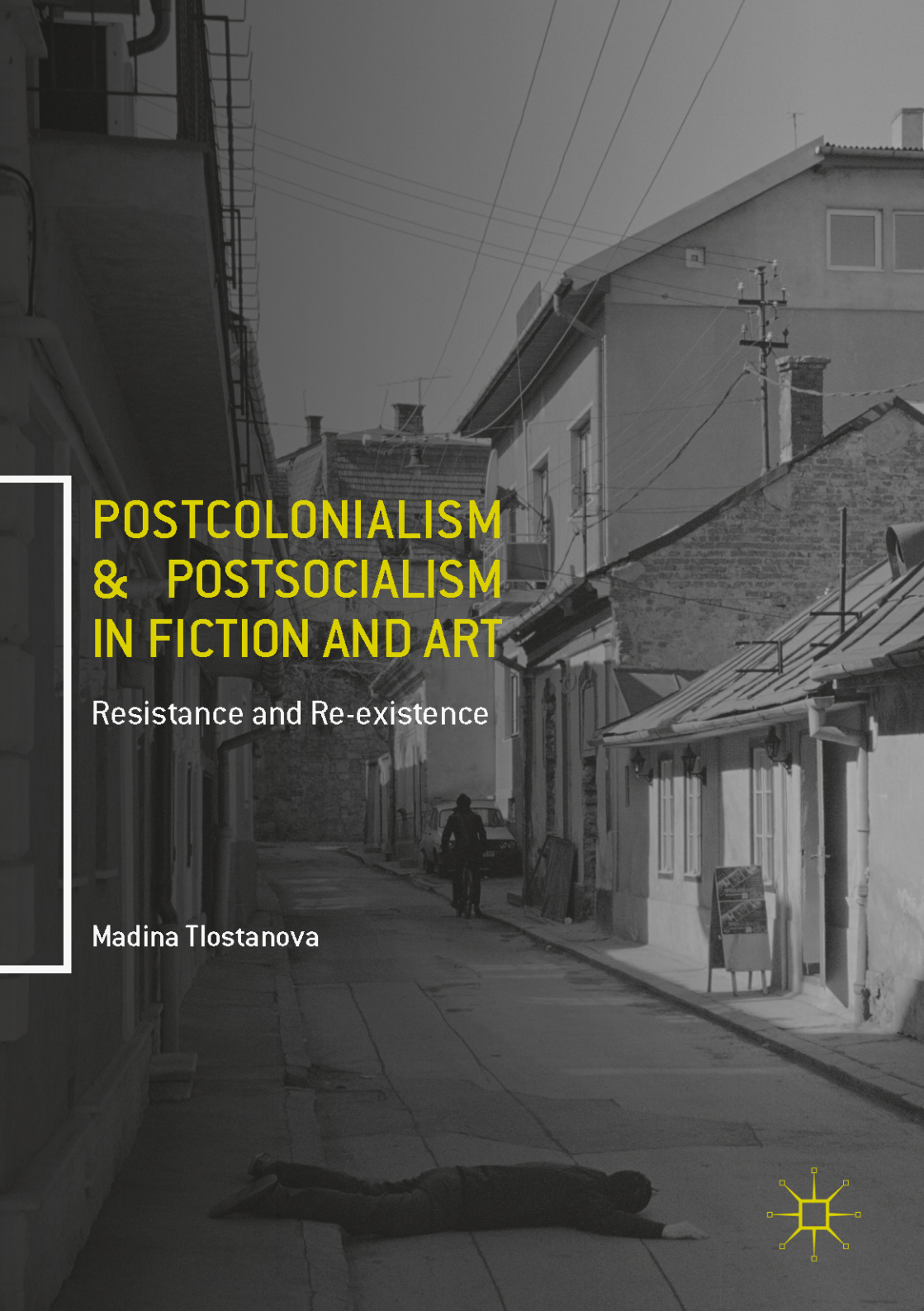

POSTCOLONIALISM & POSTSOCIALISM IN FICTION AND ART

Resistance and Re-existence

Madina Tlostanova

Postcolonialism and Postsocialism in Fiction and Art

Madina Tlostanova, *The Sublime of Globalization: Sketches on Transcultural Subjectivity and Aesthetics*

Madina Tlostanova, *Gender Epistemologies and Eurasian Borderlands*

Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo, *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas*

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Prologue

Let me start with a story that I was told by Indian scholar Kalpana Sahni who wrote a book on Russian/Soviet Orientalism debunking the notorious myth of proletarian internationalism (Sahni 1997). Sahni's story of the 2010s demonstrates the shifts that have taken place in the last twenty-five years placing many of the postsocialist people in a strange delocalized colonial situation – colonized not by one particular country any more, but by the global coloniality of neoliberal capitalism which forces the post-socialist subjects to migrate to the global North and become contemporary equivalents of the colonial subalterns. Paradoxically today the masters are not necessarily the white privileged Europeans but quite often those who were previously the classical subalterns themselves. The race indicator so powerful before, the symbolic belonging to Europe, goes to pieces leaving us with a strange picture of the poorly communicating remnants of the two grand modernity projects – the Western (European) liberal/neoliberal one and the Socialist failed modernity replaced today with various nation-state projects which often go under the pressures of neoliberal globalization and the necessity to survive between the stronger and more aggressive powers.

Sahni was in London, helping her daughter-in-law with her newly born baby. The daughter-in-law is originally from India but brought up in the USA where her parents – people of humble backgrounds – went forty years ago to improve their prospects. The father became an engineer and the mother became a doctor. Now both are retired and wealthy Indian-Americans who rented a flat in London and hired a Lithuanian lady cleaner, who ran from house to house trying to make enough money to

send back home to her son who is studying to become a doctor. This Lithuanian lady was a Marathon runner in her country where, in the years of the Soviet occupation, she had a standard flat and the meagre free amenities provided by the Socialist system. Today her son works in three places to make ends meet. Sahni was curious to watch the conversations between the Indian doctor who did not know how exactly to treat this 'servant' and the obsequious Lithuanian woman. One made it from the bottom up; the other's life came crashing down. One day the Lithuanian woman mentioned that she had to get home soon because her son was arriving for a few days before he performed in Berlin. Seeing a surprised look, she explained that he was a member of the Lithuanian State Philharmonic Orchestra . . .

In telling this story Sahni was not defending socialism but rather trying to reflect on the ironies of history that has placed the postsocialist other in a much more difficult and unwinning condition than the postcolonial one who has been gradually entering the ex-metropolis and winning his or her place there. In the postsocialist case the trajectory was often the reverse.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: A Leap Into the Void?

The title of this introduction comes from a dialogue of the two art works: one of them – French artist Yves Klein's famous 1960 photomontage *Le saut dans le vide* which celebrated a sense of the emancipation of the artistic impulse, transcendence, negating gravity but also rhymed with Klein's interest in the Zen-Buddhist interpretation of the void; and the other – contemporary Romanian artist Ciprian Muresan's 2004 ironic work *Leap into the Void, after Three Seconds*, concentrating on the painful and degrading fall coming three seconds after the leap.

The spatiality of both works is almost the same – the old cobbled streets of some unrecognized European city (Fig. 1.1), but the accent on the fall rather than the leap makes a lot of difference, symbolizing the gist of the postsocialist initial hope, bitter disappointment, and the subsequent emergence of a critical reflection on our condition and our prospects for the future.

1.1 The Postsocialist Predicament: From the 'End of History' to a Postcolonial Analogizing

The almost overnight dismantling of the Socialist world after 1989 has led to a typical Western understanding of postsocialism exclusively in temporal (a period after socialism) and not in spatial terms, thus ignoring the millions of people who share the experience of being branded for several decades as 'the (communist) East' and who are still inhabiting this

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Fig. 1.1 Ciprian Muresan, *Leap into the Void, after Three Seconds.* Photography, 2004. Courtesy of the artist

symbolic East which is fragmenting today under the pressure of new geopolitical divisions and North/South axes. We woke up one day to find ourselves in a notorious 'post-' situation, or to adopt a more well-known formulation of this situation, Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' discourse (1992), we woke up to a new reality of multiple dependencies and increased mental, if not economic and social, un-freedom, invisibility to the wider world and the continued forms of silencing and trivialization by the dominant discourses of neoliberal modernity, the growing dispensability of our lives, the intricate subordination of the spheres of being,

thinking, and perception which continue after political decolonization and flourish after formal de-sovietization.

History has resumed its course since then but the position of the ex-Socialist world in this process has remained precarious and under-conceptualized – for various reasons – both in the West and in the ex-Socialist world itself. Western social sciences and humanities have for a long time simply ignored the collapsed USSR since the enemy was conquered and it was not important any more to spend as much money and effort on (post-) Soviet area studies as before. As a result many grants and programs were redistributed along different geopolitical divisions that were more fitting for the new situation in which the postsocialist world was indeed a void. It is high time we – the postsocialist people – attempted to reflect on our post-1989 trajectories and today's condition and decide if and how we can refer to our mutual experience of the deviant Socialist modernity to build a positive future and identify the agents and forces in the contemporary world with whom we can build dialogue and make coalitions.

What has been required from us – the inhabitants of the collapsed once-utopian and later dystopian Socialist world – was divided into two quite familiar options – Orientalist annihilation or progressivist appropriation. The post-Soviet people with a few exceptions of the Baltic countries, Western Ukraine and Western Belarus, divided at the former imperial borders between the 'Asiatic' Russian Tsarist empire and the not sufficiently modern/capitalist but still European Austria-Hungary, became equivalents of Amerindians, seen as the losing race bound to disappear or merge with the global South. The postsocialist Eastern European countries were interpreted in a more progressivist than Orientalist manner meaning that they were considered to be reformable and eventually subject to European assimilation yet always with an inerasable sense of difference. The postsocialist 'other' was encouraged to uncritically accept the existing hierarchy of the world where everyone is assigned a precise and never-questioned place, and even being unhappy with this position on humanity's ladder – with the frozen human taxonomy naturalized in and by modernity – is to risk losing one's quite precarious position and becoming associated with those who stand even lower, like the global South today. In two decades all of this resulted in a peculiar postcolonial complex and even fashion within Europe when the postsocialist people started to compare their present situation with the former third world and regard the core Europe as their stepmother.

Certainly, the after-the-end-of-history effect of rendering the post-socialist people as the last representatives of the race that had to disappear together with the vanished second world, giving space to more successful rivals, was far from being particularly new or original. It reiterated in slightly different terms the general logic of modernity with its habitual operation of translating geography into chronology and assigning whole groups of people living in the non-European or non-Western spaces to other times or rather, positioning them outside the only sanctioned course of time and the only appropriate way of life.

What was new and different in the postsocialist case was that it was not the archaic tradition, not the downtrodden premodern 'savages' to which Western modernity was opposing itself. Rather it was an *other* state Socialist modernity which failed and was subsequently rendered as wrong and non-viable, while its practitioners had to be instructed on how to become fully modern (in the only remaining neoliberal way) and therefore, fully human. It goes without saying that the progressivist paradigm has had an in-built feature of always keeping a sufficient lag between the modernizing catching-up ex-Socialists and the first-rate Western/Northern subjects. This logic was first seriously shaken only in 2008 when the global economic crisis demonstrated to the inhabitants of the first world that they were not really immune to joining the armies of dispensable people, and their 'natural' advancement in comparison with the ex-second and ex-third worlds did not guarantee them a stable and invulnerable position.

The validity of the concept 'postsocialist' itself as an umbrella term, no doubt reeking of Cold War area studies approaches, is being questioned more and more radically together with the growing dispersal tendencies relocating the former Socialist subjects along different vectors and within different alliances in the new world order where the precarious Socialist semi-periphery is rapidly sliding into a more and more chronic peripheral condition. If we look at the post-Soviet states it becomes obvious that those who still remain under Russian imperial rule, like the Northern Caucasus republics, are in great variance with those who have been politically independent for the last twenty-five years even if they have been forced to always negotiate their rights with stronger partners (Russia being only one of the possibilities in this case), as happens in the Southern Caucasus.

This is the historical juncture at which the postcolonial ghost emerges in the background of the postsocialist drama. A complex and contradictory

drama for sure, as it contains the initial euphoria of the postsocialist countries returning to the European bosom and soon discovering their secondary status, the more traditionally subaltern postcolonial fate of the non-European Soviet ex-colonies, and the bitter post-imperial Russian sense of defeat dangerously manipulated into today's imperialist revanchism, as well as many other local nuances and complexities. Erasing ideological differences between the symbolic West and East proved to be rather easy and today, twenty-five years after the collapse of the Socialist modernity, it should have been possible to museumize and shelve the Socialist experience. However, it has not happened because the thin ideological film hides unreflected upon imperial and colonial complexes and persistent re-emerging power asymmetries, which correlate with pre-Socialist memory and mythology, with Socialist discourses which have always had their darker colonial side, and with today's situation of global colonialism from which no one is exempt.

A different view from Francis Fukuyama's end of history paradigm for the postsocialist world was summarized by art and media theorist Boris Groys:

> The only real heritage of today's post-Communist subject – its real place of origin – is the complete destruction of every kind of heritage, a radical, absolute break with the historical past and with any kind of distinct cultural identity . . . The post-Communist subject travels the same route as described by the dominating discourse of cultural studies – but he or she travels this route in the opposite direction, not from the past to the future, but from the future to the past; from the end of history . . . back to historical time. Post-Communist life is life lived backward, a movement against the flow of time. (Groys 2008, pp. 154–5)

Groys stresses that the communist modernity went against the course of world history, in a sense transcended it. When the project failed we were all forced to come back to the usual established course, speed and most importantly direction of history and to the camouflaged but recognizable mild progressivism as opposed to a radical Socialist one. And this was interpreted by many as a way backwards, whereas for a number of social theorists this trajectory reminded of the postcolonial situation albeit with some important differences which did not allow the easy translation of the lighter side of modernity into the darker one – in this case, socialism into colonialism.

The postsocialist people soon started to experience the painful pullbacks from the dubious state Socialist system to the miseries of overt and cruel neoliberalism combined with neo-traditionalist revivals often erasing even the smallest and most meagre advantages of Socialist times. Thus, Slovenian feminist Lilijana Burcar bitterly claims that 'the so-called transition from socialism to capitalism is a euphemism for regression. It stands for the massive scaling back of essential socio-economic rights which affects women differently from men. The re-installment of capitalist social relations rests on the processes of re-patriarchalization, most clearly evident in the dismantling of the Socialist welfare system' (Burcar 2012, p. 108). Indeed, in Neil Lazarus's words, our liberation from 'actually existing' Socialism has been a liberation into the world-system of 'actually existing' capitalism (Lazarus 2012, p. 121). But the question is precisely in what capacity we were allowed into the free world. According to Romanian social theorist Ovidiu Tichindeleanu, 'the post-1989 civilizational promise of Europe and Occidentalism has currently reached a critical point of saturation in Eastern Europe. However, the direction taken by the accompanying disenchantment and reinvention is by no means predetermined. Consequently, one is faced today with the historical task of decolonizing the imaginary and rebuilding alliances, against the dissemination of cynicism, ethnocentric nationalism, and postcommunist racism' (Tichindeleanu 2013).

1.2 On the Wrong Progressivism and Starting from Scratch

What is important in all of these and many other reflections on the postsocialist condition, is that in contrast with most postcolonial countries which have not interrupted their successive movement along the progressivist trajectory, the postsocialist people were asked to forget about our version of modernity and start from scratch in a paradigm of a different Western and neoliberal modernity. We were not really in the position of a tabula rasa or a 'savage' waiting to be civilized but this is largely what we were offered after 1989. Certainly there were a lot of intersections between the Western/liberal/capitalist and state Socialist modernities, since the Socialist modernity after all originated in the West and therefore shared such familiar features of modernity as progressivism, Orientalism, racism, providentialism, hetero-patriarchy, and a cult of newness. At the same time there were clearly opacities and blind spots between the two

versions of modernity, false parallels and redoubling of a number of discourses which no one has managed to critically conceptualize or overcome so far. Tricked into believing that the only legitimate modernity is the neoliberal capitalist one, we have doomed ourselves to the next twenty-five years of stagnation, catching up and forever emerging. The crucial aspect of this position is that not many of the Socialist people really shared the ideals of Socialist modernity. The majority of those who found themselves under the Soviet rule were its victims who had to build themselves into the state Socialist modernity to survive. And our redemption dream then was linked precisely with the capitalist liberal modernity of which not many of us had any experience. When the dream came true it soon became clear that our role in this 'correct' modernity was far from the ideals we nourished. The renewed polarization of the world into the global North and South did not leave us many options and the leap into the void soon acquired quite real dimensions intensified by an undertheorized feeling of injustice stemming from our overnight displacement from the second world to the global South or the deep periphery of Europe.

There is a complex correlation between the postsocialist as an objective state of those who simply happen to originate in the ex-Socialist countries, and can manifest any political, ethical or existential agenda, and the postsocialist as a discourse genetically linked with socialism, even if revisionist. In this book I interpret the 'postsocialist' in the first sense, as a geopolitical and corpo-political circumstance and legacy which in most of the artists, writers, theatre and film directors, activists and thinkers discussed in what follows, induces a clear anti-Soviet stance. This positionality is also often decolonial as they become increasingly disenchanted with actually existing Socialism and actually existing neoliberal capitalism both of which devalue their lives and futures.

Alluding to W. B. Du Bois's phrase, Jane Anna and Lewis Gordon point out that racism and colonialism generated people 'marked as the continued sign of ill fate and ruin. Problem people' (Gordon and Gordon 2010, p. 19). The ex-second world came to be a problematic region in such a post-Duboisean collective sense of the people with delayed humanity and no place in the new world. But this is not a clearly racialized division; it is a poorly representable semi-alterity. Russians and Eastern Europeans have become after 1989 the off-white blacks of the new global world – looking and behaving too similar to the same, yet remaining essentially other, the hyper visible invisibles who, according to Jennifer

Suchland, like Spivak's subalterns, have never even started to speak (Suchland 2011). The cruel and often colonial forms of enforced Socialism that lasted for several decades were what we all shared. They left their marks and traces on us, weaving collective memories and myths, some nostalgic, others condemning. But no matter how we interpret this shared past, we won't be able to forget it and erase this experience pretending to be or acting as the postsocialist subalterns who are only now starting to learn to speak.

The postsocialist void was so traumatic precisely because it asked us to renounce the past and the future alike, leaving us with very meagre options. This overflowing negativity has cemented the void situation for a long time. As Sharad Chari and Catherine Verdery state in their often quoted article contemplating the possibility of postsocialist studies and comparing them with the trajectory of postcolonial discourse:

> over time, 'postsocialism' came to signify a critical standpoint, in several senses: of the Socialist past and of possible Socialist futures; critical of the present as neoliberal verities about transition, markets, and democracy were being imposed upon former Socialist spaces; and critical of the possibilities for knowledge as shaped by Cold War institutions. Here, postsocialist studies began to converge somewhat with the agenda of postcolonial studies. Just as postcoloniality had become a critical perspective on the colonial present, postsocialism could become a similarly critical standpoint on the continuing social and spatial effects of Cold War power and knowledge. (Chari and Verdery 2009, p. 11)

I will come back to this theorizing of the 'postsocialist' below, but it is important to stress already here that these authors remain insensitive to the temporal and spatial inconsistencies and discordances between the two projects and also vis-à-vis the mainstream Western modernity that a number of postsocialist scholars have been able to detect and analyse.

All the struggles, achievements, failures, double standards, and multidirectional paths of the Socialist people who were hard to homogenize in any non-contradictory way, were neglected and indeed – following the path described by Groys – we were made to go back to a starting point preceding the West, and forced to unlearn what we have learnt before and forget what we have gained or lost in the Socialist years, in order to start from scratch. In contrast with some colonial situations this negation of the Socialist models and patterns was not so much a forced procedure but

rather, more a case of a voluntary self-colonization by the rhetoric of the Western capitalist modernity which started to be questioned only much later, often in unappetizing essentialist and nationalist forms.

The situation was even more grave thanks to a virtual lack of any theoretical models to conceptualize this peculiar void. The Cold War division of academic labour with its clearly colonialist social sciences versus area studies binarism was less and less capable of addressing or adequately investigating the contemporary knowledge and subject production marked by mobility, dynamic changeability, and decentring. The Socialist world was studied by the West somewhere in between the social sciences and area studies but certainly closer to the colonial side, within its separate model of Sovietology. Such study existed on substantial financial support until 1989, when this peculiar form of area studies failed to offer any sufficient overall models to explain the collapsed USSR which stopped being regarded as one homogeneous region and started to be redistributed along different geopolitical lines (Tlostanova 2015).

Some of its parts drifted in the direction of the object of study within the still flourishing Western area studies. This shift is obvious in David Chioni Moore's article in *PMLA* applying postcolonial theory to the postsocialist reality (Moore 2001). However, it proved difficult to lump together Eastern and South-Eastern European countries, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Russia proper and Siberia without taking into account the complex interplay of colonial and imperial differences and intersecting experiences of various subalternized empires and their internal and external others. It is important that the application of postcolonial theory to the analysis of the post-Soviet and wider, postsocialist world was done first by a Western scholar (and not even by diasporic postcolonial scholars in the West who were less ready to equate communism with colonialism but also were more sensitive to the obvious differences between the two models).

Sadly, there were almost no efforts from the side of postsocialist researchers themselves to have their say and not only describe their own experience but also attempt to conceptualize it without following the convenient mainstream Western models. This was an alarming indication of a more severe (than in the global South) case of coloniality of knowledge in the failed Socialist modernity. It is true that there were sporadic interesting works contemplating the postsocialist condition, written by Western scholars and several diasporic thinkers from the former Socialist countries and Soviet republics (usually claiming a more European belonging, such as Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic countries) (Chernetsky 2007;

Bobkov 2005). Methodologically these works followed the Western social sciences and the humanities. But with few exceptions their Eastern European genealogical traces have interfered in the process of assimilation into the global knowledge production system.

1.3 The Splendours and Miseries of Post-Cold War Studies

In response to the mainstream reading of the postsocialist as a void, and the postcolonial analogizing of the postsocialist condition, and in dissatisfaction with an antiquarian turn in the emergent postsocialist studies, a number of scholars have offered alternative definitions and concepts. One of the well-known models was formulated by Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery in their understanding of post-Cold War studies. They did an important job in at least opening the discussion for looking 'between the posts'. However, it is not clear where the authors themselves speak from, in relation to the postcolonial and/or postsocialist world. Their geopolitics of knowledge is obviously Western, although certainly leftist. This leads to vague and shifting optics, and paradoxically to a reproduction of vantage points they seem to be against. The authors homogenize the USSR, at times buying the Soviet theses at face value, ignoring the gap between the Bolshevik manipulative rhetoric and the reality.

Chari and Verdery operate with generalized and homogenized notions of postcolonial studies and postsocialist discourses which are far from concrete cases of both critiques. Thus they claim that the main postcolonial vector is away from Marxism and towards philosophically informed critique, although we know that some of the most powerful postcolonial texts are Marxist (in a Frankfurt School rather than any orthodox sense) and can at the same time be postmodernist and philosophical. Further on the authors say that the main postsocialist vector of development is in an ethnographic direction with Marxist tools (Chari and Verdery 2009, p. 9). This could seem a totally false statement if we did not guess that Chari and Verdery actually meant a very specific Western sort of postsocialist social sciences exemplified by Michael Burawoy, and completely ignored even the possibility of postsocialist subjects themselves reflecting on their own condition, which would demonstrate an almost completely opposite picture. So with good intensions Chari and Verdery continue to practise epistemic colonialism and endorse the Cold War division of intellectual labour.

Their suggestion to jettison both postsocialist and postcolonial studies and launch a single overarching post-Cold War research agenda instead is grounded in a contradictory impulse of freeing the social sciences from the Cold War ideological restrictions but paradoxically using that very Cold War as the only vantage point. It is questionable not only because contemporary critical discourses usually try to avoid vantage points as such, but also because the Cold War is back albeit in a new disguise and also is a too narrow and too ideological, historically recent vantage point, seriously narrowing and simplifying our perspective.

Chari and Verdery's approach lacks the necessary intersectionality as they attempt to analyse various aspects of socialism and colonialism in an isolated way, without realizing that labour markets and redistribution of surplus value, the Soviet yet obviously colonial division of labour and resources cannot be regarded separately from racist and colonialist human taxonomies of the Soviet Empire. The Soviet economy was unimaginable without colonialism, as well as its double standard gender system. Although this was a very specific kind of racism which could take mutant and creolized class, religious, ethnic and gender forms. Buying at face value the Western revisionist Sovietology idea of the USSR as an 'affirmative action empire' (Martin 2001), and homogenizing the Soviet Union as opposed to the rest of the Socialist world without taking into account the imperial-colonial structure of the Tsarist empire, later preserved and 'improved' by the Soviet leaders, the authors ignore the fact that the Bolsheviks wanted to have communism and keep the colonial empire too (Sahni 1997, p. 109).

The Tsarist empire, the USSR, and even today's Russia are all multicultural, multi-confessional, multiethnic polities held together at different times by various ideologies, faiths, and power discourses. And any conversation on the meaning of the postsocialist cannot start as late as with the Cold War, because the trajectories of discrimination and human taxonomies in which these discourses are grounded, started much earlier than the capitalism versus socialism division. The Socialist experience cannot be taken exclusively to ideology the same way as it cannot be limited by colonialism. It existed at their intersection leading to the creation of a model which – after the collapse of Socialism – turned out to be colonial as a whole, in relation to the winning neoliberal modernity/coloniality, yet retaining traces of its own internal imperial-colonial structures. Understanding this configuration requires a critical and dynamic intersectional approach.

Chari and Verdery do not sufficiently differentiate between the post-Soviet and the postsocialist discourses whose relations with postcolonialism are different not for ideological or even economic but rather for racial reasons and because of the external imperial difference (in this case it is clearly Russia as the loser-empire in modernity, an empire which turns into a colony in the eyes of the West). Russia conquering Siberia and later the Caucasus and Turkestan is a more traditional case of imperial-colonial relations often mimicked from Spain, Great Britain, and France, whereas its advances into Europe – both in Tsarist and later Soviet periods – are fit less well into the postcolonial pattern because within the larger Eurocentric and progressivist logic Russia/USSR stands lower than the territories in Europe it attempted to conquer.

Chari and Verdery also make a mistake of dehistorization comparing the Soviet empire of the post-Second World War period with the European capitalist empires of the much earlier époque when they were involved in the conquest, infiltration, and annexation of the colonized territories. These events took place at different historical junctures: the Russian empire did exactly the same but it happened before the Soviet times, and the capitalist empires were not annexing new territories after the Second World War either.

This brings us to the necessity of differentiating more carefully between various local histories and structural models within the postsocialist, post-Soviet, and various postcolonial intersections. Postcolonial critique can be very roughly divided into two versions – the earlier leftist anti-capitalist and still progressivist modernizing form (grounded in the principle of young national modernities), and the later more critical and radical post-colonial theories questioning Western modernity primarily in its epistemic aspects and often looking for the erased, forgotten and subsumed indigenous knowledges and ways of life. Both extremes are potentially anachronistic as they tend to idealize either socialism or the highly constructed precolonial tradition. Both sensibilities do not agree with the postsocialist subjects' stance either when we criticize state Socialism or when we refuse to romanticize the constructed 'tradition'. According to Slovenian scholar Svetlana Slapšak, 'the carefully cultivated "wisdom of the colonized" is effective – almost deadly – in restoring conservative values imposed as liberation from Socialist ideological constraints, and imposing nationalist discourses and practices instead, initializing forced silence and other anthropological signs of power being distributed through new channels' (Slapšak 2012, p. 40).

The evolution of postsocialist critique therefore did not correspond to the familiar postcolonial logic at all – either in its temporal or in its notional accents and nodes. Initially the postsocialist trajectory was marked by an almost emotional rejection of everything Socialist and a fascination with Western knowledge. This happened at a time when postcolonial theorists still largely rehearsed the leftist anti-capitalist discourses. Later a number of postsocialist scholars started reinterpreting the Socialist legacy in a less negative way, criticizing the Western infiltration of postsocialist academia. They were doing this at the point when postcolonial critique started developing its anti-Western modernity stance and objectively the two discourses intersected, although the traditions they had in mind were totally different and they did not hear each other then. This very schematic juxtaposition of the speed and direction of postcolonial and postsocialist trajectories demonstrates that there are indeed many intersections but they often happen at different time periods and are triggered for completely different reasons leading nevertheless to similar results and even possible coalitions in the end, because ultimately they manifest the spectre of different reactions to the coloniality of power.

In their introduction to the 2012 special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* devoted to postcolonialism, communism, and East-Central Europe, Dorota Kołodziejczyk and Cristina Sandru explain the lacking or marginal intersections between the postcolonial and postsocialist realms, through political and disciplinary terms, claiming that anti-communist dissidence in Eastern Europe was seen in the West (including the postcolonial theorists of the West) as a right-wing movement which was not necessarily the case, and also that postcolonial theory was grounded in what they call post-structural culturalism, and rejected other approaches (Kołodziejczyk and Sandru 2012, p. 114). This is true of the relations between the Western-based largely post-Marxist postcolonial theory and the postsocialist world in its (peripheral) European frames. But it is not necessarily true in a wider horizon – I mean among less Western varieties of postcolonial discourse produced by third world intellectuals, and the postsocialist condition in its wider than Eastern European sense.

But let us go back to Chari and Verdery. They apply the Western area studies sources rather than paying any attention to the discourses formulated in the postsocialist regions themselves, by the still living but rapidly passing away people who can offer first-hand testimonies of the Soviet and Socialist racism, colonialist and gendered divisions of labour, and

inequality in the distribution of resources and representations, as well as other issues demonstrating the mechanics of the Soviet/colonial contexts. Of course the locals did not leave too many texts or these texts are still unavailable. Many of them have never been written for fear of repression or simply the inability of witnesses to write down their experience. So these testimonies may exist only in the form of oral histories and anthropological interviews. And even if they do exist, they are not in English and not published in the USA or in Western Europe. A number of Western area studies specialists who have had access to such materials (knowing the language and spending some time on the sites) have been using them in their own works, but seldom acknowledging the initial sources or much less methodologies provided by the local scholars, invariably dismissed as merely native informants (Tokhtakhodzhayeva 1999; Kamp 2008).

Such a retelling and translating into English is not always an innocent strategy and particularly when we deal with postcolonial, postsocialist tricksters who often formulate their testimonies very cautiously, being aware of speaking in public, hiding their irony very deeply, negotiating between official versions and personal wounds. They often remain silent about certain events and episodes which are central to their lives and for the Socialist trajectories. Deciphering these lacunas, double discourses, and tricksterism is hardly possible for most of the traditional area studies specialists who are simply retelling the sources in English, Russian, or even the local languages at times, but always following parochial disciplinary modes and positivist principles. Therefore postsocialist knowledge should strive to be as transdisciplinary as possible.

Another problem is that the mainstream Western media and fictional and cinematic interpretations of most postsocialist countries have been often grounded in sanctioned ignorance and efforts to trivialize recent history, (ab)using it and accentuating exclusively the sensational and violent images and stories such as of the mafia, mass rapes, self-immolation, ethnic clans controlling huge territories, prostitution, human trafficking, involuntary sterilizations, the spread of AIDS and TB (Shakirova 2006; Slapšak 2012).

In the end Chari and Verdery realize that it is necessary to take into account the opinion of local postsocialist and postcolonial informants, but disappoint us with a token mentioning of the classical third world activists and dissidents from Socialist countries. This is a false analogy because the dissident anti-Soviet movements were quite different from decolonial national liberation struggles. Many dissidents held extremely conservative

and potentially rightist and even in some cases, racist and patriarchal views. This combination of ideological protests against state Socialism and a xenophobic exclusionary stance in relation to ethnic minorities, other religions, women, LGBTQ people, was particularly painful in the case of former Yugoslavia. According to Slapšak, often women were equated with communists and therefore dismissed on the grounds that 'women were responsible for communism in the first place because they were granted rights' (Slapšak 2012, p. 43). As a result, by the 1980s the majority of dissidents in Yugoslavia opted for the war, while feminists favoured peace and the preservation of Yugoslavia as a state, and thus the war in Yugoslavia turned into a war between genders. Therefore, continuing to identify the whole postsocialist discourse with dissidents is a grave mistake.

1.4 The Post-Dependence Condition

Finally, there is one more concept suggested to analyse the postsocialist condition in all its multiple reverberations with other un-freedom conditions. It is the term 'post-dependence', easily prone to accusations of universalism yet having some potential for the future. It was proposed by the Polish scholars of the Post-Dependence Studies Centre at the Faculty of Polish Language and Literature at Warsaw University (Nycz 2014). They did so mainly for political reasons to avoid the word 'colonial' applied to the study of Poland, as it could be offensive to national pride and for the country which for centuries has vacillated between proto-imperial and proto-colonial conditions. This is a peculiar Central and Eastern European manifestation of the contradictory intersection of the postcolonial, secondary Eurocentric, post-imperial, postsocialist and an array of smaller complexes and nuances, voids, and silences. We should fully realize the Aesopian and contradictory nature of this term. But the term 'post-dependence' can be also a pluriversal term better and more fully defining the situation of the ex-Socialist world along with other 'posts' because it does not focus exclusively on ideology and class (as in the case of postsocialism), or on race, colonialism, and Eurocentrism (as in the case of postcolonial discourse). The term post-dependence being deceivingly terminologically unmarked, lets additional dimensions and flexibility into our theorizing, dimensions that would hardly be found or admitted had we been speaking exclusively in postcolonial or ideologically postsocialist terms.

The commonality of human experience, and particularly that of dependence, should not be formulated and seen exclusively from the Western and modern position any more, but the imperial-colonial complex cannot act as the universal common denominator either. The question is how to define the existing intersections between the post-apartheid, post-dictatorship, postcolonial, post-Fordist, and postsocialist? These intersections stem from the very nature of modernity, yet they are not always obviously or unproblematically connected with its darker colonial side. It is crucial not to withdraw into one's local standpoint experience of oppression, but to create conditions for an alter-global vision and transversal coalitions of struggle against all modern/colonial forms of dependence.

Defining post-dependence as a specific condition intersecting postcolonial, postsocialist, post-dictatorship, post-apartheid, and other similar experiences, we inevitably come to a multi-spatial hermeneutic of many local histories and dependence narratives. The emerging post-dependence community unites those who were marked by the Anzaldúan 'colonial wound' (Anzaldúa 1999, p. 25) and those who suffered totalitarian or dictatorship suppression in a common mechanism of realizing one's own humiliation and/or one's complicity in the humiliation of others on local and global levels; in a meticulous study of the sensibility of exclusion, rejection, fury, resistance, overcoming, repentance, nostalgia, and the painful birth of emancipated, independent, and finally fully grown up and responsible humanity. There will always be nuances of experience and disjointed opacities. For some people the indicator of race will be more important than sexuality; for others religion will prevail over gender. Multiple dependencies and intersections of oppression may fold into intricate designs hard to be fully rationally interpreted by others, yet often grasped and conveyed through artistic metaphors, leitmotifs, and recurrent themes.

The common denominator in all post-dependence cases will be getting rid of the trauma, not necessarily in the form of the colonial wound, linked directly with colonial experience. It can be a trauma of imperial difference typical for the Russian sensibility. It can also be the experience of former second-rate Europeans from Eastern Europe who for centuries have been multiply dependent on various empires and today slowly and painfully are re-entering the European world and wider, the global world, struggling to discover and accept the affinities of their experience with the global South. In spite of some positive globalization tendencies like easier travelling and the emergence of critical cosmopolitanism, divisions into sameness

and otherness are stubborn even if at times imperceptible. They linger after the formal laws establish equality. And former internal others suddenly become externalized and maximally dehumanized.

1.5 Global Coloniality and the Postsocialist Other

What can still allow us to regard the postcolonial and the postsocialist together is not a historical concept of colonialism linked with postcolonial studies but rather the decolonial concept of the global coloniality of power, of being, of gender, of knowledge, of perception (Mignolo and Escobar 2009). After all the Socialist and postsocialist experience is an integral part of modernity/coloniality, although a complex, and in many ways contradictory part. Taking it into account is necessary in any decolonial efforts to conceptualize global coloniality and the possible ways out. It is especially important that the main task of the decolonial option is a critical analysis of modernity and its darker side – coloniality – tracing the genealogy of modernity's violence in relation to its internal and external others, and restoring the alternative genealogies of decolonial struggles in order to offer ways of delinking from modernity/coloniality and decolonizing our being, knowledge, perception, gender, and memory.

The decolonial option combines some elements of world system analysis, critical race and ethnic studies, and women-of-colour feminism, with themes and issues typical for postcolonial works, or in other words, accentuates not the historical description of colonialist and neocolonialist strategies, but rather the long-lasting traces in ontological, axiological, and epistemic spheres that are left, after any colonialism as such seems to be a matter of the past. Socialism in this frame will be still a part of a larger and longer modernity but its stray and irregular version. Coloniality as an outcome of colonialist and imperialist histories acts as an overall conceptual category and helps us grasp certain mechanisms, the logic and direction of modernity's evolution always looking at the world from the perspective of the exteriority or the outside created from the inside, in Enrique Dussel's formulation (Dussel 1993).

Global coloniality as an indispensable underside of modernity emerged as a conceptual and ideological matrix of the Atlantic world that, since 1500, has expanded all over the globe as a specific kind of imperial/colonial relations, and brought imperialism and capitalism together. Global coloniality is manifested in particular local forms and conditions, remaining a recognizable connecting thread for the understanding of

otherwise often meaningless and dissociated manifestations of modernity. In Russia or the Ottoman sultanate – the sphere of imperial difference with the first class Western empires, capitalism (as well as race) was not a necessary ingredient, as the global coloniality has worked more profoundly in the spheres of thinking, knowledge, and perception. On the global scale the imperial difference mutated into the colonial one, as Russia became a Janus-faced empire that felt itself a colony in the presence of the West and half-heartedly played the part of the caricature 'civilizer' in its non-European colonies. It is a graphic case of coloniality without colonialism. The dead-endness of external imperial difference has been for centuries a specific Russian problem, long before the capitalism/socialism divide.

In this book I cannot avoid addressing at least partially, the sensibility and subjectivity of contemporary Russian people many of whom are marked by a severe postimperial syndrome in which the 'post-' unfortunately does not stand for any critical analysis or rejection but rather indicates the continuing imperial claims and assumptions. The concept of the 'postimperial' as an aftertaste of the empire always ready to be resurrected and easily manipulated by state propaganda, also points to the necessity of de-imperializing the people's minds and bodies, which would be a specific equivalent of decolonization performed on and by the ex-colonizers.

Delinking from the existing system of knowledge production, disciplinary spheres, and epistemic modes, the decolonial option attempts not to 'study colonialism', but to decolonize knowledge, subjectivity, gender, sensuality from the position of exteriority – the outside created from and by the inside. Crucial then is the distinction between imperialism/colonialism and the rhetoric of modernity/logic of coloniality (Mignolo and Tlostanova2007).

Decolonial thinkers are deliberately delinking from the epistemic grounds and principles of modernity attempting to unlearn the naturalized scholarly tools, concepts, and premises in order to relearn and rediscover forgotten or marginalized genealogies of being and thinking (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012). The decolonial concept of pluriversality differs from 'situated knowledges' (Haraway 1988) as it means a coexistence and correlation of many interacting and intersecting non-abstract universals grounded in the geopolitics and corpo-politics of knowledge, being and perception, reinstating the experiential nature of knowledge and the origin of any theory in the human life-world. Pluriversal critique targets not the concrete constellations of race, gender, and class but rather the aberration

of the universal as such. And here it is important to detect the hidden impulses and threads penetrating and uniting all the local histories in modernity/coloniality without drawing any far-fetched universal conclusions. This decolonial pluriversality is decentred and stresses the locality and provinciality of the universalized Western concepts by constantly juxtaposing them with their non-Western parallels, opposites, and incommensurable versions.

To make it easier for readers to understand the main arguments of the book it is worth pointing out from the start that I interpret the terms 'decolonial' and 'postcolonial' in a specific way somewhat different from the generally accepted definitions. Namely I focus not on the geocultural or even theoretical and disciplinary trajectories of the two approaches, not on the differences in their origination and their links to various types of colonialism, but rather on their methodological, epistemic, and politico-ethical grounds and agendas that at times overlap and at times remain incommensurable. I see the postcolonial as an objective condition, the geopolitical and geohistorical situation of those who were born and raised in ex-colonial societies. The decolonial stance is one step further in the sense that it involves a conscious choice of how to interpret reality and how to act upon it. It starts from a specific postcolonial situation, which can fall into the traditional sphere of interests limited to the British and French colonies, or focus on a more typically decolonial Central and South American configuration, or even go beyond both locales and venture into the unconventional imperial-colonial histories of Central and Eastern Europe, the Ottoman sultanate, or Russia. A mere description of a postcolonial predicament or an analysis of its present outcomes in a concrete locale, then, must lead to the next step of developing an active and conscious ethical, political, and epistemic positionality whose goal is to decolonize thinking, being, perception, gender, and memory.

It is a complex stance of someone who not only clearly sees but also delinks from various manifestations of modernity/coloniality in one's art, activism, scholarly works, and existential and political views. To put it simply, it is not enough to call a scholar postcolonial anymore. It is crucial to take into account not only our given objective positions, but also who and what we choose to be in our profession and in our life. Decolonial thinkers are quite often postcolonial people and postcolonial scholars in their majority share the decolonial agenda. And many of the fictional and art works analysed in the book were created by people of such persuasions.

In a sense I try to divorce the postcolonial and the decolonial discourses from their respective genealogies of knowledge and see how relevant these theories remain when tested against quite different geopolitical regions such as Eurasia (in the continental and not in a political sense) or Central and South-Eastern Europe. And here the postsocialist dimension enters the stage complicating the picture with the darker colonial sides of the Socialist modernity, as well as with the subalternization and neocolonialization of the ex-Socialist countries and people in the two and a half decades that have passed since the disintegration of the Socialist world.

1.6 Beyond the Void?

As I tried to briefly illustrate above, the breakup of the Socialist world has led to various efforts to nominate and define new disciplinary areas and approaches for the study of the postsocialist world many of which objectively intersect with the postcolonial problematic. The easiest and at times misleading way was to analogize postsocialism and postcolonialism. The more radical step of post-Cold War studies attempted to get rid of both concepts and question the progressivism at their core. Some scholars continued to work with 'posts-' but in a less overtly political way choosing instead an ideologically unmarked post-dependence. In any of these cases, however, they were not questioning modernity/coloniality as such, particularly in its epistemic forms. They were working within the established normative system presented and internalized as natural. No wonder most of the logical and epistemic operations used to define the emergent area of research dealing with the postsocialist world were quite predictable and limited by comparisons and defensive explanatory reactions to some presumably objective events like globalization or neocolonialism.

Yet it is possible and necessary to take a more radical step and question the very epistemic mechanisms that lie in the basis of modernity/coloniality and define the ex-second world, as much as the first and third worlds. A bitter disappointment in and a radical delinking from modernity/coloniality is what unites many people in the world. But there is no space for any traditional abstract universalism here, as a person from Eastern Europe would experience this anger and angst differently from an Amerindian or an African. Instead of a proliferation of 'posts-' which tends to be descriptive and restricted, it is more important now to *disengage* from a number of modernity discourses which marred its Socialist version similarly to the capitalist one, such as Orientalism, progressivism, racism, sexism, and the

imperial/colonial power asymmetries. It is too early to speak of any temporal post-dependence as dependences are not over and in fact are proliferating in new forms. Therefore it is important to find ways of disengaging and subsequent engaging with something else and building the world anew.

