genuine dialogue with people rather than speaking for them (Ries 2000:x) and how they shed light on the way people represent their own agency in shifting historical contexts (Ries 2000:x; Wolfe 2000:210). Such ethnographic concerns were premised, according to Michael Herzfeld (2000), on the creation and maintenance of intimacy with one’s informants. This implied not only a more prominent role of conversation as a privileged way of creating intimacy, but also becoming aware of the multiple responsibilities of the ethnographer towards informants. This was even more true in the case of local ethnographers (Herzfeld 2000:223). The topical concerns of postsocialist ethnographers stimulated the reconfiguration of writing styles, textual

registers, and representational techniques employed by anthropologists, resulting in new genres in the literature on Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union such as ethnographic reporting - the “article-length descriptions of social processes produced by analyzing a handful of sites or episodes” (Wolfe 2000:207).

The emphasis on experience and the reconfiguration of values in the ethnographies of postsocialism (Dudwick and De Soto 2000; Herzfeld 2000; Lampland 2000; Wolfe 2002; Burawoy and Verdery 1998) or approaches developed in other social sciences (Roeder 1999:755; Fish 1999) went in a totally opposite direction from earlier schematic representations of the fall of the socialist system. Even the most theoretically focused ethnographers known for their concern with political processes and/or working through political economic models progressively oriented themselves towards constitutions of local life-worlds and the filtering of macro-political processes through everyday life interactions and experiences (Burawoy and Verdery 1998; Lampland 2000; Hann 2002; Hayden 2002b; Verdery 2002). The reflection on renewing research agendas, appropriate levels of analysis and the positionality of ethnographers gave most of these scholars the opportunity to re-conceptualize knowledge and politics, revealing the mutually constitutive relations between the two categories (Verdery 2002; Wolfe 2000; Kurti 2000; Lampland 2000).

Postsocialism and postcolonialism

The fragmentation of knowledge that postsocialism stood for has been reversed by the recent search for more systematic approaches. Critics of the concept of postsocialism have already argued that its usefulness in describing the current historical period has reached its limits (Sampson 2002), that it was improperly used conveying a teleological direction of change (Kenneth McGill in Chivens et al. 2005) or was never actually relevant for the entirety of Eastern Europe (Andrew Gilbert in Chivens et al. 2005). They have also called for the approach of postsocialism as an ethnographic category (Elizabeth Dunn in Chivens et al. 2005) being experienced and narrated by the subjects of our ethnographies (Thomas Chivens in Chivens et al. 2005) and used in strategically different ways by Western scholars and Eastern subjects (Michal Buchowski in Chivens et al. 2005).

The analysis of postsocialism in its global dimensions creates the premise for the simultaneous analysis of the turn to autarchy (and nationalism) in many former socialist societies and their subsequent conjunction with world-wide political and economic processes. Whereas socialism was characterized by rational redistribution by the political center as the dominant (if not unique) logic of power (Verdery 1996), the diverging pathways out of socialism cry out for theoretical perspectives that would make the comparisons between them both possible and useful. This comparative potential of postsocialism used as a historical category has been linked to two research strategies. On the one hand, comparisons between the trajectories of various postsocialist countries can facilitate the understanding of “the heritage of actually existing socialism” (Humphrey 2002a:12), of the distinct ways people make sense of their socialist

experiences, as well as of the diverse ideologies and political imaginaries emerging in these regions (e.g. Europeanism, Eurasianism) and facilitating new projects of power and the control over resources. On the other hand, a comparison with the postcolonial condition - an approach progressively gaining currency in “post-Cold War studies” - creates the conditions for a more nuanced and profound understanding of the “practices of domination” in various historical and political regimes (Verdery 2002b:17). This can facilitate a rewarding inclusion of the postsocialist paradigm into “comparative studies of imperialism and colonialism, post-imperialism or political anthropology more generally” (Humphrey 2002a:12).

