The Return of the Colonial: Understanding the Role of Eastern Europe in Global Colonisation Debates and Decolonial Struggles

Workshop: 10 September 2020

A Summary and Future Roadmap

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Aims of this roadmap

The current document summarises key points in the conversations during the workshop "The Return of the Colonial: Understanding the Role of Eastern Europe in Global Colonisation Debates and Decolonial Struggles", organised by Romina Istratii, Zoltán Ginelli and Márton Demeter, with the aim to extend the insights and lessons learned beyond the small circle of participants. It is hoped that it can trigger wider reflections and conversations within and outside the region known as Eastern Europe around the themes explored, and provide a roadmap for future studies and explorations. To facilitate this, the document has been structured to reflect as much as possible the discussions on the day. The following section explains some of the motivations that led to this workshop. The rest of the document is organised according to the sessions of the workshop, each concluding with a group discussion and together leading to a final roundtable at the end. The document concludes with a list of relevant bibliographic sources that were mentioned in presentations and discussions or were suggested by the participants as further study materials.

Workshop motivations and objectives

Numerous forces conspired to bring together the co-organisers, ultimately leading to the idea of the current workshop. Romina has been actively seeking to decolonise epistemology in development, gender and religious studies for the past decade working anthropologically with communities in sub-Saharan Africa. While pursuing studies in the UK and since completing those, she engaged in efforts to decolonise research practice and research funding, liaising directly with funding bodies in the UK. Márton has been an avid critic of inequalities in the distribution of academic capital, which he has worked to demonstrate with qualitative and scientometric evidence. He has also been an advisor to Decolonial Subversions – a newly established open access, multilingual, peer-reviewed publishing platform committed to the decentring of western epistemology launched by Romina and her colleague Monika Hirmer in 2020.

The workshop was motivated by discussions about the epistemological and material disparities between European countries, but also the lack of open problematisation of the ways in which Eastern Europe has been often silenced or 'othered' in Northern scholarship, but also Southern critiques that seemed to ignore the unique histories of the region (understood here in the broadest epistemological and geographical sense). The events in Northern America and the anti-racist protests sparked by the Black Lives Matter movement in North America and various decolonial movements in western societies heightened the urgency to raise these matters. Some discourses either ahistorically subsumed Eastern Europe in the history of Western colonialism or quickly dismissed issues of inequalities, identity-profiling or 'racialising' patterns as irrelevant to the region. Both tendencies seemed particularly problematic because they suggested that western histories, politics and discourses continue to frame public debates around the world regardless of context-specific histories, effectively maintaining Anglo-American epistemological hegemony in the world, and that Eastern European responses had not yet overcome dependency structures vis-à-vis western Europe, likely resembling (post)colonial symptoms manifested in other regions in the world.

To explore these issues more extensively, it was found important to connect with existing initiatives in the region and to explore how to achieve a more collective voice in the realm of (de)colonisation studies in the region and decolonial struggles globally. This led to new

connections with Zoltán, who has been intimately involved with these debates as a critical geographer and historian of science. Zoltán was already involved with two pertinent projects: "1989 After 1989" and "Socialism Goes Global" led by Professor James Mark at the University of Exeter, which looked at locating Eastern Europe within global histories of colonialism, anti-colonialism and decolonization. Zoltán is also co-curating a decolonial art and research exhibition project with Eszter Szakács for the next OFF-Biennale in Budapest: the "Transperiphery Movement: Global Eastern Europe and Global South", which will explore parallel and interconnected transnational histories within global colonialism and migration.

Efforts to contextualise Eastern European histories of colonisation and decolonisation in relation to Western European colonialism are not new and that there has been important scholarship in this field, albeit having perhaps limited influence on mainstream post-colonial, decolonial and 'whiteness' studies that have shaped discourses in the western academy, but also, in many parts of the post-colonial Global South. In these realms, calls to decolonise minds, ontologies, epistemologies and axiological systems critiquing Eurocentric knowledge or Euro-American epistemology have assumed almost a uniform imaginary about European histories and epistemologies. This would be inconsiderate of Eastern Europeans' own lived experiences of various colonialisms and imperialisms, diverse positionings vis-à-vis Western European colonialism within these countries, and in some cases direct contributions to global anti-colonial struggles. Eastern Europe seems to be missing from both histories and contemporary debates about global colonial relations.

These problematisations raised numerous questions and the need to engage scholars and practitioners directly to learn from each other and to develop more collective platforms and united voices. It was thought that there is a need for Eastern Europeans to develop more nuanced and actor-focused accounts of their region's complex historical experiences with modern colonialism and contemporary participation in anti-colonial struggles, in order to enter into conversation with other Southern researchers and develop more refined theoretical frameworks together. It was also a main objective to link these epistemological issues with more systemic and material regional inequalities. The epistemological 'othering' of Eastern Europeans should not be seen as disconnected from the realities of a global scholarly landscape that remains defined by western 'academic imperialism': research funding inequalities, Anglophone publishing hegemonies and research standards grounded in western epistemology.