In the following chapters I will try to present how this multiple disengaging takes place in the intersecting realms of ontology (decolonization of being), epistemology (decolonization of thinking), and axiology (decolonial aesthesis), in the experience and theorizing of the postcolonial/postsocialist people.

CHAPTER 2

How to Disengage from the Coloniality of Perception

In the early 2000s at an international conference devoted to dialogue among civilizations I happened to be seated next to a princess of one of the Arabic states. She had predictably graduated from 'Oxbridge' as had several previous generations of her family. The princess had everything including a patented royal equanimity. Yet when I mentioned 'coloniality', she suddenly looked at me and said that in her dorm room in an elite British university there was a fire plug with a red shiny cover hiding a curled hose. Her very first guest – an over-polite Englishman classmate from a good family, asked if the fire plug were some national ornament or a sacred symbol that the princess carried around to avoid homesickness. Her royal upbringing did not allow her to openly comment on this incident. But inhaling the sweet scented smoke from the silver water pipe the princess could not hide her annoyance and fatigue, so familiar to me as well. Her English husband sitting next to us inhaled from the same water pipe and started defending the maladroit guest: 'He did not do it on purpose, just out of ignorance; he did not mean to offend.' 'Precisely!' – the princess and me exclaimed almost in chorus – 'but the problem is that the English classmate has always been allowed not to know, whereas we would never even think of asking him such a question because we must know the sacred and not so sacred symbols of his Western civilization'. Or, in the words of Michelle K. (a Singaporean graduate student of another well-known Western university), 'merely claiming that "our" art or philosophy is as beautiful or good as their

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Western counterparts only disguises the problem: it hides the issue of why we are in the position of having to make that claim in the first place (the question of coloniality), and it begs the question of what we mean by "good", or "beautiful", or even by "art" or "philosophy" (the question of imperial aesthetics)' (Mignolo and Michelle K. 2013).

In what follows I will try to trace what makes decolonial aesthesis different from other well-known modes of contemporary art and recent aesthetic theories, to understand the mechanisms of aesthetic emancipation and the ways of decolonial art evolution, particularly in the postsocialist and postcolonial contexts, as well as in other post-dependence societies.

2.1 An Old Hat in a New Box: Homo Altermodernus, or a Montage Human Being?

The first two decades of the twenty-first century have been globally marked by rigorous debates on aesthetic issues, and at the same time, by a sense of exhaustion of the subject itself due to the fact that many of the artistic slogans of the 1960s, including the demand for authenticity, creativity, and political and social engagement, have been already implemented in contemporary art, only to be trivialized and appropriated by global capitalism to create a sensation of impasse and the impossibility of opposing anything relevant to the chameleon talents of neoliberal globalization which is able to discredit any honest artistic ideals such as community or participation.

New aesthetic trends have announced their arrival, yet many of them hint at a well forgotten past. The spectrum of such presumably new trends is quite wide – from the revival of the traditional European preoccupation with beauty and/as goodness, to the return of the existential and individual dimensions as opposed to political and communal in art, which is in itself a symptom of the European reterritorialization in an individualistic rendering of the Western self, all too easily co-opted by the state or the market. Other options include various projects of revisiting vanguard, socially engaged art, and generally a certain repoliticization of aesthetics in bland, anonymous, and mundane forms of essentially apolitical practices mimicking the political, often with a focus on communicative and participatory drives in relations between the artist, the art, and the viewer (Post-autonomy online).

'Altermodern' is a concept coined by Nicolas Bourriaud – French art theorist and curator of the exhibition of the same name in London's Tate Gallery in 2009. He is well known as the author of one of the most influential current aesthetic theories – that of relational aesthetics. Bourriaud broadly defines relational art as a set of artistic practices which take as their 'point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space' (Bourriaud 2002, p. 113), while relational art becomes for him an activity consisting in producing relationships with the world by means of signs, forms, actions, and objects. According to Bourriaud, 'relational art produces intersubjective encounters through which meaning is elaborated collectively, rather than in the space of individual consumption' (Bourriaud 2002, pp. 17–18). It remains unclear, however, what mechanism would make the viewers share their collective experience and what would motivate them in creating such a collective meaning.

This theory strives to define the newest trends in Western art and aesthetics from within the exhausted (alter)modernity, echoing the new sensibility of the world and the subject, linked with the internet, computer technologies, and computer metaphors (user friendliness, do-it-yourself interactivity, et cetera), yet clearly erasing or ignoring social and political power asymmetries and hierarchical differences, seeing abstract artists who are by default modern subjects and referring to some homogeneous imagined audiences capable of and willing to create a collective meaning. As Claire Bishop pointed out, 'the relations set up by relational aesthetics are not intrinsically democratic, as Bourriaud suggests, since they rest too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity as whole and of community as immanent togetherness' (Bishop 2004, p. 67). Bourriaud simplifies contemporary social reality and contemporary art, erasing the boundary between art and life and doing it not in the direction of a utopian high ideal as was the case with the Romantics, but in the direction of taking art to the level of the mundane and turning it into the generator of some sort of artificial social environment for the collective action of an imagined hypothetical group of people.

What is absent in relational aesthetics is the conflicting complexity and dynamic contextuality of contemporary art and life, the multiplicity of subjectivities and intersubjective relations and a lack of consensus on what and who is the contemporary subject or artist, or on the possibility of any homogeneous and shared experience of appreciating or interacting with art. To exactly what community is Bourriaud oriented? Where does his

idea that relational art is not really art but life itself lead us? On closer inspection we find that his trendy theory is rather provincial in its scope and nearsighted in its approach as it rests on certain assumptions which are far from being universal or agreed upon. These assumptions obviously refer exclusively to a Western subject or a subject who turned into Western, but what is left for the rest of the world remains unclear or rather it does not concern Bourriaud to begin with. He is not interested in what kind of aesthetics, if any, a person needs, who cannot or does not want to sign up to relational aesthetics due to a partial belonging to (post)modernity or a radical non-belonging to it.

In his interview with Bartholomew Ryan when asked rather ironically if the global state of culture marked by total creolization 'could be said to describe only a new cosmopolitanism that is accessible to relatively few', Bourriaud emotionally protested evoking the image of the global violence of the capitalist system and accusing of extreme naivety everyone who doubts its totality and continues to differentiate other than economic shades of discrimination (Ryan 2009). Criticizing multiculturalism and identity politics for their paternalism, Bourriaud comes to a problematic conclusion, throwing out the baby with the dirty water. He attempts to lift up (*aufheben*) the dialectical contradiction of the global and local by means of yet another universalization of modernity which he imbues with historical ambivalence seemingly protecting it from both standardization and nostalgia.

Four years before the *Altermodern* exhibition which launched this new concept into the public domain, Bourriaud stressed that artists are looking for a new modernity that would be based on translation: 'What matters today is to translate the cultural values of cultural groups and to connect them to the world network. This "reloading process" of modernism according to the twenty-first-century issues could be called altermodernism, a movement connected to the creolization of cultures and the fight for autonomy, but also the possibility of producing singularities in a more and more standardized world' (Bourriaud 2005).

Altermodernism is in fact a response of the anxious Western mind, feeling that power (in this case, a power as the right to declare new trends in art) is slipping away. As a European product altermodernism was an effort to save modernity and give it a new impetus in the conditions of globalization. Bourriaud's *Altermodern Manifesto* claims that all artists in the world today use the same techniques and artistic devices. Therefore it is high time we forget about identity politics and differences and greet the

coming of boundless altermodernity instead of the old-fashioned postmodernism and outdated postcolonialism (Bourriaud 2009).

Altermodernism is all-inclusive, marked by a new global omnivorous universalism and a similarly indiscriminate and levelling perception. It grows from the assumption that there really is a new global homogeneous culture marked by the intensification and simplification of contacts, migrations, and journeys, as well as subtitles and translations. For Bourriaud the new slogans of altermodern art are creolization and transit. These two concepts immediately evoke a different genealogy as they are both well-known and rather old terms coming from the darker side of modernity. Bourriaud simply discovered them rather belatedly and immediately appropriated them, forcefully unlinking their initial connection with specific local conditions and circumstances of theory production.

Bourriaud does not leave the progressivist scheme, so typical of modernity. He just merely prolongs its vector to the next stop – altermodernity – without changing the passenger of this train – a homo modernus–postmodernus–altermodernus. For him altermodernism is an attempt to rethink the present by changing one instrument of periodization to another (Bourriaud 2009) and in fact just a contemporary indication of the end of postmodernism and the local fights against standardization. The main motif of altermodernity then is a wandering in space, time, and various media.

In some ways this position echoes Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's stance as a network variant of collective opposition from the side of the multitude organized through conflicting and at the same time acting manifestations of singularities in the common. Similarly to Bourriaud they also celebrated the end of imperialism and colonialism as specifically modern phenomena claiming that in the post-Fordist era the previous power hierarchies dissolved and there emerged a unique opportunity for the multitude to practise a radical democracy supporting the multiplicity of possible worlds opposed to the single world of Empire (Hardt and Negri 2005). However, this is an illusion, because the Empire meticulously reproduces all modern hierarchies, especially in the department of expropriating someone else's knowledge. This does not allow the fulfilment of a truly radical democracy, within the frame of which multifarious and equal knowledges would serve not the capital but the commonwealth.

Bourriaud is preoccupied with the same problems but he formulates them in relation to contemporary art and the altermodern subject who creates it. Already in *Postproduction* he speaks of the shift from the artist as

a creator to the artist as a programmer or even a DJ who is merely selecting cultural objects to place them into new contexts (Bourriaud 2002a), in other words, recycling what was already created before. In *The Radicant* (Bourriaud 2009a) Bourriaud attempts to politicize this position claiming that there is a difference between appropriation and 'formal collectivism' (referring readers to the familiar Marxist idea of the commons as seen in art). The theorist claims that the aesthetic challenge of contemporary art lies in remaking the montage of reality, the constant editing and reprogramming of the everyday material in order to implement alternative and temporary versions of life stressing the importance of precariousness, instability, and permanent transit as elements of contemporary culture, society, institutions, and group and individual behaviour.

Thus at the centre of attention stands a false opposition of capitalism which Bourriaud imbues with finality, immobility, and stability of the political system marked by a feverish change of merely external decorations, and contemporary art, grounded in the Marxist idea of the lack of any stable human essence, which is always a result of this or that agency at a particular moment of history. But we realize that contemporary capitalism, and wider modernity, are very good at adapting to new trends and can easily build Bourriaud's paradigm of instability into their system making it in the end just one more external prop of the tamed protest.

Altermodernity has the right to exist but it should not be the only legitimate theory around, and the epistemic operation of appropriating someone else's knowledge, its trivialization and distortion should not be the only possible modus of relations between the world of modernity–postmodernity–altermodernity and that of transmodernity correlating with the decolonial stance.

Various artistic efforts to delink from this logic can hardly be regarded as something entirely new. Yet, previously the non-Western aesthetic endeavours often had a restricted choice of either postcolonial predictable resistance forms or going back to archaic stylized authenticity, exoticized as fashionable in the West. Today delinking (Mignolo 2007) and transformation take place on a more profound level, leading to fundamental rethinking of aesthetics and art themselves as Western products, and diagnosing the crisis of aesthetics as part of the crisis of modernity, turning to transmodern (in the sense of overcoming modernity) forms of contemporary art, firmly linked with knowledge production and subjectivity. The main impulse of this art is to free itself from the aesthetic, mental, cultural, epistemic, and existential constraints of modernity/coloniality.

Instead of predictable and marketable socially engaged art, decolonial post-dependence art focuses on a deeper shaking of the very foundations of Western art, making a paradigmatic shift from resistance to re-existence to use Colombian artist and theorist Adolfo Albán-Achinte's term (Albán-Achinte 2006). The shaking of the foundations of Western art can start through a decolonial rethinking of the concepts of aesthesis and aesthetics as such.

2.2 Aesthesis and Aesthetics

Aesthesis has become a frequently used term in recent reflections on art, perception, philosophy of the mind, and critical social theory. In different genealogies of thought aesthesis has different meanings. The most well-known interpretation is the Western postmodernist version in the works of French sociologist Michel Maffesoli for whom aesthesis is a total and collective aestheticization of the life-world (Maffesoli 1996), as well as Deleuze's and Guattari's reflections on art as a conglomerate of sensations, a sum of perceptions and affects, generated by the artist (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 176). But there is also a different interpretation of aesthesis developed in the works of decolonial thinkers, artists, writers, and curators – a decolonial aesthesis.[1]

Aesthetics is a term coined by German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten (Baumgarten 1750), to denote a modern shift from a mere sensibility to, on the one hand, a taste in good art with a specific material and market value, and on the other hand, a mode of articulation between various forms of agency, production, perception, and thinking – in other words, a new explicit institutionalized philosophic, moral, cultural, and social sphere, which around the early nineteenth century, according to Jacques Rancière (Rancière 2009, p. 36), shifted the previous representational regime of art to a contradictory aesthetic one, gradually leading to the demise of art as such, to its dissolving and merging with other activities. Not incidentally Rancière also stresses the fact that aesthetics in its modern understanding was born at the time of the French Revolution and was bound up with equality from the very beginning, a democratic and liberating spirit which indicated simultaneously the beginning of art's demise. This equality was of contradictory nature and presupposed not merely a destruction of previous artistic hierarchies as well as the boundaries between art and life, but also a problematic shift in relations between the passive sensibility and active understanding of art

addressed among others by Kant in his rendering of the aesthetic sphere as a specific realm where 'works of art were free from the forms of sensory connection proper to the objects of knowledge or to the objects of desire. They were merely "free appearance" responding to a free play, meaning a non-hierarchical relation between the intellectual and the sensory faculties' (Rancière 2009, p. 37).

Aesthesis has a much longer though also implicit genealogy as an integral part of human nature as biological species. In this understanding aesthesis has successfully lived until today to take a central place in contemporary models of society, culture, and art within the frame of the so-called affective turn and going back to reconsider matter and materiality as well as the ways of their perception. Examples of this tendency are the concept of vibrant matter formulated by Jane Bennett (Bennett 2010); Brian Masumi's understanding of affect as the foundation of meaning bound up with the social and existing in a reflexive relationship with it (Masumi 2002); the posthuman post-anthropocentric philosophy of Rosi Braidotti (Braidotti 2013); Patricia Clough's model within which the affect as a pre-subjective (pre-rational) bodily phenomenon exceeding consciousness, is juxtaposed to emotion as an already conceptual product (Clough 2008); affect understood as an embodied perception and an intersection of ideational and somatic stands in Eugene Shinckle's rendering (2013); and a possibility to move beyond the individual and personal, to shift critical attention away from language, discourse, and representation and emphasize the real instead, in Anu Koivunen's interpretation (2013).

Aesthesis literally refers to our ability to perceive through the senses, and the process of sensual perception itself – visual, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, et cetera. With the emergence of explicit aesthetics, aesthesis was subordinated and subsumed on a global scale. It was a part of the wider process of colonization of being, knowledge, and perception. In the area of sameness this referred to the sphere of the premodern, whereas in the area of otherness it referred to both spatial and temporal differences. This has led to very strict formulations of what is beautiful and sublime, good and evil, and to the emergence of particular canonical structures, artistic genealogies and taxonomies, and cultivating taste preferences. The latter determined according to Western whimsies the role and function of the artist in society, always othering anything that fell through the coarse sieve of normative European aesthetics and presenting its local affective experience as universal.

Certainly the intention to liberate the aesthesis is not a mere decolonial non-Western phenomenon. It is present in the internal Western critique of the ratiodicea syndrome as well. Thus already Wilhelm Dilthey was not happy with the 'knowing subject' previously constructed by Locke, Hume, and Kant, who explained experience and cognition in terms of facts that are merely representational:

> No real blood flows in the veins of the knowing subject constructed by Locke, Hume, and Kant, but rather the diluted extract of reason as a mere activity of thought. A historical as well as psychological approach to whole human beings led me to explain even knowledge and its concepts (such as the external world, time, substance, and cause) in terms of the manifold powers of a being that wills, feels, and thinks; and I do this despite the fact that knowledge seems to be woven of concepts derived from the mere contents of perception, representation, and thought. (Dilthey 1991, p. 50)

This dimension is particularly meaningful for the non-Western subjects who are initially deprived of their ability to think and whose bodies are systematically disciplined and taxonomized by bio-power in order to be either classified as part of nature or mutated and retailored to be distorted reflections of Western bodily representations. Yet such copies always remain marked by insurmountable difference imposed and constructed by the West. A non-Western body is much more sensitive to the bodily dimensions of knowledge, perception, creativity, sexuality, and gender. In their experience the highly constructed material bodily difference is constantly put forward and problematized and such people are seen or made invisible only and exclusively through their bodily difference.

Decolonial aesthesis growing out from the border position aims at liberation from often unconscious but persistent total control over the sensations to which our bodies react. To do this it is necessary to decolonize knowledge regulating aesthesis, and subjectivities which are controlled by Western modern–postmodern–altermodern aesthetics (Mignolo 2011a).

2.3 Art and Beauty

The correlation of aesthetics and aesthesis is built on a particular interpretation of the role and meaning of beauty as a central category of art which is definitely connected with the ongoing efforts to grasp how

universally human or contextually bound is our sense of the beautiful. In mainstream affect theories there is still often a tendency to homogenize all human experience and converse about subjects as such, which have never existed, and also too hastily deny the post-structuralist and semiotic multiple conceptions of the self. The decolonial geopolitics and corpo-politics of knowledge, perception, and being on the contrary strives to combine and balance the discursive and real dimensions in a complex intersectional way. Human affects and mechanisms of perception are universal. According to embodied simulation theory (Gallese 2003) people as well as other primates possess so-called mirror neurons enabling us not merely to feel and have emotions ourselves, but also to detect, understand, and evaluate empathetically similar emotions in others when we witness them being experienced. Yet the manifestations of these affects and modes of perception are always locally, historically, and culturally specific, not in any final or deterministic way but still impossible to ignore and dismiss. It is crucial for those rendered subhuman to contemplate how we inhabit the colonial matrix of power and how we respond to it. It is important to claim our epistemic rights grounded in local histories and in concrete bodies instead of being grounded in abstract disciplinary principles established in local European histories and by body agents who prefer to erase their own contextuality and corporality.

Decolonial aesthesis is not a mere stating of the multiplicity of sensual experience expressions and, consequently, the ways of their comprehension, although that is important as well. One of our peculiarities as a species is the ability to use simultaneously two different mechanisms of orientation in the environment and regulation of our behaviour – intellectual and affective – and two types of cultural experience – rational-analytical and emotional-sensual, intersecting them in the aesthetic sphere. But the concrete notions of what is beautiful and what is ugly, appropriate or improper, are considered today as exclusively culturally determined. There is no universal invariant and necessary law of beauty which every human being would find ideal. Or are there still some judgements of taste and beauty untouched by the coloniality of aesthetics which live in all people regardless of their culture? Kazakh artist Saule Suleimenova stresses that small children unspoiled by culture are able to feel a true beauty often unseen by grownups (Suleimenova 2010a). Answering the questions of my interview she added that a 'true artist is always in quest for the new formula of the beautiful and is always free and ready to create something that would liberate others as well, while beauty equals freedom, joy and

life, but also simplicity and the glowing of truth as it is, and therefore it cannot be a quotation or a mimicking, and is devoid of the annoying factors of cultural discrepancies. It must be your own and not a second hand colonial use of someone else's freedom, or joy' (Suleimenova 2010b).

The token acceptance of multiplicity and diversity cannot cancel the persistent aesthetic power asymmetries and hierarchies created along the modern–postmodern–altermodern templates and the subsequent labelling of non-Western art as primitive, ethnic, naive, or magic realist seen as a non-Western version of postmodernism. The time has passed for classical aesthetics which accused people of lack of taste if their views did not correspond to particular European notions of the beautiful. Previously such people used to be considered 'raw' and unprepared by culture. Kant, among others, identified them as children, women, poor people, and 'savages' for whom nature was merely awful, whereas for those prepared by culture, it immediately became sublime (Kant 1951, p. 105).

The very relativism in the understanding of what is beautiful has become the object of the all-encompassing aesthetic trend of late modernity – that of commodification, consumption, and commercialization. No one is really preoccupied with beauty any more, and nobody can avoid dealing with price – real or symbolic. This aspect accentuates the trajectory of appropriation and accumulation of meaning from simple looting of art objects in non-European countries and bringing them into European museums and cabinets of curiosities, through Africanist and other exoticizing motifs in European modernist art as a way of more refined appropriation, to today's situation, when the former object of appropriation becomes himself or herself the producer of art and a neocolonial good. Decolonial aesthesis is a conscious and self-reflective critical movement for the development of practices of subversion and emancipation of experience, corporality, and the sensations produced by our bodies, from the creative mechanisms, norms, and limitations of (post)(alter)modern/(post)colonial aesthetics. In decolonial contexts, phenomena, and subjectivities there emerges a different aesthetics, an *other* optics, sensibility, and creativity, linked to a specific understanding of the nature of aesthesis, the goals of art, its ontological, ethical, existential, and political status. It can be creativity as dissidence (el Saadawi 1998, pp. 157–75) or as a journey within other people's worlds with a loving perception (Lugones 2003), art as healing and reopening the old colonial wounds and interpreting the sublime as a pleasure from pain (Anzaldúa 1999, p. 3), or art as

re-existence (Albán Achinte 2006). Such a transmodern creativity becomes a way of liberating knowledge and being through subversion, tricksterism, resistance, re-existence, and overcoming modernity and its creative mechanisms, norms, and limitations. Reason alone is not able to set the epistemic and existential sphere free; emotions alone and sensuous experience are not enough either. Art is what is needed for the magic effect of their embodiment in a liberating gesture.

On what super-sensual level does this appreciation of beauty take place? And what happens after, at the turn when the trickery of global coloniality comes into the picture, imperceptibly replacing the all-human ability to simultaneous intellectual and emotional perception with a specific system of aesthetic values imposed onto the whole world as universal thus colonizing its aesthesis. Forms and ways of this colonization can be quite different and at times illusive. The coloniality of aesthetics is no longer expressed in prescriptive rigid forms, and can easily include externally tolerant boutique forms of multiculturalism and exoticism as ways of appropriating the other. Those who refuse to follow this mode are once again excluded and rendered invisible. Can a decolonial artist delink from this logic, and if so how?

Decolonial aesthesis accentuates the purification of our perceptions and sensations from the layers of normative aesthetics. It is not a call to go back to the past, to essentialized and imagined authenticity, much less a call for lowering professional standards in order to avoid competition. Practically all decolonial visual and verbal thinkers turn out to be highly educated, self-conscious, skilful in their play on Western and non-Western models and far from any ancient forms based on immediate perception and reflection/description of the world. Yet inspiration and spontaneity remain an important element of decolonial art along with a strong conceptual ground often surpassing that of Western postmodernist and post-avant-garde art. Therefore any primordialist interpretation of decolonial aesthesis would be guilty of the heresy of inadvertent Orientalism and exoticism. The question is how to legitimize knowledge which we acquire through contesting and liberating aesthetic experience, as opposed to knowledge as it is legitimized in Western modernity, that is, mainly scientific knowledge? What is at work here is a complication and an enrichment of the perspective, a constant balancing on the verge – neither here nor there or both here, there, and elsewhere. Decolonial aesthesis as a perceptive instrument allows realizing the locality of Western aesthetics and letting our sensations and consequently assumptions formed on their

basis, move forward and possibly beyond the normative models of truth, beauty, and goodness.

The historical archival part of decolonial aesthesis lies in the quest for and rehabilitation of native sounds, tastes and odours, that is, in re-existence as an effective decolonial strategy. 'When a human being exists in the core of the colonial matrix as an other with no rights, for him/her an inclusion and an active reworking of odors, tastes, colors, sounds of his/her ancestors and the remaking of systematically negated in modernity forms of interactions with the world, of being and perception, become a necessity, a sensual response of resistance and building of one's own existence anew and in defiance to coloniality' (Albán-Achinte 2009, p. 91). Re-existence then becomes a (re)creation of positive life models, worlds, and sensations overcoming the injustice and imperfection of the world. It is an impulse not of rejection and destruction, but a creation of something different, taking its own path, and overcoming the contradictions of the world and its perception by humans.

2.4 Knowledge, Aesthesis, and Art

Along with the concept of beauty there is one more aspect of aesthesis which is important in the process of decolonization. It is the intricate connection of knowledge and art. The ambivalent yet inextricable link between aesthesis and epistemology is stated in many aesthetic theories both classical and post- and non-classical. Art acts as a crossroads of being and cognition, in which reason and imagination interact. Certainly art does not generate knowledge in any traditional rational sense. It is not knowledge as justified true belief, it is not knowledge firmly linked with logos, but knowledge as an attempt to understand and interpret the world, with a constant realization that there are multiple ways of perception, seeing, sensing, cognizing, and further interpreting this aesthetic (in the wider sense of the word) experience for (re)constructing and changing the world. Thus art gives an insight into different ways of understanding always stressing the multiplicity of truth and the equality of its different interpretations. This specific knowledge would be always relative, non-absolute, multi-spatial, and vacillating between reason and imagination.

Within the Western tradition it was the Romantics who discovered this relativistic aesthetic turn dividing the multiple truth of art from the singular truth of science and accentuating the unique ability of art to transcend the physical world experience into emotional and

supernatural spheres. This led to the twentieth-century modernist and postmodernist vigorous reinterpretations of the aesthetic sphere (from non-classical to post-non-classical to anti-aesthetics and kalliphobia, from post-structuralist to Frankfurt School aesthetic models, from avant-garde to post-avant-garde). Not many aestheticians today go back to Hegelian, Kantian, Platonic, or Aristotelian aesthetics. For a hundred years at least the beautiful, moral, and sublime have been pushed from the centre of aesthetic experience and theorizing giving way to the new, unusual, shocking, intensive, absurd, ugly, obscene, evil, and other such categories. For a hundred years the notion of the community of sense theorized among others by Rancière (Rancière 2009), has been gradually freed from its exclusionary nature. The Romantics also formulated the idea that aesthetic experience in itself should be liberating, that our mind acquires freedom from the dictate of reason in the course of aesthetic experience. But they remained universalists who saw aesthetic experience as the possibility of a new form of universality. In decolonial aesthetics universality gives way to pluriversality of various experiences and the liberating impulse is intensified and made concrete through global decoloniality.

The 1990s brought a partial restoration of conventional aesthetics in the West with the return of beauty equal to goodness (beauty as a moral good) and beauty as a visual pleasure. Dave Hickey (Hickey 1993), Arthur Danto (Danto 2003), Elaine Scarry (Scarry 1999), and several other contemporary Western aestheticians certainly appeared more tolerant and inclusive (for example allowing for LGBTQ aesthetics), yet the logic of inclusion and exclusion remains in the hands of the Western art establishment which determines what is appropriate, urgent, fashionable, and easily commoditized. In the slightly dusty idea of beauty as goodness and beauty as visual pleasure one detects the familiar and much criticized Western approach of visuality as the main category of world perception forced onto the rest of the world, pleasure as the main category of late modern bourgeois consumer culture, simulacrum of moral goodness as a phantom of Western normative morality long dead. In a way this is a contemporary version of Enlightenment universalism. Yet it seems that the pervasive sensibility in contemporary aesthetics remains the same as fifty years ago – demonstrating and deconstructing the masked link between the seemingly autonomous modernist formal experiment and capitalism in its various manifestations, particularly the consumption of art as a commodity.

What is even more important and seldom addressed in mostly post-Marxist contemporary aesthetic theories is the investigation of how non-Western subjects perceive the world and its beauty. How to awaken them to emancipatory sensibility and perception, how to set free their gene of freedom? Instead of the post-Duboisean ontological question of what does it mean to be a problem (Gordon 2007), in the sphere of aesthesis a different question is asked. A person, whose very humanity and rationality were problematized before, aspires to be an artist, and not within the decorative, ornamental, and applied or stylized type of creativity but rather, as a full-fledged artist asking important ontological and ethical questions. It is an effect of a Caliban turning from an object, a mere decoration highlighting the beauty or the sublime of nature (a seascape or a volcano) into a subject with his own agency, aesthesis, and aesthetics. An object suddenly acquires a voice, an ability to suffer, to experience pain and humiliation and to react to this experience through aesthetic means. Objectifying the world the Western consciousness imparts to it the aesthetic qualities of beauty, goodness, and sublimity taking its freedom or sometimes life in return. This refers to nature, women, indigenous people, and other groups and phenomena. Therefore decolonial art is often focused on demonstrating the ugly underside of the Western beautiful and sublime and giving subjectivity and creativity back to Calibans.

2.5 Aesthesis and Corporality

Aesthesis as a sphere of intersection of ontology and epistemology and as an effective mechanism of producing and regulating sensations is inevitably linked with the body – an imperfect instrument which nevertheless makes our perception possible and mediates our subsequent thinking. In the context of the affective turn, sensation as a form of interaction with the environment, falling out of the usual semiotic and rhetorical paradigms of representation, has come forward, together with various affective interpretations of corporality. Setting aesthesis free instead of the disembodied aesthetics allows delinking from the dominant epistemology rooted in theological (in the pre-Enlightenment époque) and ego-logical (in post-Enlightenment modernity) politics of knowledge, being, and perception, grounded in the suppression of sensations and corporality in their geohistorical dimensions.

The difference between the affective turn still developing within the mainstream philosophy of mind and accentuating universalized elements

of human experience, and the decolonial corpo-politics of knowledge, perception, and being is well expressed in Walter Mignolo's reformulation of Descartes's 'Cogito ergo sum' into 'I am where I think' (Mignolo 2011). The rehabilitated and re-accentuated space is not only a physical space that we inhabit but also our bodies as specific spatial entities – the privileged white male bodies or the damned non-white and dehumanized, often gendered bodies originating from the 'underside of modernity' (Dussel 1996). The corpo-politics of knowledge then stresses locality as not merely a geohistorical location of the knowing subject, but also an epistemological correlation with the sensing body, perceiving the world from a particular locale and specific local history.

Our bodies adapt to the cultural environment inevitably through local histories and our deeds or creations are largely defined by our geo- and corpo-politics of knowledge, or in Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's formulation, what is at work here is the 'theory in the flesh' – 'the one where the physical realities of our lives – our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity' (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, p. 23), using flesh and blood experiences to concretize a vision that can begin to heal our 'colonial wound', or in Anzaldúa's words, 'una herida abierta' where the third world 'grates against the first and bleeds' (Anzaldúa 1999, p. 3).

Anzaldúa's metaphors of creativity are particularly corporal, fleshy, and stress the close connection between body, knowledge, and art. In 'Speaking in Tongues' (Anzaldúa 1981) she claims that 'it is not on paper that you create but in your innards, in the gut and out of living tissue – organic writing I call it . . . The meaning and worth of my writing is measured by how much I put myself on the line and how much nakedness I achieve' (Anzaldúa 1981, p. 172). Regarding writing in the same line with being a queer, a Chicano, an other, that is with racial and sexual difference, with alterity in general, Anzaldúa interprets this marginality ultimately in a positive and creative way when she says that one's 'skin must be sensitive enough for the lightest kiss and thick enough to ward off the sneers . . . Write of what most links us with life, the sensation of the body, the images seen by the eye, the expansion of the psyche in tranquility: moments of high intensity, its movement, sounds, thoughts' (Anzaldúa 1981, p. 172). She continues her peculiar graphic corporal metaphor when she compares writing with a cactus needle stuck in one's flesh and generating a painful process of recuperation and making a new sense out of past experience and memory (Anzaldúa 1999, p. 95).

This does not mean that we are locked and trapped in our bodies and cultural and historical contexts once and for all, but it allows seeing how exactly we exist in modernity/coloniality and how we react to it, including our aesthetic reactions. Decolonial aesthesis draws attention to how the Western aesthetic categories of the beautiful, sublime, representation, or mimesis, became universal and how exactly they are used for the control over our perception of ourselves, the world, and other people.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* Franz Fanon invokes the inextricable link between knowledge, perception and corporeality when he exclaims: 'Oh my body, make of me always a man who questions!' (Fanon 1967, p. 232). This prayer concluding the book contains the gist of border thinking, grounded in the geo- and corpo-politics of knowledge. Through this formulation Fanon initiated a peculiar politics of knowledge sharply aware of its own geohistorical and bodily contextuality. Several decades later the black women and women-of-colour writers and thinkers would nuance Fanon's theorizing of the body as an important part of a sensing and thinking mechanism, as suggested by Dominican-American writer Junot Diaz in his interview with Paula Moya: 'To me these women were not only forging in the smithies of their body-logos radical emancipatory epistemologies – the source code of our future liberation – but also they were fundamentally rewriting Fanon's final call in *Black Skin, White Masks*, transforming it into "O my body, make me always a woman who questions . . . my body" (both its oppressions and interpellations and its liberatory counter-strategies)' (Diaz and Moya 2012).

All of these metaphors coincide in the necessity of realization of one's own corpo-politics of knowledge, perception, and being, and working with it through border thinking, delinking, and re-existence. For this it is necessary to rehabilitate space as a concrete locale and corporality as a concrete body.

2.6 The Decolonial Sublime

Finally we cannot forget such an important aesthetic category as the sublime which also acquires an original interpretation within the decolonial aesthesis. In the Kantian aesthetic model, contemplating a volcano, a storm, or other non-human elements elevates the spiritual forces, rising them over their natural level and allowing us to discover in ourselves a completely new ability for resistance and opposition, calling for our strength to measure the world by the seemingly absolute power of nature.

Kant takes the sublime into the sphere of human moral and ethical dignity that is the only thing that can resist the natural forces (Kant 1951).

In Bruce Robbins's sweat shop sublime the elevation takes place due to our realization that we belong to the global world of capital and labour. He claims that the specific aesthetic sensibility, generated by globalization, is based on the effort to link the common situation of everyday consumption and the myriad interrelated hands and minds that actually produce the objects of this consumption in conditions of hard exploitation. This is often a sudden and shocking realization of the global dimension of being, strictly positioned in economic and cultural terms by means of the 'sweat shop' concept. However, this often leads to stagnation, apathy, and a sense of the impossibility for the individual to exercise his or her epistemic abilities or social and political activism. The discovery of this dimension in the world of singular, mundane, intimate experience leads to a sense of inaptness, weakness, and inertia (Robbins 2002, pp. 85–6).

Decolonial aesthesis is grounded in accentuating certain affects which are subsequently reworked into knowledges, notions, beliefs, and actions shaping what can be called a decolonial sublime. Most of the elements of the Kantian sublime are present in decolonial aesthesis – giving dignity back to the subject, freeing his or her mind, creativity, imagination, being, the element of resistance – not to the forces of nature but to the logic of modernity/coloniality. The decolonial sublime demonstrates violence, injustice, contradictions, and, at the same time, the finiteness of modernity/coloniality, applying parody, irony, deliberate and aestheticized nostalgia, chiasmus, overlay, undermining of generally accepted norms and rules, a border balancing on the verge of the tragic and comic, a grotesque alienation of both Western allusions and non-Western imagery (Tlostanova 2013). Mexican-American artist and decolonial theorist Pedro Lasch continues this list of devices with imitation, mimicry, over-identification – everything that creates a critical mirror image of modernity/coloniality (Lasch 2013), so that the audience or the participant does not experience a Kantian sublime based on fear (or pleasure linked with fear in the face of the greatness of nature), or pleasure due to feeling one's nothingness and oneness with nature, as in the case of Schopenhauer (Schopenhauer 1958), leading to a resistance (to the forces of nature); and not the sweat shop sublime in Robbins's vein, as an ordinary person's shocking realization of the global social-economic dimension of being, leading to stagnation, apathy, and helplessness.

Rather the audience experiences the decolonial sublime connected with sadness, indignation, repentance, hope, solidarity, resolution to change the world in the future, and, most importantly, with the restoration of human dignity and the right to be oneself in accordance with the Zapatistas principle: because we are equal we have the right to be different, incommensurable, and even opaque in relation to each other. This incommensurability is not temporal but rather axiological. So it would be incorrect to see decolonial artists as some kind of ancient shamans and frozen emblems of themselves. Rather decolonial aesthesis belongs to shamans who graduated from art academies yet never cut their links to shamanism and decolonial agency. This is important as it shows the contradictory nature of the decolonial aesthesis. On the one hand it is highly conceptual and rational, in a way more so than even Western contemporary art, precisely because it is grounded in a conscious multi-spatial hermeneutical effort. On the other hand, decolonizing aesthesis from Western classical aesthetics and theory and history of art is driven by the wish to make it immediate and non-rational.

These two opposite impulses dynamically work together in the mechanism of the decolonial sublime. It sets our perception free in order to push us in the direction of agency – ethical, political, social, creative, epistemic, and existential. This agency would not necessarily materialize in the form of political activism but would definitely lead to serious shifts in our optics, in the way we interpret the world and relate to other people. We peel off the immobilizing layers of Western normative aesthetics and acquire or create our own aesthetic principles growing out of specific local histories, geo- and corpo-politics of knowledge, being, and perception. Here sublimation is motivated not by nature but rather by global coloniality and our belonging to it in various capacities – from objects to subjects, from critics to accomplices and those who delink. An individual communicating with such art learns to recognize the enormity of global coloniality and identify it in its entirety in various phenomena, people, events, institutions, and works of art. In order for the decolonial sublime to work we need to add our own experience of being objectified, to decolonial sensibility, education, and knowledge. This does not mean that a more or less prosperous European viewer is not able to appreciate decolonial art. Yet, if for them the primacy of private sphere and personal life, 'the tyranny of the close over the distant' in Robbins's words (Robbins 2002, p. 86), wins, then they remain on the level of the sweat shop sublime.

Decolonial art deconstructs the binary oppositions of beautiful and ugly, tragic and comic, lofty and low. They co-occur and infiltrate each other in reality, in people, in art, grounded in the non-exclusive duality principle which is to be found not only in multi-semantic logic but also in many indigenous traditions and epistemic models. The decolonial sublime is grounded in overcoming in the existential sense, transcending in Kantian categories, and in transmodern delinking. Yet after delinking we need to relink with something or someone and here resistance gives way to re-existence. Being border subjects, decolonial artists constantly play on, delink, and relink in a complex, conceptual, and at the same time spontaneous way with various Western and non-Western models from the position of exteriority – the outside created from the inside.

The elements of so-called traditional culture or a way of life are not marked once and for all as archaic. They interpenetrate with contemporary features (not necessarily positively marked) outside the usual either/or logic. A reshuffling of times takes place as a rejection of the vector directionality of time, of the straight arrow from tradition to modernity. An impression is created that everything in these works exists simultaneously and does not exclude but rather complements one another in multilayered multi-spatial palimpsests. In Saule Suleimenova's grattography (Suleimenova 2010a) this is expressed in a peculiar exuding of old photographic portraits through snapshots of contemporary Kazakhstan. Pedro Lasch achieves the same effect through the use of the metaphor of reflection and spontaneous performances with the participation of the audience. He claims that decolonial aesthesis is not modern, postmodern, or altermodern. Rather it is a 'multitemporal movement of those who look and have looked to rebuild the world from the ruins of the modern/colonial system' (Lasch 2013). A similar decolonial visual effect is found in the films of Wong Kar-wai who in Vivian Lee's words 'breaks down any coherent vision of the cosmopolitan city into images of inconsistency and affective disconnection' (Lee 2013).

2.7 A Decolonial Community of Sense?

Contemplating the mechanism of the decolonial sublime evokes the concept of the 'community of sense' coined by Jacques Rancière, in which he plays upon the two meanings of the word 'sense' – that is, meaning and feeling – the crossing of emotions and intellect. Rancière formulates this concept in connection with his reflections on the political dimensions of

aesthetic experience. He claims that a community of sense is 'a frame of visibility and intelligibility that puts things or practices together under the same meaning, which shapes thereby a certain sense of community. A community of sense is a certain cutting out of space and time that binds together practices, forms of visibility, and patterns of intelligibility' (Rancière 2009, p. 31). Rancière links it to a 'form of collective existence that will no longer be a matter of form and appearance but will rather be embodied in living attitudes in the materiality of everyday sensory experience. The common of the community will thus be woven into the fabric of the lived world' (Rancière 2009, p. 38). Such a community of lived experience for Rancière may be negative as an alienated life and a fake homogeneity and equality. But it can also 'maintain a heterogeneous and autonomous sensibility grounded in the eternal connection and disconnection of sense and sense' (Rancière 2009, p. 39).

It is hard to reanimate the concept of community in such conditions without equating it to the liberal understanding of the commonwealth or the Marxist idea of the commons. What often remain unaddressed are the models accentuating the aesthetic sensual aspect of the political and social going beyond ideology as such. Rancière senses this shift in the critical paradigm when he discusses the four main forms of contemporary aesthetic dissensus – the joke, the collection, the invitation, and the mystery – embodying the reconfiguration of the political in aesthetic forms and placing art in the capacity of an instrument of 'reframing a sense of community and mending the social bond' (Rancière 2009, p. 49). Rancière formulates this complex interconnection of aesthetics and politics in the following way: 'Art does not do politics by reaching the real. It does it by inventing fictions that challenge the existing distribution of the real and the fictional . . . Fiction invents new communities of sense: that is to say, new trajectories between what can be seen, what can be said, and what can be done' (Rancière 2009, p. 49). Rancière's take on aesthetics and politics remains largely within the universalized Western social and economic realm, but his ideas on the contradictory political–aesthetic relation find parallels in the communal models of many indigenous people and social movements grounded in intersectionality that surpasses the simplified post-Marxist approach.

What would global decolonial communities of sense be like? What happens to the audience perceiving decolonial art? Does it go through catharsis? Does it experience conciliation, suffering, or satisfaction leading to agency or moral elevation? Or is it more important to set free certain

sensibilities alienating, questioning, and destabilizing the usual notions and values of modernity? The decolonial 'community of sense' requires an active rational and emotional effort, certain knowledge and critical thinking tools, an analytic ability to link various decolonial experiences metaphorically through art, indeed an active understanding versus a passive sensibility. Global coloniality is illuminated in an image or a metaphor momentarily lighting up the trajectory of further epistemic, ethical, and ontological subversion. It can be a solidarity and a participation even against one's will, grounded in a sense of shared exclusion and a strange feeling of one's own non-existence for the world.

The decolonial sublime is grounded in dignity (as opposed to fear). It attempts to heal colonized minds and souls setting people free from colonial inferiority complexes and allowing the feeling that they are also human beings with dignity, they are also beautiful and valuable the way they are. The target audience of decolonial art is internally plural and its collectivity is grounded in difference and not in sameness. It is a plurality as difference often embodied in an unstable elusive institution or event created for a day or for an hour and therefore never fixed and frozen, as well as accentuating the possibility of coexistence and interaction of many worlds in the multi-spatial transmodern world (Dussel 2002). The point here is to avoid excessive particularity of frames of thinking, to never lose a global yet pluriversal dimension.

These general reflections on the decolonial sublime allow me to concentrate in the next chapter on the analysis of the works of several artists and film directors living and working at the crossroads of postcolonialism and postsocialism, and to examine the specific features of decolonial art in this particular intersection of post-dependence.