The two types of comparisons outlined above should be seen as overlapping rather than mutually exclusive. A thematic number of *Africa* dedicated to African socialisms and postsocialisms, “[sought] theoretically to break the mould of Soviet-centrism that characterizes much of the literature on postsocialism and to invite other scholars to include African countries in comparative analysis” (Pitcher and Askew 2006:5). According to the two authors, the impact of the collapse of socialism in 1989/1991 on African formerly socialist states was no less profound than on their East European counterparts and the acknowledgement of that impact calls for a more attentive exploration of the interconnections or parallels between postsocialisms on the two continents. Furthermore, the fact that neoliberal ideologies and their institutional promoters globally (the IMF, the World Bank, the IFC) were active agencies and shaped postsocialist opportunities on both continents, further strengthens arguments for comparative analysis and support claims that the socialist legacies are not the only defining features of the postsocialist condition. Postsocialism, which first emerged as a complex category glossing over a diversity of socio-political transformations and historical experiences - or as the symbol of a specific mode of (re)integration into the global system - has recently mutated into a generous theoretical category that creates numerous opportunities for comparison and calls for overcoming academic and regional parochialism.

The comparison with various postcolonial contexts and the forms of knowledge emergent there (such as postcolonial studies or subaltern history) is not accidental. The diminishing explanatory power of earlier theoretical models and the reorientation of area studies more generally (Guyer 2004) have stimulated anthropologists of Eastern Europe to look for alternative conceptual developments or for models based on trans-regional comparisons. The postsocialism–postcolonialism parallel has gone beyond the stage of an implicit comparison and has been proposed as an explicit research strategy by numerous anthropologists and social scientists (Lampland 2000; Verdery 2002b; Hayden 2002a, 2002b; Hann 2002; Chari and Verdery 2009).⁶ The similarities between postsocialist and postcolonial studies are multiple: importance of history and historical anthropological approaches (Verdery 2002b; Hayden 2002a), pronounced interdisciplinarity and the transgression of national boundaries by academic communities and agendas (Verdery 2002b), and the preoccupation with giving “voice” to the natives and their concerns (Verdery 2002b; Hayden 2002a:213). Ethnographers of Eastern Europe were further encouraged to pursue such a comparative path in order to unmask the “practices of domination” (Verdery 2002b; Lampland 2000; Chari and Verdery 2009), to understand representations of the

West and the forms of knowledge supporting them (Tishkov 1998; Verdery 2002b), to approach critically the politics of knowledge in contemporary Eastern Europe and the unbalanced systems of knowledge production in East and West (Lampland 2000), or to understand better the historicity of colonialism and the significance of postcolonial studies themselves (Hayden 2002a, 2002b).

Similarly, Katherine Verdery argued that postsocialism could be used to ground comparative studies of historical routes out of empire (2002b:16). As postcolonial studies could be viewed as part of the global order structured by the Cold War (Verdery 2002b:18; Chari and Verdery 2009:21), the parallel between postsocialism and postcolonialism is not only possible but necessary for understanding the practices of dominance around the world. The opening up of postsocialist studies as a multi-disciplinary field of investigation and the awaited contribution of “native” scholars from Eastern Europe are some of the other conditions necessary for the consolidation of the field. At the same time, the integration of postsocialist and postcolonial studies can illuminate the political constitution of “the West” itself. Such a comparison can illustrate “how not just the colonies but the existence of socialism itself affected the constitution and becoming of “the West,” often simultaneously with processes involving the colonies, post-colonies, and neo-colonies” (Verdery 2002b:17). Furthermore, anthropologists were encouraged to focus on postsocialist/postcolonial forms of knowledge and their contemporary reconfiguration. The ongoing legacy of the Cold War on our knowledge practices cannot only render comparable the various colonial practices of domination in the multiple “Souths” across the globe, but also can reveal the various “Eastern,” socialist, and colonial representations of the “West.” To those goals, historical anthropology is able to uncover the situated notions of history, time, and space, and the multiple technologies producing the contemporary “varieties of modernity” (Verdery 2002b:19).

Europeanization and colonialism

Focusing on different historical processes, yet in connection to some of the previous arguments, the postcolonial turn in postsocialist studies sheds a different light on current projects of re-integration or “return to” Europe undergone by many of the Eastern countries. Thus, Steven Sampson’s argument about the “cultural boundary” between the West and the Balkans (2004), Matti Bunzl’s “neo-colonial subjectification” of the Easterners through mundane embodied practices of ordinary people (2000), or József Böröcz’s treatment of the “Eastern enlargement” of the European Union (EU) in terms of “empire” and “colonialism” (2000; 2001) are good examples of a new focus in anthropology. Europeanization had taken place in Eastern Europe even before the accession within the EU, many times being a distinct process from that of EU integration. From a different perspective, Europe itself (for which the EU often stands metonymically) had been an ideological object long debated and longed for in “the East.” Katherine Verdery argued that Europe had long been a “master symbol” of Romanian politics (1991) while Susan Gal has shown how Europe functioned like a “symbolic counter of identity”

in Hungary (1991). The emotional involvement with European categories is confirmed even by quantitative analyses of political scientists (Linden and Pohlman 2003).