Scientometric analyses show that scholarship in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) from what is called Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) remains extremely under-represented in European and global research. Research papers submitted from scientific institutions in CEE are seldom published in leading, high-impact international journals. In some cases, their contribution is under 1 percent, while the share of scholars from Western European societies can be above 50 percent (see Márton's analysis). Editorial boards in leading international journals tend to be composed of western scholars and are rarely based in the CEE region; hence papers submitted to high-ranking journals are most likely to be reviewed by western scholars and not CEE scholars, which contributes to perpetuate biases in academic peer review. In parallel, the distribution of European research grants has been noticeably uneven in recent decades. According to an assessment of European Research Council (ERC) grants published in *Nature*, the most prestigious European funding is allocated to Western European institutions (98 percent) with their counterparts in the CEE region receiving under 2 percent (see also the ERC

[data available](#)). More importantly, the acceptance rate of project proposals is over 15 percent for Western European institutions as opposed to 5 percent for CEE institutions (acceptance rates can be calculated by dividing the number of awarded projects with the number of assessed projects; see [statistics](#)).

These significant structural, material and normative inequalities in academic knowledge production suggest clear links between CEE's limited representation in both influential publications and research funding and the dominance of western epistemology in current debates and mainstream conceptions of the world and world problems.

The workshop, thus, aimed to bring scholars and practitioners of Eastern European and Global or Transregional Studies, from various fields to explore these issues, with the aim of formulating a common strategy and more organised effort for scholars in / from Eastern Europe to respond to these issues. An underlying objective was to understand better what particular historical accounts and existing representations in western scholarship Eastern European scholars might need to 'reclaim' and how this could be pursued more systematically. The questions that were identified to guide the workshop included:

1. How can we historicise colonialism through different agencies in Eastern Europe, and how can the experiences of colonialism and imperialism in the region inform global decolonisation debates?
2. How can Eastern European scholars respond to the material and epistemological barriers that govern knowledge production and publishing currently?
3. How can Eastern European scholars diversify and challenge constructs, theories and paradigms that remain rigidly informed by experiences of colonialism and racism in Western Europe and North America, including 'whiteness' debates?

The workshop was structured as a series of presentations and discussions under the three questions outlined above. The facilitators opened each session with a presentation to outline the state of debates and to suggest possible answers to the question to spark discussion, followed by 10-minute presentations from some of the participants. The sessions were followed by group discussions and a final roundtable. In total, the workshop included 33 participants in addition to the three co-organisers.
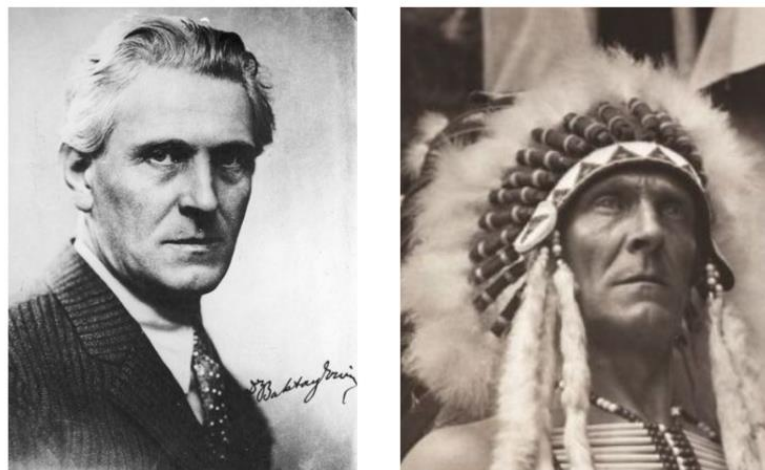

Session 1: Eastern Europe in global colonialism

Session 1 was dedicated to exploring what colonialism might mean to the region and how to historicise local, national and regional experiences of coloniality in global and comparative contexts. The session opened with a presentation by Zoltán Ginelli. He engaged with the question "How should we understand Eastern Europe in global colonial history?" using Hungary as a case-study to contextualise on-going debates and competing narratives about Eastern Europeans' relationship to or involvement in colonialism. As he explained, the common narrative, which has been recently taken up by populist politicians, is that since the region "never had colonies", its peoples are morally or politically not responsible for any consequences of colonialism (e.g. racism, colonial atrocities and postcolonial "immigration"), which is regarded as the sole responsibility of the West. To counter this narrative, Zoltán proposed to both spatialise and de-territorialise the mainstream concept of colonialism by not limiting its conceptualisation to who

had colonies or territories, but understanding its different actors in a global historical framework. He argued that colonial politics played out transnationally at different levels and involved variegated actors, and Eastern Europe integrated into global racial-colonial capitalism from a semi-peripheral position (as a proximate periphery within 'Europe'), which structurally conditioned its various, changing and often antagonistic relations to coloniality.

To demonstrate this approach, Zoltán proceeded to present about Hungary's colonial experiences and colonial legacies in present-day political and public discourse, showing how a complex 'colonial discourse' has recently emerged in government propaganda and has been taken into European Union political arena. He spoke about Hungarian commemorations of colonial-era expeditions, nationalistic discourses unreflectively "Hungarian Indians" and embracing Turanism (a geopolitical-racial ideology of Hungarian origin in Central Asia), but without simultaneously discussing colonial knowledge production and cultural appropriations that occurred in the colonial era, and the histories of Hungarian migrants relocating to colonised and postcolonial territories. The interactions of out-bound migrations to (post)colonies (e.g. of Hungarians to South America) with local peoples and in-bound migration from the postcolonial Third World (e.g. Cuban workers to Hungary in the 1980s) are also being disregarded in Hungarian debates around colonialism. Zoltán concluded that scholars of Eastern European studies could explore the region's relation to colonialism by looking at how this semi-peripheral in-betweenness and manoeuvring constructed different relations to colonialism, by both contesting and adapting to the global racial-colonial capitalist system.