Note

1. There were already several important decolonial initiatives around the aesthetic sphere, including the *Decolonial Aesthetics* exhibition in Bogotá in 2010, followed by a collection of articles edited by Walter Mignolo and Pedro Pablo Gómez (2012) and the *Decolonial AestheSis Dossier* in *Social Text: Periscope* (2013) edited by Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez.

CHAPTER 3

Decolonial Art in Eurasian Borderlands

The post-Soviet non-European ex-colonies found themselves relegated from the (often) honorary second world and classified as the global South almost overnight. The implied audience from this locale is more preoccupied with immediate survival than with any aesthetic experience or consumption. This is largely true of the artists as well. In such locales with scarce resources and complicated imperial-colonial configurations, the politics of physical survival and the politics of servility towards the corrupted or totalitarian state often dominate and the artists like everyone else are not immune to the appropriation by the market and the state, to being neo-Orientalized in the West and in Russia and confined to intuitive liberating moves that are only starting to be theorized in public art discourse. The dissident and delinking artists in this situation are confined to the position of subversive tricksters and negotiators, working for the creation of a transmodern post-dependence community of sense. Yet these people do not represent the typical developing world positionality particularly at the level of art production.

The post-Soviet space cannot enter either the world of capital or the company of the world proletariat. It does not suffer the sweat shop sublime as much as it wanted to. The aesthetics of the post-Soviet sublime is specific because its subject does not feel guilt passively consuming the fruit of other people's labour, and does not experience Caliban's anger either. Against the will of the common person and due to historical cataclysms of gigantic scale the global forcefully penetrates his or her

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private life, the global that connects together the lives of the millions of the subjects of the (ex) empire, all of a sudden thrown out of their usual social existence, deprived of their status, work, citizenship, ability to survive, self-respect, and prospects for the future. Here the moral sphere is acting not in the form of guilt and self-justification, but in the form of resentment resulting either in a lack of action or in transcending the post-Soviet and wider post-dependence sensibility and going in the direction of decolonial aesthesis.

Post-Soviet artists often come to post-dependence decolonial sensibility intuitively, sometimes after learning the decolonial grammar abroad and later finding its realization in local phenomena. An important role in this process is played by the artists' dissident political and aesthetic experience of the late Soviet époque which today acquires new overtones in the conditions of either a forced existence in the new fundamentalism – national or religious, generating its own sanctioned repressive communities of sense, a diasporic mode, or an invisible border in-between, with a doubled sensibility which is capable of seeing more than in the West or in the East alone.

For post-Soviet artists with Muslim links, Islamic aesthetics in various forms continues to play an important part. Since they were forced by the Russian/Soviet modernity into a decidedly secular (Eurocentric) cultural and aesthetic semiotic system, today we mostly find creolized forms of secular/Western/Russian (post-Soviet) and native/Muslim sensibilities often seen through the prism of contemporary and post-avant-garde art on which these artists were educated. The logic of appropriation and discrediting of other knowledges and aesthetics allows for only certain prescribed models for non-Russian artists such as primitivism, a word-for-word copying of the dominant trends, or a compromise defined before in the formula 'socialist in its content, national in its form' and today – 'market or developmentalist in its essence, fake-ethnic in its form'.

In the first post-Soviet decade the Caucasus and Central Asian artists strove to get rid of this formula through a contemplation of various neo-mythological forms that were popular in the 1970–1980s. P. R. Gamzatova pointed out the main leitmotifs and symbols connected with this sensibility (stone, felt, dung, Silk Road, train, hero) that helped the artists in their quest for self-identification (Gamzatova 2009). This 'ethnic renaissance' was a preparatory stage for the decolonial sensibility of the 2000s. A decade turned out to be enough to make this groundbreaking shift as the world itself has changed so rapidly and violently calling the

artists to turn from introspection back to social and political reality. The triumphant global coloniality quickly resulted in a new contesting decolonial aesthesis which the most sensitive artists could not ignore.

This transit aesthetics does not juxtapose the topicality of art and its local cosmological roots. The critique of modernity does not mean its simple rejection and going back to some idealized past. Instead it is linked with the quest for projected ways into the future, which may be found in a dialogue with ethnic-cultural memory, forgotten cosmology, or even tribal continuity grounded in ecosophically spiritual practices typical of many non-modern cultures. On this level of a reconsidered post-ethnic art the first decolonial overtones started to emerge often based on recycling of the recurrent images and motifs of the 1990s but rethinking them through contemporary global political and social concerns, urgent in post-Soviet postcolonial puppet states.

In such openly repressive states as Uzbekistan critically minded artists risk imprisonment (such as photo-artist Umida Akhmedova), murder (in the case of Ilkhom Theatre company director Mark Weil), or banning (as in the case of the artist Vyacheslav Akhunov who has been denied exit visas by the Uzbek authorities for many years while his works were often exhibited at prestigious art forums in Europe and Asia). Akhunov ironically plays on various post-dependence national myths utilized by the new (old) elites, such as the ubiquitous Tamerlane's presence in contemporary Uzbekistan. In his counter-discursive *The Doors of the New Tamerlane* (2005) the artist reproduces the Russian Orientalist Vassily Vereshchagin's well-known painting. But instead of the original Tamerlane's guard, the work fashions a modern Uzbek uniformed guard proudly standing next to his medieval double (Fig. 3.1).

Creolization of visual and tactile sensibilities in expressive embodiments of philosophic and religious metaphors is characteristic of the Uzbek film director and video artist Nazim Abbasov. From seemingly postmodernist but in fact decolonial parables such as his early *Appointment in Samarra* (1989) he has come to ecosophic works on the death of the Aral Sea and the endangered species of Central Asia, pierced with a specific feeling of the unity and equality of all living beings and entities and the unjustified human claims to exceptionality. This sensibility stems from his growing interest in Sufism. In Abbasov's refined philosophic and at the same time palpably material video-art *Eternity* (Abbasov 2005) the cycle of life and death merges with the problematic of creation and creativity, human being as a servant of God and as an equal creator – 'the lord of the Earth'. The

Fig. 3.1 Vyacheslav Akhunov, *The Doors of the New Tamerlane*. Digital printing, 100 × 80 cm, 2004. Courtesy of the artist

author draws attention to the delicate transitions between the animate and inanimate, natural and manmade, to the mystery of birth and return to dust. Religious symbolism of the human being created by the Lord from clay and destined to return to the same state – a favourite Sufi metaphor – is materialized in the juxtaposition of various textures united by the parallelism of clay in all its different states (from natural to architectural and ceramic, from the birth of crockery to its careful taking out of the kiln womb and to shards and splinters) and the human body, particularly kneading fingers. The boundary between flesh and clay is constantly questioned. In this work there is a reiteration of the same visual, colour, and textual combinations and transitions, the eternal play and repetition of images of earthly and heavenly kingdoms: the bare and almost clay foot of

the master covered with dust, forever rotating the wheel; the clay tones of the inward-turned faces concentrated on creation; the hand of the potter soaked in liquid clay making his fingers look shapeless and almost non-human, and the emerging – from under these fingers– curved figure of an anthropomorphic jug with a visibly disappearing seam between its body and proud head. The audience is mesmerized with the magic of clay turning into a work of art, a mystery of creation, an almost magic potter's ritual bound by the leitmotif of spinning: the potter is whirling in his rhythmic dance of clay kneading, as a dervish, his wheel is rotating together with the spinning glazed and ornamented dishes, and the sun-like round flat breads, and the world itself. Here the re-existence element prevails as a healing of coloniality through an appeal to the intuitions and memories of ancestors (real or constructed). The living matter of this memory connected through zillions of threads to the present and the future is precisely the material that is critically reinvented by the decolonial artist.

Kazakhstan, as a border country between Russia and Asia, a nomadic culture with no written language in the past, a highly constructed nation which has more ethnically Russian citizens than Kazakhs and which is largely Russian-speaking, is an equally interesting case of the post-dependence sensibility, probably the closest Eurasian version of Caliban's protesting art, only in this case fashioned as an exaggerated 'Asiatic' identity often manifested in radical forms when the artists 'exploit' their own 'Kazakh' (that is decidedly Mongoloid) look making themselves into emblematic Orientalist objects to articulate their aesthetic-political statements. Such is Said Atabekov (Atabekov 2011) creatively deconstructing the Genghis Khan mythology trivialized in contemporary Kazakh culture and playing on pre-Islamic pantheist rituals and forgotten models as well as marginalized Islamic traditions (for example choosing a Dervish identity for himself). In his *Holy Family* (2001) the shocking effect is produced through a combination of objects and situations from completely different times and locales put together by a 'traditional' Kazakh family which either does not understand the symbolic or real meaning of accidentally discovered objects – the signs of the presence of the forced global modernity in its most militaristic images – or maybe is knowingly reusing them in a non-aggressive domesticated way: the woman is rocking a baby in a cradle whose handle is made from a rifle; instead of a canopy the family reuses an abandoned banner of the United Nations troops.

Atabekov's1995 pastiche *Son of the East* (Atabekov 2009) is a palimpsest of semantically fluctuating contradictory images and messages: on the one hand the artist applies a recognizable ancient symbol of hearth and domestic comfort – the *shanyrak* – a wooden ring with an internal cross-piece used to hold together the yurt (Kazakh traditional house) frame. The shanyrak is used in the post-independence Kazakhstan coat of arms acting as an important symbol for the country. On the other hand, Atabekov places a figure of a naked teenage boy wearing a traditional Kazakh felt hat inside this circle in such a way that his body is crucified (in Saint Andrew's pose) on the shanyrak's cross-piece. The image of the crucified human body written into the circle immediately makes a link with da Vinci's Vitruvius Man with all its controversial connotations of the exclusionary ideal proportions of the human body setting the universal aesthetic standards from the Renaissance onwards. However, for Atabekov this nuance is less significant than the idea of the crucifixion of the son of the East in the entourage of officially sanctioned frozen ethnic-national symbols that in the end amputate his humanity. The haunting motif of the dispensable lives of the new nomads in the global coloniality emerges again and again in Atabekov's works, such as his *Observatory of the Bereaved* (1998) which centres on the bereaved as a specific subjectivity (a homeless, a dervish, a new Noah, a nomad, an unemployed). They obviously parallel Franz Fanon's 'wretched of the Earth' (Fig. 3.2).

The post-dependence decolonial syndrome emanates from Kuanysh Bazargaliev's project *When Everyone was Kazakhian* (2013) in which an intricate and tongue-in-cheek post-apocalyptic historical grand narrative of Kazakhstan as the centre of the world and the only surviving place on Earth after the grand deluge is accompanied by a visual series of famous Western masterpieces redrawn with typically Kazakhian features and supplied with Kazakh-sounding names (Bazargaliev 2013).

The recurrent imagery of dispensable lives is linked with another motif of Central Asian contemporary art – that of the caravan route or wider, a road, as a means of survival. Here many artists play on the fundamental cultural and economic premodern pattern of this locale – the Great Silk Road – in order to stress the shifts in the interpretation of the road chronotope in the context of global coloniality. One example is Murat Dzhumaliyev and Gulnara Kasmaliyeva's video-installation *Trans-Siberian Amazons* (2004) which contains a close-up of Kyrgyz women shuttle-traders – the new post-Soviet nomads.

Fig. 3.2 Vyacheslav Akhunov, *The Red Star Alley of the Clown Politicians.* Carpet and digital printing on plastics, 90 × 90 cm, 2015. Courtesy of the artist

According to the tenth-century Arab geographer and historian al-Mas'udi the Caucasus is a mountain of tongues (Shboul 1979) – not only linguistic but also artistic languages and sensibilities which differ ethnically, religiously, linguistically, and cosmologically yet all retain some non-verbalizable pan-Caucasian community of sense. As stated above, we should not lump together the post-Soviet independent Southern Caucasus states such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia and the remaining Russian colonies of the Northern Caucasus. Their decolonial impulses are predictably different, grounded in different local histories, imperial-colonial configurations, and independent or confederative futures.

Georgian visual and verbal thinker and art historian Iliko Zautashvili is the editor of the international art magazine *Loop A*. At first glance he is far from any decolonial drives. However, many of his sayings reveal an essentially decolonizing stance: 'Art is identical with life. Reality is revealed when the immediate contact with a fact dominates over ideologies and rules' (Zautashvili 2012, p. 38). What is behind this if not an effort to decolonize sensibility and perception? Many of Zautashvili's conceptual

works are decolonial in their impulse to free our minds from various stereotypes and automatic reactions imposed by dominant cultural, social, political, and ethical notions and institutions. His installation *Sweet Life* (2000) makes us question the ready-made clichéd meaning of twelve concepts – revolt, power, money, freedom, morals, nations, faith, society, fame, religion, passion, marriage. These words are inscribed on twelve kitchen knives aggressively sticking out of the white silken fabric, such a foreign and strange background for the knives indicating the ambivalent and potentially dangerous nature of the treacherously familiar concepts.

An even more pronounced decolonial sensibility is to be found in his controversial photo series *Caucasian Manifesto* (2008) – a declaration which attempts to demystify and deconstruct the exoticist image of the Caucasus and a mythic holistic positive self-image which is often highly patriarchal and conservative. It plays on the stereotypes of the Caucasus identity, lifestyle, values, and ethical norms, juxtaposing the external stereotype, the internal mythical ideas of the Caucasus people, and the latest developments and instabilities which often render both myth and stereotype meaningless. By deconstructing various eclectic elements of the fusion Caucasus culture, Zautashvili conveys that no primordial pure Caucasus culture ever existed in either negative or positive sense.

Another manifestation of a similar sensibility with a clearly marked gendered dimension is Georgian woman artist Irma Sharikadze's multimedia art project *Letters* (Sharikadze 2010). It is a multilayered conglomerate of various cultures, pasts and presents, artistic traditions and modes, power vectors and ideologies, intricate visual and verbal metaphors, unexpected global parallels, and intimate unconscious drives. The central figure of the *Letters* is Frida Kahlo. Sharikadze inextricably links beauty, love, and freedom as a basis of creative work. But her idea of beauty and freedom is different from any abstract universalism of classical aesthetic theories as it carries a strong gendered and Georgian flavour. This Frida is played by Georgian model Kristy Kipshidze and decorated with ancient style jewellery resembling the pre-Columbian adornments created by Georgian designer Sophia Gongliashvili. As Alexander Evangely pointed out, Sharikadze explores the character of Frida Kahlo as a metaphor of artistic, feminine, and national identity (qtd. in Sharikadze 2010). And the fact that the *Letters* was presented in Moscow adds an additional postcolonial spatial, visual, and verbal touch to this complicated epistolary dialogue of the artist and her invented alter-ego (a twin sister Maritsa) on whom Frida projects her pain, her fears, her love, and her uncertainty. The letters

themselves as a way of auto-communication or even auto-psychotherapy, written by hand and displayed under the deceivingly glamorous photographs and in the powerful video of Frida's dream, were written specifically for the project by Georgian woman writer Maka Goguadze, written in Georgian script and presented in Georgian (and significantly not Russian or English).

Azeri artists offer their own decolonial transcultural models questioning and destabilizing various modernities imposed on the Azeri liquid shifting identity always mocking and finding its trickster ways beyond and across, such as Babi Badalov's multilingual visual poetry mixing Latin and Cyrillic alphabets or Orhan Guseynov's ironic work *Non-Standard* (2006) in which we see a traditional Azeri corn bread Churek stuck half way into an electric toaster where it obviously does not fit. Dagestanian Magomed Dibirov's *SOUP* (2006) falls in the same category: it depicts the artist's niece – an image very different to the standard ear-to-ear smiling and oozing happiness pop-art children. With clear hatred she is looking at a big plate of Andy Warhol's replica of mass-produced tomato soup which this child refuses to eat.

P. R. Gamzatova is right when she points out that the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia are in a more favourable position than the Northern Caucasus because today they can shape different vectors of influence and dialogic connections with Europe and with the wider Muslim world which the remaining Russian colonies are lacking (Gamzatova 2009). Yet there are decolonial impulses in the works of Northern Caucasus artists as well. An interesting example is Dagestan where several dozen ethnicities each with its own language and identity coexist. This republic remains a part of the contemporary Russian Federation whose control is performed in the form of familiar post-Soviet ethnic statism fused with criminal groups from the centre.

Magomed Dibirov (Dibirov 2013) was born and has lived all his life in Khasavyurt – an iconic town in contemporary history of the Caucasus and Russia, at the border of Chechnya and Dagestan. A peculiar border sensibility emerges in a straightforward metaphor in his provocative *A Member of the Federation* – a post-Sots art image of Russia as a smooth brick wall one of whose bricks is defective and stands for Dagestan. The idea of deprivation of human rights, dignity, and even human rank in case of Dibirov acquires additional salient overtones of the ubiquitous ethics of the real war in the contemporary Caucasus. His alarming canvas *Temporary Truce* presents a hyper-realistic meat grinder standing upside

down on a table. Next to it is placed a lonely miserable tomato with which the artist identifies. The tomato 'knows' that the truce is temporary and its time will come very soon. Dibirov could not avoid the Muslim theme which he treats again in the ambivalent way of a border-dweller. In *Security Service* he contemplates the boundaries of Western tolerance and conditions of the multicultural integration of Muslims into modern Western societies. Modernity here looms behind a beautiful ornamented arch – an entrance into the wonderful world represented or maybe guarded by an unexpected materialized idiom – a gigantic safety razor. An out-of-scale smallish figure of a traditionally dressed and bearded Muslim man stands in front of this arch not daring to enter, not sure if the razor would shave off his beard (a symbol of Muslim identity) to let him in, or much more is to be sacrificed.

3.1 Close Up 1: Passing for Boy-Batyr?

Contemporary Kazakh artist Erbossyn Meldibekov's art is an interesting merging of postcolonial and postsocialist problematic, imagery, and aesthetic principles also significantly struggling to come to terms with Western and global tendencies. Meldibekov chooses a Caliban's path that is deliberately and ironically playing on one's negative demonized identity. But since he is a Central Asian artist with a different local history, Meldibekov transforms himself into an Asian analogue of a paradigmatic barbarian – an oriental Other who has fallen out of time, whose image and ambience are opposite to any normative aesthetics and to the ideas of the beautiful and the good – both Western or Russian and Soviet, and those blessed by the canon and by contemporary official Kazakh ideology, or, more broadly, by the Central Asian system of aesthetic norms. The post-Soviet/postcolonial situation of Central Asia features many hierarchically organized modernities each with its own darker colonial side. The many-faced dependency paradigms combine into an intricate pattern, which may be deciphered only by an attentive, sensitive, and informed viewer who would be familiar with Western, Russian, and Soviet hermeneutical systems, reworked in the artist's projects in a creative, ironic, playful, and subversive way.

In his over-identification and excessive imagery one clearly senses the postcolonial overtones of 'writing back' to the centre. Only there are many centres: Russian and post-Soviet modernity as well as neocolonial Central Asian reality, where the rhetoric of former Soviet/colonial leaders

frequently shows through the new/old representations of authenticity, which on closer inspection turn out to be simulacra. Finally, it is also the global coloniality of the commercialized world, in which contemporary Central Asian art yet again is sold and recognized only in its Orientalist incarnation. In the case of Meldibekov this involves aggressive, rather than exotic-erotic imagery, which echoes Franz Fanon's interpretation of violence as catharsis. A number of Meldibekov's performances, unified by the dystopic space of Pastan, are based on such a cathartic mechanism, interpreted in an ironic, at times satirical postcolonial way.

In the post-Soviet states the process of identity construction has gone along several potential trajectories – from recycling ornamentalism and different Orientalist stylizations to subsequent more serious attempts at reviving ethnonational imagery and cosmology. A reinterpretation of the colonial and Soviet past and neocolonial post-Soviet present has come to be expressed in two different models. The first one is softer and is expressed in the ideas and sensibilities of the critically-minded part of Central Asian society, which long ago learned to play along and engage in trickster-like deception of authority and power. This is common to artists who work with images of dervishes, jesters, madmen, and saints (Ismailov 2015). The second, exaggerated model is closer to the Caliban (Fanonist) version of open resistance. It could not be dominant in Central Asia, not least because it was dangerous for its authors. Yet it turned out to be very marketable in the West and in Russia, which reaffirmed the old Orientalist stereotypes. The ironic component of Caliban-like twists and turns most often was neither seen nor understood by the cosmopolitan audience, while at times the artist was accused of exploiting the Western stereotypes of his own culture.

Meldibekov chose a post- (neo)colonial model that is provocative and hard to implement, yet, if successful, promises immediate and visible results. It is consciously opposed to the old/new official tradition of stylizing and prettifying national culture, and chooses the opposite extreme of a bloodthirsty – and essentially also stylized – exoticism. Western viewers take this exoticism at face value and find in Meldibekov's works a confirmation of their Orientalist stereotypes. The local elite, on the other hand, reacts indignantly, regarding such artistic acts as unpatriotic. Both are wrong as they are unaware of the playful, yet politically charged gap between the artist's own position and his sometimes strange allegories. This allegorism is based on the principle of redoubling, whereby an ostensible allusion to reality often turns out to

be an allusion to another allegory, and where the process of allegorical copying may continue indefinitely.

The combination of violence, humiliation, and dehumanization, seemingly frozen in time and always present as a persistent feature of Central Asian life, is depicted by Meldibekov not as a result of the region's inherent ontology, but as an outcome of modernity/coloniality in its various guises and oppositions – the Russian and Western empires, the Soviet Union and the capitalist world, the contemporary situation of the global coloniality, which affects everyone, yet has very specific local neocolonial manifestations.

Meldibekov depicts Pastan as a generalized image of Central Asia – an imagined dystopian country, frightening both in its past and present and having no future. The name Pastan is a topos that links all the 'stans' (Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, etc.): it is perceived as a fantastical 'nowhere place', filled with recognizable human post-Soviet overtones, colours, smells, sounds, and voices speaking in a multiplicity of languages. Pastan is a post- (neo)colonial allegory with the traditionally predominant spatiality. This allegory is filled with Orientalist stereotypes, deeply rooted in the subconscious of every European, as well as Russian. Slaves, devoid of any rights, dispensable lives who are sold like cabbage in sacks; pyramids of skulls 'made famous' by Vassily Vereshchagin and evoked by Meldibekov as people, still alive but covered over by bricks and left to slowly die; refined tortures of the type shown in the Soviet 'Eastern' movie *The White Sun of the Desert*. All of these images represent the Oriental other as such, popularized by dozens of Western and Russian Orientalists – a cunning and bloodthirsty savage.

Yet more frequently, Meldibekov depicts himself as inscrutable Oriental, incapable of thought, speech, or any creative ability, lacking the capacity to be a subject, to possess any dignity, to strive for freedom; as operating in a reference system that is incomprehensible to a European. This is apparent in *The Slap* (2003). The protagonist of this performance is the epitome of powerlessness and uncomplaining muteness. The artist recreates this leitmotif of Central Asian and, today, even global social reality, where colonialism is being reborn as coloniality.

For several painful minutes we are forced to witness the victimization of a defenceless man, bare to the waist, who placidly accepts the increasingly powerful blows and insults as something normal. The insults are of special significance, since they convey an important feature of not only Kazakh, but any Central Asian culture. The curses are intoned, in the manner of a

rhymed incantation with a strong final crescendo, mainly in Kazakh, but they invariably conclude with the Russian universal swear word 'bliad'. This is prompted not only by the unquestionably expressive force of the Russian obscene lexicon, but also by the still-present Central Asian belief that 'our god will neither hear, nor understand curses in a foreign tongue' and so will not punish the one who utters them.

The victim only instinctively blinks at the ever more forceful blows to the face and feebly shakes his head back and forth. His only social identifier is a simple Kazakh felt skull cap, *takiya*, which the tormentor repeatedly knocks off (the greatest insult in any Eastern culture). As for the tormentor, he belongs to a higher stratum, as indicated by his tall felt cap – *kalpak*. The protagonist is deliberately presented as unable to evoke empathy. His facial features are made unquestionably Mongoloid (in contrast with the current official Kazakh aesthetics, which enlarges the eyes and makes the cheekbones smoother, seeking for maximum distance from the Genghis Khan phenotype); his gaze is devoid of thought; his body is on the heavy side; his face is puffy, and seemingly lacking in spirituality. Furthermore, he displays physically repulsive signs of having been beaten – the splatter of mucus and blood, the smashed nose, the real tears. Two videos, filmed from fixed positions in the front and the back, allow the public to see separately the face of the one doing the beating and the one being beaten up. The viewer witnesses the torment in turn through the torturer's and through the victim's eyes, identifying with each.

Critics, who most often describe Meldibekov's art as related to European actionism, often interpret *The Slap* as an allusion to the well-known performance by Marina Abramović and Ulay *Light/Dark* (1977), in which they endlessly keep slapping each other. But this similarity is purely formal, since the work of Abramović and Ulay deals with something entirely different – it explores the universal relations of the male and the female, the boundaries of corporality, and the affective aspects of sensory communication. Meldibekov's video investigates, in a corporeal, expressive manner, the far less attractive affects, linked with a lack of freedom, violence, humiliation, and aggression. The hero's inescapable submissiveness, the absence of any kind of solution to the entire situation or any resistance on his part, makes it nearly unbearable to view this short work, while, at the same time, the public is tested for possession of such essentially human features as the capacity to empathize and share another's emotions. More likely *The Slap* is similar to the performance *Cuirass* by

Guatemalan artist Regina Jose Galindo. The artist, wearing a bulletproof vest, was supposed to be repeatedly shot at by a man holding a gun after he asks her several times, sharply and roughly, whether she is afraid; the audience watches through a side window and is able to enter the improvised cell only after both participants have exited.

In many works Meldibekov applies the strategy of the 'canonical counter-discourse' (Tiffin 1995, pp. 99–100) typical of postcolonial art. This allows for powerful dynamic transformations reinterpreting the canonical historical and artistic metanarratives through bringing forward the marginal and peripheral ideas, plots, and characters usually associated with the darker colonial side. Through this strategy the author exposes the colonialist bases of ideological and cultural constructs, characters, and situations. Canonical counter-discourse is not simply 'writing back' to the centre remaining within its reference system, but very actively invades the canon by means of subversion, rewriting, deconstruction, and mocking. In so doing, it avoids simply relabelling black as white and the other way round in the binary opposition of the dominant and suppressed cultures, rather aiming at problematizing their relations. In the case of Meldibekov, this 'writing back' dissolves and breaks up into a multiplicity of answers, since the very centres of Western, Russian, Soviet, Kazakh, and Central Asian culture are highly provisional and constantly mutate into and imitate each other, so that it is almost impossible to distinguish a party boss from the Soviet times from his 'ancestor' – a medieval 'bey' – or his contemporary incarnation – a Central Asian 'father of the people', who is promoting yet another hastily slapped together version of national identity.

Meldibekov creates his own specific kind of canonical counter-discourse, which is grounded in the defamiliarization and decentring of the canon. A striking example is his work *Gattamelata in the Hide of Genghis Khan* (2006). This grew out of a double critique of both the canon itself and its contemporary caricaturistic neocolonial incarnations, with their necessary global dimension – an emphasis on the eternal cult of military bravery, authority, and power which is exploited today by the present-day rulers, parasitical on the archaic stereotypes. At the same time, the artist is repelled by this artificially imposed return to the past not because of its secondary self-Orientalization or its equally derivative Eurocentrism, acquired during the Soviet years, but because he rejects the contemporary cosmetic and simplistic treatment of what little remains of national culture. The artist masterfully plays on the motif of absence, hiatus, blurring and

unimportance of the figure of the military leader himself – be it Gattamelata or Genghis Khan, Timur or Yury Dolgorukiy. He implements this idea in his favourite naturalistic and even taxidermic manner – the quite real equine legs with physiological details of bones and veins – the legs that mercilessly trample the earth and smash people's lives in all epochs and under all kinds of governments.

The canonical foundation of *Gattamelata*, which the artist ironically plays with, is the celebrated equestrian statue of the condottiere Erasmo da Narni (nicknamed Gattamelata – the honeyed cat or the spotted cat) in Padua. His name would likely be lost to history, had he not been immortalized by Donatello, who created the first equestrian monument of the Renaissance. This plastic model will be replicated in all the equestrian monuments of European cities, and today also in the majority of Central Asian capitals, which have acquired statues of their national heroes, hastily brought back from oblivion. Meldibekov calls them the faceless nomads but in fact they are equipped with statistically average tentatively Mongoloid sets of features and lack any significance for national identity, for the destinies and worldview of the contemporary inhabitants of Central Asia.

One of Meldibekov's most precise and plastically compelling works focused around this theme is the *Contest*, in which monuments-transformers were inspired by the Revolution Garden Square in Tashkent. Central Asian authors have long dealt in their works with the theme of materialized history and memory. Thus, in the requiem-style documentary *The End of an Era. Tashkent* (1996), we see eleven actual monuments that at various times during the twentieth century had occupied the same pedestal (depending on the change of moods and caprices of the ruling power). In the end Weil offers a poignant and bitter visual metaphor – he collects all the eleven monuments at once in one ghostly space gradually being covered by the sands of time and oblivion. And one can no longer distinguish between Lenin's familiar raised hand, barely visible above the sand, and the finger of Timur, threateningly pointing towards Moscow (Weil 1996). But whereas Weil's work is visibly shot through with nostalgia, Meldibekov's creation displays the triumph of a colder, distanced awareness of the artificiality, modularity, and prefabricated nature of all symbols, ideologies, and images.

One of the key leitmotifs re-emerging in Meldibekov's works is metamorphosis, which is expressed in a creative remaking of the world as an endless chain of transformations that escape being fixed, rationalized, or

defined, and refute or problematize the very possibility of naming. The motif of the ever open and non-finite changeability of life, human being and space, of the protean nature of physicality and corporality, of dismemberment and new rejoining, as well as the more social and politically contextualized motif of mimicry as the desire 'to pass for' someone entirely different, is handled by Meldibekov through material, plastically expressive and daring interventions. Yet the artist always emphasizes the presence of a certain fundamental theme or sensation, around which he improvises his variations, deformations, and mutations of human images, manmade monuments and even geographical phenomena, used in a similarly politicized signifying role. This is aided by his choice of wax, which imitates bronze, yet remains the most plastic and metamorphic of all materials.

Thus, in the *Mutation* series (2009), the author emphasizes the contradictory but tenacious permanence of emblems of authority in various historical periods and contexts, notwithstanding its adaptability to any kind of conditions and ideologies that invariably deprive the ordinary human being of all rights. Not by chance did Valerya Ibraeva, writing about Meldibekov's art, aptly compare the new Central Asian leaders to 'balls of mercury, able to assume any form – Russian-communist or American-democratic – in order to preserve their authoritarian power' (2007). And so the bust of Lenin becomes elongated, mutating into the aesthetics of Alberto Giacometti, and then fully transforms into familiar propaganda-derived figures of Genghis Khan, Patrice Lumumba, and once again, Genghis Khan, although already in a wholly unrecognizable form, as if it were turned inside out. Trained as a sculptor Meldibekov is hypersensitive to plasticity and to spatial and tactile dimensions. This is complemented by his acute perception of space that swallows up time – a quality characteristic of many post- and neocolonial contexts. Such a sensibility has been manifested most clearly in the previously noted Meldibekov's interest in monuments as the material embodiments of memory.

Here is what the artist has to say about his strategies of dealing with monuments: 'If previously I learned to create; now I destroy and simultaneously search out new contexts for already existing works. I take, for example, a finished bust of Lenin, created by some sculptor and reproduced in thousands of copies for regional and municipal party committees; I copy it and then destroy it, placing into a different context. This could be depictions of Nazarbayev or of new Kazakh clan heroes' (Fomenko 2013).

Significantly, Meldibekov is not attracted to the changing humans against the background of space, but rather the very space of Central Asia: 'It is being moved forward – so total are the changes it has undergone. Figures, by contrast, are fading into the background. The relationship between them is changing' (Fomenko 2013). This is a critical interpretation of the basic trope of colonialism – that of linear progress. Meldibekov conveys the sense of the negative continuity between the colonial, the Soviet, the post-Soviet, and the neocolonial in Central Asia – a paradigmatic intersection of postcolonial and post-Soviet experience and imaginary. This is why his conception coincides so well with the actual spatial history of Tashkent with its eleven monuments succeeding each other in the same place.

Meldibekov points out: 'Unlike the countries of Eastern Europe, we did not undergo de-communization – everything remained in its previous form. This is true of our entire region (including Afghanistan): it exists in a different temporal mode . . . If in our case everything originated in Moscow, then Afghanistan reacted to what originated in America and Russia' (Fomenko 2013). This parallel with Afghanistan is significant as it shifts the conversation beyond the frame of the historical confrontation between communism and capitalism and into the sphere of modernity/coloniality, the Soviet and the Western, and of their equally ruinous consequences for peoples. In his works Meldibekov recreates the continuous chain of coloniality, which has assumed different forms, always retaining its essence of colonizing people's minds by imposing upon them specific models of memory and perception of reality. This is particularly evident in *The Peak of Communism*, where, according to the artist, 'we forced the history of a mountain into a single day, conveying three periods – the colonial, the Soviet and the post-Soviet' (Fomenko 2013). In this mountain renaming project the seemingly eternal and immutable natural phenomena are made into a space of cultural-ideological human games. In Immanuel Kant's aesthetics, mountains pertained to the category of sublime as the natural element which we challenge in order to overcome fear and to elevate our souls (Kant 1951, paragraph 28). In Meldibekov's work mountains are made of chipped pots, tea-kettles, and basins, and fulfil a different function. Their perception does not involve a ponderous contemplation of unchanging natural ontology but instead a mutable hermeneutics and rhetoric, which are engaged in renaming space as a way of it being appropriated and mastered by various forms of authority. The remaining semantic fragments of the ruined repressive

system all too often mean nothing to the present-day inhabitants of the region, who, as was the case centuries ago, have no right to a choice, have no say in their own fate, and are forced to make overtures to stronger, more dangerous neighbours.

Most of the critical writing on Meldibekov's works as well as interviews with him come from the pen of art specialists brought up on the Western canon. For them the only possible frameworks within which they analyse the artist's work are the avant-garde, modernism, and postmodernism – that is, originally Western movements that subsequently became universalized, so that their local Western European or North American components were completely erased. There is no need to condemn critics for this involuntary and unconscious Occidentalism. But we do need to examine how their interpretations limit our perception of works by artists such as Meldibekov, and how they remain blind to entire layers of meaning in such works, simplistically treating dynamic imagery as static. In reality, by alluding to the avant-garde or modernism the artists may be indirectly indicating that they belong to the community of contemporary art, that they are able to speak the language of this art, yet at the same time, they can alienate this language so that it becomes incomprehensible to those who invented it or claim it as their own. References to Kazimir Malevich or Robert Rauschenberg, Barnet Newman or Kuz'ma Petrov-Vodkin are in fact decentring, subversive forms of intertextuality. They frequently superimpose the motifs, methods, and devices of the avant-garde on quite local historical and political dimensions and genealogies, in this case Central Asian. This endows Meldibekov's works with stereoscopic optics, which, regrettably, most critics do not perceive.

Let us consider *The Flag of Emir Abdurrahman and the Flag of the Taliban: the Second and Nineteenth Flag of Afghanistan*. If we ignore the actual (post-) (de-) (neo-)colonial meaning of this change of Afghan flags, they will turn into nothing more than a belated copy of abstract expressionism. This let Andrei Fomenko to declare somewhat condescendingly that 'this flag and Barnett Newman's painting are like two peas in a pod' (Fomenko 2013). However, Meldibekov here is not citing modernist art but subverting and mocking the citation, turning it inside out with purposes that are incomprehensible and alien to modernism. The key to the meaning of his project does not involve convergence with Newman, although the latter's works are undoubtedly present on the margins. However, they are not the main backdrop, rather confirming the bitter historical irony regarding the twenty-three different flags that succeeded

each other over the past hundred years in Afghanistan. But that did not change the essence of the constrained existence of its wretched inhabitants. Meldibekov's flags fuse political statement with an ironic artistic experiment and are more likely connected with an entirely different American artist – Jasper Johns – who over the course of several decades depicted the American stars-and-stripes in all imaginable and unimaginable ways and forms (Johns), thus maximally defamiliarizing and separating it from its original patriotic meaning.

It is incorrect to reduce Erbossyn Meldibekov's artistic world to postmodernist playing with a foreign avant-garde. This simplifies and narrows his vision and his ways of representing reality. Essentially, such an erasing of all de- (post-) colonial meanings and concepts from his works continues the distortion, appropriation, and simplification present in neo-Orientalist strategies. Meldibekov successfully plays with, parodies, and exploits these new forms of Orientalization, in a way paying them back. The viewer or participant of his performances goes through powerful affective jolts which decolonize our perception and lead to a shift in how we interpret the world and relate to other people. In the end, the exaggerated Oriental savage still displays his crafty Nasreddin-like guise, too evasive to be fully comprehended by both the political authority and the artistic canon, and this is his way of initiating serious aesthetic, epistemological, and political shifts.

3.2 Close Up 2: Defloration of Kazakhness

Saule Suleimenova's genealogy is paradigmatic for the whole generation of artists in Central Asia, destined to the position of eternal dissidence and resistance which only some of them are able to rework into re-existence today. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Suleimenova was a central figure in an underground anti-Soviet art group, 'Green Triangle', belatedly experimenting with hippy, rock, and punk cultures while being employed in their official Soviet lives as plumbers and janitors: 'We laughed at the Socialist Realism school, the Artists' Union and the heavy gilded frames . . . The most important task was to free ourselves from Sovietness in all its manifestations . . . Our works were far from academic appearance, they were presented on torn paper, water pipes, pieces of carton. There were grandmothers and grandfathers who came to our open exhibition and yelled at us and tore and smashed our works . . . Then our main task

was the social protest against everything Soviet, while the goals of art were in the second place' (Neweurasia.net 2010).

Today Suleimenova is more clearly decolonial. She creates polysemantic works which sometimes more easily find their audience in Europe than in Kazakhstan, but things slowly change. She experiments with grattography applied to modern and archival photographs mixed with painting in her series *I am Kazakh* (a layering of acrylic paint, paraffin wax, and gouache as a base for etching and graphics). The artist printed the collages on huge banners usually used for advertising. We see a multilayered, multi-temporal, and multi-spatial composition. Suleimenova is not provoking or openly challenging anymore, attempting instead to carefully release the forgotten and suppressed impulses and sensations of the beautiful, to give people back the flavour of life and their self-respect. In doing this she discards conceptual art principles, and shifts to a level which in a way is closer to decolonial aesthesis as it interpenetrates rationality with emotions and spiritual elements. Answering my questions the artist clearly stated that the time of the open protest is over for her, though it was crucial to go through it to get rid of all boundaries, fears, and conventions. Yet now she is trying to 'reconnect and reconcile the traditional Kazakh culture and the aesthetics of revolt, the modernist artistic devices, the pathos of eternity and the poetics of the everyday' (Suleimenova 2010b) (Fig. 3.3).

For her the main problem of contemporary independent Kazakhstan is an inferiority complex, a colonized consciousness, system of values, and notions of what is beautiful, good, and appropriate, a constant painful self-reflection typical of young postcolonial nations with a vague or distorted national idea. 'Our people desperately want to look better. They are awfully afraid that someone would think badly of them' (Suleimenova 2010b). Through decolonizing visuality, Suleimenova attempts to teach Kazakhs to unlearn those lacquered ersatz things they were taught to like and appreciate as beautiful, and as their own. She wants to decolonize their idea of Kazakhness and free it off the bombast which is so pervasive in official state aesthetics today. It is particularly important for the artists themselves to get rid of colonial mentality, cultural stereotypes, media-images, and mimicking modes, to 'squeeze a slave out of oneself drop by drop', as Suleimenova says quoting Anton Chekhov (Dzvonik 2009, p. 69).

A continuation of postcolonial complexes is the hostility towards Suleimenova and other critically minded artists who are accused of lack of patriotism and of disgracing the image of the people. It happens

Fig. 3.3 Saule Suleimenova, *French House*. Gicleé print and acrylic on canvas, 127 × 180 cm, 2016. Courtesy of the artist

because they step away from the official lacquering notions of the beautiful successfully sold before. The accusers clearly exploit the myth of modernity versus tradition and the catching-up complex when they claim that Suleimenova depicted Kazakhs against the background of ragged walls and garages as if they live in the eighteenth century while in reality they are super-modern. This is a clear case of coloniality of being and of knowledge and this is the complex from which the artist wants to cure her compatriots.

There are several leitmotifs which Suleimenova keeps coming back to, that ring a decolonial bell. One of them is the stress on liberating the notions of the beautiful. The artist divides them into two kinds – a beauty which is like someone else and a beauty the way it is (Suleimenova 2010a). That is why it is so important to protect children who naturally feel and know where and what beauty is from the pressure of stereotypes which kill the notion of the beautiful. In this respect Saule Suleimenova is the opposite to Kant's idea of the raw subject (including children) who is

not able to appreciate the beautiful and the sublime until prepared through and by culture. Another decolonial touch is the artist's rejection of either/or logic and a stress on a non-exclusive duality: she claims that contemporary Kazakh reality is simultaneously awful and beautiful (Suleimenova 2010a) and people must learn how to deal with it and how to appreciate this complexity, this symphonic nature of life which art should not portray in flat frozen images and stereotypes, rosy prettiness, or stylized archaic patterns. Suleimenova's complex relations with Kazakhness remind one of the Mesoamerican mode of cyclical motion with a variation. She also (re)visits many versions of the past and present which are unstable and changeable, and yet which retain certain recurrent and always recognizable and reconstructable elements. She calls this a sense of eternity in true art which always speaks about everything and nothing.

Both in Russia and in the majority of the post-Soviet countries state power is afraid of free thinkers and dissenting artists, allowing only those who act as service personnel with no opinion of their own to gain favour with local power or with the West. A crucial problem for decolonial art is the danger of commercialization. Can an artist exist outside and beyond this logic, delink from the capitalist art market, and ignore the material side? Suleimenova declares that she is an artist, does nothing else in life, never takes orders, and does only what she wants to do (Suleimenova 2009). Yet she also has to make compromises and sometimes repeat herself; she also cannot avoid dealing with commercialized curators and gallery owners both in Kazakhstan and abroad (Suleimenova 2010b) (Fig. 3.4).

In such situations a decolonial artist is divided – he or she cannot exist in a cold basement as Georgian 'primitivist' of the early twentieth century Niko Pirosmani, who painted ingenious works on pieces of oil-cloth and made fantastic tavern signboards for a plate of soup and a glass of wine. What to do in this case? Make a compromise and create little by little a decolonial post-dependence community of sense which could learn to appreciate the decolonial works? Suleimenova is doing just that, stressing that there are more free thinking people today than before.