Local adaptations of and responses to EU-induced cultural-political processes are able to expose the ideologically dominant constructions of Europe. Thus, Michael Herzfeld has argued convincingly that the examination of the current European project can shed light on a second type of colonialism, one whose subjects are regions and countries within Europe itself, “a more insidious Western colonialism, one that is primarily engaged today in the international politics of cultural distinction” (Asad et al.:714). Similarly, contributors to the roundtable on “Provocations of European Ethnography” have argued that the study of processes of Europeanization taking place in Eastern Europe can create the premises for a critique of Europe’s fundamental identity categories and for a “culturally based critique of liberal capitalist democracy” (Katherine Verdery in Asad et al. 1997:716). Furthermore, deconstructing categories such as “the West,” “liberal democracy” or “capitalism” offers a good basis for “questioning the nature of socialism, its representation, or its transformation” (Katherine Verdery in Asad et al. 1997:717).

The critical analysis of Europe and its strategies of power offers ethnographers the opportunity for self-reflection on the practices of anthropology that are many times complicit with colonial and national projects. As Michael Herzfeld put it, we can “take Europe as an object of comparison with anthropology,” that is, “to use the highly accessible history of what is, after all, a historically European-driven cultural activity to flush out some of the assumptions it shares with nationalism and colonialism, both of which, if not quite as uniquely European as some commentators have argued, are engaged in extremely self-conscious processes of classification and control” (Asad et al.:715). Even with the development of an apparently new political construct such as the European Union, if one is to get at its underlying cultural logic and not to fall into the essentialist trap (similar to that of nation-building processes) then one should try to put it into a comparative framework. Comparisons between various colonial projects, between the multiple processes taking place in local arenas where the European project is realized, between reactions to Europeanization at its margins, or between academic practices and their objects of investigation promise to mediate a more distanced perspective and to facilitate awareness of the essentializing representations of anthropology, nationalism, and colonialism.

The Cold War legacies

Premised on the assumption that we are still living the political and cognitive consequences of the Cold War, most of the theoretically productive strategies outlined in the sections above have been pursued by several of the presenters and were debated collectively during the roundtable at the end of the 2009 Soyuz Symposium. Participants agreed that the persistence of the cognitive frames elaborated under socialism on both sides of the Iron Curtain has not yet been consistently analyzed and is still little understood. Coming to terms with such Cold War legacies is becoming aware of the politics of knowledge involved by our scholarly enterprises. This means not only replacing a dated Three Worlds ideology with a more integrated

perspective on the world (Chari and Verdery 2009:19) but also understanding the perpetuation of forms of knowledge and practice that we experience every day. Game theory, for instance, has grown in the political context after WWII into one of the dominant paradigms of the social sciences being used to model everything from macroeconomic theories to labor union negotiations, and to explain things as diverse as international relations and audit practices in academic institutions. Anthropologists and other social scientists sharing a similar worldview are the ones called to understand the practical consequences of such modes of thinking that have been routinized silently over the last decades into many realms of social life.

From a different perspective, the global ambitions of an anthropology claiming to incorporate and explain postcolonial studies prompt legitimate questions about the agents of this disciplinary transformation. Who are the ones promoting the postsocialist-postcolonial comparison and how are they situated in between “Western” academia and “Eastern” areas of study? How does this differ from the case of postcolonialism? How will anthropology itself be transformed by the global engagement with the Cold War strategies of domination? The last question promises to generate a particularly fruitful reflection. Whereas the birth of anthropology was associated with colonial projects almost all over the world, the anthropology of socialism was from the beginning a critical reflection on the constitution of power on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The anthropology of global postsocialism(s) promises to recapture the stream of critical anthropology engaging technologies of power that were generated, experimented with or renewed in the former socialist regions of the world. This represents a rather important turn towards theory and overarching political-economic processes that comes to recuperate the general perspective neglected with the emphasis on localism in the early ethnographies of postsocialism. Either postulating the existence of a world of global processes or claiming that the overarching reality is a product of social imagination (but not less real for that matter) giving a specific shape to localized interactions, the ethnography of global postsocialisms tries to come to terms with the entanglements and relations making up worldwide processes.