Figure 1: Nationalistic discourses paying kudos to "Hungarian Indians"

Ervin Baktay the "Indologist Indian" (1920s–1930s) as "Chief Lazy Buffalo"

The second presentation was delivered by Zsuzsa Gille, based in the US. Zsuzsa, focusing also on Hungary's case, built on Zoltán's argument for taking a more critical approach to understanding how different Eastern European countries related to or were involved in colonial politics. She problematised internal discourses, such as the Prime Minister's tactic to diffuse the problem of migration by associating it with Germany and not with Hungary, to discuss multiculturalism only in relation to Western Europe with less attention to the Hungarian context; or discourses placing

emphasis on Hungary's hosting of Roma as an indication that racism is not a problem in the country. Zsuzsa proceeded to propose approaching the conceptualisation and analysis of colonialism in a more multi-dimensional manner. She suggested that the post-socialist postcolonial matrix is not simply a relation of the Soviet Union to Eastern Europe (E1/E2) nor one of Eastern Europe to Western Europe (E/W), rather a link between the post-socialist East and the postcolonial relationship of Global North to the Global South E/(N/S). Zsuzsa urged that these relationships need to be understood temporally since they can shift and be valued differently. Finally, Zsuzsa acknowledged the difficulty of speaking monolithically in terms of Eastern European 'complicity' in western colonialism, but she did consider it important to acknowledge migrations from Eastern European countries to western colonies and their implications, speaking of 'colonisation by proxy.'

Figure 2: Complicating the matrix of post-socialist/post-colonial relationships

Complicating the matrix of relationships

1. Relations are not among poles but between their relations
   - the colonial/postcolonial matrix = a relation of E/W or N/S
   - the postsocialist postcolonial matrix is not simply a relation of E^1/E^2 (Soviet Union/Eastern Europe) nor E/W
   - But: the link between the postsocialist East and the postcolonial relationship of Global North to the Global South → E/(N/S)
- Dynamic: poles and their relationship is valuated differently depending on historical period

The third presenter was Manuela Boatcă, who positioned herself as a Romanian living in Germany with previous experience in Latin America and a current focus on the past and present of the Caribbean. Manuela proposed that in order to account for internal hierarchies and the complex entanglements with western colonial experiences, it is necessary to unlearn the received notions of Europe. Drawing on approaches developed in and about the Carribean, Manuela proposed approaching the history-telling of Eastern Europe through the concept of 'creolisation.' She explained that the history of Europe has always been told in relation to Occidentalist theories: modernity, industrialisation and class struggles, and not in relation to imperialism, colonialism, enslavement, or migration to the colonies. In her understanding, 'creolising' these narratives can bring the unwritten, subalternised narratives to the fore in order to retell the history of Eastern Europe so as to encompass the experience of colonial, imperial and racialised subjects. She ended her presentation by referring to the case of Transylvania, demonstrating the limitations of western frameworks of analysis, such as 'empire' or 'nation-state' to understand the emergence of Transylvania at the intersection of colonial and imperial conflicts, histories and experiences.

Manuela was followed by James Mark, a scholar not originating in Eastern Europe. He argued that in order to understand how best to conceptualise the role of Eastern Europe in global (de)colonisation debates, it is necessary to look back at those who tried to answer the same

questions historically. He then offered a brief genealogy of thinking around colonisation in the region, starting in the 1920s and 1930s with the emergence of anti-colonisation discourses to describe Eastern Europe's historical experiences with different forms of expansionism, reaching up to the 1970s with the rise of world systems approaches, which reframed the region as a semi-periphery. This happened just as many Eastern European states started to move toward westernisation. James concluded his genealogical analysis with a set of important questions for further exploration: How can scholars of Eastern European studies re-think histories that have been provincialized at a moment when colonial or anti-colonial discourses are rife? How far has becoming a 'real' European country meant accepting European colonial aspirations (e.g. Mussolini's invasion in Ethiopia in the 1930s)? To what extent African peoples see the Eastern European region as inspiration in their own colonial discourses?

James' analysis and questions were followed by another critical presentation by Tsvetelina Hristova. Tsvetelina made an intervention by questioning some of the premises of the earlier presentations in relation to the broader objectives of the workshop. She noted that the presentations raised numerous issues that should be understood as intertwined, but should not be considered identical and must be approached at distinctive levels of analysis. These were: the history of anti-colonial struggles and their dialogue with socialist states; the question of race; the appropriation of decolonial tropes by the far-right; and the geopolitical configurations of power that have influenced the politics and history of the region; and the issue of decolonising knowledge globally. Tsvetelina encouraged the participants to consider more reflexively their positionality in the critiques they raised and if the re-told narratives they suggested truly gave voice to the lived experiences of those most concerned, most silenced or most marginalised historically. "How do we take seriously our epistemic power?" asked Tsvetelina, pointing to the need to think deeply what Eastern Europeans should aim at achieving collectively in view of these various issues, tensions and unresolved problems. Her concern was that the focus on coloniality and a decolonial approach runs the risk of erasing differences and becoming yet another epistemological framework for reading and explaining Eastern Europe without drawing from the political context of the region.