In defining her own aesthetic stance she refuses to join any of the existing art groups and trends in Kazakhstan (a definition by the rule of contraries which shows her delinking and a lack of any critical language for such a position). Suleimenova is not interested in self-Orientalizing art exploiting ornamentalism which has taken centre stage after the collapse of

Fig. 3.4 Saule Suleimenova, *Three Brides*. From the series 'Cellophane Painting'. Plastic bags, board, 100 × 140 cm, 2015. Courtesy of the artist

Soviet aesthetics. Contemporary Kazakh artists are divided by her into those who create their own aesthetics and those who work with ready-made forms. The first are usually conceptualists, ideologists, creators, while the second are traditionalists (including modernists) who apply Picasso or Matisse or someone else's aesthetics (Suleimenova 2010c). She detects the sterility and vacuum of such traditionalism, its lack of any links with everyday reality and with people. Yet, even if she is closer to conceptual art her works cannot be summarized in a clear and lapidary rational message. Suleimenova deals as much with her emotions and affects. Therefore her message is less rational and mono-semantic, less fixed in her own ideas, and more dependent on the contact, on the audience, on the dialogic task of understanding. In the last several years it has turned out that her language is after all understandable to the people and her Kazakh chronicles were long expected and appreciated. She finds an explanation for this not in semiotics but in the characters of the Kazakh

oral singing tradition that 'lived by giving themselves to the world' (Suleimenova 2010b).

An interesting example of Suleimenova's decolonial rendering of memory politics and memory culture is to be found in her works comissioned for the international project *Ultra-Memory* (2012). They balance between painting and photography, past and present, exhibiting the harmonious composition of rational and emotional (beautiful and sublime), a sensibility freed of any binding aesthetic canons and coming as much from the heart, from the childhood, from the soul, as from a conceptual analytical interpretation of an aesthetically shrewd individual. She superimposes an *other* Kazakhness (unofficial and uncombed) onto today's third class (post)colonial modernity, producing a shocking and sobering decolonial effect.

3.3 Close Up 3: A Buddhist Trickster

When I arrived at an exhibition opening at Khankalayev gallery of Buryat art in Moscow (2012), I could not shake off the feeling that Zorikto Dorzhiev's art was not understood either by the Moscow 'connoisseurs' or by the Buryat diaspora (Khankhalaev 2010). The well-meaning academic painters immediately lapsed into the familiar Orientalist mode seeing his art as not quite skilful in the European sense yet raw and ethnic enough to be interesting, while the Buryats were simply proud of a Buryatian painter who made it in Moscow, in Europe, in America, but equally mistook his subtle irony and border sensibility for a primordialist essentialist authenticity. As for Dorzhiev, he just smiled and kept silent. In a sense he is a paradigmatic realization of ironic tricksterism, playing on the market forms while using them at the same time. If in the West there is a rather long tradition of contesting art, marked with both ethnic, racial, and existential and epistemic difference, in Eurasia this problematic and imagery so far have been mainly conceptualized through Orientalism. Mostly Dorzhiev's works are reviewed by either colour-blind or exoticizing critics who remain mentally within the frame of (post-)Soviet multiculturalism where Buryatian art could only be decorative and largely confined to the realm of handicraft. Hence there are no instruments, no concepts, and no theoretical tools for understanding and interpreting Dorzhiev's works. In one interview he was asked why there was a lot of European in him, and was it because he travelled a lot (Chernoba 2010, p. 106). The interviewer expected to see a primordial Buryat and was in a

way disappointed to find a young man who was quite contemporary in his appearance and behaviour. The artist answered this tactless question in a typically trickster way first transferring it to the sphere of art and not personal identity and then indirectly problematizing his own European nature but never openly confronting the interlocutor.

The artist does not like to explain what he does, claiming that a work of art does not answer questions, it asks them. Critics often describe his works as stylizing, for lack of a better term (Arsenyeva 2009). Dorzhiev agrees but with a sly smile and we clearly see the absurdity of this definition offered by someone confined to the Western aesthetic principles. All of a sudden the shocked spectator realizes that the savage who before was seen as only capable of making simple objects, not only knows Leonardo da Vinci but has the nerve to laugh at his Giaconda in the *Giaconda Hatun* where the étalon of European beauty transmutes into a Buryatian one. Other characters of Dorzhiev's subverted quotations continue to destabilize the Western originals (*Are you Jealous?, Danae, Girl with the Coral Earring, Gulliver* series). The word 'stylizing' is marked by a desire to confine this art within the limits of European aesthetic normalcy, where the use of indigenous cosmology can be allowed only through detachment, exclusively from the position of the Western aesthetics shared by yet another Ariel. A Caliban, painting an ironic Miranda's portrait, and making her look like his mother Sycorax, cannot by definition be accepted in Prospero's reference system.

Dorzhiev claims that he does not go back to some imagined authenticity which exists only in the Western imagination. Instead he uses his genetic memory of a nomad to constantly remake, recreate, and rework the images of the Great Steppe and its people, always trying not to lose the main thread which is retained under any circumstances taking different forms. This method is far from stylizing. Rather it is groping for one's own ways of re-existence in the dialogue and in the cracks between the West and the non-West and not merely conceptualizing the past and the present, but also creating a new world for the future. Openly political activism would not find its way into Dorzhiev's art. Yet it does not make him apolitical or self-Orientalizing. He simply practises a tongue-in-cheek existence – he is cunning, he is pretending, and he is making fun of Western art theory and aesthetic judgement, in such a way that the West would not even guess it.

Dorzhiev undermines the very grounds of hegemonic aesthetics, which coded its ways of feeling and sensing as the only true and acceptable ones.

He questions not merely what is the sublime and the beautiful but also who is the person who judges, how and under which factors his subjectivity and taste have been shaped, and why he has or has no right to universal aesthetic judgements. Dorzhiev does this as a border artist who retains his Buryatian subjectivity even if he has had a Westernized education. Both of his parents are professional painters and Dorzhiev himself grew up as a city boy surrounded by art, and not as a taiga dweller. He had a classical academic art education during which the future artist was always waiting for the moment when they would learn something about Asian artists, Asian history, and Asian culture. But there was no information and it was not in the curriculum. At some point Zorikto simply became bored and started to miss the native motifs, feeling a certain emptiness. This was apparently the beginning of his decolonial subjectivity and sensibility. He began to fill the empty niche by learning the history and culture of Buryatia (Chernoba 2010, p. 106). Dorzhiev discovered that life is wider than academic art and started to work on his own unique style, always changing yet recognizable as a jazz theme. There is nothing primordialist in it. Instead there is an attempt to enter the Buryatian imaginary as a river which is always changing yet remains the same river, which falls out of the Western logic of either/or, balancing the change and the continuity. Instead of going back Dorzhiev liberates the so-called tradition from the grip of Western aesthetic and disciplinary divisions, concepts, and categories. The river of Buryatian cosmology is entered not by a Kantian 'raw' unprepared savage, but by a subject with double and multiple visions, marked by a pluritopic position.

Dorzhiev does not refer in his art in any direct way to the history of Russian colonization of his land, and its negative modernization. He creates his works as if this official history did not exist; he intentionally marginalizes it, making the colonization by Russia and the vassal relations with it look as merely the last and short chapter in the long history of Mongol-Buryats. He broods over an *other* history and an *other* genealogy striving to understand an *other* subjectivity, evading rational understanding and much more complex than a simple vector of modernization. His personages do not suffer the subaltern inferiority complex, they are not trying to prove anything to anyone, and they are self-sufficient and often immersed in meditation. Even his numerous warriors are never fighting but meditating, sleeping, or dreaming, because for Dorzhiev the state of reverie conveys a person's core most accurately. Yet certain details betray an other thinking and an other

perception. He calls Buryatia a 'country' even if it is technically a part of Russia. Then the artist cautiously suggests that Russians might take an interest in Buryatia and is immediately snapped with the journalist's question: why should we love Buryatia? – Not love, the artist patiently explains, but at least learn something about it, because it is a part of human history and the grand mechanism of history would not work without even the smallest detail. He still attempts a dialogue though apparently in vain (Chernoba 2010, p. 109).

Discovered by a Buryatian patron of art Konstantin Khankalayev, he seems to follow the predictable path of a multicultural artist acquiring global fame through skilful PR, which he has to subsequently work off. First he exhibits in the Museum of Buryatian History in Moscow, in Khankalayev's own gallery, later in Taipei, Strasbourg, in the Tibet House in New York, in the State Museum of the Art of the Peoples of the East in Moscow, and only afterwards, in the Central House of Artists: in accordance with Westernized museum logic, an Oriental other is first seen outside the history of art and closer to natural history and anthropology, and only after the Western blessing is his art allowed to rise to the status of a truly aesthetic object. Dorzhiev says that a union between an artist and a producer today is the most optimal for the artist because it allows him not to think of the commercial side (Svobodina 2007). Yet little by little the seeds of resistance ripen and Dorzhiev revolts against the pervasive commercialization. When asked to copy again and again his own paintings which are successfully sold by the owner of the gallery he finally starts to refuse realizing that with each copy the canvases fade out, life and inspiration depart from them, until only a cheap acrylic print is left. What is next?

Yet he manages to keep his art out of reach of the Orientalist and commercial stereotypes. There is a parallel world of Buryatian aesthetics and subjectivity which Dorzhiev constantly puts in dialogue with the world of normative imagery and ideas of the sublime and the beautiful. It is not an aggressive argument, not a negation; it is precisely a dialogue based on parity and openness, led from a position of someone demanding and critical of himself, yet retaining a certain internal harmony, a meditative equilibrium, as he does not exist within the agonistic paradigm with its drive to succeed by winning over the others. Rather he is competing with himself, aware of the impossibility of reaching the forever escaping perfection. As a true trickster, he is in a state of constant becoming; he creates his style anew with every new painting.

The main character of Dorzhiev's art is a paradoxical contemplating nomad. As the artist explains, the nomad is not a tourist, thirsty for new experiences and emotions and he is not looking for better life either. Rather nomads are lonely artists, poets, and philosophers – because it is easier to think when you are alone (Dorzhiev 2007). And the Great Steppe where he resides is not a two-dimensional nationalistic symbol but a living collective organism, with which its inhabitants are in dynamic balance. He regards the nomadic world not as a real physical space with an everyday lifestyle and material details, but rather as an infinite and constantly changing existential and metaphysical space, which combines a personal and a cosmic dimension at once, and is stitched together by a sense of unity of everything and everyone in the universe. Dorzhiev avoids such excessive logic and rationality. He claims that the implementation of a rational idea is never his primary task, that he does not use bright colours because they are too logical, that he prefers to whisper instead of speaking loudly, because that way it is easier to hear the most important things.

The proud girls from the *Concubine Days of the Week* series, the brooding postman in the snow-covered steppe and the vagabond fallen asleep in *The Return*, the vulnerable princess sleeping on a pea and the old man dreaming of the non-existent sea – all of them are not just flat and frozen images coming from folklore. They are more than pictorial and literary quotations, as each of them acquires subjectivity, a character, a unique story. In this sense Dorzhiev answers the model of María Lugones's playful traveller who juggles cultures and other people's worlds with a loving perception (Lugones 2003). However, he always keeps an ironic distance, a border balancing on the verge of the tragic and the comical, and a grotesque alienation in relation to both Western allusions and the Buryatian and Buddhist imagery. Such border trickster art at the intersection of ontology and epistemology unexpectedly turns out to be most effective in the process of liberation of knowledge, of being, and of perception from the myths and limitations of modernity.

CHAPTER 4

Decolonizing the Museum

An important sphere of the practical realization of decolonial tendencies in art and aesthetics lies in rethinking and problematizing the museum as an institution in the form of various museum interventions which are becoming more and more popular all over the world, including the postsocialist and postcolonial regions. Decolonization of museums, like any decolonial gesture, is connected primarily with questioning the perceptive and epistemic operations as the basis of the creation, appreciation, and interaction both with art and with other artefacts, represented in the museums according to established myths of modernity. In their ground lies the principle that Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez described as the hubris of the zero point: 'The co-existence of diverse ways of producing and transmitting knowledge is eliminated because now all forms of human knowledge are ordered on an epistemological scale from the traditional to the modern, from barbarism to civilization, from the community to the individual, from the orient to occident' (Castro-Gómez 2007, p. 433). The rationale that legitimized the classification of human beings and their ranking was not ontology but epistemology. It was in the cognizing subject and the system of knowledge in which it operates. In the museum this syndrome was manifested in the deliberate detachment of the viewer who, in Sharon MacDonald's words, could 'think of himself as outside or above that which was represented. This was coupled with the idea that . . . it was possible to find external viewing positions from which the world would appear as ordered and complete and created

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the idea of a privileged, objective view point from which "structures of meaning" might be evident' (MacDonald 2012, p. 276).

Museums, along with universities, have become one of the tools responsible for the production of modern systems of knowledge such as institutions and disciplines. Museums helped to establish and maintain the control of knowledge and its production by the West and turned out to be a very powerful epistemic technology. As Neil Curtis points out, 'the language of much professional museum thinking reflects the dominance of a particular way of looking at the world that is a product of 18th and 19th century academic thought, with its origins in essentialism. An essentialist approach views the established beliefs and institutions of our modern heritage as not only real but true, and not only true but good' (Curtis 2012, p. 74). Museums in this specific modern (post-cabinets of curiosities) understanding were rather early on divided into two groups: history of art museums (grounded in the concept of the fine arts – 'les beaux arts' – as formulated in the second half of the eighteenth century by French aesthetician Charles Batteux (1746)), and natural history museums. In the former the Western memory was constructed, preserved, and transmitted to future generations. In the latter the non-European world was and sometimes still is represented at large. Later anthropological and ethnographic museums placed the non-Western and non-modern subjects in between the natural and the civilized worlds thus supplanting the previous Orientalist exoticist interpretation of the other with the progressivist one – presumably more developed and open-minded. Contemporary museums as institutions and particularly the public museums with their heavy load of mythic national ontologies largely continue to reproduce the prevailing modern episteme appropriating the other and commoditizing their art, although there are some islands of resistance and initiatives that attempt to delink from the logic of Western modernity–postmodernity–altermodernity.

The first steps in this direction were made as early as in the 1980s in the frame of the emergent postcolonial, critical race, and ethnic studies, women-of-colour feminism and queer discourses which have been immediately applied in art and in curating practices questioning and critically contemplating the institutional framing of art and the linear historical narrative that museums mostly continued to promote. There emerged more and more art events exploding the totality of the Western art discourse from a radically different position and destabilizing its centricity. One of the major epistemic and optical shifts enacted in these interventions can be defined as a deliberate reversal or confusion of subject and

object roles and consequently destabilizing of the previous bounded and coherent mostly national identities that the museums helped to forge. Françoise Lionnet gives an appropriate example of Native American museums in which 'exhibitions have been designed and controlled by those whose culture is on display . . . Then the objects appear to be observing the spectators who become objectified by the masks whose eyes seem to be following their movements.' The exhibition then 'builds a close and flexible dynamic relationship with the culture it seeks to represent, and at the same time – with the viewer – neither of whom is entombed or simply reflected but put into a problematic dialogue instead' (Lionnet 2012, p. 192).

In epistemic terms this leads to a collapse of the previous sanctified belief in one Truth and the museum's ability to convey and preach it, and consequently to reconstructing the institutional architecture of museums in the direction of formulating questions and not feeding the audience with ready answers. An early example was an exhibition called *A Museum Looks at Itself* (1992) which accentuated such a self-critical approach. In more specific museum terms this shift is also expressed in seeking for a mode of representation (in its complex relations with power and authority) that would really represent and not appropriate which is easier to say than do because museums – even the most multicultural and tolerant ones – still by their nature remain 'cannibalistic in appropriating other people's material for their own study and interpretation' (McMaster 2012, p. 377).

One of the landmark events in this context was *Documenta 11* in Kassel in 2002 curated by Nigerian curator and art critic Okwui Enwezor who sees postcoloniality as the dark other of the European avant-garde and post-avant-garde. *Documenta 11* was one of the first exhibitions which focused on the disruption of the relations between the centre and the margins, the rejection of the teleology of progress and development, and the rethinking of spatial–temporal relations and difference within the postcolonial frame. These tendencies were developed by Enwezor in his subsequent projects including the 2015 Venice Biennale (Enwezor 2015). Yet, in general, rather soon the postcolonial stance in rethinking the museum was emasculated and turned into a fad in various boutique forms of multiculturalism and an array of international exhibitions built around this fashionable concept. The apotheosis of this tendency was manifested in the aforementioned Nicholas Bourriaud's *Altermodern*.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century the postcolonial problematic has been appropriated by various mainstream art institutions, theories, and practices so that in the end they lose any contesting element and turn into nicely wrapped and easily digestible postcolonial goods which are treated once again through the well-known principles of Orientalism, exoticization, demonization, progressivism, and other predictable stereotypes and Eurocentric knowledge frames. A rigorous critique of this tendency has gone hand in hand with the development of boutique multiculturalist art.

An early example is British postcolonial critic Ann McClintock's article 'The Angel of Progress' where she criticizes one postcolonial exhibition (*The Hybrid State*) for maintaining the general linear and progressivist logic in spite of declaring its rejection:

> In colonial discourse, as in the Passage, space is time, and history is shaped around two necessary movements: the progress forward of humanity, from slouching deprivation to erect, enlightened reason. The other movement presents the reverse – regression backwards from (white, male) adulthood to a primordial black degeneracy usually incarnated in women . . . The exhibition rehearsed this temporal logic – the viewer went through the enfilade of halls, from primitive pre-history, bereft of language and light, through the epic stages of colonialism, postcolonialism and enlightened hybridity. Leaving the exhibit, history was traversed backwards. (McClintock 1992, pp. 84–5)

Decolonial artists from all over the world are actively rethinking the very concept of the museum as an institution for particular knowledge production and distribution. Often they combine the role of the artist and the curator through engaging critically the permanent collections, the spatial and temporal structures of existing museums, and the ways they stage their interaction with the audiences.

In the exhibition's architectonics this is realized in the so-called hidden or camouflaged interventions grounded in a deliberate accentuating of the elements of 'tradition' seen through a certain perspective, and politically and socially charged in and by modernity. For instance, the artefacts of this or that non-modern culture are presented along with conceptual video-art or performances of contemporary authors connected with this culture. A widely known example of the decolonial museum intervention is Fred Wilson's site-specific installations *Mining the Museum* and *The Museum:*

Mixed Metaphors. Wilson is 'interested in bringing historical information to the aesthetic experience in order to reveal the imperialist reality of how museums obtain or interpret the objects they display. Doing so makes clear the complexity of things on display' (Putnam 2001, p. 101). What Wilson is doing is often a form of assemblage in which real objects from historical and ethnographic collections mix with his fictitious creations to form larger installations questioning 'how history gets told, what gets left out, how we as audience members interact with institutions such as art and history museums' (Crane 2012, p. 307).

Another case of epistemic and aesthetic delinking is Mexican-American artist and theorist Pedro Lasch's projects. In *Black Mirror/Espejo Negro* he focuses on the transparencies and reflections erasing the boundaries between the past and the present, the art work, the viewer and the environment, the pre- and the post-Columbian. The idea of a black mirror is unfolded in a spectrum of meanings – from a magic evocation of spirits to pictorial tricks and experiments of the pre-photography period to today's omnipresence of the black mirror as a security camera eye. Moreover it implies the possibility of temporary installations: encounters either at the territory of Velázquez's *Las Meninas* – which is in the Prado – or at the territory of the Aztec goddess of fire and earth – Coatlicue – which is in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City (Lasch 2013). There, divided by a sheet of dark glass hovering between them, Coatlicue and *Las Meninas* together with their contexts and audiences ooze through each other in the transparencies and misleading half-reflections. Mirrors do not reflect those who look into them. They show a different picture and a different aesthetics. We encounter a peculiar effect of one otherness glancing into another (because there is no sameness here) with no obvious understanding. Lasch is against defining his aesthesis with the help of the fashionable term 'mestizaje' because for him these reflections allow the perception of simultaneous difference, co-presence, and contemporality. The ironic play on mimicry in Lasch's works is connected with the chiasm of the Fanonian metaphor of black skin and white masks stressing the border between the mask and the skin generating new meanings of resistance and re-existence.

In Lasch's spontaneous performance or 'tableau vivant' *The Execution of Emperor Maximilian* from his series 'Naturalization', he engages new participants each time. These people are just part of the audience and he asks them to impersonate the well-known characters of Édouard Manet's painting, which was banned for its harsh critique of French policies in the

colonies. Manet deliberately painted the people who are shooting the Mexican governor in French uniforms to stress the real reasons for the execution. Lasch asked the audience to put on the mirror masks and shoot each other with camera shots instead of real bullets. In both cases mirrors acquire their full meaning only when their real situatedness and contextuality becomes obvious. Yet such relationality is politically and existentially charged and grounded in problematizing of the power asymmetry from the side of coloniality.

4.1 Museum Interventions around the Caucasus: The Post-Imperial and the Decolonial

In the post-Soviet space a similar tactic of museum interventions was applied among others in Olga Sosnina's 2012 controversial exhibition *Dictionary of the Caucasus* in Tsaritsyno Museum (Kavkazsky Slovar 2012). This project deserves to be analysed in more detail as it represents a specific post-Soviet problematizing of the museum exhibition as an institution and as an event. Sosnina explains that she adopted conceptualist art tools to deal with ethnographic categories in refreshing ways:

> The key to the linking of ethnography and conceptualism . . . was to show the Caucasus through the concept of the dictionary . . . The method of ethnographic conceptualism, allowed me to engage with traditional ethnographic visions of this region that dominate in museum practice in Russia. In doing so, the project calls into question exactly what is an 'ethnographic object'. The exhibition suggests that the object itself is not as important as the semantic frame created by the curator, artist, or researcher . . . But this particular project also displaced the 'ethnographic' from its widely accepted meaning in Russia and in the Caucasus – referring either to 'traditional culture' or 'ethnicity'. Ethnography itself became a site of conceptualist experimentation. (Sosnina 2013, pp. 240–1)

The curator attempted to apply an innovative principle not very frequently used in Russian curatorial practices – 'to create a new space of meanings, to make historical or ethnographic heritage contemporary – to retain as well as modify the ethnographic' (Sosnina 2013, p. 241).

It seems that the general approach, the conceptual and organizational instruments and mechanisms used to deconstruct and reconstruct the museum and its meanings, are the same as in the case of above-mentioned

examples of decolonial art and curating. Thus, the main structural and curatorial principle of this exhibition is a labyrinth which successfully problematizes the usual linear enfilade museum structures which have been normally used for ethnographic expositions before leading the audience along a neatly defined path. While labyrinth means wandering, difficulties in finding a way out, dead-ends hard to overcome even with the help of the offered dictionary, labyrinth also successfully rhymes with the Caucasus thematic as in the Caucasus labyrinths have been frequently used as wall decorations, on embroidered clothes, ornaments, and as kitchen utensils decorations. Sosnina problematizes the relations between the objects and museum annotations as in her exhibition the material objects turn into visual texts to comment on the words and concepts. She deliberately designs the whole exhibition as a ludic 'intellectual installation' building up the space 'according to the arbitrary logic of a set of Caucasian words from A to Z, which differed from the positivist hierarchy of scholarly concepts and definitions of Caucasian ethnography and historical chronology' (Sosnina 2013, p. 242). Finally, she makes this exhibition into a scholarly workshop rather than a simple passively consumed show, in the sense that she combines and mixes up the commentaries of researchers, ethnographic texts, books, maps, typologies, and various artistic texts (from graphics and painting to the works of contemporary artists).

However, in my view this is a rather false similarity because in reality the curator is not really interested in the Caucasus as such. Rather she is attracted by the idea of the Caucasus, its image in the Russian mind and perception. She investigates a new cultural reality which she herself repeatedly defines as 'the Russian-Caucasian space'. This exhibition is clearly innovative in its theoretical and methodological grounds both curatorial and anthropological, as the author rethinks the usual frozen and fixed collection principle, based on archaization of the anthropological material represented in an exhibition, in taking it out of the course of time. She wants to de-archaize the Caucasus tradition and make it resonate with modernity and with a varied social reality. As Sosnina points out, 'the world of the Caucasus opened up before the audience . . . not as a set of ethnographic loci but as a heterogeneous space filled with various meanings' (Sosnina 2013, p. 242). Yet this good intention stumbles against the curator's unconscious colonialist assumptions in her choice of material, optics, and the overall meaning.

In a sense it is a curious exposition organized by an inadvertent colonialist revealed in her images of the colonies. It is not by chance in this context that the words she chose for the dictionary are not the words from any Caucasian languages, or even the words the people from the Caucasus would use in real life. The roots of these words are to be found in the Russo-Caucasus War as the curator stresses herself, or in more blunt terms, in the history of colonization of the Caucasus by the Russian empire: 'The source for most of these words is the Russian vocabulary of the nineteenth century, particularly of the era of the Caucasian war (1817–1864), where they appeared through Crimean Tatars, who frequently worked as interpreters. Having settled in Russian romantic literature through these translations and Russian Orientalism, these words gradually became tools of understanding and interpretation of the Caucasus among scholars, writers, travelers, as well as in Russian everyday consciousness' (Sosnina 2013, p. 241).

In a sense this exhibition indeed strives to recreate the principle of a museum intervention used earlier within the postcolonial, African-American, critical race, and other dissenting contexts. Yet it is different because here the vantage point is not the Caucasus but the Russian perception of the region which traditionally has consisted of a number of simple stereotypes – some exotic, most negative and dehumanizing. The geopolitics and corpo-politics of knowledge, being, and perception lying at the basis of this project did not allow Sosnina to really dig into the history of the Caucasus and its relations with modernity, the Russian and Soviet empire and their aftermath, in order to deconstruct and destroy and not reiterate the stereotypes. For her the Caucasus is still an exotic Orientalist space which is meaningful only when it becomes a part of her own grand Russian history. Therefore Sosnina as a curator is affectively animated only when she recognizes the familiar Caucasus stereotypes resonating in Russian minds. The choice of the subject matter in fact could easily be different (it could be Central Asia or Siberia, Africa or India) as the focus is on conceptualist tools rather than the abstract alienated material. There is no decolonial anger involved in this case, for the curator does not feel this as her own history. There is no sense of boundaries either, in what is appropriate and permissible in the assemblages of different dictionary entries. The tragedy of the Caucasus and its people who became the pawns in someone else's imperial games, the Circassian genocide, the subsequent diasporic existence of many ethnicities, artificially devoid of their intelligentsia, aristocracy, and ultimately

culture, do not so easily or unproblematically succumb to the cold post-modernist collage mixing them with the colonialist opinions and views on the same events and much less the caricature Soviet rewritings of history. This approach is problematic primarily in an ethical sense as it hides behind the principle of impartiality.

I would have never ended up in such an exhibition to begin with but I knew that contemporary Caucasus artist Taus Makhacheva's works were going to be incorporated into Sosnina's *Dictionary*. Avarian by origin but Western-educated, Makhacheva's critical cosmopolitanism does not prevent her from maintaining links with her native culture, however constructed and symbolic they might be. Similarly to Jamaican sociologist and writer Erna Brodber, Makhacheva acts as an anthropologist-cum-artist who applies some anthropological methods to better understand the contemporary culture and social and political reality of Dagestan (an autonomous republic in the Northern Caucasus that is still part of the Russian Federation and features several dozen ethnicities and languages) yet avoids the classical anthropological presumably objective vantage point, instead preferring to be a part of the community she attempts to understand.

I was curious to know how this unlikely assemblage was going to take place. It was a disappointment as there were no affective, logical, or conceptual links between the items symbolizing particular words from the *Dictionary*. The links were mostly conjunctive or arbitrarily analogical, which immediately reminded me of Jorge Luis Borges's famous philosophical essay 'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins' (Borges 1964). It contained a bizarre fictional Chinese encyclopaedia, the 'Celestial Emporium of benevolent knowledge', later made famous by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* (Foucault 1994). After walking along Sosnina's labyrinth for two hours I could not help thinking of her *Dictionary* as a very similar taxonomy presenting the Caucasus as a celestial emporium of not so benevolent knowledge after all.

In Borges's essay the animals in the fake Chinese encyclopaedia were divided into '(a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies' (Borges 1964, p. 156).

In Sosnina's exhibition the concept of the horse so crucial for the Caucasus culture of the skilful horsemen warriors and no less skilful

horse-breeders was represented in a similarly conjunctive way: the predictable horse-related objects such as harness, bridle, saddle, and the like, made by Caucasus artisans, were placed alongside equally predictable Orientalist depictions of the brave Caucasus equestrians accompanied by serious scientific explanations of the economic and spiritual importance of the horses in the region, their worship and their use. The optimistic Soviet documentary on Caucasus horse-breeding was shown alongside Taus Makhacheva's work *Karakul* (2007) which, in my view, completely broke down all this dictionary logic. Obviously it was chosen just because one of the characters in the video is a horse. The curator did not bother to get the main ideas and layers of this piece and placed it into the horse semantic cluster just by analogy. In the centre of *Karakul* stands the man/animal and social/natural binary which is obviously not only part of today's innovative theoretical trans-human concerns but also part of many indigenous cultures and histories. A partly anthropomorphic and partly zoomorphic being of indeterminate gender (Makhacheva herself) hiding under an Astrakhan fur costume, a fabric usually used in manufacturing of men's hats in the Caucasus, comes into a strange relationship with a horse.

It is a completely relational communication which, in Erin Manning's words, 'creates a body-ing in a shifting co-composition of experiential spacetimes' (Manning 2013, p. 57). Ideally the object/subject or species division of the world then is erased and replaced with relational and operational, forever open and becoming perception and movement. Makhacheva's *Karakul* is precisely such a reflection of the possibility or impossibility of human/non-human communication – the problematic totally ignored in Sosnina's presentation of this work.

In *Karakul*'s communicative game the border between natural and social is once again eroded and problematized. Makhacheva accentuates the changing of the world itself, the metamorphosis of its sensual and perceptive landmarks as a result of interaction of these two completely different beings who can symbolize anything – from gender difference to intercultural contact. What kind of event is this? Are they both horses, or do they just play horse, or maybe they play human? Or does the strange karakul-covered being play its own game? How human and how animal or other-than-human and/or animal is the creature in the Astrakhan costume? Does it manage to overcome the boundaries of human teleology, and often forced subversion, in the treatment of other worlds and other beings when it hides its humanity under the karakul cover and meekly

mimics one of the first domesticated animals – the horse – not to tame it but to interact with it on an equal basis of two living beings?

We do not know what the horse 'thinks' seeing this strange karakul-covered creature repeating its own movements wishing to establish a dialogue, to find a common language, maybe even a common source or ground that it can share with a horse. This unlikely interaction creates the world anew for both of them. It is a different world as a result of their obviously successful communication as the video ends with Makhacheva peacefully riding the horse. All of these semantic reverberations remain bracketed in Sosnina's representation.

The same loss of semantic and symbolic reverberations we find in another case when she illustrates the concept of the carpet not only with actual carpets and predictable documentaries meticulously demonstrating how women make felt carpets in Dagestan, but also with one of Makhacheva's early video works documenting her performance *Kilim* (2006). The artist slowly wraps herself into and unwraps out of a traditional carpet (kilim). Once again, this is not a video about carpet making. It is rather about the difficult ways of coming to terms and staying in touch with your own culture, tradition, and epistemology, and also with your own body which as it turns can have its peculiar genetic memory of other Caucasus women's bodies wrapped and unwrapped into carpets. The artist always performs her works in an extremely affective and raw way concentrating on her own perception and corporeal apprehension. She feels the rough carpet on her skin, she feels herself as if she were a woman wrapped into a carpet and kidnapped, maybe to be forced into marriage, maybe to be sold into slavery. It is a clear act of reliving these memories, of re-existence when the carpet is a mechanism, a tool of reuniting with one's culture. The carpet is not a detached object of decorative applied arts but rather an almost living subject.

Finally, there is one more crucial intertext around which Sosnina's exhibition cannot help being organized. Yet it is never mentioned by the curator or by any critics and interpreters of her project. I believe that if this intertext were more openly discussed and accentuated, it would have been a different exhibition, much more successful and radically delinking from the usual disciplinary boundaries and museum conventions. It is important that Sosnina is a curator of the highly controversial Tsaritsyno Museum and therefore cannot be free from specific institutional bonds and omissions. Therefore she stopped at presenting her exhibition as a whole, as an intellectual installation. Yet, there is an even larger frame of the *Dictionary*

of the Caucasus that the curator chose to ignore. But it is still readable and quite symbolic in the overall picture of this museum, its genealogy and history. The larger spatial and historical level linked with the locus of this exhibition is also inadvertently a part of the overall design adding highly problematic overtones to the whole project, and undermining the initial urge to represent the Caucasus in all its multiplicity. What then is the darker side of the *Dictionary of the Caucasus*; what is the significance of placing it in Tsaritsyno?

Tsaritsyno is the long-suffering monument of contemporary style of the so-called fantasy restorations which are not particularly faithful to the original historical architectural designs. The official story of this estate is well known. It was first commissioned by Catherine the Great to the famous architect Vassily Bazhenov and then, when she disliked and criticized the almost ready palace ensemble, it was torn down, redesigned and began to be rebuilt by his pupil Matvey Kazakov (Samutina and Stepanov 2014). However, the death of the empress in 1796 interrupted the project and it was never completed. The massive abandoned structures remained unfinished and decaying for more than two hundred years until the 'golden times' of the Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov who in the early 2000s finally found money to (re)build the palace and other constructions, making Tsaritsyno into a strange State Historical-architectural, Art and Landscape Museum-reserve of completely imagined and whimsically combined mock historical details and contemporary features.

The main palace became a strange neo-imperial combination of the two or more original projects of different architects which never meant to exist as such, with an add-on of the deep underground museum entrance floor, equipped with escalators and vast gloomy spaces, restaurants, and souvenir shops. The so-called *Bread House* acquired an atrium which became an organ concert hall but completely destroyed the original design and balance of the ensemble. The Tsaritsyno pond cascade was decorated with a musical fountain which Catherine the Great would probably have disliked as she was never fond of fountains.

However, I am more interested in the tragic historical symbolism of Sosnina's exhibition placed in Tsaritsyno of which the curator is unaware, preferring to focus on the arbitrariness of anthropological conceptualism. Yet history has a penchant for loops and returns, for repetitions with variations. Tsaritsyno is not only an unfinished ruin which was romanticized as such back in the nineteenth century but also a space heavily filled with military, imperial, and patriotic overtones within which the

annexation and subsequent subordination of the Caucasus was a bloody and seldom mentioned side-effect. It was in Tsaritsyno that the future of the Caucasus as a Russian colony was finalized without asking the inhabitants of the Caucasus themselves, with the ratification of the Kuchuk-Kainardzhy peace treaty between the Ottoman sultanate and the Russian empire. The treaty ratified in Tsaritsyno was the result of the Russian–Turkish 1768–1774 war – an important victory of the previously terrestrial empire which now finally acquired long-desired access to the Black Sea along with large adjacent territories. These lands also happened to be the native lands of the indigenous population of the Caucasus – the Adyghe people.

According to the peace treaty the new territories were simply given by the Turkish sultan to Russia as if he owned Circassia which was not the way the majority of the Adyghe people interpreted the situation. However, their multiple petitions to the Russian Tsars claiming that they were never vassals of the Turkish sultan remained unanswered. The Adyghe divided their alliances between Russia, the Ottoman sultanate, then quite powerful Tatar Crimean khanates traditionally controlling the Caucasus, and Persia. However, this local history fell through the grid of the official Russian imperial historiography and still does even more so in the context of the maniacal attraction of the present Russian administration to the Sochi area as the last bastion of Circassians on top of whose unburied bones the latest Winter Olympic Games were taking place. But let us go back to Tsaritsyno for a moment.

In 1775 Catherine bought the future Tsaritsyno at the time of the magnificent celebrations of the Russian–Turkish peace treaty. On 10 (21) July 1775 at the Khodynsky Field, the empress organized a grand exhibition and performance in a baroque masquerade style. It was designed by the future architect of Tsaritstyno Bazhenov and his pupil Kazakov. The field itself was an allegory of the Black Sea. The fairytale pavilions were named by the empress with the names of the sea forts – Azov, Taganrog, Kerch, Yeni-Kale – the places of the recent battles. The entertainment constructions symbolized the reclaimed cities (Lyubetsky 1865). The colourful pavilions mocked Turkish style the way it was interpreted by Bazhenov and Kazakov in the vein of architectural Orientalism of the time. There were little minarets, kiosks, belfries, ships, islands, and forts. Catherine decided to recreate this fantasy yet patriotic style in the future Tsaritsyno ensemble. Even later in the nineteenth century, when it became a colourful romantic ruin, Tsaritsyno was still regarded as a memorial to

the glory of the Russian army and the courage of the Russian heroes (Rayevsky 1815, p. 59).

This is the hidden ironic topos of the Tsaritsyno Caucasus exhibition, its specific double edge. For how can anyone place the exhibition in the space where the unfortunate future of the Caucasus was decided and its destruction was ratified, and at the same time claim that the exhibition aims at developing mutual understanding between the Caucasus people and the Russians, boosting multicultural awareness and other such positive values? Is it then a camouflaged way of exercising post-imperial guilt and a belated and indirect asking for forgiveness? The Caucasus exhibition is indeed a belated and mock repetition of the widespread colonial anthropological expositions to be found in Europe, and in the USA as recent as half a century ago. A mock conceptualist recreation marked by a critical approach towards anthropology as such. Yet strangely enough this critique has never achieved its goals and the reason is the perspective, the optics, the angle of vision, the geopolitics, and corpo-politics of perception and of being. In the case of Sosnina it is clearly Russian and unconsciously imperial. Therefore the Caucasus other remains silent, mute, and once again, studied from afar.

I was walking along the labyrinth of the *Dictionary of the Caucasus* staring intently into the faces of the audience as their reactions were no less important than the collection itself. Many came with children. These were just simple people from the street, no hipsters, no educated public. Tsaritsyno is not a place frequented by such audiences. It is dismissed as a tasteless remake, Moscow kitsch which is usable only for the local grandmothers with small children. They did not get Sosnina's attempt at conceptualism at all. Instead they pointed with their fingers to attract the children's attention to the curious objects torn out of their habitual contexts – the worst anthropological scenario reproduced once again.

They became nostalgic and lingered not in front of Taus Makhacheva's enigmatic video *Karakul*, but rather in front of the popular Soviet slapstick comedy *The Captive of the Caucasus*. And of course none of the audience members whom I encountered that Sunday attempted to reflect on why the curator put these objects, installations, and videos together in this particular way. This lack of understanding became painful in the halls devoted to the Russo-Caucasus war which again was marked by the Russian vantage point and the exotic-demonic image of the Caucasian other. All in all, in spite of all of its claims at conceptualism, this exhibition has not folded in the end into a unified conception. And the curator's

attempt to hide behind the idea of the dictionary as a principally non-linear, rhizomatic, incoherent structure, did not really help. Too much was left behind. She refused to seriously rethink too many things, and first of all, to go not to the familiar imperial stereotypes but to try to hear the voice of the Caucasus itself.

This need to find a way to speak critically in the museum entourage, to problematize the museum as an imperial institution imposing particular historical frames, narratives, and aesthetic norms onto the audiences, to juxtapose the objectified delocalized expert viewpoint and that of the other represented in a museum through certain objects, was fulfilled on a much smaller scale in a project designed by Taus Makhacheva and based on the collection of the Dagestan Museum of Fine Arts. It is called *The Way of an Object*. This work is not a usual museum intervention as it did not take place in an actual museum. Rather it simply played with a number of museum objects putting them in various unfamiliar contexts. Originally it was the steps of the local puppet theatre where the performance took place. Later it was repeated in other spaces and the elements of the performance – the skilfully made marionettes – were demonstrated many times in various other exhibitions. This taking of objects out of their mortified museum environments and hence out of their muteness, is in itself a significant step which is used by the author as a necessary shift helping to switch to a different mode of representation, to creolize visual art with theatre, and images with narratives. In a sense it is a way from the visual back to the verbal. In the centre of Taus Makhacheva's performance stand the talking museum objects. In contrast with her mute video works chosen by Sosnina for the *Dictionary of the Caucasus, The Way of an Object* is presented as a play with conversing characters (Fig. 4.1).

In the past several years the artist has turned to mixed verbal and visual narrative forms with a more and more pronounced verbal element, sometimes theatrical and sometimes leaning more in the direction of a documentary, oral history, or sociological and/or anthropological interview, all of which are created with a realization that it is a fictional narrative and not an objective scientific truth. *In Let Me be Part of a Narrative* (2012) Makhacheva tries to problematize stories and histories as no more than arbitrary narratives that can be promoted as official versions or buried in favour of some other master narrative. In this case it refers to the invisibly present negative image of Dagestanian culture created in the Russian mainstream media and significantly simplifying the multiple and entangled local histories. The problematic narrative in Makhacheva's project is born

Fig. 4.1 Taus Makhacheva, *The Way of an Object*. Mixed media installation. Dimensions variable, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and M HKA museum. Photo by Nikita Shokhov

at the juncture of the two items of documentary footage – the old Soviet propaganda film about famous Dagestanian wrestler Ali Aliev who held the world champion title for many years, demonstrated side by side with a present-day story of the Dagestan shepherd dog fighting championship, made by the artist herself in the form of several interviews with dog-breeders.

In both cases the artist detects the same impulse – the competitive spirit as a form of self-expression and a way of converting male violence into peaceful forms. The emulating drive corresponds to a particular masculine honour code, as well as courage to meet one's defeat with dignity. Dog fights as well as traditional wrestling have existed as specifically male forms of socializing and self-affirmation in Dagestan from time immemorial. But Makhacheva's narrative is not an antiquarian recreation of some frozen social pattern but a flexible and dynamic story with unexpected modern interventions, such as a young girl dog-breeder who obviously has her own project of displaced gendered self-assertion.

The structural juxtaposition of the two videos also plays an important role in the narrative, as it adds an ambivalent reflection on the dynamics of Caucasus masculinity. On the one hand it helps recreate the unstable niches for masculine self-expression across the urban and the rural, reinstating identities shuffled by modernity and often devoid of previous ground due to social and economic problems. On the other hand recreating and retracing previous social links and connections, the institution of dog fighting risks being commercialized. But what is important in the end is, once again, the problematic and subjective quality of any interpretation. Even in the documentary, Makhacheva creates her own narrative, her own story which is only one of the possible versions, not necessarily innocent. The artist is well aware of this fact, drawing our attention to the manipulative element in any documentary. This double video narrative then becomes a reflection on how history is made and constructed, how the official and non-official individual and collective versions of history coincide. History then becomes a constellation of narratives – often framed one into another – none of which has a monopoly of truth but each of which enriches our understanding of a particular culture, community, event, or individual. And the key notion here is how we experience history, how it interactively folds into some meaningful interpretation as a result of our perception.

In *The Way of an Object* (Makhacheva 2013, pp. 68–76) Makhacheva manifested even more pronounced tendencies of merging the verbal and the visual through the medium of the street puppet theatre. There is a verbal script written for the three peculiar characters – animated exhibits from the local museum made into puppets. Without this text – the actual narratives and arguments of the Avarian salt box, the Kubachi wedding bracelet, and Victor Vasnetsov's painting *The Bird Gamayun* (1895) – Makhacheva's project would not be possible at all. Here the accent shifts to rethinking the idea of narrating multiple histories in relation to a museum exhibition. The audience is tempted into interpreting the whole project as a museum intervention taken out of the museum and into the street. Importantly it is the traditional puppet theatre that is used as a medium of this performance.