The theoretical implications of this disciplinary shift of attention must be put under scrutiny themselves: how are categories of anthropological investigation being produced? How are they used and by whom? How do they travel and get adopted by other area specialists and the “natives” of our ethnographies? As Elizabeth Dunn (Chivens et al. 2005) has anecdotally described the “great chain of being in anthropology,” until recently, everything said about Papua New Guinea used to apply everywhere, whereas anything said about Eastern Europe and China used to apply only to those areas.⁷ The current turn in the anthropology of socialism and postsocialism towards global processes and post-Cold War comparisons might be a good moment to question such symbolic hierarchies of power within the discipline and to contribute something substantial to the ongoing reinvention of anthropology.

The contributions to the special issue

The articles gathered in this special issue speak to each other in numerous ways in spite of the diversity of topics, methodologies and periods addressed, as well as the varied theoretical concerns. The transgression of the (by now) narrow confines of the traditional focus of Soyuz (postsocialist societies in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union) by the incorporation of perspectives from sociology, history, and comparative literature, and the engagement of themes pertaining to African and international socialist movements or to postcolonial contexts, are several of the notable accomplishments of this year's Symposium.

In the first article of the collection, Maxim Matusevich contextualizes the rise of racial intolerance in post-Soviet Russia by making an excellent historical analysis of the changing attitudes towards African students in the Soviet Union from the 1950-60s to the political transformations during *perestroika*. Coming to universities in the USSR in increasing numbers after the revival of socialist internationalism by Soviet leaders during the post-Stalin thaw, students of African origin challenged the popular ideas about race through their cultural representations and mundane practices. The initial enthusiasm towards African exoticism and forms of artistic expression turned into anxiety and intolerance with the worsening economic prospects and the competition for resources during the last years of the Soviet Union. Soviet citizens' cultural encounters with African students played into and illustrate well the support for socialist internationalism during the early postcolonial period and the subsequent withdrawal from Africa (as well as from other international engagements) of Soviet leaders before the demise of socialism in the 1980-90s. Matusevich's excellent analysis should be complemented by comparative studies of the relations between other socialist strongholds (Eastern Europe, contemporary China) and the postcolonial regions pursuing a socialist path.

Referring roughly to the same period, Rossen Djagalov's contribution is an excellent example of historically informed and theoretically minded analysis of the role of the Cold War in structuring politics and knowledge both before and after 1989/1991. Working with the example of Howard Fast, the American best-selling novelist who found himself a victim of McCarthy's anti-communist campaign, Djagalov reveals the ideological effects of the Iron Curtain both in the United States and within the Soviet bloc. As for many other leftist scholars in the West, Howard Fast's actions and situatedness were constitutive of the operational principles of left wing literary apparatuses that mediated (through selective translations and interpretation) the communication between the two sides of the Curtain: canonization, excommunication, membrane effect, and monopoly effect. The example of Howard Fast's trajectory illustrates the fractures appearing in the "world republic of leftist letters" in the second half of the last century as well as the continuing legacy of the ideological perception of leftist culture in the West. During the Cold War, the two ideological blocs produced not mirror images but rather partial knowledge and distorted representations of each other. Djagalov's effort helps us not only to understand the role of Soviet cultural politics but also to reevaluate the complicity of Western scholarly and literary establishments (such as the coalition of Slavic Studies and Eastern anti-communist dissidents) in perpetuating distorted representations of each other.