The discussions that followed this first session precisely underlined the tensions and challenges that Tsvetelina problematized. Participants disagreed not only on which states might be considered 'complicit' in colonial politics, but also the very notion of 'complicity.' One participant argued that speaking in terms of white guilt and trying to foster this as a sentiment in the region is rather unhelpful since it perpetuates unrealistic and essentialising binaries of guilt and innocence when the situation is one of considerable more complexity. Others insisted in using the idea of complicity by asking "Why is it that some states do not admit some complicity and turn this into something creative?"

Picking on the debate about socialist Yugoslavia and Tito's lifestyle, one participant based in Serbia cautioned against mistaking or mixing the internal politics within Yugoslavia and the possible discrimination against certain internal groups with modern colonialism, or to conflate Tito's lifestyle with the positions or experiences of the whole country, as some of the comments seemed to suggest. This participant argued that while there may exist some complicity, conceptualised in some way, this can only be understood as minor, individual and sporadic. The speaker opposed the tendency to equalise the role of Western and Eastern Europe in modern colonialism, which he thought would be unjustifiable.

Others argued that talking in binary terms results in being stuck in a dichotomy: "either we are on the side of the colonists or not". This was found unhelpful because it essentially distracts from what should concern scholars of Eastern European studies, namely, "our own histories, experiences and understandings." These discussions led to the observation that one must account for complexities and suspend generalisations, since colonialism and imperialism played out differently from different positions and entanglements. This spoke to the need for what one participant referred to as "more conjectural analyses" that suspend assumptions and ground research in historiographic and ethnographic ways. This agreed with another participant's comment that local historical experiences varied and that taking a case-by-case approach might be most appropriate and productive.
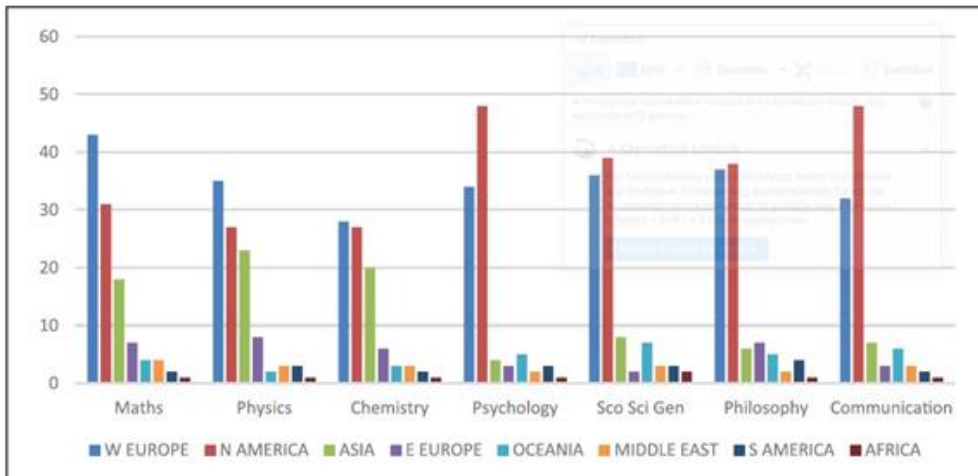
Another participant reflected on the conceptualisation of 'colonialism', suggesting that most tend to think of colonialism in reference to the specific forms it took in Asia or Africa. They proposed thinking of this a bit differently, arguing that the change of names of Muslims in Bulgaria could be considered, for example, a form of colonialism in their eyes. The participant asked "How would histories be told by Muslims, Roma or other racialised communities in Eastern Europe?" They proposed that while it is important to avoid dichotomies, scholars of Eastern European studies of colonialism should consider how to account for these more local histories of colonisation, subjugation or appropriation.

Focusing on global relevance, a presenter cautioned against not detaching Eastern European histories from global events. They suggested that speaking of the former as a semi-periphery might be one possible approach. Alternatively, one might speak of entangled histories, which can account better for multiple or shifting positions and interdependencies as noted by numerous participants. Another participant proposed shifting the attention away from western histories and developing analyses in relation to Southern histories, constructs and realities, a theme that was picked up in the following sessions. Yet another participant spoke about the benefits that studying imperial experiences in the region can have for global studies of coloniality. Referring to the cases of Transylvania, the Caribbean and Taiwan, this participant proposed the concept of inter-imperiality, arguing that coloniality is the product of longer processes, the continuation of empires and need to be approached as such.

Session 2: Eastern Europe in global academic knowledge production

Session 2 was dedicated to the exploration of global inequalities in knowledge production in general, and specifically between Western and Eastern European countries and scholars. The session opened with a presentation by Márton Demeter, currently based in Hungary, who presented data on global inequalities at different levels of knowledge production. Framing his analysis in a world-systems theoretical framework, Márton argued that the hegemony of Western Europe over its Eastern counterparts can be scrutinised at many levels, from theory-making and paradigm-setting to publication outputs and citations impact, editorial board membership and research funding. He demonstrated graphically enormous asymmetries between the two regions, but especially at the level of publications, citations and research funding.

Figure 3: Contributions of world regions for different disciplines

Contribution of world regions in different disciplines from 1975 to 2017, by the affiliation of authors of research articles indexed in SCI/SSCI WoS. Note: Vertical axis (left) shows the percentage of a given world region. SCI = science fields; SSCI = social science fields; WoS = Web of Science.