The affective element in the perception of this work is also quite important. I was present during its first performance in Dagestan which took place on a rainy and windy October day in 2013. The wet audience was trembling at the staircase of the old theatre in the centre of Makhachkala (the capital of Dagestan) and our physical inconvenience

added to the general intended feeling of spontaneity: an impromptu sketch quickly set up in any conditions and at any point. The quarrelling objects in this performance seemed particularly miserable and homeless as if they had escaped the museum to gain freedom but probably later felt sorry for their decision.

Among the epistemic shifts taking place in the museum today, one of the main trends is giving the mute and muted objects the right and ability to speak again, restoring their agency yet fully realizing the impossibility of any objective, neutral, disinterested principle of representation. Often the main focus in the museum is not on the (material) collection itself but rather on a narrative which a curator builds around a set of objects or in spite of them and even in the mode of 'objectless storytelling' (Spalding 2002, p. 55). Something quite similar we find in the case of Makhacheva's carefully selected characters. The artefacts of Dagestanian culture are torn out of their context and deprived of their socio-cultural, utilitarian, and cosmological functions and abilities when they are put in the museum, which is organized according to Western progressivist and objectifying principles. Vasnetsov's painting is also torn out of its original context and becomes a dead representation of someone else's impenetrable canon, brought to Dagestan long ago to educate the local people according to Western/Russian aesthetic norms and therefore carrying a colonialist and hidden condescending agenda which is verbalized in its lines in Makhacheva's performance.

This problematic is often touched upon in contemporary art, for example in Fred Wilson's museum interventions and site-specific installations mentioned above. This is an intersection of the postmodernist Foucauldian reading of the museum as a heterotopia which is capable of accumulating, negating, and interrupting time (Foucault 1986, p. 26), and the decolonial rupture of the progressivist model of museum as a decentring of the official narrative. Makhacheva's puppet theatre recreates this tendency on a smaller scale. But her most recent works continue exploring this thematic sphere in more ambitious museum interventions.

Rethinking the museum as an epistemic institution and promoting disobedience for artists, viewers, and curators has already become part of the common glossary and a new trend both in apolitical and in post-critical theory and decolonial forms. In the latter case, artists as curators and curators as artists focus on disengaging from the hermetic museum institutional contexts. The colossal epistemic shifts taking place in the museum today are making the role of curators ever more important and

independent. One of the main trends here that stands out is that of giving mute and muted objects the right and ability to speak again, in a sense, restoring their agency as Makhacheva attempted to do in her work *The Way of an Object*. This technique becomes particularly effective when the curators reverse the backroom and the museum hall objects according to their specific conceptions and ideas and fully realizing the impossibility of any objective, neutral, disinterested museum principle of representation.

Other effective instruments include intensive rethinking of relations between the object and the museum tag, thus problematizing the gap between the word and the image. Often the artists and curators deconstruct, and in many cases reject, the notorious collecting function of traditional museums with a shift in the direction of the museum as a workshop, as a space for dialogic experimenting, as a process of (re) creation of various kinds of knowledges (Deliss 2012, p. 21). And this is another way of decolonizing the museum. The above analysed narrativization and theatricalizations of the museum are a double-edged sword as such a museum can easily cross the line of entertainment and lose its contesting edge (Spalding 2002, p. 149). What is more valuable as a general principle found today in quite different curatorial projects is the rejection of previous linear chronology and taxonomy as the universal museum organization principles. This allows forgetting about excessive audience disciplining techniques that prescribe what to do, where to go, which way to look, and what impression to shape in one's head. Then the spectators are encouraged to build their own narrative or their own field studies map (Deliss 2012, pp. 19–20). Such a recycled anthropological residue is completely remodelled today in comparison with the parochial, racist, and exclusionary forms of only several decades ago – in various remediation and participatory anthropology-cum-art approaches (Rabinow 2012, p. 22), a promising example of which we find in Makhacheva's project and an unsuccessful example in Sosnina's ambitious Caucasus exhibition.

An important factor in decolonial knowledge production through curatorial and artistic forms is the merging of the roles of the artist and the curator and consequently, the turning of the selection, representation, and signification process into a truly creative artistic experience – curating as assemblage and the exhibition as a whole as a work of art. This often takes the form of museum interventions interweaving or juxtaposing the works of an artist with the museum collection or space, thus questioning the mechanisms of acquisition, selection, representation, interpretation, and

the shaping of taste and aesthetic categories. In a sense curators, similarly to decolonial artists, become tricksters and negotiators infiltrating and dismantling the museum system from within and making compromises in the increasingly commercialized art world, yet still creating and dialogically and imparatively educating a transient transmodern community of sense – forever open, unfinished, always with an unknown result. In this context the role of curator becomes much more active and co-authoring than in traditional representational models.

CHAPTER 5

Postsocialist/Postcolonial Tempo-Localities

The decolonial aesthesis analysed in the first three chapters addresses several intersecting spheres at once – ontology, epistemology, axiology. In this chapter I am going to continue investigating the artistic dimensions of the postcolonial and postsocialist sensibilities (sporadically involving other forms of post-dependence as well). But I will do it from a different angle – that of the fundamental ontological grounds of time and space within which all human beings exist. In Chapter 1 I have mentioned the correlation of the Western affective turn and the decolonial corpo-politics of knowledge. Yet a parallel and interconnected spatial turn or rehabilitation of space from the ruling time is also important as a shift from the traditional Western linear progressivist time model to other options. Within various contemporary revisionist movements, including postcolonial theory and decolonial thought, there are efforts to rethink the spatial and temporal patterns leading to original artistic interpretations of spatiality and temporality. They are quite effective in the liberation of thinking, perception, and being, and eventually imagining fairer life models answering the idea of re-existence.

No one is able to overcome time and space and their redefinition and a shift in their perception are crucial for any aesthetic decolonization. Time and space continue to play a central role in fiction, cinema, theatre, and the arts. Spatial and temporal artistic models have reflected the deeper cultural, epistemic, and existential grounds of various locales and time periods affecting all other elements – from composition and narrative structure to

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visuality, characterization, and language. In all post-dependence conditions as intersections of post-totalitarian and postcolonial sensibilities and imaginaries, leitmotifs and subjectivities, a serious rethinking of tempo-local relations takes place which is reflected in fictional texts, art projects, films, and theatre performances. In this chapter I am going to focus on the analysis of various postsocialist and postcolonial tempo-localities. I coined this term to deconstruct and decolonize the previous well-established models of Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope and Michael Foucault's heterotopia and show that in many situations of post-dependence and in decolonial aesthetic models specific temporal and spatial relations emerge. These relations remained outside of Foucault's and Bakhtin's attention.

As in many other cases the concepts of chronotope and heterotopia were borrowed by the humanities from the natural and strict sciences. Bakhtin turned to Alexei Ukhtomsky's psychology and Albert Einstein's physics whereas parallel to Foucauldian heterotopia there still exist the strictly medical and biological understandings of the concept (the presence of particular tissues and sometimes even whole organs at non-physiological sites). Yet both theorists radically changed and enriched the initial meanings of these terms and ultimately they demonstrated many intersections. Bakhtin stresses time in his chronotope, whereas Foucault accentuates space in heterotopia. In the end both regard spatial-temporal unity as a key to understanding subjectivity, which is expressed in Bakhtin's formula that any 'entrance into the sphere of meaning is done through the gate of the chronotope and the character is always chronotopian' (Bakhtin 1975, p. 407). Transcultural tempo-local models in art, fiction, cinema, and theatre, questioning the Western ideas of time and space and linked with postcolonial/postsocialist discourses and multi-spatial hermeneutics, testify to the growing complexity of the characters' relations with time and space.

Bakhtin's and Foucault's close attention to the spatial-temporal continuum is not a matter of chance. Each of them grasped, in his own way, the specific modes of being and thinking characteristic of his époque, or in Foucauldian terms, the change of epistemes. Today not only philosophers but also physicists seriously discuss multidimensional time, various eternalist hypotheses, multi-variant cosmologies, and parallel universes (Zimmerman 2011) – in short all those tempo-local concepts that have existed for generations and are still to be found in different indigenous cosmologies. In Kechua and Ayamara cosmology (as well as in their Inca ancestors) the spatial-temporal continuum is reflected in the concept of

'pacha' (Manga Qespi 1994) – simultaneously space and time. In Zoroastrian Zervanism it is Zervan – the supreme deity who created the world and the god of eternal and endless time and space (Zaehner 2015). Similar tempo-local models are to be found in some trends of Sufism and pre-monotheistic Caucasus cosmology (Yagan 2003).

Even if the anthropic principle excludes the possibility of existence of any other world except the one with three spatial and one temporal dimension, this very anthropic principle and consequently, its spatial-temporal matrix must be problematized within the frame of a posthumanist ethics as a vitalist ethics after life, formulated among others by Patricia MacCormack (MacCormack 2012). It is possible that nature and life are constantly rewriting and rereading themselves as a text and it is likely that people will not find a place for themselves in this newly edited text. The still numerous anthropocentrists would argue by saying that it is the human being who turns chronos into tempus, physical space into the space of culture. And if the human ontology, our relations with space and time are changed, if we – people more and more obviously programmed for self-destruction – disappear from Earth, then there will be no chronotope, no space and time as human concepts!

Rediscovering and reinhabiting a certain space and the return of spatiality is an important tendency of contemporary cultures – both postmodernist and the so-called 'traditional'. The frozen time of globalization with its single remaining horizon of consumption and the withering sensibility of the end of history, forces people to turn to forgotten spaces – local and global – to spatial histories and 'glocal' identities, as well as to the possible ways of re-rooting in new spaces – real or imagined and constructed. As a reaction against the five hundred years of time colonizing space, this space is finally taking revenge and displacing time.

5.1 Revisiting Foucauldian Heterotopias and Bakhtin's Chronotopes

Foucauldian heterotopia can be described as a quite real space of contestation, rupture, and negation of the habitual hegemony, including the mental and discursive dimensions, falling out of the usual spatial logic (Foucault 1986, p. 24). It necessarily includes a temporal element, also marked by a rejection of habitual relations and often also heteronomic. Thus heterochrony is an important element of heterotopia, making

possible a rupture with the usual time. Anti-topos and anti-chronos are united through a (re)production of specific subjectivity, sociality, and corporality.

Foucault juxtaposes the heterotopias of crisis, which he links to traditional societies, and the modern Western (pertaining to 'our' society, as he puts it) heterotopias deviating from the norm or, in other words, heterotopias of otherness. He points out the ability of heterotopia to combine in real space several incompatible spaces, meaning their projections rather than themselves, for instance, in a movie theatre or in a garden which is one of the oldest models of the world. Heterotopia, according to Foucault, always 'presupposes a system of opening and closing' that isolates it and 'makes it penetrable' at once. 'Heterotopias also exist that are entirely devoted to practices of purification that are half religious, half hygienic' (Foucault 1986, p. 26).

Foucault singles out two possible extreme roles (functions) of heterotopias in relation to all the space that remains: 'Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory . . . Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled' (Foucault 1986, p. 27). The example immediately following this theoretical statement demonstrates the limitations of even the most daring poststructuralist positions, connected with their internally European geopolitics and corpo-politics of knowledge and of perception and consequently, a specific convenient vantage point for observing the world. For Foucault the New World Puritan settler colonies were heterotopias. He calls them the absolutely ideal other spaces, as well as the 'extraordinary, marvelous and absolutely regulated Jesuit colonies that were founded in South America', 'in which human perfection was effectively achieved' (Foucault 1986, p. 27). The instrument for reaching all these heterotopias in the contemporary Western imaginary is certainly the ship – in Foucault's words, a heterotopia par excellence, a reservoir of enfolding possibilities for adventure, piracy, unexpected and sudden changes in fortune, although taking into account other Foucault's works, it can also be the image of the ship as a floating brothel or prison.

Obviously Foucault is judging from the Western position which has always preferred to act in the logic of an empty territory subject to colonization, and completely ignoring the people who had the misfortune of being born and dwelling in that territory and who therefore stood in the

way of the triumphant imperial march. For them these Puritan and Jesuit colonies could hardly be ideal heterotopian spaces. On the contrary, they acted as materialized hellish dystopias – the distorted reflections of the alien and unfamiliar logic, destroying all previously existing cosmological, social, cultural, and other orders and their agents. The paradigmatic ship heterotopia demonstrates its darker and cruel and not only romantic and adventurous sides, particularly in the form of the Atlantic transit of the African slaves into the New World.

Foucault's rich concept of heterotopia stores a whole lot of conceptual possibilities and needs further decolonization and a serious rethinking from the position of a postcolonial/postsocialist other – a heteroclite character inhabiting an artificial space – be it a colony, a totalitarian state, or other constrained society. Postsocialist culture, art, fiction, and cinema offer a number of interesting examples whose analysis allows singling out certain concepts that were not visible or relevant for Foucault.

In a similar logic, Mikhail Bakhtin attempted to single out the universal chronotopic features and pointed out the unity and inseparability of time and space stressing that time 'shrinks and condenses, becomes invisible, whereas space is enforced and involved into the course of time, plot and history' (Bakhtin 1975, p. 234). But what if chronotope becomes disunited, fractured, multiple and stops to imbue the fictional text with what Bakhtin calls a genre unity? And what if time colonizing space through the idea of progress (dominating in all of his examples coming from Western European 'realistic' literature) is problematized, negated, exiled to the outskirts of the plot, and becomes more and more devoid of previous utopian teleology? Then chronotope is replaced with shifting, contradictory, and multiple spatial histories, a rehabilitated topos (not necessarily real) taking its revenge over time. The idyllic chronotope gives place to mutopian (changeable, mutable, and mutating), in Csicsery-Ronay's words (Csicsery-Ronay 1997), if not mutant models grounded in the rejection of history, responsibility, and rootedness, whereas space often replaces the almost missing temporal plot. The tempo-locality then becomes phantasmal and moves away from plausibility. Instead of that it works for the creation of often highly unrealistic imagery grounded in distortion or overcoming of tempo-local characteristics of physical reality in excessive, expressionist, often grotesque forms, or in the creation of seemingly material, heavy, and lush topoi with no real equivalents.

5.2 Decolonizing the Tempo-Localities of Post-Dependence

In post-dependence tempo-localities, multiple spaces obviously taking over time are permeated by and broached with multiple histories, sometimes parallel or intersecting with each other and with the exhausted metanarratives of modernity. These spatial histories are not archaic or frozen; they do not go back to some ancient roots in quest of ethnic renaissances. They are dynamic and marked by the principle of non-exclusive duality. The spatial history is often materialized through changing and flexible language. Space becomes a palimpsest of overlapping traces left by a succession of inscriptions. The function of inscribing names on the symbolic cultural map then comes forward. It turns into an experimental field of constant crossing of borders, spaces, and times, where the signs of history exist in the signification of lacunas, semantic slippages, and renamings.

Memory is materialized in most unexpected places – from words to real physical spaces – so that it becomes necessary to purify language, contaminated by the rhetoric of dictatorships, totalitarian regimes, and colonialist states to use it very carefully afterwards. Space also requires purification and exorcism. The postsocialist world is full of such places that remember the contaminated topoi. But there are different tactics applied to their interpretation. For example in Russia it is preferred to impose the newer images onto the half-erased and never properly analysed old ones and simply ignore the restless ghosts of the past. Yet even exorcism, a symbolic and public purification, might not be enough. What is needed is a painstaking effort of gazing into the face of the past. Art and fiction are the best instruments for such questioning and purification.

Decolonial tempo-localities do not only trace the historical scars of postcolonial or post-totalitarian spaces but also rehabilitate places giving them new vital impulses instead of mere survival or a painful pleasure from the eternally unhealed wounds inflicted by history. As a result, spatial history is filled with unexpected meanings of renaming and recreation of the world anew instead of eternal repentance and guilt. Often this step is possible only in one's imagination, fantasy, or in some parallel reality.

In Joanne Richardson's documentary *Letter from Moldova* the necessity of disinfecting the post-totalitarian space is brought forward. She demonstrates that humans are hardly ever able to successfully superimpose

various spatial and temporal and cultural and ideological models. At Kishinev main street which was renamed seven times in the last several years we find a pompous if a bit decayed building in Stalin's imperial style with baroque elements and never removed sickles and stars. Now it is the central office of the national mobile monopolist 'Moldcell'. A diasporic Moldovan who spent all her life in the West, Richardson sees Kishinev as an abandoned and devastated battlefield right after the artillery raid. They do not shoot any more, but small pockets of war are still rooted in the fabric of everyday life.

The author conveys the tempo-local interactions of the postsocialist Moldova using peculiar verbal and visual metaphors. For instance, reflecting on the paradoxical popularity of the Communist Party in today's post-Soviet Moldova, Richardson points out: 'They made a refrigerator for nostalgia to freeze and store the overdue time interval when things seemed more stable and solid than in today's liquid époque' (Richardson 2009). Simultaneously with her words the viewers see the surrealistic landscapes of disheartening straight Soviet streets consisting of rows of concrete five-storey buildings and dried-up trees, identical Lenin monuments and ramshackle 'houses of the Soviets' adorned with rickety stars.

The apotheosis of this material yet totally ghostly spatiality is Transnistria, into which Richardson was never let. She even repeatedly questions the reality of this place. Her Transnistria embodies the worst and the most frequent post-Soviet scenario – the guarded simulacrum of state Socialism with all its deteriorating gift shop symbolism, warming everyman's soul and emptying the pockets of the tourists buying memories of what is written in their guidebooks. But it is a simulacrum awkwardly covering a postmodernist feudal dynastic order typical of many post-Soviet countries. Richardson is a paradigmatic unhomed person against her will, attracted to temporal and spatial borders. Moldova becomes then a border tempo-locality, an intersection of disorder and transformations, behind which looms instability and a promise of an *other* becoming whose momentum is completely lost. In this loss Richardson detects 'a reminiscence of the future which never happened' (Richardson 2009). In this model the progressive linearity is destabilized and the future freakishly merges with the embellished and imagined past.

An obvious leitmotif in *Letter from Moldova* is the border, which is evoked in different guises all the time – from a simple crossing of the border or its impossibility embodied in locks, barbed wire, and fences, the imagined and constructed Transnistria, and to borders that are inside one's

self, as well as liquid borders between various art and activism media. This is connected with problematizing of the concepts of home, native land, culture, rootedness, which is typical for such complex post-diasporic cases.

Space and spatial history are central categories in this film. Richardson reflects on home and unhomedness, real and imagined topi, particularly in the context of the multilayered Eastern European local history, in which various post-dependencies (postcolonial, decolonial, self-colonizing, post-communist, second-class European) intersect and interact, and in relation to which she obviously keeps a distance because, after all, it is not her past. The post-diasporic condition imbues Richardson with a specific detached optics as well as with a potential risk of objectification and simplification of postsocialism because this past is not a part of her real corpo-politics and geopolitics of being, perception, and knowledge. In other words, she accurately detects the problem of the primitive museum representation of communism as a kitsch, a gothic melodrama, or a house of horrors, its stereotyping and flattening, yet she cannot be entirely free of it herself, and partly because she does not have a first-hand and full-blooded experience of the Socialist reality.

Another recurrent theme in Richardson's documentary is spatial history which is closely connected with memory or its distortion and erasing. Today the ex-Socialist world is indeed full of various commercialized or museum forms of patented nostalgia which are sold to mostly Western tourists or in some cases perform a dangerous cultural work inside the postsocialist countries themselves. It is a work of self-colonization, as Richardson describes it, when the natives internalize the values of the winning West and become tourists of their own history.

However, there is a third possibility which is not discussed in this film – it is the case of Russia where the lacquered and commercialized Socialist legacy is used to consolidate the society and bridge the generational gap forcing everyone to react in prescribed and legitimized ways. Indeed it has nothing to do with memory or remembering but rather with forgetting or repressing one's past. The older people who idealize their youth which they associate with the Soviet period or sometimes exclusively with repressions, and the youngsters who were already born after the collapse of the USSR and have no Soviet memory of their own, are offered a convenient version of a theme park-cum-souvenir shop-cum restaurant nostalgia.

In contemporary Moscow this is expressed in restoring Stalin's portraits in the renovated metro stations and in pop-cultural versions of the *Soviet Cheburek House* chain and other allegedly Soviet eateries with authentic

period music, cheap Chinese plates and cups adorned with Socialist symbols, and collections of horrendous mass-produced porcelain figurines of ballerinas, pioneers with horns, and border patrol officers with German shepherds. I visited one of those places not long ago. It was an assemblage of typically Soviet and quite mismatched objects – the red flags and Lenin portraits, the pompous crystal chandeliers and the plastic cups and utensils, the Styrofoam gilded fretwork and the ugly tile floor, the typical Soviet stand-up rickety tables. One of the walls was decorated with a huge painting depicting a never realized fantasy of Soviet expansionism – the Doge's Palace in Venice over which looms a huge phallic Soviet airship with 'USSR' inscribed in red letters on its side.

I was not interested in the eternal drunkards occupying most of the places (those have not changed much from the Soviet times). I was more curious about the teenagers and smaller children who were brought here by their parents as if on a museum excursion to the idealized past. What did they see in these bits and pieces of someone else's – even if their own grandmother's – world? Were they able or willing to reassemble and reintegrate them into a new semiotic system? Some of them looked and surely felt like foreigners and for them there was no difference between this fake *chebureks, calzones* from an Italian eatery, and the Russian *pirozhki* sold at a nearby train station, the same way as there was no difference between Lenin and Ivan the Terrible as both belonged to one homogeneous antiquity before their birth. It was a peculiar case of the postsocialist self-Orientalism balancing on the verge of a zoo story. What could be the possible recipes against this contagious nostalgia for the forever lost communist utopia? And how to make the critical distancing effective not only for activist art but also for common viewers or readers?

The decolonial tempo-localities are often recreated through rituals of remembering and reconstruction, through efforts to extract the spatial memory, through merging with space, through physical and bodily amalgamating in the palimpsest of many contradictory cultural layers, historical events, and natural landscapes. The artists and writers then reveal their ability 'to see time in space' (Bakhtin 1975, p. 395), while streets and buildings, squares and boulevards become a materialized history.

A special case of tempo-local nostalgia is represented in the case of the postsocialist postcolonial authors who tend to juxtapose the idealized portraits of colonial capitals and the sinister, ruthless, and often phantasmagoric imperial cities where the colonial subjects are defenceless, rejected, and invisible. Hence comes the idealizing of his childhood

Baku by Afanassy Mamedov in his novelette *Khazar Wind* (2000), the pre-war idyllic Grozny in Chechen woman writer Lula Kuni's novelette *Outlines* (2010), and Khurramabad (Dushanbe) in Andrey Volos's novel of the same name (2000).[1]

In postsocialist/postcolonial spaces a Tsar's palace or a general governor's house which are often the colonial caricatures of the imperial Russian capitals, themselves recreated from the Western originals, could stand until very recently next to official traces of the Soviet past and with remnants of the old precolonial city. One of the strategies of the postcolonial and post-Soviet governments has been that of the deliberate destruction of the colonial architectural signs capable of holding the people's collective memories together. The capital of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, went through several of such waves – from the almost complete destruction of the old town, conveniently linked to the 1960s horrible earthquake, to the post-1991 dismantling of not only Soviet but also Russian pre-revolutionary colonial architecture. Yet a deciphering of the remnants of the past sometimes proves to be impossible. The debris is hard to put together to create any holistic picture. It is no longer possible to tell one layer from another and say who belongs to the same and who is an alien, which is today's reality and which is an imprint of the same place on the old photograph or celluloid. All of them are equal and all of them merge in the face of eternity.

A fascinating example of such an artistic recreation of the intersection of space, memory, alternative histories, and topographies is Taus Makhacheva's *Gamsutl* (2012). She questions various forms of the human appropriation of space, and communicating with the natural, the manmade, the animal, the machine, the social, and the historical. Acquiring one's humanity anew through rediscovering and reliving space and going back to spatiality through gendered forms of identification, stand in the centre of this project. Gamsutl is an abandoned ancient mountain settlement carved in and from the rocks, once famous for its skilful jewellers and armourers, as well as religious and cultural tolerance. Its picturesque ruins grow into the wild landscape harmoniously blending with the environment, as if it is time for nature to claim its eternal rocks back from the people. The protagonist is a young man taking part in a peculiar ritual of re-membering and re-enactment and striving to carefully recreate the spatial memory of the forgotten past. Through a bodily 'merging' with this space – a palimpsest of many cultural strata and dramatic historical events (the Russo-Caucasus War, the Soviet modernity,

Fig. 5.1 Taus Makhacheva, *Gamsutl*. Still from HD video. 16 min. 1 sec., colour, sound. 2012. Courtesy of the artist

the post-Soviet abandonment and return back to nature) – the 'dancer' is trying to corporally relive Gamsutl in his mimicry of natural and architectural objects. He is trying on various identities imagining himself alternately a defender and an assaulter, a warrior and Gamsutl's citizen, a collective farmer brigade leader incorporating Soviet modernity symbols into his traditional dance and mimicking inanimate objects – becoming a tombstone, a watchtower, or a crack in the wall (Fig. 5.1).

Similar overtones are to be found in the aforementioned poetic documentary *The End of an Era. Tashkent* which is the late Ilkhom Theatre director Mark Weil's requiem for the irrevocably lost capital of Soviet Uzbekistan, once marked by linguistic, religious, and ethnic-cultural diversity, interpenetration and dynamism. The list can be continued by the tempo-local representation of Baku in the jazz-like Oleg Safaraliyev's film *Farewell, Southern City* (2006); and a fairytale Tbilisi, seen through the eyes of a matured boy who turned into another unhomed character in the lyrical, penetrating yet crudely material and corporal (in a magic realist way) Georgy Paradzhanov's movie *Everybody is Gone* (2012). For the characters of these films narrating the post-Soviet cities, entering the idyllic state is inevitably problematized: without entirely idealizing this

world, seeing it a bit ironically, they still obviously prefer the detached idyll of their childhood to today's cut-down cherry orchard – the new Baku, the new Tashkent, the new Tbilisi with their often caricature signs of globalization and commercialization.

5.3 Close Up 1: From Baku to Moscow and Back

Afanassy Mamedov is one of the postcolonial/post-Soviet writers who embodied to the full the paradigmatic tempo-local sensibility of the post-dependent condition. His position does not fall into the consciously decolonial option as he invariably refuses to take part in any political or ethical agency. Yet he was one of the first writers in Russian who discovered the hidden ocean of postcolonial motifs and sensibilities, attracting attention to the colonial sides of existence which before were either bracketed or always represented through the dominant imperial prism and thus disavowed. This makes his works important as they open another and more complex and varied well of possibilities. All of his fictional journeys start from spatial and bodily memories falling perfectly into the spatial turn.

Mamedov's dynamic spatial-temporal intersections of Moscow and his native Baku are particularly symptomatic in the context of imperial-colonial and Soviet/post-Soviet tempo-localities. They result in a fragile imagined hybrid space which back in 2004 I suggested calling Bascow (Tlostanova 2004, p. 265), similarly to Rushdie's Babylondon, to identify the mingling of the two completely different topoi in the mind of a confused character. In the next decade Mamedov has continued to develop this sensibility of an imagined space, fed by his capricious memory. Today it is enriched by additional temporal dimensions between childhood and middle age, between the Soviet and the post-Soviet époques, between home and the more and more habitual unhomed state. One of Mamedov's recent short stories accumulating all of these tendencies is a deceivingly simple narrative of a five-year-old author's alter ego Asaf recollecting his very first trip to Moscow forty years earlier. The story is called 'Bascow' (echoing my old text about Mamedov's work) and grounded in a simple hybridity working as a key to unlock the unquenchable sources of memory and trigger the writer's further elaborations on the ontological shifts as a result of spatial and temporal creolization. Mamedov develops his Bascow metaphor in interesting and important ways.

In this story in a double optics of the little and grown Asaf, Moscow is associated with an unfamiliar climate, a strange topography, a discovery of the Jewish element of his split self, and with his family's 'doom' of being attracted and often subsequently destroyed by the Third Rome (that is Moscow). Mamedov never openly discusses this political element of his ancestry, and never really explains who surrounded the five-year-old Asaf during his first Moscow trip. He deliberately applies the Hemingway iceberg principle defining personalities with merely dotted lines and meagre details which are comprehensible only for those who belong to the (post-) Soviet community of sense.

Yet the most important ideas and sensibilities in this short story do not really require a good knowledge of unofficial Soviet history or the documentary details of the late Soviet artistic bohemian environment. This work addresses a different level of the post-dependence traumatic experience. The general effect is intensified by the fact that the boy cannot understand most of what is happening. He is, according to Boris Eikhenbaum's definition of 'skaz', a narrator who does not understand the event and therefore inadvertently lets out some details that allow the more informed readers to grasp the situation (Eikhenbaum 1974). Asaf makes important discoveries having to do with the child's existential experience of being thrown into a wider world, but also acquiring additional meanings in the experience of the grown-up Asaf who has already crossed the midlife point. Having spent a long time crying before going to sleep in an alien and uncomfortable flat, suffering from the sense of being torn and taken far away from home, the boy comes to a conclusion that 'distance is time and movement. Everything in life, including the fate hovering over their family, surrenders to these two things' (Mamedov 2013).

The short story closes with an episode of Asaf's first bicycle riding lesson. He does not understand the event, and is not aware of the fact that he was taught to look for balance by one of the best Soviet translators, thanks to whom many generations of Russian-speaking readers were able to enjoy the works of Kafka and Faulkner, Salinger and Vonnegut. The boy does not know who Rita Rait-Kovaleva is but it does not negate the symbolic meaning of this event. For a real translator from one culture to another one of the most important skills is looking for a balance and learning how to keep it.

The character recollecting this forty years later realizes together with the readers that this role of the cultural translator as a keeper of balance will become his main occupation for the rest of his life. 'If you keep the

balance you can forget about being afraid of distances, and also about doom which measures a distance for everyone, you can even combine the two cities – Baku and Moscow' (Mamedov 2013). In fact this is what Afanassy Mamedov has been doing for many years – carefully creating a hybrid imagined space, as a collision of the real native topos of Baku (the lost Eden of his childhood) and an other, alien space of Moscow, where only small and carefully chosen isles can become native for the character. Finally, he creates an absolutely imagined, hybrid space in between, conceptualized mainly in visual and auditory terms.

The colonial and imperial capitals Baku and Moscow cohabit inside the main character in a conflicting way. Baku is presented as almost a living being – with its lopsided old streets smelling of sweat and meat, its houses, growing together like the eyebrows of Eastern beauties, and the balconies, covered with vines as if with veils, where the long Bakinian evening tea-drinking takes place. The Russian imperial imagery is brought forward when the author describes the family dwelling and their favourite places – the old flat with the door chain from Tsar Nikolay's times, the Vorontsov's palace, the pre-revolutionary books that belonged to his grand-grandfather. Transcultural Baku is also presented as a city of tolerance which is much older than the Soviet proletarian internationalism and somewhat shaken only after the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of the independent nation-state.

Mamedov's protagonists are paradigmatically border people, unable to belong in any culture – Azeri or Moscow, colonial or metropolitan. Brought up on the Western European and Russian-Soviet intellectual and aesthetic canons, they cannot completely reject the deeper non-Western roots and languages in themselves. Theirs is a path from a peculiar self-negating Orientalism exoticizing difference, including their own, which is an Azeri version of 'double consciousness', and making them into the colonizers of their own native city, to a different way of looking at things in Moscow, where the objects of exoticization and imperial demonization would be themselves. Here the optics changes as the city is regarded not through its imperial ethnic and cultural discriminatory elements, but rather through a totalitarian dependence. The sensibility of a colonized subject mingles with the feelings of a politically repressed individual. Again and again Mamedov comes back to the symbolic emigrants from Baku – people who reluctantly inhabit different spaces and continents but can never overcome the loss of their childhood Eden – the disappeared Baku. Even if they decided to return, there is nowhere to go back to.

It is possible to speak of a peculiar creative trajectory in Mamedov's work. In his earlier novels and short stories the author more often took sides in the depiction of ethnic and political conflicts and clashes, whereas lately his position has become much more detached and concordant with Albert Camus's Nobel speech words that 'true artists scorn nothing, they are obliged to understand rather than judge' (Camus 2016). The symphony of Afanassy Mamedov's artistic universe draws up into an ethno-jazz composition, where a refined ornamentation and an often multilingual play on words intersect with complex metaphors and syncopated breaks, grounded in his always recognizable rhythm – from a romantic and slightly Proustian nostalgia for something that never existed in *Khazar Wind*, through a rather naturalistic style, the accentuated social problematic and inherent protesting element of *Frau Shram* to the latest cautious reconciliation of the new lapidary, compact, compressed, and polysemantic prose of the novelette *A Cop had a Dog*. That story centres on a painfully disturbing image of the lost dog that an Armenian family escaping from Baku during the late Soviet ethnic cleansings left behind. The dog is adopted by the new owner of the abandoned flat – an Azeri policeman who is presented not as a primitive nationalist monster but a full-fledged character, far from being ideal, yet still not devoid of love, compassion, and repentance.

5.4 The Tempo-Local Dimensions of War and…World[2]

In this part I would like to dwell on one of the tempo-local models that has not received sufficient attention either in Bakhtin's or in Foucault's interpretations. Due to a number of specific circumstances it has become central for the intersecting postsocialist and postcolonial contexts. This tempo-locality can be defined as that of the state of exception when the world is suddenly put in the conditions of war. It changes dimensions, relations, and proportions generating a new ontology with a different temporality and spatiality. In the end such tempo-localities turn out decolonial as they are grounded in a fundamental rethinking of the metaphysical conditions of human existence in war when human nature itself, the boundaries of the human and non-human, natural and manmade, are seriously questioned. War in its spatial and temporal dimensions then makes these situations particularly acute.

As mentioned above, the postcolonial post-Soviet urban palimpsests retain and superimpose various spatial histories and semiotic codes. But in

those cases when the previous urban space together with its inhabitants was violently destroyed as a result of war, the purification and decolonization rituals, the forgetting and remembering acquire a different meaning and different forms often connected with de-urbanization and even a complete return to nature.

One such example is a fascinating Palestinian architectural and art project *Return to Nature (Decolonizing Architecture)* grounded in the idea of the spatial decolonization of architecture and wider, of place and landscape. The members of this project recycle, circulate, replay, ridicule and re-master the existing infrastructures of Israeli occupation after these objects were withdrawn from the sphere of military and political dominance. The authors play on the idea of spontaneous recapture of architectural objects and their recycling in various functions – from building materials which the neighbouring villagers immediately reused, to the places of temporary rest for the migrant birds which turned out to be the focus of this project. Recycling of the former architectural symbols of power, violence, and dominance deactivates them through accentuating different aims – utilitarian, ironic, provocative. Almost perfect examples of Foucauldian heterotopias, the abandoned military bases exist in the logic of transgression, which opens unexpected possibilities but does not answer the usual teleology and economy of urban planning grounded in stability, predictability, and rootedness.

In *Return to Nature* the authors reflect on various dimensions of the unhomed condition, and trace the parallels between human rootlessness and the constant transit of migrating birds whose routes on the way from Siberia to Eastern Europe and South Africa have always crossed over the hills of Palestine, situated right between Africa, Asia, and Europe. One such place is the abandoned and decrepit Israeli military base Ush Garb – the arena of this project. Today this space is completely taken over by thousands of birds who have made almost imperceptible the traces of previous human activity in this former conflict spot. The natural once again devours the manmade which did not fulfil its ambitions and hence is expelled from history seen as much more than a grand human narrative.

However, the return to nature only seems to be natural. The manmade is present in this project in subtle and imperceptible conceptual forms of playing with space which the authors called a destructive design. For example, in order to prevent the possibility of recapturing of the military settlement by both Israeli and Palestinian forces the authors deliberately made the houses unusable for living by perforating their walls. They also

played on the mobile earth mound to problematize the relations between the buildings and the surrounding landscape: the houses were partly buried in the mixture of their own debris and the earth left from the constantly shifting military fortifications.

The Palestinian settlements were deliberately devoid of any public space for several decades, as they were turned into strictly controlled sleeping quarters. Today the public space is unexpectedly coming back through such projects as *Return to Nature*, at the border of the human and the natural, the social and the non-state. The Palestinian project is not an idyll and its creators do not aim at creating some utopia of happiness for all. Rather they are using the intervention into the physical space as a tactical weapon, helping to open up the horizons of further decolonizing transformations. Certainly this Palestinian project is fragile and possibly doomed – not only due to natural factors but also political decisions. And maybe very soon the mutopian migrating birds' shelter will give place to a new military base or maybe a peaceful settlement which will only be destroyed by the next war.

The tempo-localities of war and its aftermath are typical for the postcolonial/postsocialist contexts as well. Some of the leitmotifs of the Palestinian project decolonizing military architecture and going back to nature are recreated in the seemingly documentary novelette *Outlines* written by Chechen woman writer Lula Kuni. The title in Russian – *Abrisi* – alliteratively rhymes with *abrikosy* – apricots – an Edenic image of natural revival and fruiting in the midst of the manmade hell of the war. Through the optics of this unjust war, through its distorted ethics, seen through the eyes of a young woman, a mother of two little girls, who is later killed by the federal forces, we perceive the horrifying topos of destroyed Grozny – the capital of Chechnya, with its peculiar aesthetics of the posthuman return to nature. Today this de-urbanization is hastily camouflaged by the construction of new skyscrapers which are unable to erase the suffering, pain, and death which this space still remembers, or the ecological catastrophe overtaking the Caucasus as a result of the three Chechen wars and later, the Olympic constructions. The natural element in this novelette, similarly to the Palestinian project, somehow reconciles the main character with the world, softens the contrast between the image of the pre-war Grozny, a surrealistic copy of the battlefield from Vassily Vereschagin's or Franz Roubaud's paintings, and the following de-urbanization and the tumult of advancing nature taking away from the people what they could not cope with. The dead ruins are particularly ugly in the

winter when the green trees are not able to cover and mask the wounds of war, when the abandoned and overgrown yards in the city centre become homes for pheasants, rabbits, squirrels, and feral cannibal dogs.

5.5 Close Up 2: A Post-Soviet 'Midnight Child'

A powerful parallel to this verbal tempo-locality of the Chechen–Russian war is to be found in the works of young artist Aslan Gaisumov. Born in 1991 – the year of the Soviet Union's collapse, having spent the first several years of his life in a refugee camp in Ingushetia, never attending elementary or high school, eventually Gaisumov became one of the most interesting contemporary artists working at the intersection of the post-colonial and the postsocialist sensibility. Similarly to Saule Suleimenova, he came to the decolonial option through his own experiential way, linked with his geopolitics and corpo-politics of knowledge, being, and sensing. Gaisumov took part in several international biennales, was nominated for a few prestigious awards, and had personal exhibitions both in Chechnya and in Europe.

What strikes the audiences in his works is a peculiar stereoscopic vision typical for the post-Soviet midnight children, to paraphrase Salman Rushdie (Rushdie 1981), children who had to mature too early because of the trials and hardships they came across, and a too early destruction of the value system and any stable landmarks that any child needs at least for some time to survive. Born right before or during the war and never having a chance to experience anything else, Gaisumov still finds a very unusual way of telling us about this war, in many ways similar to what Lula Kuni is doing in her *Outlines*.

One of Gaisumov's better-known works revolves around books – the reservoirs of human knowledge, memory, and creativity. But his are books used in unusual and often unnatural functions because of the war, the books that witness the war and also fall its victims or become its accomplices. These are books with missing pages burnt in innumerable fires to warm up the children, and books containing clockwork bombs. The apotheosis of war then is presented not in military scenes, not through death and blood, but indirectly, through the perception of its victims – women, elderly people, children, the destroyed nature of the Caucasus, or the violated books. In the end the book is used as an intellectual object acting in an (anti)aesthetic and shocking function which prevents us from sliding into the predictable path of banal bookish interpretations. It is a

Fig. 5.2 Aslan Gaisumov, *No Need for Theories*. From the series 'Untitled (war)'. Mixed media: book, soil. 7.5 × 12 × 26 cm., 2011. Courtesy of the artist and Kromus+Zink Gallery, Berlin

conceptual move yet the urge behind it is far from any cold postmodernist ludic position because of the author's specific corpo-politics of perception and of being which is impossible to fake (Fig. 5.2).

Other Gaisumov works also refer to war but always in slanted and indirect ways. As the artist told me in a recent conversation, he is more interested in creating works that do not indicate a particular historical or present moment so that they do not lose their significance too soon. Instead of that he reflects in powerful metaphors on the ways an ethnic culture survives in embodied memories and oral histories yet never freezes into some given and stable set of characteristics, on how culture becomes truly a process, in constant change with each generation of people and especially in cases like Chechnya where the semantic gaps and lacunas between generations are particularly obvious. Often those who vividly remember deportations, have nothing in common with those who were born after the return. And everything is done in order for the people to forget the links and the succession of the destinies of exiles. This is done to

ensure that they remain in the enslaved condition – mentally, corporally, and affectively. Gaisumov's works explode this fake consensus and make people wake up from the imposed dream of self-colonization.

This is brilliantly expressed in one of his projects involving transparent jugs. Similarly to Taus Makhacheva, the artist acts here in the capacity of a participative anthropologist whose affective influence upon the society is much more powerful than any traditional scientific analysis as he speaks with our aesthesis, evoking bodily memories, sensuous responses, and at the same time, the erased and forgotten deviant historical realities (Fig. 5.3).

Gaisumov based this work on traditional Chechen metal jugs that were used before mostly by women to carry water. But the artist had the same jugs made out of transparent Murano glass thus reflecting on temporality, on the whimsies of memory and the difficulties of recovering the communal object in the world of commodities. Gaisumov is asking how and where does a people's ethnonational culture live when oppressed by a military conflict, colonization, dictatorship, repressions, mass migration

Fig. 5.3 Aslan Gaisumov, *Untitled*. Mixed media: one original Chechen water jug from the nineteenth century, six glass copies of the national Chechen water jugs, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Kromus+Zink Gallery, Berlin

and forced exile, diasporic existence and the ethics of war. What happens when a people can only hope to survive and forget about such fragile substances as national traditions? Memories are destroyed and become scanty. The generation gap widens. Languages, fairytales, and symbols are forgotten. Crafts slip into oblivion. Alphabets are altered. Places are renamed. The spatial and temporal landmarks are blurred. Sometimes traditions, symbols, and cultural signs disappear altogether. Can we then call ourselves creators and custodians of our culture?

What defines one's culture if it is constantly uprooted and relocated, creolizing its elements with other models, to finally be encapsulated in a form of a museumized exhibit depicting some distant past carefully isolated from any real human lives? In what elusive and escaping images, objects, memories, and smells will a culture continue to live? Still human memory, individual and collective, embodied in mundane objects and daily chores, always subjective and vulnerable in the face of censorship of any official historiography, remains the only way of preserving our cultural constants for future generations. What are these constants, the clear, lucid, and transparent structures, which are later on filled with meaning, unique for each new generation?

Gaisumov reflects on culture as an ever changing process, living in people and their actions just as well as in material objects. Culture is not stagnant waiting for the return of the exiles, which makes us all potential strangers in our native land. We freeze in front of an amalgamation of meanings of various epochs and contexts. Any naive attempt at reviving the original continuous tradition turns out to be erroneous and false. What then shall one do about those cultures that are represented in a museum by complete replicas built from scratch?