Moving westwards but staying focused on the regional processes constituting socialism during the same period, Emanuela Grama adopts and adapts a research strategy with great results in the fields of postcolonial and subaltern studies. Based on extensive archival research and interviews with experts, Grama describes the disputes between architects and archaeologists during the 1950-60s Romania over the modalities of uncovering, displaying, and preserving the ruins of the medieval Old Court of Bucharest. She treats these disciplinary discourses as competing technologies for the production of social reality as well as for the spatial and visual realization of a teleological conception of history premised on the doctrine of dialectical materialism. That is, “the past” and “the future” were separated and displayed through distinct historical artifacts and architectural forms while “the present” was only a transitional phase towards the socialist future. Although both disciplines were initially legitimated by regional ideologies and political processes affecting most of the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe, they were soon instrumentalized towards national goals. They provided the valuable means of and entered the competition for the allocation of resources by the political center that had characterized the socialist exercise of power in Eastern Europe. The preservation of the Old Court ruins at the time has left the field of urban intervention open until today perpetuating some of the disputes of the time that are reconsidered under postsocialism.

Focusing on the postsocialist period, Victor Shnirelman deftly renders visible the flexibility and local adaptability of Eurasianism both as a discourse on identity and as a political ideology. Postsocialism did not bring the demise of grand narratives in the former Soviet Union, as some might imagine. The revival of Eurasianism facilitates the imagining of regional identities and commonalities after socialist internationalism lost currency during the years of *perestroika*. A highly polyphonic discourse, Eurasianism has been promoted during the last three decades both by the Soviet leaders – trying to replace an eroding all-embracing ideology based on class with one based on commonalities of culture and history, and by the leaders of the succeeding republics - in power struggles within their own polities or the space of the former Soviet Union. Eurasianism is currently adapted locally and used for the promotion of diverse political and intellectual agendas: nationalist, regionalist, economic, or geopolitical. The varieties of the Eurasianist discourse are constructed in opposition to each other and to what is seen as the imperialist agenda behind Russian Eurasianism. While nationalists usually pursue radical versions of the ideology, policy makers tend to favor moderate versions of it, liberal politicians being the ones who articulate the most consistent criticisms of Eurasianism. Shnirelman’s article raises challenging questions about the diversity of the postcolonial contexts and the refashioning of colonial ideologies by national elites urging us to take advantage of the postsocialist-postcolonial comparison.

Discussing about the same period of time, Ekaterina Melnikova untangles the process of local identity creation in the region of Karelia, which was incorporated into the Soviet Union after its wars with Finland during the 1940s. As the region experienced the quasi-replacement of the population (through the forced migration of former Finnish inhabitants and the repopulation with migrants from the neighboring Soviet Republics), local histories about the identity of the

region and its former inhabitants were supplied by the frontier guards. They were based on rumors about former Finnish-Karelian inhabitants returning at night to repossess their dwellings that were feeding the anxieties of the new inhabitants of the region. Official histories, textbooks, and schools offered no information about the past. With the demise of the Soviet Union, the circulation across the Finnish-Karelian border of persons, objects, and memories stirs the dilemmas of identity of both the current inhabitants and the returning Finns. Local and regional identities are articulated around old artifacts attesting the Finnish presence before the war (old buildings, gravestones, furniture, or magazines) and discourses of continuity and preservation. In the process, new forms of co-ownership and relations with the past are forged as current inhabitants consider themselves “keepers” of Finnish heritage while returning Finns engage in “nostalgia tourism.”

Moving to another postsocialist context, Elana Resnik focuses on the practices through which Bulgarian Roma associate with different transnational publics in order to position themselves within Bulgarian society and the European Union. Shifting between associations with India or with African American culture, Bulgarian Roma position themselves in alternating public spheres: either one firmly situated within Bulgarian history or a postsocialist one with global outreach. Such practices of association are mediated by the consumption of images of global circulation around which transnational public spheres are created. Postsocialism can thus be analyzed through the continuously produced transnational affiliations where contexts are permanently transgressed and indexed in the formation of consuming publics. Key for the ethnographer is not any of the specific images being consumed but rather following the process itself through which marginal subjects reposition themselves within local histories. In the process, the consumption of global images re-signifies and re-contextualizes the very histories in which Roma try to position themselves in a meaningful way.