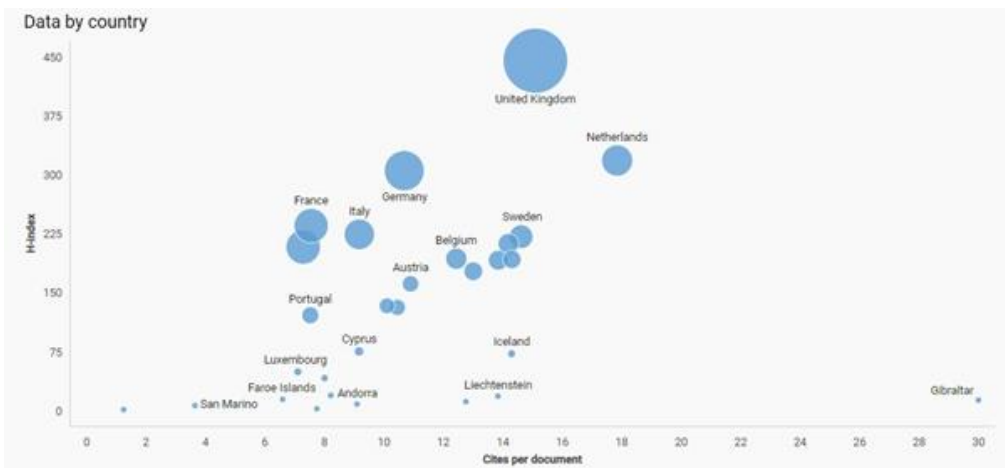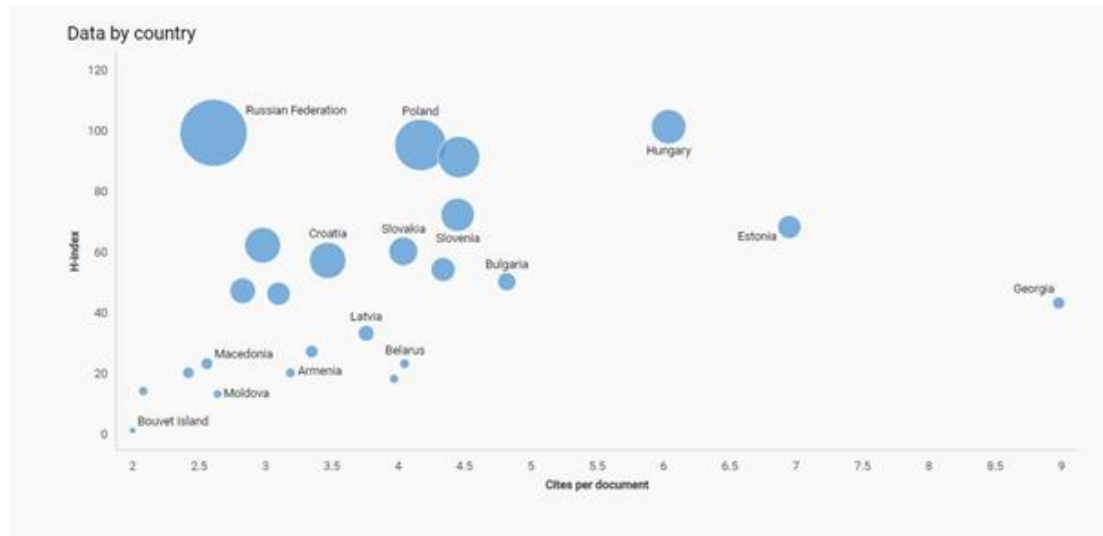**Figure 4: Citations per paper by country (Western Europe)**

Figure 5: Citations per paper by country (Eastern Europe)

The second presentation was given by Ovidiu Tichindeleanu, co-founder of Indymedia Romania and of the journal IDEA Arts & Society, from Cluj, Romania, working in Chisinau, Moldova. Ovidiu's presentation reflected on colonisation in the region. Ovidiu explained how under the influence of post-socialist and anti-capitalist / globalisation events and criticisms from the first decade of the 2000s he had arrived to conceptualise the colonisation in the region at three levels, building on the works of thinkers and writers, such as Gonzalez Casanova, Andre Gunder Frank, Ivan Illich and Maria Lugones. He defined this as: internal colonisation (level of the state and structural relations), intimate colonisation (level of the body, the control of sensibilities and perceptions), and self-colonisation (level of the mind/consciousness). These conceptualisations responded to historical tendencies in the region of confounding colonialism and coloniality, and to accusations of a metaphorical use of colonisation, as well as to criticisms of diluting class with race and of losing the emancipatory side of modernity with a monolithic criticism of modernity. Ovidiu concluded his presentation by noting a renewed interest in decoloniality, but emphasising the need to look into the cultural archives, "to the organic intellectuals and non-intellectuals and their voices when we are re-creating these frameworks."

The third presenter was János Tóth, Editor of *KOME: An International Journal of Pure Communication Inquiry*, based in Hungary. János's presentation focused on the role of author diversity in internationally recognised journals. János affirmed the publishing asymmetries that Márton presented on and proposed that Eastern European scholars should establish their own journals to raise their visibility, but they should be open to Western authors as well since the more diverse a journal is, the more likely it is that it will achieve higher international rankings. He argued that, while Eastern European journals can help to decrease the centre-periphery bias existing in international scholarship, they should maintain the ethos of internationality and they should avoid circumscribing themselves to national or regional representation.