Gaisumov's jugs embody a cultural memory, a forgotten and abandoned tradition, with a semiotic system of semantic correspondences that the jugs once represented. But today a jug risks becoming a mortified exhibit, a dysfunctional object that doesn't fit into a culture. There is no brook left that women would go down to get some water from. There are no people who would see the ornaments and the shape of the jug and tell everything about its owner. The meaning of such actions is probably lost forever. One should not think of it as a tragedy though. A culture that is always on the road can find new forms of survival despite its amputated meanings and values. Aslan Gaisumov tells this story by way of marginal, circuitous, and deceivingly inconsequent narratives, objects, and memories, which are a starting point in the reflection on the reasons, principles, and consequences

of the destruction and preservation of traditions and cultural patterns going through many hardships side by side with their custodians. And this statement is much more powerful and deep than any traditional historical narrative.

Gaisumov's indirect way of telling history is ultimately about the people who constantly have to survive and not make choices, people with just ghost memories, those dehumanized, animalized, and rendered genderless due to their class, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual preferences, or language. These people have always been in the shadow of history, which never asked them what they really wanted. Official history simply put them through inhumane trials, restrictions, and humiliations, often leaving no material traces of their memories, pasts, or lives. This is the leitmotif of Gaisumov's video and photo project *February 23/May 10* where the artist's own grandmother was filmed as a silent protagonist. She is pictured in situations and with objects testifying a complete invisibility, making us understand how it feels to be erased.

Gaisumov's work obviously brings forward the postcolonial and postsocialist crossing through historical trauma, loss, and the erased past, the lost homeland, the unrecorded and marginalized lives and histories, the darker colonial and racist irrational sides of the Soviet totalitarian Moloch. The dates used in the title of this work refer to the tragic day in Chechen history – on 23 February 1944 – when all Chechens were deported to Kazakhstan and Central Asia. They were packed into cattle cars and transported to the wilderness to die of starvation and overwork unless the local people helped them. Gaisumov's grandmother was deported as a child, and lost her mother and her five sisters whose graves are unknown. After Stalin's death she was able to come back to the Caucasus, although forbidden from resettling in the mountains where the ghosts of the destroyed Chechen villages still carried important historical and symbolic significance. The grandmother has only a few personal objects reminding her of the vanished family.

In three decades history made a circle and the new house that she managed to slowly build over the years was destroyed again by the Russian army crushing the Chechen revolt. The forever precarious refugee or exile condition is painfully stressed in the image of this old lady at the steps of the basement used by the whole village as a bomb shelter. Aslan Gaisumov accentuates how her personal life is linked to a larger history of her people in the twentieth century which today's neocolonial regime is trying to erase and forget: in 2011 the Chechen government ordered the

deportation day commemoration to be moved from 23 February to 10 May, a new neutral collective mourning day with no historical links. But the silent video of Aslan Gaisumov's grandmother as well as a number of his more recent works, which he also organized around the themes of silence, clearly show that silence is also a form of resistance, a clear refusal to have a dialogue with the suppressors. Silence is a challenge and a form of claiming one's human dignity which is a deeply decolonial gesture.

5.6 Close Up 3: An Unlikely Estonian-Georgian 'Creolization'

A decolonial rethinking of the tempo-localities of war is central in *Tangerines* – an Estonian-Georgian 2013 film directed by Zaza Urushadze (2013). The film has collected several important international prizes including the best director prize at the Warsaw Film Festival. It focuses on the idea of remaining human in the inhuman situation of artificially imposed war and the difficulty of infecting others with this humanity and relearning to be human again. It is done in a peculiar parable manner recognizable in both Baltic and Georgian cinematic traditions, but in this case, intersecting precisely through the post-Soviet postcolonial consciousness and experience. This powerfully anti-war and liberating film recollects the 1992–1993 so-called citrus war between Georgia and Abkhazia. Similarly to Lula Kuni's and Aslan Gaisumov's works, we do not find any battle scenes in the film. Instead the narrative viewpoint mostly centres around the peaceful Estonians and the casual consequences of war they have to deal with – the bombed-out building, the bodies of the adversaries killed in a shootout in front of the Estonian house, the twisted cars, and most importantly, the task of awakening humanity in the enemies and teaching them to see people in each other. Lula Kuni's text is the world of women and children; Urushadze's film is all-male ground (the only woman present is Ivo's granddaughter's photograph). But in both cases the ordinary people are afraid of both fighting sides which do not care about the civilians.

In Gillo Pontecorvo's decolonial movies *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) and particularly *Burn* (1969) it was clearly shown how the local population became token-money in the imperial fight for profit. A similar logic is present in Zaza Urushadze's film. This is a no man's war for the common

people who are dying as cannon fodder or casualties, but it is the war of the unseen and deliberately unrepresented geopolitical powers for dominance in the Caucasus. The wise and noble Ivo, who already lost his son in this obviously alien (for Estonians) war, refuses to leave Abkhazia where his son is buried, and engages in a patient and difficult task of saving someone else's sons. He is awakening a decolonial drive of delinking from the imposed games in the Chechen and the Georgian whom he saved and brought to his house – a territory of peace in the midst of war.

The film is brilliantly simple and, at the same time, complex in its harmonious intersection of different affective channels – music, visuality, dialogue. The musical theme is rather simple and plaintive. It is played on the Georgian lute *panduri* by a popular Georgian rock musician, poet, and composer Niaz Diasamidze who often applies folk music in his works. But the tune is chosen in such a way that it can belong to any national music – Georgian, Chechen, or Estonian. It is grounded in ancient human melodic codes. The second musical theme is connected with the difficult intercultural dialogue slowly evolving in the film. The Georgian Niko dislikes the Muslim music the Chechen Ahmed is listening to and during the whole film he is repairing the audio cassette broken in the shootout. Only after his death and in the very last shots of the film Ahmed finally listens to this cassette going away from this alien war in his battered car along the fascinatingly beautiful darkening road. It is a song by Georgian musician, writer, and activist Irakly Sharkviani who died young in 2006. After all the deaths the end of the film is still optimistic because Ivo managed to awaken a human being even in a mercenary.

The second element of the film's powerful impact is its aphoristic sparse dialogue based on subtexts, pauses, silences, and non-verbal communication of those who are linked by the community of the post-Soviet/post-colonial condition. It is important that these ex-dependants have no choice but to speak Russian among themselves, the notorious language of intercultural communication, oversaturated with profanities (as in the case of Meldibekov's *The Slap*, everyone here curses in Russian) and in this case spoken by the enemies. The Estonian Ivo wants to stand above the battle and attempts to give this language back its human dimensions. The test which triggers the final fight with the Russians, who bring only destruction and death, is also a linguistic test. The Russian captain demands that Ahmed say something in the Chechen language (not knowing a word of it and not being able to determine if it is really Chechen) but in fact is simply looking for an excuse to kill him.

The third and probably the most important element in the film adding to its complex effect, is the visuality made possible by the wonderful camera work. It is grounded in the contrast of idyllic nature (autumn in the mountains, the soft light, ochre-coloured fruit against the pastel withered grass) and the almost documentary shots of the evidence of war. The film also accentuates the vital materiality of the world, and the human being as a creator and not a destroyer. The main character is forced to put his carpenter's craft on a war footing and make coffins instead of tangerine crates. But in the end his actions are all creative – burying the dead and putting the world back in order after the war, restoring the balance violated by the unreasonable warriors, is essentially human and also constructive. Hence the cyclical visual and palpable composition of the film, accentuating the live surface of the wood on which Ivo is working on his carpenter's bench, and his old skilful hands, stubbornly creating something in the midst of war and death. Creation seems to be what makes us human in the end.

Tangerines problematizes the idea of home, native land, and one's exclusive right to them which presumably excuses wars and killings and presupposes the notorious divisions into us and them. Everyone in the film is entitled to this land in various ways: the Georgians, the Abkhazians, and even the Estonians who ended up in this place in the 1880s in quest of a better life and gradually made this land their own. The paradoxical nature and the relativity of the concept of home are repeatedly touched upon in the film. Ahmed says that he is sitting on the Estonian stool in the Estonian house on the Abkhaz land and not in Georgia. The owner of the tangerine plantation Marcus says that it is a war for the land on which his tangerines are growing – the Estonian tangerines on the Abkhaz land in Georgia. Ivo's son did not listen to his father's arguments and went to defend his native land against the Georgians. At the end of the film Ahmed and Niko are in fact defending Ivo's modest, neat, and clean typically Estonian house – full of handmade furniture and built on the Abkhazian land in Georgia – from the attacking Russians. For the director this seems to be the real conflict of the film and of history and not the Caucasians artificially set on each other. Ivo's function in the film is largely to show the Caucasians that they are being manipulated. His authority does not spread to Russians, however, who are obviously also fighting someone else's war, but remain deaf due to their false imperial ambitions.

Ivo's positioning is grounded in his local history and trajectory. His ancestors were deceived by the Tsarist empire which having destroyed or

expelled from the Caucasus after the long and bloody war the majority of its indigenous people including the Abkhazians, decided to apply the old recipe of populating the free lands covered with blood and strewn with bones of the previous inhabitants, with Russian or European colonists such as Germans and Estonians. Similarly to French colonists in Indochina and future Americans in New England, the Baltic pilgrims found themselves in inhuman conditions on the swamped land of then still uncultivated Black Sea coast that was almost unfit for living and agriculture. But the industrious Estonians, suffering from malaria and malnutrition, managed to drain the swamps, grow the plum orchards and build sawmills, making the place habitable and domesticated under any regime including the Soviet one.

The transculturation processes have taken place and have gradually changed the everyday life of Estonian diaspora in Abkhazia. Hence the Estonian Marcus growing exotic tangerines or Ivo's typically Abkhazian ration. But only the citrus war forces the Estonians to go back to their historical motherland. The diasporic Estonian point of view imbues the film with additional overtones of unhomedness due to a problematic link between soil, ethnicity, and language. Ivo refuses to judge people according to their ethnicity and gradually teaches his accidental guests to do the same, to act as fellow humans with no ethnicity but with a number of basic human laws and honour codes to follow in all situations. Skilfully playing on the Caucasus honour code and dignity, on the importance of keeping one's word, Ivo brings his guests to a realization that honour does not depend on nationality or ethnic belonging and that instead of the ethics of war one needs human ethics with simple but fundamental laws – one cannot kill the sleeping or sick person, even if it is an enemy; one cannot kill the enemy in a friend's house.

The fact that his son was killed by the Georgians does not prevent Ivo from loving Niko and lamenting the death of his very young friends. This is one more key to understanding this existentialist film: each person – and particularly in the situation of war – makes a choice at the border of life and death, decency and cowardice, treachery and saving someone's life. Ivo's house becomes a mini-state with its own moral imperatives which Ivo demands be observed. In firm and terse words, he says: 'In my house you cannot kill anyone if I don't want it. First you will have to kill me.' The atmosphere inside Ivo's house is human and tolerant, even tactful at times which is particularly strange in the midst of war. The recurrent image of the inhabitants of this house anxiously looking through the net curtain

into the cruel and dangerous world outside, stresses the association of the house with a fortress which they all are ready to defend.

The film also features the element which is grounded in a gap between Ivo's reconciling and colour-blind perspective and the director's more pronounced pan-Caucasian solidarity against imperial oppression and wider, the solidarity of all subalterns who are dehumanized by Russians even if they fight on their side (as Russians in this film habitually see all Caucasians as subhuman). In the end this film projects a decolonial sensibility even if Ivo is cultivating a different and more universalist perspective. The hostile (from the Georgian point of view) Abkhazians are still presented by Urushadze as humans – maybe excessively rude and bearish but generally honest people who keep their word. The only group who are obviously seen as a menace are the Russians. Yet even here there is no group demonizing or hatred. Russians are equally human and different. Unfortunately they are guided by an obviously inadequate captain, mad with fear and intoxicated with a sense of impunity and boundless power, which allows him to kill without trial. The real coalition of the oppressed emerges in this film at the moment when the Russian insults the Chechen and he stands for his dignity, while the Georgian Niko starts to shoot not because of the war but because he defends Ahmed (his ex-enemy and now brother) and Ivo (who saved his life). This simple and transparent situation immediately sweeps away the artificially imposed chess compositions profitable for the larger geopolitical players but meaningless for common people.

In the bitter irony of *Tangerines* the Estonian doctor, carpenter, and peasant save the life of the Georgian actor, wounded by the Chechen mercenary, only to let him be killed in the end by a crazy Russian captain. Yet Niko is dying already as a dear person for them all, a brother in humanity. *Tangerines* is an alternative history of the Soviet people's friendship and its inglorious end and metamorphosis into some other human coalition – in this case, the post-dependence condition of those who suffered from Russia, and a Caucasian community of sense which stands above the imposed wars.

5.7 Home, Transit, and Paradigmatic Unhomedness

The urban postcolonial/post-Soviet palimpsests in their peaceful or militarized versions are obviously connected with a wider theme of home and unhomedness as paradigmatic conditions of the post-Soviet

people. I believe we can even speak of a specific tempo-locality of transit which is typical for these contexts and for such experience. Neither Bakhtin nor Foucault paid attention to this tempo-locality as they worked from a different positionality and concentrated on a different material.

It is important to take into account not only the hermetic tempo-locality of the fictional text but also the wider chronotope of its context – the author, the present and future readers or viewers, the époque, the cultural and social space – in short, everything that Bakhtin defined as the 'dialogue of chronotopes' (Bakhtin 1975, p. 400). This phenomenon requires a multi-spatial and multi-temporal hermeneutics grounded in intertextual and hyper-textual principles. This leads to difficulties in interpretation, particularly when societies go through sharp axiological fractures in a short period of time as happened in the postsocialist world. As a result, many postsocialist fictional and art works presuppose an interaction of several semantic layers – from national and ethnic to global, Western and non-Western, (post)socialist, (post-)Soviet and postcolonial, which fewer and fewer audiences can handle. For example when in 2012 I was watching Paradzhanov's *Everybody is Gone* at the International Moscow Film Festival my neighbours were all enchanted with the magic of this movie. Yet they laughed and cried at different moments because the film demanded an interaction between several intertextual layers which not many viewers were able to achieve.

Hardly can we speak today of any post-Soviet community of sense apart from the shrinking linguistic sphere and a not very productive negative identity connected with the feeling of the looming end and one's exclusion from world history and modernity. The Soviet has already taken its place on the museum shelf and its interpretation by the younger generation is no more painful than in the case of other time periods. It is no longer dominating as it used to be until only recently. The post-Soviet space more and more often gravitates towards the unhomed condition which does not require an immediate re-rooting. Therefore this space itself in the films, novels, performances, and art objects turns out to be highly virtual, liquid, arbitrary, as if it has lost its physical stability together with the never attained stability of social, economic, and political life. The weak rootedness of the post-Soviet people in the world and the extreme precariousness of their lives are important leitmotifs of post-Soviet art and fiction.

A crucial topos remains that of home in all its contradictory manifestations. However, a modern trickster is an eternal wanderer who feels at home only in transit. Hence so many transport metaphors and topoi – metro, ship, airplane, funicular, railway-station, and other tools of modernity – are reconsidered in the tempo-localities of post-dependence art, cinema, and fiction. In the case of the African diaspora the Atlantic Ocean acts as a graphic symbol of constant dis-/(re-)location. In the case of postsocialist diasporas there are also powerful metaphors of exodus, transit, and crossing.

Thus, Adyghean diasporic anthropologist Seteney Shami points out the importance of ship imagery as a symbol of dis-/(re-)location for the Northern Caucasus people who left their land in the mid-nineteenth century, as a result of its annexation by the Russian empire, and who crossed the Black Sea, often in unbearable conditions, packed in ships and sent in the direction of the Ottoman sultanate (Shami 2000). In Shami's view, this largely unknown diaspora was a prehistory of globalization generating a complex contradictory attitude to the homeland. Many of these people were forced to change their identities literally on board – from pagan to Muslim, from peasant to warrior, often from free to slave. A contemporary transcultural self in contrast with these historical instances, paradoxically feels at home only in transit and in transgression. It is no longer considered as something tragic or abnormal.

In the aforementioned Afanassy Mamedov's works the intersection of distances, movements, times, and spaces is often expressed through various transport metaphors – from airplanes to ships. His *Khazar Wind* accentuates a fantastic transport, connecting the past and the present by myriad strange coincidences. It is tram number 6 from his Bakinian childhood that unexpectedly comes into the Moscow present and brings him to a small flat on the outskirts of Moscow. The tram imagery here works for the creation of a specific atmosphere of a southern city by the sea, where even the trams lazily shine in the sun and move slowly, allowing the fast boys to jump off while the tram is still moving. This atmosphere is visually recreated in Oleg Safaralyev's Bakinian movie *Farewell, Southern City* as well. Mamedov's autobiographical hero is looking for mysterious signs and correspondences, pointing in the direction of his previous Bakinian life in the still alien Moscow. A specific feature of this topos-creating activity is the magmatic plasticity of various times and spaces. That is why a tram from the Bakinian past so easily materializes in the Moscow present.

5.8 Cemetery as a Heteroclite

The state of paradigmatic unhomedness and transit often has no way out in the postsocialist/postcolonial contexts even in the seemingly final and ultimate case of the cemetery as the last refuge and a symbolic home. It is not by chance that the cemetery becomes a frequent topos in post-dependence fiction and art and a central spatiality for displaced persons and unhomed lives. In the Foucauldian system the cemetery along with boat, hospital, colony, and brothel is an ideal example of heteroclitic space. At first sight our last refuge seems to be the only space relatively immune to transgressive tendencies and transcultural journeys. Crossing the boundary between life and death we hope to return to our ancestors and finally reterritorialize. Yet, the life/death boundary does not guarantee a final happy homecoming.

In 2004 Georgy Paradzhanov made a documentary *I Died in Childhood* (2004) about his famous uncle Sergei Paradzhanov – dissident film director, artist, and philosopher whose films were often banned or destroyed in the USSR and who was imprisoned for many years. The film keeps coming back to the lost grave leitmotif and remaining restless even after death. Paradzhanov tells a disturbing story of the destruction of Tbilisi's old cemeteries in the 1970s to make room for parks which left the dead unhomed and unclaimed. He calls this an exile from his childhood. The director clings to the only remaining link with the erased past – the cemetery cypresses which touched his forebears with their roots. Reflecting on his last and never finished film *Confession*, Paradzhanov lingers over the image of his ancestors escaping the destroyed cemetery. They are laughing and rushing to board the famous Tbilisi funicular eager to reach the upper station and to finally enter the other world. Rejecting the laws of linear time, the director claims that he wanted to die in his ancestors' arms and be buried by them: 'I must come back to my childhood in order to die there.'

Playwright, activist, and poet Ariel Dorfman from the other side of the Earth, a transcultural person of Jewish-Russian origins, who was born in Argentina, became a Chilean citizen and President Salvador Allende's companion in arms, who lived for decades in European exile and ended up in the USA, a writer who has never heard of Paradzhanov, recreated this same displaced cemetery sensibility in almost minute detail in his autobiography *Feeding on Dreams: Confessions of an Unrepentant Exile* (Dorfman 2011). Dorfman is writing about borders not between

countries and continents, not between languages and identities, but rather between life and death, between memory and forgetting of the living people, and some higher memory of no less than the universe. This motif emerges in connection with a paradigmatic inescapable exile of the three generations of his family – even after death. We learn about his grandparents' displaced graves in Buenos Aires cemetery with no one left to take care of them and Dorfman remarks that the urn with his parents' ashes stays in his sister's kitchen cabinet because they cannot decide in which country to bury their father and mother – as if there is no soil which would completely accept the exiles and grant them peace. The border between life and death is supposed to be that utmost line which finally defines human belonging or exclusion. The fact that even after death people remain unhomed and displaced creates a special optics which these different yet similar post-dependence narratives share.

In *Tangerines* the cemetery and the grave also play an important part. The cinematic metaphors are simple and deceivingly transparent, taking us to the most elemental archetypal human deeds, reactions, feelings, to what needs to be done if you are human. For example, being human presupposes that one buries the dead, no matter enemies or friends, and in spite of any wars, religions, and nationalities. The grave here as well as in the case of Paradzhanov and Dorfman acts as a symbol of home. It is not only the last refuge, but a thread connecting the living with their land. If your family is buried in this land it is already your land. The degree of closeness of the graves symbolizes the measure of acceptance, of sameness and otherness. Therefore the two Estonians decide to bury the Georgians separately from the Chechen and at the end of the film the Chechen character Ahmed asks Ivo if he would bury him next to his son if he were to die instead of Georgian Niko, and Ivo answers in his characteristic joking manner: 'Yes, but a little farther.'

5.9 Rethinking the Idyll

The last tempo-locality I would like to discuss in connection with the analysis of the spatial-temporal relations in postcolonial/postsocialist art and fiction, is the idyll – one of the oldest plot-structuring tropes which undergoes a serious change in comparison with its canonical forms. Bakhtin devoted several pages to the analysis of the idyllic chronotope writing about the Western European modern novel focused on progress, development, and a corresponding teleology. Therefore for him the idyll is

defined by the homogeneity and unity of time and the adherence of life and its events to a particular space. But the prevalence of the sense of place was interpreted by Bakhtin and others as a flaw (hence such derogatory terms as regionalism, regional, and local colour novel). In the postcolonial and postsocialist works topos also prevails over chronos. But this topos is not idyllic, it is an ironically reconsidered, though lovingly recaptured idyll, with clearly detectable detachment and lag. This sort of idyll is a love–hate narrative in many ways, non-binary and always ambiguous. Moreover, the creation of idyll becomes a paradoxical challenge. There is nothing to root oneself in – there is no home, or it is highly problematic, there is no identity in which one could hide, there are no generational links and no continuance in the typical idyllic sense. Hence the false and doomed efforts to reanimate various invented spaces with vaguely idyllic aims.

The imagined geography in this case is an intentionally invented space, based on playing on various cultural topoi, rethinking the artistic reality, distorting the angles under which it is placed in relation to the real world. It is built on the tendency to subjectification, to a more and more pronounced isolation from any real locales, to the unimaginable and ephemeral nature of spaces. This gradually leads the authors away from any spatial stability and materiality, from politically engaged works to consciously utopian and constructed spaces which exist entirely inside the characters' minds, inside their split 'selves', and which often utilize fictional and mythic rather than any real political overtones.

Bakhtin positively interpreted the historization tendency in the evolution of the Western European novel. Today it is more appropriate to speak of the relativization of the idea of time itself, of the dialogue and interaction of different historical narratives within fictional texts and of dehistorization and decentring for the sake of bringing forward various alternative histories. Time in post-dependence tempo-localities changes its usual characteristics, such as linearity, mono-dimensionality, and irreversibility, becoming multidimensional, multi-cyclical and moving with different speeds and in different directions. The resulting relatively subjective time lacks duration or, in Bakhtin's definition, falls out of the normal flow of biographical time (Bakhtin 1975, p. 396). Subjectification of external time leads to extreme relativization of personal time, to its arbitrary acceleration or (less often) slowing down, when post-dependence characters acquire an ability to live out several lives no matter how short or unhappy they are.

This complexity of temporality is connected with rethinking of the idyllic chronotope. In post-totalitarian and postcolonial art and fiction, this idyll is often destroyed from the start by the forces of modernity in its different guises – from the civilizing mission to war. Such is the metaphor of the railroad as a cruel sign of modernity's destruction of all other lifestyles in Uzbek exiled writer Hamid Ismailov's novel of the same name (Ismailov 2007). The railroad becomes a menacing symbol of modernity (the novel originally written but never published in Russian, is called *Zheleznaja Doroga*, that is, a 'railroad' but also literally, an 'iron road') destroying lives with its steely inevitability. Such are the modern loggers destroying not only the jungle but also the African village in Georgian expatriate director Otar Iosseliani's film *And Then There Was Light* (1989). Such is the logic of Soviet modernity with its forcefully imposed gender model destroying the quiet idylls of human lives in Uzbek director Yusuff Razykov's film *Orator* (1999).

These are the stories of painful modernization, disjointing the previous local traditions, bringing forward specific metanarratives and unresolved dilemmas of subjectivity. If Bakhtin presented the idyllic restrictedness focused around the very basic few realities of life such as love, birth, death, labour, food, drink, age, as limiting and too domestic for serious literature, in the post-dependence and in many ways post-progressivist works the accents are destabilized through a different optics – giving significance back to the basic events of any individual private human life. Yusuff Razykov's *Orator* directly plays on this contrast of the main character's official public persona and his unsuccessful and inapt rendering of personal relations with his wives who soon formed their own separate friendships and companionships beyond their hapless husband. The concluding phrase of the film sounds highly ironic stressing the inadequacy of presenting the insignificant public events (like his endless speeches) and the real life trajectories, tragedies, and triumphs of the human compassion of his close family: 'Grandfather has never forgiven his wives for not going to the meeting at the railway station to listen to his speech.'

In most of these cases the idyll is presented ironically from the start and coming back to the lost Eden of eternal values at some new level acquires a complex and often contradictory quality of not simply dissolving in the natural and/or communal, but necessarily maintaining the hardly earned individual element transformed and enriched through the idyllic frame. So the idyll is always portrayed with a certain lag and in Bakhtinian terms, through a philosophic sublimation. It is interesting not as such, but as a

gist of humanity in human relations, as a manifestation of the integrity and the organic links with nature lost by modern people, and also in the accentuation of simple labour or craftsmanship and the idyllic things created as a result which is opposed to any mechanical conveyer style work and its alienated dehumanized workers. In Yusuff Razykov's *Gastarbeiter* (2009) this sublimated idyll is expressed through a simple leitmotif of a clay flute connecting the disintegrated generations of an Uzbek family thrown into involuntary migration in quest of survival.

A graphic example of many of these tendencies can be found in the aforementioned Lula Kuni's *Outlines*. Its first part is a paraphrase of Bakhtin's family and agricultural idyll. But instead of the family there is just a doomed woman with two daughters. For her the restoration of the organic links with nature and the simple agricultural labour are not a part of some Rousseauesque game but a necessity for an ex-urban dweller turned into a barely surviving farmer. Instead of the product created by the agricultural worker we find a story of an apricot tree – wounded by a shell, cured by the main character, and unexpectedly revived to give abundant fruiting between the two Chechen wars. The apricot Eden in the midst of a hell, the skeleton geometry of their meagre lives, and the tumult of invincible nature in the small garden, present a distorted idyll, built on the contrasts of life and death, war and peace. This is at once an effort to humanize nature and bring humans back to their natural terms. That is why apricots are described as human flesh – they experience pain as any flesh, as a child's arm covered with a golden down similar to that of apricots.

The all-penetrating violence triggers in war survivors a specific optics of animating everything that is alive and a solidarity of not only humans but also trees, animals, and the city itself. Kuni's characters are making apricot jam in the destroyed city and in an endless war. It is not just a recreation of the forever lost idyll but an act of re-existence, a Bakhtinian temporal inversion, a link of the past and the future which will never happen. The apricot harvest is a temporal idyllic border, which helps to divide the time of idyll from the time of hell. This is a post-apocalyptic tempo-locality presented in seemingly documentary form although we realize that the narrator is dead from the start and addressing us from the other world. In post-dependence verbal and visual art works there are cases of deliberate use of fantastic, eschatological motifs to imagine another existence transcending this imperfect world.

Similar broken or altered idyllic motifs emerge in Urushadze's *Tangerines*. On the one hand the landscapes are notoriously idyllic – the

calmness of the mountains and the sea beyond, the fascinating tangerine gardens with heavy branches full of unpicked fruit, the silence and beauty of the slowly deteriorating abandoned villages caressed by the sun. Tangerines are everywhere in this film, accentuating the contrast of abundant nature and the absurdity of war. In contradiction with the very nature of idyll the harvest is destined to perish after almost everyone who could gather it, is killed and Marcus – the owner of the plantation who was more interested in the necessity of saving this wonderful blessing harvest than in the money he could earn – is buried under a tangerine tree.

Here as well as in Kuni's text, there are no intact families left indicating that the idyll is over. The Estonian families have already left, back to their historical motherland leaving behind only men with unfinished business – the doctor who is saving the lives of the two enemies just before taking a plane to return home, Marcus who needs to gather and sell his proverbial tangerines in order to be able to return to 'free Estonia' – the unknown land he never visited before – and finally Ivo who has an almost Faulknerian love–hate relationship with this land and would never abandon his son's grave. Ivo is the one who is desperately trying to repair the idyllic family model; having lost his own son he acts as a substitute father for all of them – for the Georgian Niko whose father died long ago and whose mother does not even know where he is, for the Chechen Ahmed whom Ivo gently persuades to go back to his family and shakes him out of the war logic, putting him back into the human one. Ivo even attempts to imagine a utopian future idyll in which Niko will go back to his theatre acting, and Ahmed and Ivo will come to Tbilisi to see his show and applaud – a simple event quite possible to fulfil but for the war.

The characters of the post-dependence novels, films, and theatre performances are longing for the idyllic merging of the cradle and the grave, of childhood and old age. But history does not give them this chance – often against their will it sends them wandering, makes them alienated, takes them out of the cosy cyclical life to throw them into the forceful linearity of modern existence. If in the nineteenth century the Western novel was working on the new optics and aesthetics in the sense of educating the human being for living in the big world which this human being had to master – and Bakhtin's chronotope theory is in many ways grounded in this shift – now it is not a world of capitalism, modernity, or urbanism any more, it is simply the whole world which all of a sudden has become alienated. The human being turns into an expatriate not within his or her environment – the West, or Europe – but the whole world, so

that the contemporary subject is expatriating in truly global dimensions. These shifts and emerging new elements in the interpretation of space and time require a careful analysis and constructing of a separate theoretical frame which would be in dialogue and sometimes in argument with both Bakhtin's chronotope and Foucauldian heterotopia.

Notes

1. Volos having entertained himself with social, and almost documentary novels (*Real Estate* 2001) and with the still gripping Soviet past (*Traitor* 2011), recently came back to Tadzhik culture and wrote a prize-winning, exquisite, and refined narrative surpassing time, and telling his version of the life story of Abu Abdollah Jafar ibn Mohammad Rudaki – a famous medieval Persian poet. In 2013 this writer was awarded the Russian Booker Prize for his novel about a ninth-century Tadzhik poet. The historical and political analogies seem to be less important for Volos at this point than his more and more pronounced feeling that people have not changed, that they are unfortunately the same as a thousand years ago, but a true poet, a real thinker, an authentic clairvoyant surpasses time and history, human cruelty and injustice. It is important that overcoming and recognition comes as usual in another world. The return of Rudaki to his native Panjrud is a way to death as redemption and transcendence (Volos 2013).
2. The title of this part is a play on the original Russian title of Leo Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace* which meant *War and World*. The meaning was subsequently lost in the later Russian/Soviet editions and also in most translations.

CHAPTER 6

Tricksters, Jesters, Qalandars

Resistance and re-existence are graphically embodied through the characters – the strange heroes of post-Soviet and postcolonial books, films, and art works – who can be regarded through the archetype of tricksters. The tempo-local models analysed in the previous chapter affect the ontology of these people and are also changed themselves under the influence of tricksters who are rethinking and remaking their worlds anew. In this chapter I am going to concentrate on the main features of postcolonial and postsocialist tricksters as the main characters of many post-dependence works, to trace what elements of trickster subjectivity are transformed in the postsocialist/postcolonial intersections and how and why it happens.

These tricksters are not the traditional folkloric personages of many mythologies such as gods, half-gods, anthropomorphic animals, and humans with supernatural characteristics, mediating communication between humans and the other world. They are also not identical with the later secular version of tricksters, acting as cunning agents outsmarting the forces of power. The postcolonial/postsocialist tricksters are rather transmodern border thinkers and border dwellers destabilizing conventionality and negotiating modernity and the sphere of its otherness. What is important is the insurgent nature of any trickster, their tendency to disobey normative rules and conventions. From the classical understanding of tricksterism come such qualities developed and sustained in today's tricksters as ambiguity, deceit of authority, playing tricks on power, metamorphosis, a mediating function between different

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worlds, manipulation, and bricolage as a mode of existence. In this sense, the trickster becomes not only one of the most ubiquitous figures of contemporary fiction, but also acquires specific features in postcolonial/postsocialist contexts where tricksterism may act as a form of resistance and re-existence.

I am referring here to the dialogic concept of the trickster that negotiates between Donna Haraway's (Haraway 1991) and Chela Sandoval's (Sandoval 2000) interpretations, as well as to the real trickster traditions that grew out of the geopolitics and corpo-politics of particular locales. Haraway's trickster is a revolutionary form of human being who becomes an amalgam of technology and biology, the machine and the human, but also the dominant and the oppositional, the first and the third world, the men and the women. She takes up the Native American trickster metaphor (that of coyote) to formulate her position of a radical critical 'mestizaje' or a Cyborg machine, which is linked to the indigenous peoples' resistance through looking for similarity in difference. In Sandoval's dialogue with Haraway, the differential mode of social movements and consciousness depends on the ability to read a concrete situation of power and consciously choose an ideological position that poses the most adequate opposition to this power configuration. The individual practising such a mode is required, according to Maria Lugones, to make a nomadic journey between the worlds of meaning (Lugones 2003). Differential consciousness inclines to other principles of mobility and to metamorphosis and transformation.

Tricksters take countless forms from lumpens and rogues to homeless people and sorcerers. Sometimes all of these identities merge. If before there was a firm connection of identity with the concept of home in a wider metaphorical sense, today individuals radically change their sense of belonging together with the collapsing institutes of state, family, economics and education that provided their stability and socialization before. They become modern *picaros* without biographies, with just a chain of loosely connected adventures in each of which they act in a new role and in a sense create themselves anew.

Their leaking identities and multiple liquid selves destabilize the boundaries between the human and the non-human, the animal and the machine. Such tricksters retain the metamorphosis element, as a trickster's modus vivendi, but this metamorphosis differs from the (post)modernist Western representations of tricksterism, as it grows as much from Kafka or Romanticism, as from non-Western local histories,

trajectories, experiences and life-worlds, from other ideas and perceptions of the self and of community, marked by the Fanonian sociogenic principle intertwining with Duboisean negative double consciousness or Albert Memmi's 'painful and constant ambiguity' (Memmi 1991, p. 15), and the striving for 're-existence' as a positive life and world creation anew.

Tricksters often dwell at the borders of imperial/colonial differences and from this experience emerges a new trans-aesthetics with a shared decolonial sensibility. In this case topos reconquers chronos. And a trickster becomes a site and an agent of translation/transculturation. Tricksters translate the world and themselves, questioning the normalized aesthetics through liberating their aesthesis and that of the others. For both postcolonial and postsocialist tricksters typically associate themselves more and more with migration and transit. If they arrive someplace, it is likely to be not a new home in which they can and want to permanently reterritorialize, but an airport, a ship, or a train. Hence the importance of these topoi for all post-dependence narratives. There is a pronounced focus on movement, not on locality, on unhomed, in-between states, and on hybridity as a chosen identity. This specific self juggles and shuffles cultures, and does not regard its deterritorialized condition as something that has to be overcome.

Place in this case is not just a topographic space, but also a way of life in its material and spiritual manifestations. In the centre of such an existential condition lies cultural, linguistic, and epistemic translation as an interpretation in the course of self-identification. It is a reconstruction of the past as a result of which many recollections are erased and only some of them remain relevant – giving birth to the myth of exile and often turning the past into a commodity. The state of in-betweenness is interesting from the point of view of the signifier and the signified and the problematic of referentiality, because the in-betweenness of an exiled or transcultural person, his/her being outside of the common system of coordinates almost prescribes a non-stop movement, a dynamics, a change questioning the stability of the signifier and the signified complex and the peculiar logic of interaction between the sign and the referent. The carriers of such sensibility are border dwellers, not border crossers. And the fiction they write or the art they create, is not centred or arranged around the previous hierarchies and binaries of home and exile, motherland and foreignness, immigration and exodus.

6.1 Tricksters on the Road

In Bakhtin's system of chronotopes which I critically analysed in the previous chapter, one of the main spatial-temporal models of the character's existence was that of the road and the journey. Bakhtin's road chronotope is complicated and enriched in the post-dependence tempo-localities, often taking the main place in the story. This happens because most postcolonial, postsocialist, post-apartheid, and other post-dependence narratives focus on wandering and nomadic characters with no homes and no homelands, the people who literally live on the road. For European literary material which stood in the centre of Bakhtin's analysis, it was enough to work with just two types of the road chronotope – the picaresque chronotope of the journey along the native world where exotic social details came forward, and the chronotope of the romance in which the main character (a knight) travelled along some alien exotic marvellous space and where cultural differences came forward instead. Significantly, Edward Said later linked this second type with Orientalism. As a result, there is a double vision – of the same and the other – because the protagonist of such a novel, film, video art, or theatre performance is more and more often a post-Duboisean subject marked by a double consciousness.

In post-dependence art and fiction including its post-Soviet and post-colonial intersections, there is no clear understanding of who and what belongs to the same and the other in the social and cultural sense any more. Hence the trickster's journey is not a linear vector. It is not directed from ignorance to knowledge, but rather from one pre-knowledge and premonition to another. It is a journey along other peoples' worlds and times – ideally with a loving perception, but often with a hatred of an eternally rootless individual, and with an inescapable ennui of the rootless self. This subject may even be born and live in some real country but nevertheless remain an *other*. He or she may become an other due to circumstances (as happened with the ex-colonizers in the former colonies). Wondering along an alien space, the trickster may remain an other in his or her own world or simply not have such a world to begin with. A paradoxical and comical example is presented in a novelette *American Adzhabsandal* written by Armenian writer Agassi Aivazyan (Aivazyan 2001). The main character of this book is an itinerant homeless philosopher who is invited to an international congress of homeless people in Los Angeles. It is there that he feels for the first time, how important it is for

him to be a homeless (*tnank*) but in his native Armenia. It is significant that the author sends him back in a desperate and deadly journey – swimming across the Atlantic. In this case the geographic border visibly turns into an existential one.

One of the chronotopes singled out by Bakhtin is a specific type of existential psychological chronotope. It is particularly important for tricksters as it refers to a shift in human self-identification exceeding the frame of static mythic and folklore elements and going beyond the temporal and spatial characteristics of human existence. Bakhtin called it a border chronotope or a threshold chronotope and linked it with the problematic of existential transition, a critical transitory moment in the life of a character (Bakhtin 1975, p. 396). In decolonial tricksters this mode of existence is realized through a protean, in-between, and transitory state of extreme openness and also falling out of both time and space – a parallel dehistorization and deterritorialization as the main constants of the human condition.

Journeys in utopian, dystopian, and mutopian spaces are a metaphoric route to salvation by means of some magical, other reality, which turns into a mirage intrigue, a vicious circle, a wandering in the literal and figurative sense, based on temptations and semblances. Tricksters inhabiting these half-imagined spaces are the doppelgangers of the very topoi of transculturality, the turncoats and wanderers against their will, juggling their own constantly metamorphing selves. They exist outside of linear time and solid space; they are initially other-worldly and strangely eternal. Such paradigmatic tricksters balancing between parody and sacralization, and unstable in their increasingly irreversible metamorphosis, can become voyeuristic in the way they see and interpret life.

As for the art and fiction at the intersection of postcolonialism and postsocialism, here we find a specific kind of trickster which can be defined through a metaphor of 'qalandar' alluding to the Sufi figure of the wandering poor sage, madman, prophet, and poet. These tricksters, similarly to Bakhtin's classical fools, expose the fake conventionality in human relations, and fool the authorities through irony and cunning. The author, the narrator, and the character may all carry some features of such qalandars who are allowed not to be literal and, in Bakhtin's words, 'to take life through the intermediary chronotope of theatrical stage, to represent life as a comedy and people as actors' (Bakhtin 1975, pp. 310–11). After all theatre is always a border between reality and fiction.

The two important tendencies in the interaction of contemporary art and fiction can be defined as transculturation and intermediation, marked by specific forms of intertextuality and interdiscursivity. The visual forms of art are actively narrativized and sometimes theatricalized, whereas the narrative forms go through a considerable visualization. This blurring and merging is accompanied by processes of transculturation, understood as a tendency to counterbalance the mutual and dynamic influence of the dominant culture and that of the suppressed ones, and the multi-spatial hermeneutical exchanges. Pluritopical hermeneutics (Mignolo 1995) helps us understand something which does not belong to our horizon through a dialogic and experiential (not merely interpretative) learning from the other. The understanding subject is placed in a colonial periphery, non-Western tradition, or a marginalized space, thus disturbing the habitual Western vantage point and questioning the position and homogeneity of the understanding subject.

Peculiar theatricality imbues the canvases of Uzbek artist Bobur Ismailov in whose works qalandars occupy a central space. Even structurally they are presented as theatrical mise-en-scènes and inhabited by strange masks and fools, turncoats and other trickster-like personages (Ismailov 2015). Contemporary theatre often acts as a site for intersections between visual and verbal arts, and also creolizes theatricality and qalandarianism in its intricate play on the Western and Eastern motifs, ideas, devices, aesthetic and poetological principles, and transformation of Orientalism into ironic and interactive-anthropological forms. Along with theatre and theatricality, the museum acts as another important site for the realization of the trickster's modus vivendi. In many ways it supplants the Bakhtinian castle chronotope because the museum is a castle in a figurative sense; it is a preserved time of historical past, whereas simulacra and antiquarianism are the signs of our time. Temporal and spatial dimensions of the museum chronotope, similarly to theatre, are grounded in alienation and framing, playing with the borders between the subject and the object.

All in all, qalandarianism acts as a specific kind of prosaic metaphor, a complex realization of an allegoric human existence and a special way of life. Foucault claims that heterotopias create specific temporal relations – they can accumulate time (as museums and libraries do), they can also disrupt or even do away with time (Foucault 1986, p. 26). But museums do not simply conserve time; they also deliberately construct specific narratives – official and private. According to this principle Orhan

Pamuk created his *Museum of Innocence* and claimed that museums are needed not in order to walk in them and stare at things but in order to feel and live (Pamuk 2010, p. 597). Playing on museum heterotopia and mocking the official museum narratives is part of many contemporary films, video art, self-reflective exhibitions, and even computer games and novels (Pamuk 2010; *The Lost Museum*; Tlostanova 2011). Let us look at one of the original examples of the realization of qalandarianism in the aesthetic principles of the Tashkent theatre *Ilkhom*.

6.2 Close Up 1: Ilkhom

The Uzbek theatre company Ilkhom (Ilkhom 2014) defies the continuing Orientalism and critically rethinks the caricaturistic or exoticist images of the East created by the West, questioning both Western modernity and ethnic nationalist or religious fundamentalist discourses. This had become obvious already in Ilkhom's early production of Karlo Gozzi's *Happy Beggars* (1993). Mark Weil fused in this show the sources one could hardly imagine in dialogue – Uzbek street theatre and commedia dell'arte. Significantly he placed the whole performance into an old train station – the quintessence of the early post-Soviet Babylonian life – a temporary home for migrants, refugees, imperial war veterans, vagabonds, crooks, beggars, and transcultural misfits. They constantly switch from one language, one époque, one culture to another, creating a complex mosaic of postsocialist postcolonial existence fallen out of history yet finding itself suddenly at the global intersection of continents, mentalities, and value systems.

Qalandarianism stands in the centre of another play staged by this theatre company in 2006. This is the *Flights of Mashrab* which celebrated the parallels between the eighteenth-century Uzbek Sufi poet and prophet Mashrab and the Austrian composer Mozart. Mashrab acts as a cunning Oriental double of Mozart. Both are equally disrespectful to any authorities, both are free geniuses in their life and art, and both share a tragic personal fate. Mashrab is presented in this show in a highly unconventional way, very far from the Uzbek canonized national classic. Rather he is a poet, a prophet, and an outcast.