In an exemplary study, David Kideckel illustrates felicitously the virtues of genuine comparisons between postcolonial and postsocialist political processes. Based on extensive fieldwork and intimate knowledge of Romania and the Indian state of Kerala, Kideckel compares the citizenship concepts and discourses in the two countries crafted in various forms of public protests. Political activism manifest in “contentious performances” (Tilly 2004) (protests, meetings, demonstrations, etc.) both create and reflect the distinct conceptions of citizenship in a postcolonial and postsocialist milieu. While in Kerala public protests are more vibrant, rights-focused, system challenging and based on larger social coalitions, Romanian activism usually takes the form of fragmented protests that are grievance-based, issue specific and directed more towards temporary bargains than long-term political rights. Variations in the forms and aims of activism are accounted for by both the recent histories of political protest in each of the countries and by the different degrees of political inclusion within the global economy. What unites the postcolonial and the postsocialist polities is that some of the main causes and audiences of the public protests are located “off-shore from the state,” political activism being often directed against expanding neoliberal processes.

Addressing Romania's present incorporation into the global financial capitalism, Narcis Tulbure focuses on the cultural mediation of the regulatory practices pertaining to mutual funds. Adopted as technologies of value production and for the decentralized allocation of investment capital within the economy after the end of socialism, mutual funds were at the center of some of the most notorious financial scandals and political protests during the postsocialist period. Their ambiguous functioning and widely mediated collapses raise challenging questions not only about meanings of money and the social constitution of value, but also about the new property arrangements emerging in the postsocialist era. Thus, the initial institutionalization of mutual funds in Romania during the mid-1990s followed the American model characterized by the collective ownership and mutual action of the investors participating in the venture. This institutional form is currently being replaced with a pan-European model for mutual funds where ownership and control are attributed to the asset management companies while investors are turned into consumers of financial products. The uneasy changes in institutional forms and regulatory practices are mediated by the ongoing disputes over the defaulted funds and by the shifting conceptions of ownership, risk and values witnessed in Romania. The untangling of the disputes over the regulations in Romania bring to light the tensions within some of the basic categories of contemporary financial capitalism (too easily taken for granted in the West) and the complications created by the transferability of institutional forms and norms across cultural contexts.

The Soyuz Symposium this year ended with an instructive discussion about the future of the organization and about the most challenging themes of research lying ahead. While many of the arguments were either in favor of comparing various (post)socialist formations around the world or of engaging the modalities of knowledge/power emerging during the Cold War that are still shaping our scholarly practices, the response to these pressing questions remained only tentative. What the presentations at the Symposium and the articles gathered in this special issue leave us with is the awareness of the global and international dimension of both socialism and postsocialism. This turn in perspective can help us recapture a more integrated theoretical perspective on some of the most important historical processes of the twentieth century. Finally, the diverse group of scholars and students present at the Symposium and publishing in this issue, made up of people from the East and the West, traveling easily between regions of the world, educational systems, and academic disciplines, are a good reason for optimism with regards to both the continuation of the challenging debates initiated by Soyuz and the questioning of the localism that seemed to characterize early postsocialist studies.

Notes

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presentations and discussions in New Haven has made the editing process a pleasant and rewarding experience.

² The quotation comes from the call for papers launched before the 2009 Soyuz Symposium. For more details on the program of the symposium and a summary of all the presentations access: <http://www.uvm.edu/~soyuz/frameset.html>.

³ Ethnology was subsisting in East European academia by pursuing essentially non-political topics of research. Its loss of prestige in comparison with the American socio-cultural anthropology is being decried by some of the scholars of the region even today (Michal Buchowski in Chivens et al. 2005).

⁴ The papers gathered in the collective volume by Dorle Drackle, Iain R. Edgar and Thomas K. Schippers (2003) make a useful presentation of the re-emerging anthropological schools in the East European countries. The lack of transnational comparisons and the still underdeveloped communication between the members of different national schools are their main weaknesses, according to the editors.

⁵ An excellent discussion about the transformations in the meanings and uses of postsocialism took place at a panel on “Non-Postsocialism: Socialism, Presentness, and the Naming of the Past” organized by Thomas Chivens and Kenneth B McGill at the 2005 Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association (Chivens et al. 2005).

⁶ For scholars of comparative politics, the parallel between the postsocialist transition and the democratization processes happening earlier in Latin America has been a commonplace and, occasionally, a reason for dispute after 1989. See Bunce (1995) and Karl and Schmitter (1995) for an excellent scholarly exchange of arguments and criticism on this issue.

⁷ Quotation from memory of comments given by Elizabeth Dunn as a discussant at a panel organized at the 2005 Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association (Chivens et al. 2005).

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