The fourth presenter, Anikó Imre, affirmed the problematic disproportionality of research funding and the condescension and colonialist attitude this implies towards Eastern Europe, but she proposed that there are ways to position oneself in these inequalities strategically so that the

in-betweenness that Eastern Europe seems to occupy can become an advantage. For example, not having a commonly agreed understanding of what Eastern European scholars represent as a collective globally could be resourceful. Anikó spoke of the need to seize the commonalities and emergent collaborations within the region, noting that contributions from Eastern European scholars are often hindered by local politics, identity politics and affiliations, but they also vary by the scale of the population and linguistic group represented each time (comparing for example Poland with Croatia). Anikó also emphasised the importance of understanding the 'masculinist' structures of many Eastern European states and the importance of applying a gender-sensitive lens to the processes and consequences of colonisation within the region and beyond.

The final presentation was delivered collaboratively by Elena Stavrevska and Slađana Lazic, who both identified as members of the Yugoslawomen+ Collective, composed of six female scholars from Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia, Slovenia based in the discipline of International Relations (IR). Elena explained that this collective was in fact the result of frustration at being perceived in Global North academia as scholars who can both only know the Balkans and at the same time never really 'objectively' know it because of the inherently biased position they are perceived to occupy. Elena spoke about the problematic trend of auto-colonisation whereby scholars from abroad are being assumed to be an authority on the region / countries they look at while locally-based scholars with decades' experience are ignored. She also problematised the possibility of changing this system when many of the participants, including the members of the Collective, are precariously employed in Global North academia and must produce outputs according to the standards of those academic institutions (e.g. REFable outputs in the UK) in order to keep their jobs and earn promotions. Elena encouraged participants to think how Eastern European scholars sitting in the Global North might use their visibility to create opportunities for researchers in the region. Slađana, in turn, drew attention to the awkward position of Eastern Europeans as being in Europe but not quite 'European', white but not quite white, with many still trying to demonstrate their Europeanness so as to join the EU. Slađana proposed that acknowledging this marginalisation but also involvement in global hierarchies and being in between, might, in fact, offer a better structure to produce knowledge in relation to Eastern Europe.

The discussions that followed evidenced that participants considered the scientometric and material asymmetries discussed earlier to be important, but also possible *loci* for propagating unhelpful West-versus-East narratives if essentialised and not used productively. The extent of Western dominance in knowledge production and publishing raised the important question - debated extensively in the chat - if the aim should be for Eastern Europeans simply 'to play the game' in order to 'infiltrate' mainstream scholarship, not play the game at all but retrieve to focus on Eastern European scholarship and realities, or recreate the game with new rules that can ultimately perhaps subvert Northern hegemony and diversify the landscape of producing knowledge.

In these reflective contemplations, the issue of positionality was considered central. While affirming the importance of geopolitical and institutional affiliations, some participants thought that it might be possible to turn the apparent disadvantage of Eastern European scholars into intellectual capital by using the different locations strategically to make Eastern European narratives, ideas and ways of perceiving the world more visible globally.

In discussing the options, numerous participants pointed to internal limitations and problems of academic culture in the respective Eastern European states they were from or originated in. Nepotism, a relative disinterest in getting international grants and the fact that international research excellence has been less important for achieving tenure in many of these countries were considered to function as additional impediments in the process of strengthening the presence of Eastern Europe in global knowledge production and publishing.

Session 3: Decolonising research approaches in Eastern Europe

Session 3 aimed to provide a roadmap for suggesting how Eastern European scholars might diversify and challenge constructs, theories and paradigms that remain rigidly informed by experiences of colonialism and racism in Western Europe and North America, with a focus on 'whiteness' studies. This opened with a presentation by Romina Istratii. After positioning herself as a Moldovan raised in Greece who sought to be educated in North America and Western Europe motivated by the aim to decentre western hegemony in knowledge production from 'within', she proceeded to delineate the system that she believed has perpetuated the dominance of western Euro-centrism in epistemology and knowledge production. She drew attention to research funding asymmetries, western norms of theorising and publishing and Anglophone standards of research excellence and peer review.

Figure 6: Global distribution of R&D funding

Calculated percentages: Sub-Saharan Africa 0.7 percent of world total; Central and Eastern Europe 4.47 percent of world total; North America and Western Europe 46.5 percent of world total

She then shifted attention to Eastern Europe to examine the relevance of post-colonial and decolonial frameworks, acknowledging their contribution and potential in instigating regional efforts to rediscover Eastern European ways of thinking and histories, but arguing that this would not suffice to understand and to describe the distinct experiences of the region with western powers and regional empires (e.g. Roman Empire, Russian Empire, Ottoman Empire, etc.). She then turned to problematise the invention of 'Eastern Europe' in western scholarship, drawing attention to critical thinking around the concept of 'Europe', 'Byzantium' and the 'Balkans' in the region before decoloniality appeared on the horizon, mentioning the works of Greek-speaking Church Fathers, historians, philologists and philosophers. She argued that these were not given sufficient validation by Eastern European scholars due to other, westernised, narratives being privileged within these countries. She lastly attempted a deconstruction of 'whiteness' studies, tracing the field's roots in the distinct histories of white settler regimes and slavery in North and Latin America and western colonisers' experiences in African and Asian colonies, problematising their internationalisation without close attention being paid to the ethnocentric metaphysics of humanity they have been underpinned by.