But the most striking example of qalandarianism in Ilkhom's interpretation is *The Ecstasy with a Pomegranate* (2006). The play was co-written by Mark Weil and Valery Pecheykin (under the pseudonym of Dmitry Tikhomirov), a then aspiring playwright who has become

famous in Moscow since then. The title follows the name given by the critics to an untitled work by Alexander Nikolayev (1887–1957) which is now in the collection of the State Museum of Oriental Art in Moscow. The play is loosely based on the artist's life story, focusing more on his spiritual and artistic metamorphoses than on actual events. For instance, the main character is tragically killed at the end of the play (which echoes both the plot of Nikolayev's *Ecstasy with a Pomegranate* – a story of two young men falling in love with each other and dying as a result of society's intolerance – and Weil's own early death). As for Nikolayev himself, he died of natural causes even though he was imprisoned and had to live a double life for many decades due to his sexual preferences. As a young artist, Nikolayev was a student of Kazimir Malevich, and although none of his early Suprematist works survive, the general aesthetic principles of Suprematism are obviously reused in his later works, emerging as a result of Nikolayev's fascination with the East, particularly in its forbidden homoerotic overtones such as the Bacheh-baazi tradition of young boys cross-dressing and performing for male clients, and also his subsequent adoption of Islam and his interest in Sufism (he even changed his name to Usto Mumin, which means Gentle Master).

It is well known that Malevich was attracted by iconography as well as 'primitivist' signboard painting, although his interpretation of the icon was purely pictorial and compositional (and not religious) (Malevich 1926). It is this element of Suprematism that survived in Nikolayev's works. The delicacy and sensuality of his leitmotifs combined with the artist's enchantment by Sufi esoteric aesthetics were recreated by Weil in his theatrical performance through various media. Nikolayev's aesthetics and his return to figurative painting clearly contain references to the avant-garde but in a subdued and digested form, freely quoting from Persian miniatures, particularly of the Shiite Sufi tradition, iconography, and various other sources (Georgiev and Pope 2010).

His *Ecstasy with a Pomegranate* is a curious example of this mixture; it is created using the iconic technique of tempera on wood and recreates the classical genre of the hagiographic icon consisting of a series of images reflecting the key events in the life of a saint. But the stylistic decisions and closeness to ornamental art are reminiscent of Eastern miniatures. Remaining faithful to figurative art, Nikolayev at the same time encrypts Sufi and homoerotic symbolism into his work. This narrative icon at the intersection of different kinds of art tells a tragic story of

two youngsters falling in love, getting married, and subsequently dying. The word 'ecstasy' in the title was not picked up by chance, as in Sufism it stands for the joy a human being experiences when approaching God through esoteric rituals. Here the Suprematist predominance of feeling unexpectedly comes forward through a Sufi practice. One cannot interpret this work merely as an apology for homosexuality, because in the Sufi tradition (both pictorial and especially poetic) love always means heavenly love (in this sense the characters actually marry God and not each other) and not carnal passion. When this and Nikolayev's other pictorial works are back-projected onto a rolling and moving (breathing) screen during Ilkhom's performance it creates an almost other-worldly sensation in the audience.

Weil combines seemingly incongruous genres and techniques: animated esoteric sensual painting gives way to documentary photographs of the time; the general postmodernist all-out citation principle functions on many levels in a conglomerate of intersecting meanings, from narrative archetypes to colour leitmotifs, from persistent re-emergence of particular metaphorically interpreted objects to rhythmical repetitions of sounds – the verbal and the musical. The intertextual and interdiscursive sources of this play come both from the West and from the non-West, leading to a peculiar transculturation effect. Nikolayev's own trajectory of influences is accompanied by Weil's series of relevant narratives and images. The artist's passion for the young pomegranate seller rhymes with the unbearable story of the doomed ageing writer/composer obsessed with the angelic boy in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912) and with Luchino Visconti's cinematic version of the same story (1971). Another intertextual source is Sergei Paradzhanov's film *The Color of the Pomegranate* (1968) with its encrypted homoerotic and also Armenian visual overtones of embodied collective and personal memories. The pomegranate is a symbol of Armenia but also more generally a symbol of love, blood, the unity of the world, of marriage and fecundity overlapping with a specifically Muslim interpretation of pomegranates as holy fruit of paradise. As a result in this performance the trickster is presented in its clearest form. This trickster acts as an intersection of many religions, languages, cultures, traditions, colonial and imperial canonical structures, and different artistic trends. The image of the artist who is tragically in love with the Orient and becomes a victim of this love, remains one of the most powerful representations of qalandarianism in post-Soviet art and fiction.

6.3 Probing Metamorphosis, Problematizing Mimicry

As pointed out above, one of the important features of qalandars is their mutability and changeability, their ability to constantly metamorphose. Let us dwell on this trickster quality at some length. The usual postcolonial metamorphosis goes through considerable changes at the postsocialist/postcolonial intersection. Metamorphosis and mimicry are crucial tropes for post-dependence fiction and art. They directly affect human subjectivities and their environments and help further problematize the idea of the human, humanity, and humanism as such. Although this problematic has been addressed by postcolonial theorists before, the postsocialist version offers additional features that are important to address.

Metamorphosis is closely connected with the idea of the world as a re-enchanted space, as a non-ending chain of changes, impossible to fix, rationalize, and define once and for all, negating the very possibility of naming. Metamorphosis is also expressed in the very principles of constructing fictional characters and the negotiating narrative itself. In many cases it keeps its links with folklore and mythology although they can acquire ironic and playful forms. Thus in Caribbean fiction metamorphosis is regarded not within the frame of the Western Kafkaesque logic of alienation and irreversibility, and not in the logic of virtual reality where there are no irreversible points any more. Instead metamorphosis is regarded in connection with the mythology of opposition, survival, and tricksterism. Guyanese writer Wilson Harris in an article fittingly called 'The Limbo Gateway' analyses the close relationship of bodily metaphors and metamorphosis in Caribbean literature and the folklore origin of trickster motifs such as the image of Anansi spider and the limbo dance.

In the originally African limbo dance the dancer is impersonating the folklore hero-trickster Anansi. He is bending and going under the pole which is being held lower and lower until there is only a narrow space left and the dancer has to move like a flat spider to keep going under it. This dance was born on the slave ships where the slaves were kept so crammed together that they were really turning into spider men. The limbo ritual is recreating and repeating the journey from Africa to the New World.

Harris claims that this metaphor can be applied not only to the African slaves, but also regarded as a universal allegory of the Caribbean existence as such. Detention then is seen as an analogue of the threshold, a gateway into the New World and at the same time, a metaphor of a phantom limb which is connected with a specific understanding of corporality in

Caribbean culture. Harris expressed this idea in the image of a dismembered but never dying god or a human, thus approaching the ideal of unstable protean physical nature and non-finite metamorphosis of living and dead, resurrected and changed. It corresponds to spiritual awakening and is expressed in the escaping corporeal metamorphosis, when the imagined and the real disappearance and shifting towards a new and different condition, help in coping with the unbearable and oppressing surrounding world (Harris 1995, pp. 378–82).

A more poetic and literary play on metamorphosis dressed in the garb of a peculiar canonical counter-discourse is found in South African writer Achmat Dangor's ironic novel *Kafka's Curse* (Dangor 1997) – a transcultural and cross-gender palimpsest. We meet a modern trickster Omar Khan passing for Oscar Kahn in order to win a place in apartheid society – and later, the love of his Anna, a white woman. Kafka's curse afflicting Oscar (as Majnoen, he turned into a tree) is a punishment for his urge to assimilate, for his breaking with nature to fit the life of the white establishment. Oscar and his wife switch the usual assigned gender roles – she, as a white person, performs the part of the desiring actor and it is not the husband who looks at her with desire but rather she herself gazes at him with a typical Western male gaze, at the same time remaining a chaste female on a pedestal. But we find practically no description of Oscar's gazing at Anna while he remains apprehensive in a typically colonial way of how others see him.

Another example is David Dabydeen who creolizes the history of the Indian indentured labourers in Guyana, the African legacy, the Caribbean experience of the non-white oppressed majority, and the personal history of someone early immigrating to Great Britain and getting a Western education, presently an art history professor and a transcultural poet and writer. All these 'selves' mingle in the fluid and forever open, transitory topos of meanings and images, in the ironic aesthetics of transgression and metamorphosis created by Dabydeen.

Metamorphosis is used here not only as a prevailing theme, but also as a structural principle allowing the indigenous elements and the Western dimensions of metamorphosis to combine and hybridize as a grotesque 'alienating' phenomenon, turning the familiar into the strange and horrible. This contrast is especially clear in the image of the master of metamorphoses – shaman Manu. In the Guyanese tradition, the shaman is often called 'a lookman', 'a seer', that is literally the one who predicts, turning into something that he foretells, exercising endlessly his ability to

change and become different, undergoing metamorphoses, an ability that the Western tradition with its 'forbidden change' principle has largely lost. The intervention of Western ways into the local system potentially leads to freezing, to logocentric binary oppositions of living/dead, man/woman, inner/outer, white/black, animate/inanimate which Dabydeen denies, making the opposites meet and mix, producing an array of intermediary forms and shades. Thus, in one of the stanzas we find that there are more 'moods' than just life and death. The narrator wants to mould the unborn child (the unformed or deformed self) into something new, beyond the human form. He vacillates between death and 'another mood' (Dabydeen 1994, p. 28), which is never defined in the poem, but clearly denies a simple life versus death opposition.

Metamorphosis is often realized through the trope of mimicry which has become central in postcolonial discourse. The psychology and ontology of the 'returned gaze' and the colonized subject's violated authenticity in its different functions have been extensively discussed by many postcolonial thinkers. Long before Homi Bhabha formulated his largely semiotic and psychoanalytic view on this problem, it had been addressed by Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon 1967), by Cuban theorist R. F. Retamar, who interpreted mimicry as a form of radical resistance (Retamar 1974), by French-Tunisian-Jewish writer Albert Memmi, who similarly to Bhabha, believed that the self-legitimized superior portrait of the colonialist which the colonized long to imitate, in fact, questions the legitimacy of his own identity (Memmi 1991, pp. 55, 58). Other important views on mimicry we find in the works of Caribbean thinker and writer E. C. Brathwaite (Brathwaite 1971), who saw it as a defence mechanism against assimilation to the dominant discourse by means of specific cultural forms and the use of language, a specific way of looking at the world with blue eyes but from under the black skin, to use Derek Walcott's famous formula (Walcott 1974, p. 57). He regarded mimicry in a close relation with a certain cultural locale and historical configuration, and not in a more delocalized and disembodied way as it was eventually portrayed by Bhabha (Moore-Gilbert 1997; Ashcroft 2001; Loomba 1998).

However, Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* remains the central decolonial text for the interpretation of imitation and the mirroring problematic on both philosophical and psychoanalytic levels or, the level of failures in Fanon's own interpretation, which Bhabha later attempts to alleviate and regard in a more constructive and even ultimately positive way, both in the

direction of the production of a creative ambivalence, slippage and indeterminacy (Bhabha 1994, p. 86) in the mimicking colonial other, and in mimicry seen as an effect of the cracks within colonial discourse (Loomba 1998, p. 149).

In *What Fanon Said* Lewis Gordon points out that the black body is forcibly placed into a

> schema of deviations and imitation. As deviation, it falls from a presumed original white body. Why does not it rise from the white? As the standard, the white would make illegitimate the movement in any direction of deviation: whether up or down, the consequence is failure. The path then seems to be to overcome the deviation by reclaiming an original unity. The white however, denies the original unity, because that would entail a potential blackness at the heart of whiteness, which makes the claimed reclamation imitation. As imitation, what is lacked is the original advantage of the self as standard. The imitation, in other words, is not its own standard. It becomes a failure even of its achievement. To achieve imitation is to fail at what an imitation imitates, namely, an original. (Gordon 2015, p. 23)

Curiously, Bhabha's intense interest in mimicry may be a sign of his own meditative, split, and ambivalent stance. It is not an accident that another postcolonial theorist, Edward Said, was more interested in the image of the colonizer, and their predecessor Franz Fanon was more drawn to the colonized subject. Bhabha in his turn is focused on their interaction, and the discussion of difference and similarity based on the colonial divide. Theorizing mimicry, Bhabha follows Lacan, stressing the psychological effect of colonial relations – the 'desire of the other' and the 'fear of the other' (Bhabha 1994, pp. 44–5). He points out the instability of the psychic nature of these relations – their dual and conflicting character, as well as the negotiated identities that are born as a result. In his interpretation of Fanon, the figure of colonial otherness is constituted not by the colonialist self or the colonized other, but by the disturbing distance in between – 'the White man's artifice inscribed on the Black man's body' (Bhabha 1994, p. 117).

In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha refers to mimicry as an ironic compromise between identity and difference, and also – 'the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha 1994, p. 86). In other words, mimicry is built around ambivalence. To be effective mimicry

has to always produce its own slippage, its own excess, and its own difference. The authority of mimicry, according to Bhabha, is determined precisely by its indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as a representation of difference which in itself is a process of disavowal. Bhabha calls mimicry a sign of 'double articulation and complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline which "appropriates" the Other, as it visualizes power' (Bhabha 1994, p. 86). For this reason, the effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and in fact destroys it from within.

6.4 Post-Soviet Mimicry

This fatality of mimicry's failure in the post-Soviet case is multiplied and distorted due to the lacking clear-cut black and white opposition. Russian as a substitute for 'white' is not so white itself and also infected by Europe-longing mimicry, and the non-Russian sphere cannot be so easily racially tagged either. For example, the Central Asian is not quite 'yellow' and the Siberian is not quite 'red', whereas the Caucasian peoples in spite of being massively racialized by Russians, even with their name, point to 'whiter' origins than Russia itself. After a rather short period of accepting Russians as the mimicry model these internal post-Soviet others had long started to find other mimicry models both Western and today more and more often non-Western.

The postsocialist mimetic trauma needs to be further contextualized as it combines intersecting postcolonial and postimperial elements as well as the dimension of global coloniality and the notorious subalternization of the homogenized postsocialist subject as such. The external imperial difference is at once an unpersuasive imperial sameness for its own subalterns (the more European and/or ancient they considered themselves to be the less persuasive for them was the imperial authority), and an imperial-turned-colonial difference for the larger global coloniality. The underlying logic is in a way close to Brathwaite's theorizing of the zones of greyness and the imitation of an imitation (Brathwaite 1995, p. 204). Russian colonizers resemble the white creoles with their decidedly secondary and subversive status. The subalterns strive to copy the unconfident colonizer (who might try to carefully hide this diffidence by excessive bravado) and as a result, there emerges a faded copy of a copy, whereas a reverse influence of the colonial culture on the representatives of the metropolis is being intensified.

In the post-Soviet case the mimicry is redoubled due to a disintegration of cultural hierarchies, and a lack of stable reference points and norms, as well as a complex interplay of socialist and liberal modernity/coloniality and the larger dimension of the returned gaze – this time, the gaze of the West scrutinizing Russia, and often regarded as the highest sanction of the truly powerful empire looking down at the second-rate one. A Russian colonialist from a European perspective always remains deficient and forever catching up. Therefore, the cracks of the colonialist discourse that Bhabha writes about, in this case become especially obvious and even caricaturistic at times.

The post-Soviet trajectory of mimicry is different from Homi Bhabha's blueprint as it intersects the internal colonial difference with the global imperial difference. The former colonial others of the USSR fall largely into two categories: the ones who can potentially belong to Europe or at least strive to do so, and the absolute others – mostly the Asian colonies and partly the Caucasus with Russians themselves standing in between, in their traditional Europe-mimicking roles and/or equally fake authenticity masks of today, hiding a void behind.

Bhabha calls the colonial mimicry the 'metonymy of presence' (Bhabha 1994, p. 120). But for him it is the problem of living 'in between' an Englishman and an Anglicized, between mutual cultural stereotypes. In the post-Soviet space this problematic is once again redoubled, yet underconceptualized, because the Russian colonialist remains a representation of mimicry in its extreme form, while the colonial subject is a grey blurred copy of a copy, a simulacrum without real reference, which questions the very authority of the Russian colonizer as a possible role model. For many ex-colonial subjects from the Eastern European colonies and Soviet satellites, the previous forced model of the Russian mimicry is completely replaced today with new or rediscovered old mimetic relations with Western European culture, marked by a neurotic and insecure Europeanism, as Benedikts Kalnačs demonstrated in his decolonial conceptualizing of the Baltic littoral (Kalnačs 2016) and consequently, an even more complex marginality. Here often a decolonizing urge is expressed in removing all the spatial traces of the despised Soviet/Russian history and mimicking directly the European sameness or – in case it is lacking – a stylized national past.

An important difference with Soviet colonialism is that in the Soviet Union it was prestigious to pass for Russian and becoming Russian remained an important goal for many people from the so-called national

republics. In other words, they quite willingly and in good faith discarded their own ethnic traditions for the sake of becoming fully integrated Soviet citizens speaking perfect Russian and sharing Russian cultural values. Present-day guest-workers from Central Asia are not interested in values, they are interested in making money and their mimicry is connected almost entirely with survival in a hostile environment. They want to become Russian citizens to find a better job and not because they seriously value being Russian as their parents or grandparents might have sincerely felt only a few decades ago. The authority of the former metropolis is completely lost by now.

This difference, which makes any mimicry dated, is played upon in a number of recent books, films, and theatre performances, for example, in the aforementioned Yusuff Razykov's film *Gastarbeiter* – a triumph of humanity in the midst of humiliation, and the glory of remaining human and keeping one's dignity in any condition. We learn that a young man from a poor but honest and musically talented Uzbek family goes to Moscow which in this case is presented as a city of illegal migrants, human trafficking, drug dealers, slave markets, flophouses, and prostitution. The Russians who are mostly representatives of various power structures (police, army, security, immigration service) and the guest-workers from various post-Soviet countries (mostly Moldova and Uzbekistan) are mutually dehumanized and once again, as in *Tangerines*, share only the Russian language – but share it mostly negatively – to curse and condemn.

This looks at first like a familiar globalization story of the natives hating the newcomers and erasing their shared imperial-colonial past. Yet this past takes over through the image of the main character – a grandfather who undertakes a long and dangerous journey to Russia to find his missing grandson and die. The grandson himself never even appears on screen, remaining an absent actor. And although he is the real guest-worker, it is the grandfather who is ironically called a 'gastarbeiter' in the title of this film. But what is that past which allows for some hope at the end of the film? It is a very specific post-Soviet past, dissimilar to the French, British, or German postcolonial cases. This forgotten past restoring the human dimension, unexpectedly comes from the shared Soviet history making the victim and the hangman equal and giving them both a chance to stay or become truly human. The grandfather shares a heroic past with this hateful country, as he is a venerable and decorated Second World War veteran. This circumstance, the fact that present-day Russians owe him their lives and futures, even allows the grandfather to escape punishment

for unintended drug trafficking. But the director adds a darker dimension to this story and at the same time, allows a glimpse into the abyss of the Soviet reality where heroic deeds were often rewarded with repression, and former torturers could easily swap places with their victims. The 'gastarbeiter' goes directly to his enemy, a KGB investigator who sentenced him to several years in Gulag immediately after the war. The grandfather intends to ask the retired torturer help him find the grandson. The investigator turns out to be a senile and deadly scared person living literally with a gun under his arm and surrounded by the ghosts of the past. He is almost expecting revenge, but the main character remains calm and full of dignity in front of the former enemy never planning any revenge at all.

It may seem that the story of the Soviet past levelling the colonizer and the colonized through a system of repression, hatred, and totalitarian control, can hardly help the people of today or change their destinies. Yet Razykov manages to trace the remaining links between generations and nations. These links may be expressed in seemingly ephemeral details such as a clay flute which the old man's late son made and now the foster great grandson is playing, thus helping to find the lost young man by means of a familiar melody. We are made to believe that meaningful links between the past and the present are initiated not on the highways of the heroic official history which hide many dark spots, but rather, through love and affirmation of life, through helping the poor and the needy as the old man and his unlikely Moscow companion (a Moldavian prostitute dreaming of going to Europe), are trying to do.

In a sense this film testifies to the rejection of the old colonial mimicry and efforts to build mutual understanding on different grounds, which again, consist of equally lighter and darker sides – the mutual history of survival and help during the war, and the cruel history of repression and broken lives. Visual art forms are particularly fitting for expressing the multiplicity of intersecting influences of various imperial and colonial traditions juxtaposed and superimposed on postsocialist spaces and identities. This is clearly seen in the case of Taus Makhacheva and her quite specific interpretation of mimicry.

Makhacheva always problematizes different sides of mimicry – the boundaries between the social and the natural, the animate and inanimate, the animal and the machine, as well as the processes of integration and discrimination which have failed to provide any adequate answers under the political concept of affirmative action. She constantly questions representation as such in its mainly fictitious terms both when we represent ourselves

and when someone wants to represent and inevitably stereotype us. She uses forms of double entendre to allow the powerful to disengage from having to face the reality of discrimination and hide behind rosy multicultural rhetoric, and the subaltern to hide and practise various cunning defence strategies. Makhacheva's performances are often based on her trying on different identities as costumes in various contexts. Mostly they have to do with racial, ethnic, cultural, and gender borders. Sometimes a costume makes her more visible like in the case of her *Portrait of an Avarian* (when she made a traditional Avarian female dress of an unusual color – almost identical with human skin – and complemented it with latex replicas of traditional jewellery, and travelled in this attire through Moscow by bus and metro causing various reactions in passengers). Sometimes it makes her anonymous and helps her to hide, to become invisible in her hyper visibility.

Makhacheva came to her sceptical and ironic *Affirmative Action* (mimesis) based on her own experience as an other in Moscow and in London (Makhacheva 2011a). This sensibility stems from her own complicated and nuanced corpo-politics and geopolitics of knowledge. Each of her works resonates on many levels – from the most local and grassroots to regional and global. Public policy, cultural, ethnic, and religious interaction of various groups, the fakeness of multicultural slogans and principles, problematizing societal norms, the new forms of discrimination and neo-Orientalism – these are some of her favourite themes all of which evolve around mimicry and metamorphosis understood in a specific way.

Obviously she touches upon the problematic of communication between people, different cultures, people and animals, people and technological gadgets, various communities, etc. Some of the characters in her performances mimic animals or camouflage themselves as members of a non-human community. Such is *Rakhen* (2009), translated from Avarian meaning a herd, where an anonymous young man covers himself with a traditional shepherd's heavy fur coat (*Timug*) and slowly and cautiously approaches a herd of sheep trying to integrate into their 'community', and fails to be accepted.

An interesting example of Makhacheva's interpretation of mimicry is her decolonial performance *Delinking* (Makhacheva 2011b). She was attracted by the idea of delinking 'from the European thinking and ways of receiving knowledge' – in her own formulation – 'because in all cultures there are completely different systems for that, the practices of transmitting knowledge, cultural and intellectual evolvement, totally different from the West, while the world uses only the sanctified Western academic

system' (Ledenev 2011). She plays with delinking as a concept in her performance, also touching upon the hermetic institutional context plaguing many performances. Makhacheva says that those performances that we often see at exhibition openings never go beyond the prescribed format and never reach any other public but the one present at the opening. She decided to leave this hermetic environment and make her performance week-long. The artist's face was intricately painted with henna using Indian, African, and Middle Eastern ornaments (Fig. 6.1) (usually this

Fig. 6.1 Taus Makhacheva, *Delinking*. Photo-documentation of performance, 2011. Courtesy of the artist and Laura Bulian Gallery. Photo by Alberto Bulian

technique of Mehndi – henna body art – is used in ceremonial pre-wedding rituals on hands and feet but never on the face).

As soon as her face was covered with ornaments the spaces where the skin was still visible were immediately filled with more henna ornaments. As a result her whole face was covered with green mass. After the henna was dry and was washed off, the face had changed its colour and become orange-brownish and stayed so for about a week – a new mask, a new mocking identity, tentative yet obviously leaving a trace. In this performance the changing face colour as a space for pluritopic overlay of different cultural and epistemic systems becomes a multi-semantic metaphor for shifting the geography of reasoning and recreation of a floating, changing, and forever open decolonial community of sense.

It is worth noting that mimicry is quite important and controversial for the Russian subjects themselves as they are marked by the imperial difference which turns into a colonial one when confronted by the Western imperial sameness. Here the main dilemma is that of passing for European as well as efforts to carve a space in someone else's modernity. Longing to be regarded as Europeans, emulating not only European looks but also training themselves to think in European terms, Russians have invariably failed and were rejected by the West as frighteningly similar yet always different. Hence the usual slur epithets describing the Russian/European difference and the resulting mimicry. There is a long historical tradition of Russian thinkers critically contemplating this failure: Kluchevsky's 'Tatar dressed as a Frenchman' (Kluchevsky 1912), Victor Yerofeyev's 'Russian in Europe as a Cockroach' (2000) (too banal and not exotic enough to be an interesting and not a disgusting 'insect'), and many others. A Russian in Europe and for Europe, remains almost the same but not quite, which in Europeans causes an unconscious fear, a destabilizing of self-identification and, as a result, a striving to build a wall against the Russian 'others' and not let them inside the field of European sameness. A negative reaction to this failure has repeatedly caused rage and peddling the 'great Russian authenticity' out of spite, in an often insane victory-in-defeat gesture, but the open secret is that there is no authenticity left and hence the stylized fundamentalist way which is being actively propagated today, is yet another Russian dead-end. It is a fake, a failure, and not a heroic one at all.

For a long time the subaltern empire has been building itself entirely out of bits and pieces of someone else's traditions and focused on consistently destroying all remnants of its own past by the hands of its cultural elites. The mental fascination with and colonization by Western modernity

was then transformed onto both the colonies of the East and the South and Russia's own populace – largely the peasants who after the experience of Soviet modernization/colonization lost any remaining links with their completely erased or (re)invented pasts. In these conditions the essentializing authenticity project of the present Russian administration forcefully shutting the country away from the rest of the world, is also doomed. Some 140 million people glorifying their invented traditional values, while constantly threatening the world with another major war are an impossible *déjà vu* of some conventional blockbuster. Such an ugly and aggressive nightmarish revanchism is still grounded in the slave mentality and the same old unfreedom which has nothing to thrive on except someone else's black-and-white stereotypes. We are left with another distorted mirror, and come back to the void from which we started.

The Russian identification is based on constant copying and further adjusting of various European models. In the books of many contemporary Russian writers there emerges a distorted metaphor of mimicry of the whole Russian culture as a subaltern imperial world in relation to the West, but not in the sense that was mean by Bhabha, who defined mimicry vis-à-vis Indian and British cultures, and not in the sense that was illustrated by V. S. Naipaul in his novel *The Mimic Men*.

The ambivalence of Russian self-identification in relation to Western culture leads to specific changes in the psychology of mimicry of the Russian 'self'. It is based not so much on copying for the sake of survival and raising one's social status, as on an internal rejection and an unconscious willingness to introduce something of one's own, to make a copy somewhat non-identical to the original. This is clearly seen in the architectural copies such as Saint Petersburg's palaces, in the literary mimicry of Pushkin's and Lermontov's romantic works, in the infamous creolization of the real French language and the one spoken by the Russian nobility, which continues today when the caricaturistic copy temporarily wins as authentic but still cannot quite learn the Russian parlance.[1]

6.5 Close Up 2: The Post-Soviet Reverse Metamorphosis and Mimicry

In the remaining part of this chapter I would like to analyse in more detail a short story written by Andrei Volos. It attracted my attention because the story is based on a paradoxical and almost impossible situation of

reverse mimicry which allows us to understand the specific features of the Russian post-imperial sensibility of a not so confident ex-colonizer. Significantly Volos is a Russian writer born in Tadzhikistan who has experienced through the ordeals of his own family, the difficulties of the relations of the ex-colonized and the ex-colonizers, including the seemingly innocent ex-settler colonists who are still held responsible for the sins of empire and can never be accepted either in the former colony or in the metropolis.

Reverse mimicry as understood by Bhabha is seriously reconsidered in the post-Soviet case. Instead of the vulnerable psychic state of the colonizer, when he realizes that he is copied and it makes him angry, depriving him of a certain part of himself, of his own individuality, the post-Soviet condition of the shift to a new cultural and political reference system, often turns mimicry upside down so that the ex-colonizer copies the ex-colonized. This is illustrated by Volos in his short story 'A Native' (2000) where a colonialist attempts to pass for a colonized. He is doing it 'in good faith', that is trying to behave in accordance with the obvious features of the life-world around him, truly wanting to become a native, and also to communicate sincerely, with no hidden self-interest. However, Volos demonstrates that the darker side of the Soviet modernity is equally infected by imperial-colonial complexes, that is it mimics the power hierarchy of which it has itself been a victim and simply reproduces the same/other dichotomy taken from the imperial model and just changes the polarity without changing the essence. Makushin with his 'good faith' is not able to survive in the Khurramabad world of 'bad faith' and deceiving semblances. But the question remains open as to whether the writer sees this rejection and suspicion as some eternal human quality or whether he is able to detect its geopolitical imperial-colonial roots.

The metamorphosis trope in its post-dependence rendering often requires a narrative point of non-return and bifurcation of the new meanings after which there is only madness and death for someone who got into a different reference system and never managed to come back to the one left behind. The protagonist of Volos's story, Sergey Makushin, an ex-scientist from one of Moscow's research institutes, turns into a menial worker in the market pastry shop in Khurramabad (a fictional city of happiness and joy closely resembling the real capital of Tadzhikistan – Dushanbe). His name is changed to Sirochiddin Maku-shin (with a stress on the last syllable). His native Moscow quickly fades and turns grey and uninteresting after Sergey encounters Khurramabad – a mysteriously familiar place. One of the signs

that help him painfully realize that he never became a native is that he never acquired a nickname in the market – just a distorted Russian name, pronounced in a Tadzhik way – Sirochiddin, which becomes yet another invisible boundary in overcoming of his otherness.

Volos mercilessly pushes his character towards a deadly encounter with an absolute otherness, throwing him into an alien reality of which he immediately longs to become part. Inexplicably feeling his link to this unfamiliar land, as soon as he steps onto the melting asphalt and breathes in the hot dust, as soon as he feels the atmosphere of the oriental bazaar, Sergey starts recollecting his childhood and feeling himself inside a fairytale. Makushin is enchanted with an other reality, as a sleepwalker he is wandering around the market. This enchantment first appeals to him with its attractive and alluring and not violent sides, but somehow we feel the tragic outcome from the start, the inevitable evolution of the story from bad to worse.

Volos's work focuses around the enchantment with otherness, the illusory and illusive sensation of being in an other space and a merciless disenchantment with Orientalism and exoticization. The character is drawn to the alien fantastic space through a strange affinity, a feeling of something native and his own, of his belonging to life around him, rather than difference. Sergey is driven by an anguish of someone, coming from a rational world, in his yearning for an other dimension, in his inclination to a certain childishness, escapism, to a strange behaviour considered marginal and abnormal in the world from which he comes. In this encounter we easily detect Homi Bhabha's duality of the colonial discourse tattered by its famous cracks destabilizing both the original and the colonial copy and defining their fatal interdependence.

This short story is based on a fantastic assumption – an implausible narrative of a successful young Muscovite scientist leaving Russia, his family, and his career and moving to Khurramabad. And yet until the very last moment the encounter with otherness is regarded as a game which he thinks he can control and stop at any moment. This disastrous game brings Sergey Makushin from a research institute to Putov Market and later to an Uratjubin knife in his stomach.

The situation described in 'A Native' is connected with specific forms of Islamic radicalism which flourished in Tadzhikistan in the early 1990s. The civil war of 1990–97 was connected with economic as well as political factors and could not be interpreted according to the simple formula – 'Islamism against the circular state'. The leaders of the United Tadzhik Opposition seemed to have made Islam their spiritual banner in the

struggle against communism. But it was just an ideological facade, behind which lay tribal relations and conflicts. This ethnic statist background formed the basis of many events in Central and South Asia at the time.

'A Native' is especially symptomatic when seen against this political background. The main character dies not because he is not a Muslim, or is a Russian colonialist, but because for the murderer he is a 'Kuljab', that is a representative of another hostile clan. Along with clan rivalry behind the civil war there lies a more global and violent process of exodus from the village to the city, from the archaic life to urbanization and back. In this respect it is interesting how Volos draws the character of Farkhod, Makushin's co-worker from the pastry shop and a true native of the city. In his portrait Volos does not allow himself any stereotyping. Farkhod is shown as a complex person, able to objectively evaluate the aims of the fighting sides. The explanation that he offers to Makushin who is not able to understand what is happening is based on a simple metaphor that clearly marks the true motifs of the Tadzhik turmoil. It is not the people who gathered there to decide their future. 'They were dividing our meat there . . . Cut the people into pieces like a slaughtered sheep . . . Is everybody content with his piece? . . . And who cares that the sheep would never graze again . . . it is a sheep after all!' (Volos 2000, pp. 131–2). The main character is never able to rise to Farkhod's position of conscious non-participation, because an other has to take sides and choose where to fight. A native has the right and ability to stay away from taking sides.

In many ways 'A Native' is based on the problematic of signification. The author is trying to understand what is the secret of otherness – can it be reduced to appearance, language, customs or other specific and not always easy to verbalize features of behaviour, only to come to a helpless realization of the irrationality of this category, particularly in the moments when difference is accentuated. The Russian character of Volos's story who is trying to pass for Tadzhik and idealistically strives to fight for the freedom and democracy of this people which he considers his own, becomes really a native just a few seconds before dying.

Makushin is regarded as a madman by the real natives who in contrast with him have never had a choice due to their ethnic-cultural belonging and colonial status. Volos expresses this in a game between Farkhod and ex-Sergey, based on Tadzhik mocking of the Russian – the colonized mocking the ex-colonizer, who for some inconceivable (for Farkhod) reason, voluntarily chose the subaltern position (Volos 2000, p. 101). This falling out of the normalized mimicking logic of passing for white/

Russian, is noticed by Farkhod, who realizes that Sergey willingly agreed to his humiliation, changed his job, left his blue-eyed Russian wife and children to marry a village Tadzhik woman, and lowered his social status for the sake of an incomprehensible idea of becoming a native.

Volos also offers a subtle reflection on the mechanics of dehumanization as a key principle of the same/other economy. Makushin's sincere attempt to learn the language and cultural traditions to become a native and claim a place for himself, immediately makes him into an absolute enemy in the eyes of his Tadzhik peers at the local research institute. The director become furious because Makushin's command of Farsi attempted to erase the boundary that helps divide easily the same from the other, from the Russian that is supposed to be as indifferent to his (director's) world as he himself is indifferent to their 'stupid, pompous and impolite world' (Volos 2000, p. 110). This suspicion of someone who mastered the language is usually analysed in reverse situations of the colonized speaking a perfect imperial tongue. But Volos shifts the emphasis to the problematic of painful boundaries and walls erected by both sides to protect their impenetrability. Language is a crucial marker in this case.

What is even more fascinating is the actual metamorphosis of the main character that we witness in the story. Makushin undergoes a subtle change connected with more nuanced ethnic differences which exist in Central Asia. Volos points out that the 'passport photograph of a well-nourished twenty-five-year-old Muscovite had very little in common with the dried out, rough-faced almost forty-year-old Khurramabadian, darkened with sun and the dirty market work' (Volos 2000, p. 113). But even so everyone took him for either Tatar or Uzbek or Kazakh, or even a Meskhetian Turk, but never a Russian or a native. If at first, expressing superfluous hospitality towards the unwanted guest from Moscow, the hosts were mocking this person who did not even realize that he was laughed at, gradually Sergey turned from such an absolute Russian other into a non-absolute blurred figure who was hated sometimes even more, and the more so the closer he got to the local life and the more actively he took part in it. The author shows that nothing – not the customs, not the language, not the appearance, not the Tadzhik wife from the village, not the child who in contrast with the father will be a native here, and not even his loyalty to these people – can determine belonging to natives.

When Sergey speaks with the customers at the market, each Tadzhik intuitively recognizes a foreigner in him and immediately stops taking him

into account addressing only the real natives. Makushin's life in Khurramabad becomes a chain of ineffective attempts to prove to everyone that he is a native. Sergey reflects on the alien skin that he got into and that still ached and warped demonstrating his birthmarks. In a sense he becomes voluntarily an in-between person and this does not bring him happiness, a new meaning of life, or playful tricksterism. After hanging for some time in the air – not here and not there, and not being able to shape his new identification – Volos's hero finally becomes a native just for a moment before dying, ironically, at the point when what he most needed was to remain an other.

Makushin regards his own flirting with danger as joining the sphere of sameness. The last scenes in Volos's story are presented in a surrealistic way, through the eyes of the feverish character. Under the pretext of visiting his sick wife he goes to Martyrs' Square and Freedom Square where everything is mixed – the époques, the civilizations, the Soviet official buildings, and the ancient tethering posts for horses and camels. The political choice that is subsequently made by the character clearly shows that he is an other, even if he wants so much to become a native. In this arbitrary choice Makushin's deeper cultural matrix suddenly comes forward. He is scared of the praying people in Muslim clothes at Martyrs' Square and chooses Freedom Square instead. This choice makes him automatically a 'Kuljab'. Volos demonstrates the blindness and helplessness of his main character who does not understand the differences between the political and social forces and powers of Tadzhikistan, for whom it does not make any difference which group to join as one of the same, because even after two years, he still continues to see the Orient within the frame of the exotic fairytale fallen out of time.

Makushin's choice of the so-called supporters of democracy and parliament, leads him directly to death. But the problem is that, as Farkhod says earlier in the story, both sides are guilty in this conflict and one must be absolutely blind (or in this case – be an other and not one of the same), not to see the absurdity of such a choice – to join the mob, presided over by the turncoats, where the ex-militia colonel is distributing free guns. A chance meeting with Alisher – a person from a different period of Makushin's life when he was still a scientist – proves to be crucial as it marks an insuperable boundary that closed for him forever the way to becoming a native. This is the true climax of the story, the feeling of despair, the sense that everything was lost and was in vain and that he was once again spat out by the hostile alien environment, accusing him of being Russian scum (Volos 2000, p. 131).

Just before dying Volos's hero insists that he is not a Kuljab, thus rejecting an opportunity to become a native. The clan differences which were not relevant for him before because he did not understand their essence – now all of a sudden become vital. It becomes important not only who you are – a Russian or a Tadzhik, but also a Kuljab, a Karategin, an Uratjubin, a Garm, a Khodzhent, etc. The writer points out the terrible power of language – it is the village accent that Makushin picked up from his second wife that plays a crucial role in his murder, but he realizes this too late, the same way as Earl Lovelace's Puerto Rican (Lovelace 1999), who decided to pass for an American but was easily discovered by the passport control officers when he called the last letter of the English alphabet 'Zed' instead of 'Zi' – thus revealing his colonial origin. However, Lovelace finishes his story on a cheerful note – the character is singing a song, in a way coming to terms with and praising his Caribbean identity (in spite of American cuff-links on his wrists). Makushin, just before dying, continues to recite the Tadzhik nursery rhyme, realizing that finally he has become a native and in a way is dying happy: 'Farukh sits high on the back of a seep./Bright sine the stars in the dark sky so deep . . . ' (Volos 2000, 133).

Note

1. A gastronomic metaphor is helpful in this case: in 2014–15 when Russia once again put itself in a besieged camp because of the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent proxy war in Ukraine, an interesting food mimicry episode took place. Russian counter-sanctions to European political disapproval of its neo-imperial behaviour largely consisted in banning EU food and other products and involved so-called import substitution which characteristically came to the bad and health-threatening emulation of European products (a food mimicking) rather than restoring and promoting local products whenever they were available. Russia still prefers a fake camembert to a good and honest Ossetian cheese (one wonders, is this a colonialist residue or something else?).

CHAPTER 7

Coloniality of Memory at the Postcolonial/Postsocialist Juncture

If the first five chapters have focused on the intersections of ontology and axiology in postsocialist and postcolonial experiences and their artistic representations, in this chapter I am going to accentuate a rather specific side of this interaction, connected with the sphere of memory, consciousness, and the unconscious, seen through the prism of coloniality and the mechanisms of decoloniality. In a sense this chapter links together the different levels of reflection on the postsocialist and postcolonial junctures, as the painful memory of violence, humiliation, and suppression, the efforts to cope with various complexes and traumas and start one's life anew, are directly connected with spatiality and temporality, subjectivity, affectivity, and the system of values (that is axiology).

One of the deeper intersections uniting postcolonial, post-totalitarian, post-apartheid, post-dictatorship, and other dimensions of post-dependence emerges in the leitmotif of trauma, violence, repentance, and revenge in all the richness of its semantic overtones and poetic representations. In decolonial terms this corresponds to coloniality (and hence, decolonization) of memory and its complex relations with the past and with history. At its basis lies the self-legitimating violence of a certain repressive system disciplining people into absolute submission to the system's bio-politics. Societies are offered certain sanctioned forms of constructed collective memory which does not conserve but rather erases the past still full of restless ghosts. In a way it becomes an unpredictable past that can be subsequently interpreted in any 'convenient' way. The

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collective memory and even the personal bodily memory of the victims themselves are then censored. The victims are forced to forgive and forget. They are force-fed a convenient version of the past and an equally comfortable way into the future. This in effect is one more betrayal of the victims, as it fixes a rupture in the texture of memory connected with violence, trauma, and humiliation, as the darker side of the colonization of memory. What is crucial here is the corporeal affective embodiment of such memory and its non-verbal and non-rational nature and hence, the impossibility of indoctrinating the victim with the official colonial version because the victim's body stubbornly remembers differently and does not allow the mind to accept the imposed point of view. This conflict often leads to psychological and mental disorders.

7.1 The Anatomy of Violence and the Coloniality of Memory

Coloniality of memory and decolonizing from its trauma are closely connected with the complexity and contradictoriness of violence as a destructive yet also cathartic Fanonian force. The Fanonian interpretation of violence was aimed at liberating the human being and creating a new individual free from the duality of colonialism (Fanon 1963, p. 59). Violence then was an act of restoring human dignity to the downtrodden.

The dynamics of violence in the Fanonian interpretation means that the system does not allow the 'wretched' to be considered people. The assertion of one's human nature as a fundamentally unlawful act within this system is inevitably translated into violence. Fanon interpreted violence both in the instrumental political sense of grasping and holding on to power, and in the sense of a peculiar energy or an internal purifying force, leading to the creation of a new and wonderful world, coming to life through a certain exorcism or liberation from violence by means of a reciprocal violence against its original source (Fanon 1963, p. 21). In the words of Lewis Gordon, revolutionary violence in Fanon's rendering may be interpreted as a 'tragedy – a dramatic resource and a human signifier' (Gordon 1996, p. 298). The main tragic trope will be catharsis conceptualized through violence, and leading to a more positive and conscious political praxis. Therefore *The Wretched of the Earth* may be called a 'tragic text about a tragic world' and about a tragic humankind refusing to grow up and take responsibility (Gordon 1996, p. 307).