The next presentation seemed to align well with Romina's call to 'rediscover' local histories. After positioning herself in relation to histories of migration, Kasia Narkowicz from Poland based in the UK turned to look at the work of Polish Professor of literature, Maria Janion. In one of her works titled *Do Europy: tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi*, which translates as to *To Europe: yes, but together with our dead*, Janion urges the readers to remember their history, to remember their ghosts and to take them and that pain with them when they enter Europe. Kasia noted that Janion has not been translated into English and she herself never migrated, like many Eastern European scholars who seek academic positions in the West. She contemplated that if Janion had migrated, her name would have been perhaps more known in English-centric academia. Simultaneously, Kasia, invoking Saudi Arabian anthropologist Talal Asad, acknowledged that translation implies transformation of those who are translated, to suggest both the risks entailed and the likely transformative effects. Kasia's presentation asked participants to reflect on what "we can take with us when we migrate and what our responsibility is in translating the works of Eastern European scholars to (in)form global decolonisation debates."

The third presentation of the session was given by Nikolay Karkov, who drew on his scholarship and experiences in the US and Bulgaria to explore the overdetermined logics of racialisation in the region. He started by reflecting on how, curiously enough, in both radical Western thought and decolonial thought the specificity of Eastern Europe is for the most part continuously absent. Taking 'race' as an example, he suggested that the foregrounding of 'phenotypical differences' in most US-centric analyses of racial dynamics fails to fully capture the particular nature of racialisation in Bulgaria and other countries in Southeast Europe. While noting the continued presence of anti-black racism in the region, he observed that in his country of origin, it is the Roma and Muslims, rather than people of African descent, that function as more proximal and familiar figures of race-making and racial oppression. Consequently, it is not necessarily colour, but other markers of 'racial difference', such as religion, culture, and even class, that tend to be very salient in this context. Nikolay demonstrated this by looking at popular literature and film from Bulgaria, whose dramatization of 'birth-of-a-nation' narratives persistently deploys the figure of the 'Ottoman rapist' targeting young and innocent ethnically Bulgarian women, challenging thereby the patriarchal order of Bulgarian men as well. He also discussed practices of 'linguistic cleansing', such as the periodical removal of Arabic words and Turkisms from modern Bulgarian, as evidence of state-sponsored attempts at 'Europeanisation'.

The final presentation of this session was delivered by Katarina Kušić. Citing a recent critique by Catherine Baker (2018a, 2018b), Katarina argued that when post-colonial and decolonial frameworks are 'applied' to Eastern Europe, the aim is to identify parallelisms and analogies (how the Global South / Eastern Europe is marginalised at different levels – epistemological, cultural and material), which does not help to understand the more nuanced ways in which the region relates to modernity and reproduces many of its 'violences' and exclusions. Asking the challenging question "what makes Eastern Europe a region", Katarina offered that its specificity might be that it is simultaneously excluded from modernity and reproducing it. "Where do we move from here? What should be the aim of decolonial discourse from the region in reference to global debates?" Katarina urged participants to think about the role Eastern European scholars have in this struggle, often living, working, and teaching in 'the West.'

The presentations triggered interesting discussions. A female participant from Zimbabwe teaching on decolonising knowledge in Helsinki found the session very relevant to the work she has been doing as an African woman. She thought that the decolonising project as discussed by Eastern Europeans aligned with the global African perspective, noting however the difference that as Africans "we start from slavery, the control of the body, especially of the black woman." The participant found the workshop very beneficial for establishing new connections, regretting that there existed no such decolonial group in Finland where she has been based.

Another female participant expressed similar enthusiasm with the workshop for giving voice to all perspectives, despite noticeable tensions and disagreements. Feeding back to the questions debated in this session, she proceeded to observe that post-colonial theory is useful because it can serve as an inspiration to examine critically our own histories, societies and cultures, as emphasized by the opening presentation. She noted with a tone of regret that "we keep defining ourselves vis-à-vis Western Europe, which makes us look small." She noted that post-colonial theory is global and provides an opportunity for achieving more collective results.

As a suggestion to this debate, and in an effort to avoid unhelpful binaries, one participant proposed employing the idea of 'strategic nationalism' (inspired by Gayatri Spivak's strategic essentialism) to offer multi-focal perspectives and to consider shifting racial positions.

Overarching themes and directions to explore

The roundtable that followed the three sessions expanded the discussions and bridged the themes and questions raised throughout the workshop. This section attempts to bring together some of the overarching themes and tensions, suggesting some directions for future studies and explorations.

One of the most important achievements of the workshop was to reveal tensions among the participants (as a small pool of trans-boundary Eastern European scholars) around the question of 'complicity' or 'involvement' of the region in West-led colonialism. The discussions suggested various histories across states in the region, different levels of analysis to conceptualise such involvement and the need to take a history-informed, context-specific approach that recognises differences across territories and peoples and suspends monolithic theories or overgeneralisation.

A specific point of discussion was whether 'Eastern Europe' can be regarded as a region with common characteristics at all, and how more actor-based, transnational or transregional and global understandings of Eastern European positions could be offered by scholars. Participants interrogated the unifying elements of the region, such as seeing this as being in the global semi-periphery or as sharing a state-socialist past, and identified rivalling identities and narratives relating to coloniality, including the nationalist appropriation, selective interpretation or denial of local colonial histories, as well as their postcolonial victimisation (having been victims to various Western and Soviet imperialisms) within changing global geopolitical settings. Related to this discussion was a point raised about the differences between postcolonial and decolonial scholarship, their associated political projects, their sometimes interrelated or competing geographical traditions (e.g. 'Yugocentrism' and Yugoslavian exceptionalism in relation to the Non-Aligned Movement, postcolonial approaches rooted in Afro-Asian independence movements, decolonial approaches stemming from Latin American critical thinking) and their convergence or divergence with the Eastern European region and its struggles.

Salient was also the issue of positionality and the question of how Eastern European scholars, especially those based in western institutions either out of necessity or choice, might relate and contribute to regional decolonisation debates and decolonial struggles. The fact that many of the participants were based in western institutions was found to be problematic and circumscribing, but also as carrying the potential to be resourceful and empowering. Potential ways of engaging in decolonial scholarly praxis were extensively discussed, in dialogue with questions of institutional affiliation and ways of positioning oneself within global, regional and local power structures, and the complex relations between these various scales of activity.

It was generally felt that scholarship produced by local researchers, scholars and practitioners must be prioritised and substantively engaged with. On the other hand, Eastern European scholars based in western societies or influential institutions felt the need to consider how to use this new privileged position to promote and support marginalised perspectives, histories and experiences in the region. Apart from the importance of due reflexivity on the limitations of their theoretical frameworks and personal positionalities, there was agreement in the need to contest material inequalities by questioning and overcoming underlying core-periphery relations and reproductive logics that fuel unequal accumulation as well as the modes of integrating into West-led academic knowledge production.

Questions were raised about what could be alternative geographical strategies of applying for funding, network-building or publishing in order to overcome global dependency structures and create relatively autonomous fields of knowledge production within often equally dependent local institutional settings. These included finding ways to integrate differently into Western capital networks (including the European Union) or to build network alliances with other (semi)peripheral actors apart from the West; experimenting with transnational solidarity economies and support for labour unionising in the academic sector; and constructing support networks that provide coaching and training from established scholars to early career researchers in Eastern Europe.

In terms of the main questions of the workshop (how to approach race and whiteness debates?) discussions seemed to point to the need for grounding such discourses and efforts in local understandings of identity and ways of relating to 'others.' It was generally agreed that it would be important to conceptualise racialised practices beyond the mere construct of 'race', paying

attention to vectors of human identity salient in defining inequalities and marginalisation in the given local context. Numerous participants felt that Critical Whiteness approaches might not be the way forward, arguing that whiteness in itself should not be centred on identity, because that contributes to the structure of whiteness and its perpetuation. On the other hand, participants looking at scientometric inequalities cautioned against prioritising 'race' (as colour or phenotypical characteristics) in trying to understand epistemological and publishing inequalities, since biases in peer review and selection of papers worth publishing typically operate through geographic location and institutional affiliation.

The concept of intersectionality was cited by numerous participants, who acknowledged the importance of not essentialising different vectors of human identity and not collapsing issues of racialisation and issues of class inequality into each other, recognising the distinctive value of each vector. Participants also noted the fluidity of personal positionality, raising the need to consider intersectional parameters that define individual positionality dynamically.

The discussions seemed to converge on the usefulness of creating linkages with other Southern struggles, without losing the distinctiveness of Eastern European experiences. It was agreed by many that postcolonial thinking has global relevance and can provide opportunities for unusual and unexpected intersections with regional studies. However, some cautioned about the need not to limit the conceptualisation of decolonisation to the epistemological or discursive dimensions alone in view of regional experiences with very material socialist and post-socialist struggles.

Participants agreed that in focusing on local narratives, histories and discourses and in the effort to 'rediscover', translate or promote these in Northern scholarship, scholars will need to be reflexive of their own limitations, recognising the situatedness of all knowledge production and acknowledging the risk of hierarchies that can continue through discourses of 'objective' science or knowledge. It seems apposite to conclude this summary with the invitation put forward by numerous participants "to consider the debates that others have had before us and to look at the ancestors on whose shoulders we are standing and make this transparent". Such reflexive practice can help Eastern European scholars to rethink, to grow and to mature their thinking, achieving the self-awareness (without risking becoming too autobiographical) necessary to produce reflexive and properly nuanced scholarship.

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Useful links and contacts

Following the workshop, a mail list was set up on JISC (https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=EASTERNEUROPE-DECOLONISING) to continue the conversations. The list aims to a) build a community of scholars grounded in Eastern European studies, from within or outside the region, b) to facilitate conversations around issues of (de)colonisation, and c) to promote a more organised regional approach in engaging with decolonial struggles worldwide. With these aims in mind, the list has been set up as a private discussion group to make communication and partnerships building more effective and manageable. Those who wish to be

subscribed are welcome to reach the list owners (the workshop organisers) with a short justification why they wish to be subscribed. Potential subscribers may also email EASTERNEUROPE-DECOLONISING-REQUEST@JISCMAIL.AC.UK directly.

If you have questions or comments about the workshop and this roadmap summary, please email ri5@soas.ac.uk or join the mail list above.