The instrumental understanding of violence is rather traditional and repeatedly criticized, because history does not really give us any successful examples of the realization of this tendency. The other cathartic understanding of violence is more interesting as it refers to the ontological and existential spheres or, in other words, becomes an effort to escape the long being-in-violence through a short and justified practice of violence and its further channelling with constructive goals in mind. However, in the last chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon gives numerous examples of psychoses and neuroses of both victims and torturers, who were his patients during and after the Algerian war for independence. He demonstrates that people remain in the grip of violence forever, and 'their future is mortgaged' (Fanon 1963, p. 22). In South Africa from the apartheid era there circulates a similar expression – 'to live on borrowed time' (Dangor 2001, p. 195), that is, to be doomed from the start. But is it possible at all to break the link between politics and violence and isn't violence, on the other hand, at times the only way to justice?

The characters in the works I will address below are trying to answer this question each in their own way. Moreover there is a particular gender difference here. The male view of political rape, trauma, repentance, and revenge is presented among others in a post-dictatorship play *Death and the Maiden* (1990) authored by Chilean-American playwright Ariel Dorfman and adopted for the famous movie by Roman Polanski (1994). The main character Paulina is not openly dehumanized for racial or gender reasons, but her violent rape by Dr Miranda equates the punishment for political resistance as a way of stripping the resister to the merely biological state of an Agambenian *Homo Sacer* (Agamben 1998), not a citizen, with presumable female viciousness, as a sick justification of the torturer. A similar position is to be found in a post-apartheid novel written by Achmat Dangor, *Bitter Fruit* (2001), where we encounter an unwanted fruit of interracial political rape – the son of the main character Michael. A brilliant, revealing, and disturbing film by Russian director Alexei German, *Khrustalyov, my Car* (1998), which is in many ways the last monument to the Soviet critical cinematic tradition,[1] stands slightly apart, for here the accent is on the bio-political violence of the Soviet system as a whole which does not recognize gender or social status, and rapes and destroys everyone including yesterday's torturers. In all of these cases, accurately detecting the problem, male characters as well as the authors, remain within the grip of the coloniality of memory, unable to overcome it or offer a way out of the circle of violence.

The women's version is presented in a number of interesting and equally disturbing works, such as *Grbavica* (2006), a powerful film made by Bosnian director Jasmila Žbanić, and Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat's critically acclaimed novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). Due to her freedom from the patriarchal norms and stereotypes in the rendering of political violence and also due to her attention to the bodily-political grounds in the interpretation of sexual violence, Žbanić is able to overcome the coloniality of memory and construct certain positive models for the future.

Likewise, Danticat's version in spite of all its despair, suicide, and the initial inability of the mother and daughter to communicate or love each other, eventually allows its brave women to prevail and reunite not only in this but also in the other world – the mythic Guinea where they all plan to meet after death. The coloniality of being is present in this book as a darker side of the family but also of Haitian history in which for generations people have been dehumanized and rendered dispensable. Tante Atie in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* expresses this in a concise and blunt way: 'Your mother and I, when we were children we had no control over anything, not even this body' (Danticat 1994, p. 20).

Although she means a particular humiliating ritual to which I will come back below, the idea of losing control over everything including one's body lies in the centre of the dialectics of political violence as well. When a human being has no rights and no control over anything, the last space of confrontation is usually the body – one's own body and the bodies of others, often in the form of bloody fights, self-mutilation, suicide, hunger strike, or terrorist acts.[2] Yet, in both Žbanić's and Danticat's cases and in Dangor's case to a lesser degree, the central dark event of rape is narratively decentred, dispersed or simply absent (which is intensified by the circular or spiral mode of telling the story) whereas what comes after the rape is put forward – the relations of raped mothers and their 'bitter fruit' (significantly, in both women's versions these are daughters) and the difficulties of this process and the complex dialectics of love, rejection, pity, duty, and ultimately friendship.

Post-dependence society of any kind often continues to stagnate in its sick and violent complexes after the formal emancipation is over and democracy seems to be established. Too often trauma and memory remain repressed and under-analysed, and hence repentance or responsibility never come in sight. In all post-dependence societies the emancipation from colonialism, apartheid, totalitarianism, or dictatorship is into the

system of Western neoliberalism or its local semblances which while correcting some superfluous ideological imbalances retain all the major injustices and inequities of modernity.

In post-Pinochet Chile and post-apartheid South Africa alike after the initial liberation drives the more conservative and often counter-revolutionary impulses took over, marginalizing and ousting former revolutionaries and underground fighters and retaining social inequity and poverty with a clearly racialized face. In case of Dangor sexual violence is always interconnected with the purity of blood and the stigma of racial mixing. In contrast with his earlier novel *Kafka's Curse* (1997) the forbidden interracial eroticism is presented largely in the form of violence and its bitter fruit. The author himself is a mild example of such sensibility incapable of making a final choice between his Indo-Muslim and Dutch Protestant origins.

In Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* Silas, the former fighter against apartheid and the husband of the main character, believes that in the new South Africa there should not be any such dusky and restless people. This painful motif is expressed even in the recurrent strange hybrid names of many of Dangor's characters – the first name and the surname are often linguistically and religiously discordant (Amina Mandelstam, Silas Ali, etcetera), in the sinister and morbid beauty of the pale-skinned Michael who 'has no color of his own' (Dangor 2001, p. 71), in the evil, in Silas's view, charm of his son's mulatta friend Vinu, and in the intersection of power, class, and race in gender-wise inverted forms of interracial eroticism.

Similar motifs are to be found in Danticat's case. In her daughter's obviously lighter face (although it is never directly stated in the novel and we only find roundabout affirmations of the next generation's darkness as a sign of restoration of family honour) the mother sees the visage of her rapist (most probably a Tonton Macoute and a mulatto). She constantly attempts to hide her visual dissimilarity with her own daughter through such means as the proverbial Haitian application of skin-bleaching lotions which in this case acquires a specific personal and painful meaning along with the general inferiority complex – both in Haiti and more so in the USA. The daughter in her turn suffers this unwanted similarity and develops a complex as if she is to blame for non-belonging to the family, for looking like the monster of her mother's life. The motif of the bitter fruit resembling their fathers emerges again and again in all the analysed works.

Typically, the rapist representing the utmost and lawless power is embodied through various sensuous perceptions other than vision and most often, through smell, or the sound of his voice or music, because the rapist forbids the victim to remember what he looks like. However, in Danticat's case it becomes particularly obvious that this is a symbolic denial and repression both imposed by the rapist out of fear of being revealed and also by the victim's own unconscious which is thus saving her sanity.

In Chile and South Africa, as well as in the Eastern European post-socialist case (to a lesser degree) the so-called 'truth and reconciliation commissions' which were aimed not only at discovering and sentencing the criminals, but more importantly at forgiving, not forgetting, did their jobs half-heartedly and with many compromises that were not morally justified for the victims who longed for repentance, even if crude as in Georgian director Tengiz Abuladze's rather early film of the same name (Abuladze 1987) with its central paralyzing event of the grandson repeatedly throwing his monster grandfather out of his grave.

Contemporary Russia reinstates the rhetoric and practice of Soviet state violence going hand in hand with the most unjust capitalist and neocolonialist methods targeted at the entire population regardless of race or class. This tendency is well conveyed in Alexei German's *Khrustalyov, my Car*, which in contrast with many other post-Soviet films and books completely lacks any nostalgia and soft melancholy even if it retains the characteristic Proustian elements of subjective capricious memory and a peculiar camera love for physical details and mundane environments.

A number of late Soviet and often dissident philosophers and social theorists commented on the necessity of collective repentance and critical work with memory. Thus Yuri Kazakov pointed out that post-Soviet Russia has never become a country of mass repentance and the majority of people have shifted the responsibility to the elites, which resulted in an explosive mixture of social dystrophy and all-penetrating total sense of injustice (Kazakov 2004, p. 144). Stanley Cohen reflects on the same problem pointing out that Russian society has experienced a process of psychoanalytic repression (Cohen 2005), which is different from both amnesia and negation. It is expressed in today's neglect of the previous crimes by the society as a whole. This system does not need remembering or repentance and replaces it with a slightly updated (with Orthodox Christianity and overt chauvinism) but still recognizably expansionist providential mythology. Post-Soviet fiction and especially cinema have

addressed this problematic in persuasive and aesthetically innovative ways, which played a negative part in their reception. These works have not been made available to a wider audience and have been accused of taking an unpatriotic stance and erased from the public space with the help of commercial and censoring mechanisms.

Alexei German's film in this sense stands apart due to its unique cinematic language and its grounding in the poetics of dream and subjective memory within which the main events are decentred. The incoherence of the characters' speech which many viewers complained about acts as an important artistic device as it replaces coherent rational speech – the world of logos – with meaningless and fierce sounds almost literally reproducing the famous Shakespearean words from *Macbeth* later brilliantly replayed by William Faulkner in *The Sound and the Fury*: life 'is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/Signifying nothing'. The sound, the fury, and the chaos of the hellish world at the edge of catastrophe – as Russia here is presented clearly as 'a working model of hell' in the definition of Eugene Margolit (Margolit 1999) – this is the atmosphere of German's film.

Its understanding is possible only through the sphere of aesthesis, affect, associative embodied memory but not a rational explanation or a linear plot, based on cause–effect logic. Mikhail Yampolsky accurately points to the fact that the film is built according to the laws of memory, and memory, like dreams, is never linear and always pushes to the foreground something marginal, arbitrary, and unimportant (Yampolsky 1999). Yet we must realize that this is a painful memory and a nightmare (not just a dream) as they are a product of the colonized consciousness which avoids any frontal clash with the central event, be it a rape or some other meeting with the system face to face. In this sense it is close to Danticat's novel. Hence a film seemingly far from the decolonial option in the end performs a decolonization of being and aesthesis, though it requires from the audience serious effort and hard work and never offers any easy readymade catharsis. In Akosh Siladi's words, German 'strives to shake us not aesthetically, but existentially, in a most concrete, almost bestial sense of the word, penetrating to the very insides. He aims not at our feelings or brain, but at our stomach. Yet this animalistic effect is reached through aesthetic means' (Siladi 1999).

It is important to add that the pragmatic impact of the film circles around death and lifelessness as the key existential experiences of the

Russian person and obviously aims at a collective shock psychotherapy of the audience, and even violation of its perception, an almost complete and unbearable control over it. This is no doubt a brilliant and effective example of decolonizing aesthesis performed as a negative proof. The film takes us along the circles of hell, the circles of the world which completely belongs to death, not offering any beauty, truth, or anything else for the possibility of renaissance. There is only a dawning idea of the human dignity and stoicism in any situation and particularly in the conditions when the world with no redemption comes to its end, and a rather radical idea of the necessity and inevitability of destroying this deadly world to create something different. However, this option does not find any place in the film's texture. It abruptly ends on an unresolved note of Russian history's doom.

7.2 Sexual Violence as a Form of Genocide

The central traumatic event of all the works under analysis is sexual violence which may be political at the same time. Sexual violence has been used as a tool of national humiliation and particularly of humiliating men-enemies for a long time. This erases women's humanity, regarding them merely as receptacles of the alien semen. David Luban states that

> all political torture aims to teach its victim . . . that they are nothing but passive bodies in pain, not the active shapers of destiny they had fancied themselves . . . But when the victim is a woman and the torture is rape, her humiliation becomes triply political. Like a male victim, she is passive rather than active and subjugated rather than victorious. But, in addition, her rapists expel her from the recent and still-fragile world of women's political emancipation into a history-nightmare – a nightmare of traditionalist society in which . . . she was never anything more than cunt . . . The same cultural habits that make chastity valuable and rape shameful to its victims obligate men to protect their women's honor. The man who fails stands exposed and impotent. (Luban 1998, p. 133)

One of the case studies in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* narrates the story of a young patient, experiencing a syndrome of intersecting violence, trauma, and post-dependence. The patient is a 26-year-old Algerian taxi driver and underground anti-colonial fighter. After his escape his unloved wife was raped by French soldiers but similarly to Paulina, did not betray

her husband and later offered to divorce him since she was dishonoured. The Algerian's somatic and psychic disorders in Fanon's interpretation are a manifestation of his guilt and at the same time, of his shame. He even develops a repressed repulsion for his two-year-old daughter who might, similarly to Michael, be the bitter fruit of rape and carries the stigma of her mother's shame.

At first the patient demonstrates the standard male reaction of jealousy, interpreting the rape of his wife as an infringement on his property rights and predictably reinstating the paradigmatic narrative of women's eternal promiscuity. Yet this patient unexpectedly demonstrates the awakening of moral qualities previously unknown to him – he refuses to divorce his wife and expresses responsibility, guilt, and compassion. The story ends on a disturbing but not a hopeless note. The patient decides to go back to his family and try to start again (Fanon 1963, pp. 254–9). In Dorfman's play, Dangor's novel, Žbanić's film, and Danticat's book we see what could happen with the victims, their relatives and the bitter fruit of violence afterwards.

All of these works are marked by the Fanonian syndrome of the apathy and inertia of the raped slave. Alexei German expressed this idea even more poignantly: 'We are a raped, a prison-bitched country and we forgave and forgot our humiliation and did not repent, did not ask for any retribution' (German 2008). And essentially the film investigates exactly that – why and how we have all become slaves and what can be done about it. The director bares the essence of the Soviet and post-Soviet predicament in his one-day Joycean story of Klensky – a general of medical service, a luminary neurosurgeon arrested in the frame of the infamous doctor's plot, gang-raped with the consent and on behalf of NKVD by a group of criminals in the proverbial van adorned by a cheerful Soviet Champaign add, and later miraculously pardoned. Klensky is hastily brought – insides torn but the general's overcoat returned intact – to the dying Stalin, just to witness the inevitable and unsightly death of this monster and help him gasp out his life anally and not through his mouth while the general is kissing Stalin's hands and belly.

However, this ghastly scene is not the only manifestation of the painful relations of the repressive system and the enslaved individual as German's film offers us several milder versions of the same pattern of mechanical sex which symbolizes anything but love or affection and most importantly, a bare will to power expressed through sexual violence. As if preparing the audience for the central rape scene German rehearses the same or similar

situations of loveless sex over and over again. Thus the general's son is attacked and ridiculed by his Jewish girl-cousins for masturbation, the general imperturbably allows his co-worker to fellate him in the office and later, attempting to avoid being arrested, spends a night with his servant who asks him to impregnate her – a task which the general can comically hardly cope with.

As Alexandra Sviridova points out, the general's rape is the only passionate scene in the whole film. And it is a peculiar passion of violence which the system performs in relation to its former elite member through the medium of its declassed and downtrodden elements – the criminals and the prison guards who feel perversely happy that they can degrade the general. Such a rape is needed by the system to subjugate and destroy the individual as such rather than receive sexual pleasure. Or maybe the latter is defined by and is inseparable from the former (Sviridova 2004).

In Dorfman's play this anxiety and a sinister realization that it is impossible to build a healthy society in a raped country is expressed in the play on the word 'irreparable', which is first used in the official judicial discourse (Paulina's husband Gerardo is a successful lawyer who avoids the word 'murder' claiming that the truth and reconciliation commission should investigate only the truly 'irreparable cases'), and then is ironically picked up by Paulina herself claiming that rape is as irreparable for the victim as death. This motif is repeated again and again in Dangor's novel as well, where Lydia reflects on the impossibility of undoing rape, which is an irrevocable act like murder, and tells her husband that neither he nor Archbishop Tutu presiding over the reconciliation commission, would ever understand her because they were not raped themselves. In Danticat's case the irreparability of rape is testified by the very fate of its victim who can never cope with this trauma and two decades after, commits suicide.[3]

A milder analogue of women's objectification and dehumanizing is the Haitian tradition of testing, which as Sofi's grandmother explains, is connected with keeping the family honour. Just as in the case of rape it is man's honour that is being degraded while women's feelings are neglected, the family's honour is more important than its daughter's life which is easily dispensed with for the sake of the family and especially an incomplete family with a missing father as in their case. Disgrace is seen as irreparable as death and in the long run this is all done for the sake of the child so that she can have a good husband. However, the honest and simple ethics of folk customs duplicated in myths, multiply fails as the

good, honest, and honourable daughters of the Caco family are not rewarded in an expected fairytale way. There is no justice and no happiness for the 'good girls' that the Caco sisters strove to be. The feelings of disappointment and resentment are formulated by an aged and callused tante Atie: 'They train you to find a husband . . . They poke at your panties in the middle of the night, to see if you are still whole. They listen when you pee, to find out if you're peeing too loud. If you pee loud, it means you've got big spaces between your legs. They make you burn your fingers learning to cook. Then still you have nothing' (Danticat 1994, p. 136). But again as in other cases this seemingly low-key discussion of a questionable local custom and the ethical dilemmas of its naive disciples acquires a wider political meaning.

Although Danticat's novel does not specifically focus on the idea of repentance and reconciliation with the past or the endless reproduction of the violence paradigm, indirectly we feel the presence of these motifs all the time as they affect the lives of the main characters. Thus the first part of the novel closes with 12-year-old Sofi's trip to the USA which takes place on an important day in Haitian contemporary history when the national airport was renamed from Duvalier to just Mais Gate (a name of the region). This is an indirect way of historicizing the events because the airport was renamed in 1986 when Duvalier's son resigned as president and a new period in Haitian history started, and was immediately marked with more violence. Little Sofi witnesses a constantly crying boy on board the plane, whose father – an important government official – was assassinated just before the trip. The author gently shows that the inhumane regime has its own children who might be unhappy because of yet another coup. Sofi is able to sympathize with the boy because of their common destiny – the orphaned child is going to the USA to his only remaining relative, his father's sister, while Sofi is taken away from her aunt to face her unknown mother. In this short and marginal episode women's love and devotion to children stands above any politics.

Later, in one of the chapters in the Haitian part of the novel, we are shown that nothing has changed. The same airport offers a stark contrast between its mural depicting a simplified myth of happy Haitians toiling in the cane fields and the poor and hungry people begging for food and money in the airport. The grown-up Sofi witnesses the same Tonton Macoutes killing an innocent coal vendor for nothing. We are then shown that no matter what political regime is there, the violence is still present in the everyday texture of Haitian life.

The narratives of political sexual violence and succeeding traumas share the leitmotif of suicide or its symbolic re-enactment. The raped woman automatically traverses the boundary between the human and the subhuman. She becomes a being dreaming of death. And the bitter fruit conceived at this moment, paradoxically saves her from the suicide because the maternal instinct turns out to be stronger than her humiliation and shame. Deprived of even such a fruit Dorfman's Paulina is doomed (it is not accidental that in the Russian stage adaptation of this play she indeed commits suicide). Left alone to fight with her ghosts and nightmares by the daughter who got married and moved away, Martine in Danticat's book also kills herself in the end while her daughter attempts a symbolic suicide by destroying her own virginity in a violent act of self-rape with a pestle, causing multiple injuries and a subsequent sex-phobia. All of this is in fact a revolt against her mother's betrayal of their trust.

The theme of suicide also has a typically Caribbean reverberation in Danticat's novel – it is a non-final metamorphosis interpreted as liberation when death means only a change from one state to another. Sofi wraps a cruel story of her self-mutilation into a myth of the goddess Erzulie, the patroness of all mothers who is saving the bleeding woman through making her a butterfly that is taking her from one world into another and thus setting her free and eventually resurrecting (Danticat 1994, pp. 87–9). Metamorphosis is evoked again at the very end of the novel when Martine's death is interpreted by her daughter, who is ardently rejecting the conventional Christian afterlife imaginary, as a liberation and a subsequent transfer to a non-human condition – a bird, a butterfly, a star.

Metamorphosis as a typical trickster mode of existence characterizes General Klensky in German's film. In the course of the cinematic narrative starting from the episode in the very beginning when Klensky accidentally meets his own double, the general disappears and reappears many times, each time changing his look and his identity and each time going farther and farther away from his original self.

In this context it is also interesting to analyse the scene of Lydia and Silas's quarrel after his accidental meeting with Dubois in Dangor's novel. It ends with Lydia's hospitalization as a result of her masked suicide attempt. The corporeal memory of violence and the typical Dangorian juggling of gender roles come forward once again. Here it is not expressed as an erotic subtext but rather through the fact that the woman is trying to explain her trauma and tragedy to her husband using the language of

predictable stereotypes which is the only language he is able to understand. For this purpose she sips flat beer from his bottle (that is literally takes in hops – the bitter fruit that beer is made of), somehow appropriating through this bitter taste a male role, in order to speak to Silas like a man. Doing this Lydia in fact humiliates and objectifies herself as a woman and blames her husband not for his lack of feeling (this she would do only in her personal diary not meant for anyone's eyes) but for his lack of manliness: 'If you were a real man, you would have killed him on the spot . . . He took your woman, he fucked your wife . . . I became his property' (Dangor 2001, p. 17). The succeeding dance of the barefoot Lydia on the deliberately broken beer glass is a complex form of transference from the failed murder of Dubois and the mental picture of his streaming blood, to Lydia's own quite real bleeding feet.

Meg Samuelson accused Dangor of not giving Lydia a voice, not being able to take her position, claiming that he wrote a story not about the victim's suffering, but about male honour and revenge whereas women remained totally dehumanized (Samuelson 2004). An epigraph from the novel *My Son's Story* by another South African writer, Nadine Gordimer (Gordimer 2012), in a way reiterates this interpretation. It presents the main character Alia who resembles Lydia in many ways yet ultimately makes a different choice – asserting herself in the form of participation in underground political activism.

7.3 Decolonizing 'Death and the Maiden'

One of the important leitmotifs which is openly or indirectly present, discussed or challenged in all the works under consideration is the 'death and the maiden' motif which is obviously linked with stereotypes of sexually insatiable women and androcentric misogyny and repressed sexuality combined with devout religiosity and purism. As a result all violent and perverse forms of behaviour are projected onto women, who are announced to be the real causes of violence and even accused of being able to experience pleasure while being raped. This motif is repeated many times, offending the victim many years after the rape. The daughter of the main character in *Grbavica* is a female version of the bitter fruit who accuses her mother of promiscuity before she learns the real story of her birth. Dr Miranda accuses the tortured Paulina of awakening a beast in him, justifying his atrocity by the fact that women can experience sexual pleasure while raped. The white rapist Du Boise in Dangor's novel adds

racist stereotypes to the patriarchal ones calling Lydia a black cunt, enjoying the rape, whereas her husband Silas is afraid of her cries, unable to differentiate between the non-human sounds of post-verbal humiliation and carnal pleasure.

The rapist as a reincarnation of death is not present in Danticat's novel yet we encounter several times his fellow Tonton Macoutes who after almost twenty years continue to bring only death, humiliation, and violence as exemplified in the structurally marginal yet quite important scene of the murder of the innocent Dessalines – a street vendor. Closer to the end of the novel Danticat offers folklore and real explanations of the Tonton Macoutes' monstrous nature, the fact that neither god nor devil created them – in fairytales, a Tonton Macoute is a bogey-man with a knapsack full of naughty children's flesh that he dismembers and eats. But still there is a special ethics here – only naughty children can be kidnapped by a Tonton Macoute. Outside the fairytale complete lawlessness, lack of any rights, and anomie prevail: 'they roamed the streets in broad daylight, parading their Uzi machine-guns . . . When they entered a house, they asked to be fed, demanded the woman of the house, and forced her into her own bedroom. Then all you heard was screams until it was her daughter's turn. If a mother refused, they would make her sleep with her son and brother and even her own father' (Danticat 1994, p. 139). Moreover, it is known that Tonton Macoutes as well as their master dictator Papa Doc, who proclaimed himself the god of death, practised voodoo and used to frighten the population with making zombies out of their deceased relatives. So Sofi's mother's rape is an insemination by death. Yet, in the end, the bitter fruit in contrast with Dangor's book turns out to be the life-affirming and love-emanating Sofi who is saving her mother's life and whose leitmotif colour is a positive and creative yellow, a daffodil, whereas her mother is associated with red – in this context, the colour of blood and passionate revenge.

The 'death and the maiden' narrative clearly demonstrates one of the main defects of modernity – the dehumanizing of the enemy/victim and avoiding the responsibility for the enemy's death or torture by means of various rhetorical figures and empty shells such as human rights, patriotism, and spirituality. Franz Hinkelammert called this a mechanism of inversion of human rights and proved that the very idea of human rights carried the possibility of judicial asymmetry – the rights of one group of people were asserted at the expense of another group

and the spilled blood tarnished the victim and not the murderer (Hinkelammert 2004).

David Luban calls this principle a fascist one and points out that 'ideologically fascism glorifies violence and cruelty . . . projecting onto its victims the fascist's own reservoir of repressed vileness. In that way, it morally justifies the unthinkable. The more brutal the desires, the more their objects deserve brutality . . . And the proof is that they arouse uncivilized desires in civilized men' (Luban 1998, p. 130). The logic described here is a realization of coloniality of being and gender, whereas fascism – according to the famous Aimé Césaire's saying – is merely a colonialism brought into Europe (Césaire 2000, p. 36) – a local manifestation of this dehumanizing tendency, which is manifested in its utmost form in relation to racialized and colonized people. Nelson Maldonado-Torres expressed this idea in a vivid form: 'While in war there is murder and rape, in the hell of the colonial world murder and rape become day to day occurrences and menaces. "Killability" and "rapeability" are inscribed into the images of the colonial bodies . . . The Black man is depicted as an aggressive sexual beast who desires to rape women, particularly White. The Black woman, in turn, is seen as always already sexually available to the raping gaze of the White and as fundamentally promiscuous' (Maldonado-Torres 2007, p. 255).

The 'death and the maiden' archetype carries an encrypted form of the Eve myth of the temptress who brought both shame and mortality on humanity. This motif is transformed in Northern European visual arts from the sixteenth century on, into an almost obscene narrative of the maiden seducing Death. That is why in Dorfman's play Schubert's string quartet acquires an additional highly problematic meaning. For Paulina this music is associated with civilization, culture, enlightenment, and beauty, whereas the playing of Schubert's quartet during her rape and humiliation deprives the heroine of any pleasure from listening to this music in the future. But in Luban's idea, this civilization itself is highly problematic as it continues to uphold such narratives as 'death and the maiden'. This is a civilization grounded in a justification of violence. Hence the image of the swamp – a shaky and unstable ground, a primordial abyss, a Freudian 'Id', a reminder of the womb. Dr Miranda feels that he is plunging into this swamp, as his humanistic principles are replaced with a cold 'scientific' interest and sexual arousal when he starts to rape Paulina (Dorfman 1994, p. 59).

7.4 To Forget and Forgive, or a Multilayered Betrayal

The main dilemma of all the works in question is the opposition between the inadequate official justice and the tramped interests and dignity of the victims of political rape whose possible revenge remains outside of law. Forgive and forget is the recipe of Paulina's and Lydia's husbands Gerardo and Silas working in truth and reconciliation commissions in Chile and South Africa respectively, the two optimists or maybe conformists, working on 'reconciling the irreconcilable' (Dangor 2001, p. 29). They are ready to make the unsavoury compromises under the guise of moderation and impartiality, exchanging democracy for the amnesty of political criminals. Dangor sarcastically points out that his character instead of the black-and-white moral oppositions was an adherent of a 'gray shadowy morality' (Dangor 2001, p. 165). But this forgetting and forgiving, and later rehabilitation of the torturers, who are manipulating Eichmann's style arguments from Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Arendt 1963), in order to justify their cruelty – is not only a compromise necessary for pushing the society forward, but also a betrayal of concrete people – in this case, both heroines who refuse to forget and forgive and for whom rape is not an abstract infringement upon honour and property, but a real hell, pain, and humiliation.

Yet, the theme of betrayal is enfolded at several levels including the most intimate level of spouses' relations. Male characters in Dorfman's play and Dangor's novel are not simply cowards, but also manipulative egotists. They are interested only in their own hurt feelings and not in what the rape victims had to go through. Both distance themselves from this trauma, persuading everyone around that it is better that way for their wives. Gerardo does not even ask Paulina what kind of torture was performed on her until the critical moment when she captures Dr Miranda. Silas who had almost witnessed Lydia's rape, even tried to drown out her screams with his own cries and later avoided touching her in disgust which in the end acted as the main boundary forever separating her from her husband and allowing her to make a choice in favour of the bitter fruit of rape – her future son Michael. The spouses' mutual deafness and the lack of any communication between them are largely a result of this betrayal and the subsequent complete loneliness of the rape victims. In Dangor's novel this motif is expressed through the diary as the only space where one can confide one's most intimate trials (Lydia's diary, Ali Ali's

diary, Kafka's *Diaries*). The main theme of Lydia's diary is the appropriation of her pain by other people (Dangor 2001, p. 127) and the endless accusation of victims of being sinful.

In Žbanić's film the main character Esma is not able to become a part of the community of rape victims for a long time – at the group therapy she is sitting separately and avoids any bodily contact with others, she is silent and stares directly into the camera when others close their eyes and give themselves up to the musical catharsis. Her everyday speech is phony in the sense that she never discusses anything that she really cares about. Like many rape victims, Esma longs to tell about her tragedy, but her painful muteness forbids her to do so, she is waiting for empathy yet at the same time curls up into a ball and sticks her spines out refusing to be pitied. Only her confrontation with Sara, the physical 'victory' over her daughter and the finally blurted out words that Sara is not the child of a Muslim martyr but rather a Chetnik's bastard, set free Esma's ability to speak about the past.

Danticat's rape victim even looks very similar to Esma – she is thin, unfeminine, exhausted, and poor – at least by US standards. Like a gastarbeiter from Vyacheslav Useinov's installation *Gastarbeiter's Flight* (Useinov 2016) she made a long journey to a different world to find the same humiliation, overwork, and exhaustion as if she never left the cane fields of Haiti. Just like Esma who is working day shifts at a factory and night shifts as a waitress at a noisy night club, Martine has to have several jobs (a nurse, a maid, and other such occupations) in order to be able to send money home for her abandoned child, old mother, and illiterate sister. This is her way of soothing her feeling of guilt and showing her love for Sofi. In Žbanić's film Esma's position is a bit different because she never left her daughter. In the scene where Esma buys fresh fish with the last of her money and gives it entirely to Sara while feeding on plain bread herself there is only infinite love and no guilt.

But there is an additional overtone involved in Esma's case that has to do with the specific postsocialist and post-civil war decline in social status. In a sense it brings us back to the story of the Prologue. Esma was a college student before the war and aspired to be a professional woman yet after her rape and humiliation, after she lost most of her close relatives, after the birth of Sara, she has no choice but to forget her former aspirations. The director shows us also that this is not a unique situation but rather a trend of Bosnian society as the surviving Esma's classmates all work at menial jobs and her new boyfriend is a gangster's bodyguard while

before he was a medical student. Esma and Martine share their lost hopes of becoming 'important women' as Martine puts it, meaning women doctors and engineers. But they come to this condition from different ends – one goes upwards materially – changing one form of colonialism to another but always retaining the unfreedom behind. The other goes downward from a peculiar Yugoslavian form of Socialist modernity with its meagre but still functioning social equality and security and women's rights, through the terrible war crimes and to her present morbid and broken-down condition of mechanical survival and oppressive responsibility which is only alleviated by a genuine love for her daughter.

Both Esma and Martine seem to be too cold and at times rough in relation to their children, unable to demonstrate their maternal love. The unspeakable rape emerges out of the bits and pieces of different information only much later allowing us to put the stories of their lives together. Martina is particularly cruel to her daughter as she shows the stubborn selfish possessiveness of a victim when she kicks out the bleeding Sofi practically into the street, secretly hoping that she will be humiliated by her man and will come back begging for forgiveness. It is more important for Martina to be right in her worst suspicions than for her daughter to be happy.

In Dangor's and Dorfman's cases the theme of betrayal is also expressed literally in the fact that both Silas and Gerardo are not faithful to their wives. The rape victims become the victims of infidelity on the part of those who initially were the reason for violence. So the identification of husbands with rapists, along with physiological reasons for projecting the image of the torturer onto all men and the inerasable embodied memory of the violent penetration, is accompanied by a quite rational argument intensifying the victim's moral right to revenge and reciprocal violence. The brilliant lawyer Gerardo, so ardently advocating equality in considering the interests of all parties involved, knows that his girlfriend Paulina is being tortured, and cheats on her at the same time. In Dangor's book Silas's affair with his companion in arms not only jeopardizes the unsuspecting Lydia and Michael, but happens at the moment when his lover's husband is in prison, which in Lydia's moral system only aggravates their guilt.

As for Danticat's novel here the betrayal acquires additional meanings. Tante Atie's suitor leaves her for another woman, Martine's American lover, a well-off Haitian immigrant Mark proves to be irresponsible (he impregnates her knowing that she is psychologically unstable and haunted

by rape nightmares) and callous (he sleeps while she is stabbing herself in a bathroom next to him and then slowly bleeds to death), unable to save her from suicide. In the all-women world of the Caco family all the encountered men remain childish, die early, or refuse to take responsibility, often betraying their women (the only exception is Sofi's African-American husband Joseph). Betrayal is represented also through the mother–daughter relationships and especially in the Haitian specific custom of testing the daughter's virginity which is a leitmotif holding the narrative together. Although we are given an official explanation of this humiliating process which interprets it as a result of Haitian sexism and cruel prejudice against girls growing up with no fathers, girls whose virtue would be forever suspicious, and also girls who are raised pure by their mothers for their future husbands, there is also a deeper, more interpersonal and even psychoanalytic side of the story which does not render mothers and women in general as totally helpless and passive.

The daughter's decision to be with a man is interpreted by her mother as a betrayal since she is herself psychologically unstable, immaturely selfish and completely lonely, safe for the daughter. Hence comes the mother's reproach for giving up 'a lifetime with her' (Danticat 1994, p. 85). But the humiliating testing itself and the lack of trust is interpreted by the daughter in her turn as a betrayal and allows her to leave her mother with no remorse. Yet as her psychoanalyst explains to Sofi later, this peculiar mother's selfishness has its roots in the fear of abandonment because your 'daughter is the only person in the world who won't leave you' (Danticat 1994, p. 210). This is a rather unusual twist of the betrayal theme which is not found in any other works analysed in this chapter. More usual is the child's reverse jealousy and fear of abandonment by the mother who attempts to find a new sexual partner, which we find in both Danticat's case where Sofi instinctively dislikes Mark, and in a more pronounced way, in *Grbavica* where a teenaged Sara rejects her mother's boyfriend for fear of abandonment.

Danticat's novel presents the sexist and patriarchal principles of Haitian society in a critical way through exposing its dehumanizing and cruel customs. Thus the birth of a new baby is celebrated only if it is a boy, the Haitian men demand their unmarried women be virgins and have all their fingers intact to do all the housework. Yet in many myths and songs there are cheating women who are invariably punished and even killed by their husbands for immorality. The old patriarchal Haitian myth of a good and decent girl who is kept innocent by her mother until she

gets married to a rich man, thanks to her virginity, certainly fails. But a different and seemingly more modern and egalitarian dream that Martine constructs in the USA, does not guarantee anything either. Her myth focuses on education as the only way to success which both Martine and her elder sister wanted to have but never did. If in Haiti testing was justified by the necessity to get a good husband, in the USA Martine justifies it by the goal of education and subsequent independence, and sees sexual promiscuity as an impediment in this task. Ultimately it is linked with Martine's deep and fundamental distrust of all and any men as well as with her damaging urge to make Sofi what she herself wanted to be (a doctor and not a secretary as the girl prefers).

7.5 Looking in the Torturer's Eyes

Anna Akhmatova predicted the emergence of the post-dependence syndrome in her 1956 words about the two Russias which would soon look into each other's eyes – the Russia which imprisoned and the Russia which was put into prison (Chukovskaya 2007). In the analysed works we see what can come out of such an encounter 'when victim and perpetrator inhabit a shared place as fellow citizens, coequals in the eyes of the law' (Gunne 2010, p. 171). At the end of *Death and the Maiden* Dorfman does not destroy the fabric of reconciliation necessary to move forward and his Paulina does not kill her torturer only to see him later at a chamber concert. In *Bitter Fruit* it is literally the bitter fruit of interracial rape – Lydia's son Michael – who becomes the instrument of murderous revenge – hinting at the impossibility of any reconciliation and testifying to the mortgaged future of South Africa as a nation violated by history.

In Alexei German's film we are drowning in the absurd world of the late Stalinist USSR with its grand imperial style presented in clearly carnivalesque and macabre more than just comical forms. The horror is never resolved or lifted; it stays with us after the end of the film. Importantly, in this world there is no difference between the free and the imprisoned people because everyone in the end is in the same prostrate position in relation to the system which has its way with anyone. Different characters simply swap their roles of the victim and the torturer in this deadly metamorphosis of Stalinist Russia.

In fact much before Akhmatova's prediction, the two Russias already meet as we witness in this film where the laws and rules are identical in prison and outside. German stresses the slavish forgiveness which leads to

a stagnant repetition of the same situation of eternal submission. This key mood is not expressed in any fabulaic way, but only hinted at in the temporal lag of the narrator – the general's son who is telling the story from a different time and complains that no one remembers the Persian lilac growing in their street, thus pointing not only to subjective time but also to the physical and mental violence of the system which dictates how to remember to those who are left.

The camera eye which Mikhail Yampolsky thinks to be corresponding to the teenaged boy's (the general's son's) view (Yampolsky 1999), in fact is hardly always restricted by just that. There are many events in the film that the boy simply could not witness, such as his father's rape or Stalin's death. If the director intended to give us only such a restricted childish view it would have been a version of reduced consciousness in the style of Benjy Compson in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. However, one day from the life of General Klensky is narrated not only by his son but also by Alexei German himself using his own unique cinematic language, and conveying the violent system's ventriloquism. This latter voice and this regard are particularly horrifying and invisible in the film's fabric.

The final scene takes place ten years after the 1953 spring events. It opens the film to the outside but not in the usual way of looking into the future. Rather German stresses once again the painful inescapable bondage as an eternal inevitable human condition in Russia. One can escape it only through nothingness or a 'phenomenological disappearance' as Yampolsky calls this effect (Yampolsky 1999). In the end we even learn that the main character was neither among the arrested nor among the dead. He literally became nothing and nobody. This is a paraphrase of an old Russian theme of a stranger, who escapes from life. But in German's film it is presented in the entourage of the late Stalinist époque.

This phenomenological disappearance from the material world of objects is put in the ground of the philosophical mechanics of the film, from time to time splashing into its material details. Thus the unity of space creates a theatrical illusion. It is a viscid space, from any point of which one can fall down into the real burning hell. In Margolit's idea, 'the space is unified to such an extent that all interiors turn into each other just with a camera movement instead of traditional montage technique. The Kuleshov effect triumphs in its elaborate and deliberate creation of space. This space is a unified labyrinth where all characters wander around' (Margolit 1999).

Yet this dream-like nature of reality has a concrete historical explanation, as in the case of most other examples analysed in this chapter. All this was not simply dreamt by the hero or the author but in a sense happened just like that or could have happened. A constant redoubling of metaphysics and politics creates a specific tension and makes German's film particularly multilayered. Likewise, in apartheid South Africa, in Pinochet's Chile, and in Duvalier's Haiti the traceless and unmotivated disappearances of people also take a mundane and habitual form as in any lawless system which does not want to waste time on even farcical justice. And if in the case of Haiti or to some extent South Africa, the mythology of disappearances is tinted in folklore shades (take for instance the Tonton Macoutes' connection to the folkloric cannibalistic bogeyman), in Stalin's USSR the mass disappearance of people triggers its own mythology. It evolves around the black NKVD cars, trucks with 'bread' and 'Soviet Champaign' commercials on their sides, hiding torture sites in their innards, and even through the seemingly childish version of Oberiu poet Daniel Harms's 1937 poem about a man who disappeared in the woods. This leitmotif is never softened with any fairytale overtones. Mikhail Yampolsky formulated the essence of this negative phenomenology of the Stalinist terror which lies in the ground of German's film as well: 'The ability of people and objects to disappear, this way of existence marked by negativity is of course, the main way of being for the Stalin's époque . . . Stalin's reality is a horrendous equivalent of the phenomenological reality, people here disappear and reemerge . . . Cause and effect connections are broken, there is only phenomenological intentionality . . . that stock of nothingness which is contained in its very way of existence' (Yampolsky 1999).

There is no repentance and nothing really changes. Under any regime the human being remains nothing. Therefore I disagree with Alexandra Sviridova's idea that in this film we encounter the coming of the new historical time, the beginning of its countdown from Stalin's death and Beria's words 'Khrustalyov, my car' (Sviridova 2004). Because we know that nothing has really changed not only ten years after but also today. So I am more inclined to agree with Akosh Siladi who said that in this film German confesses that he lost faith in Russia (Siladi 1999). German himself was more cautious and in one interview commented that 'with all its horror the film shows love for our strange people who are capable of forgiving anything and everything' (German 2008). Yet he hardly regards this as a positive feature although he does not discuss it openly. Because

forgiveness in this context clearly reads as an expression of the slave mentality, of the slave essence of Russia and Russians.[4] Almost twenty years later, the director would confess once again in his peculiar cinematic way that he lost faith not only in Russia but in humankind as such – in his unfinished *Hard to be a God* (2013). The god-forsakenness of Russia and of humankind as such is probably the most depressing conclusion of all German's works. He diagnoses our world of death which is not worth saving and must disappear to make space for other yet non-existent worlds. Hence there are many intrusive Christian parallels in *Khrustalyov, my Car* which invariably lack any piety and are presented in a grotesque and mocking way. For a number of spectators and critics it is unbearable to agree with this and they still insist that the film retains the classical binary of god and devil (and Stalin as its incorporation). However, I think that *Khrustalyov*'s world lacks a heavenly vertical, or any transcendence, and this is its principal difference with the director's previous films. Hardly can we regard as such a vertical heavenly dimension the glass of port-wine balancing on the ex-general's head in the final scene of the film.

In the case of *Grbavica* the author is less radical in her negativism and still attempts to offer some way out. Her characters try to build a national identity and induce a sincere local patriotism at least in the younger generation of Bosnians in spite of all unrepressed traumas, open wounds, and unresolved everyday problems. The aggressive and negatively charged Sara attempts a symbolic suicide similar to Lydia and Sofi (she shaves off her hair which, as her mother said, she inherited from her father). Yet at the same time Sara resurrects herself through this act hesitantly learning to love her mother with a new understanding of their shared condition, attempting to join the kids' community in the bus, singing together a patriotic song about Sarajevo.

In contrast with Sara who is looking for her identity in native Sarajevo, Lydia's son Michael carries an alien, forcibly imposed identity and therefore chooses an absolutely rational and cold way of independent construction of his new self, grounded in a consciously selected Sufi basis which the author conventionally associates with terrorism. Having killed Du Boise and having been born anew, Michael chooses a new Muslim name for himself – Nur – meaning light. It is not by chance that he is heading back to India tracing the steps of Silas's father Ali Ali (Hamed Chothia), who is not even his blood relative, thus denouncing both Lydia and Silas, both apartheid and its communist opposition.

Any totalitarian system, be it Stalinist USSR or apartheid South Africa, requires and receives the absolute fidelity and paradoxical solidarity of victims and torturers. Those raped by the system easily collaborate with it for a rare breath of fresh air and a rare illusion of power over those who are even weaker – women, children, the politically repressed. In Dangor's case we find a deadly sick society which got rid of apartheid but retained a strange aftertaste of being happy if the former colonizers suffer. In the perverse logic of Alexei German's film a similar rationale is used by the criminals raping the general in the wagon: let him suffer and then we will be happy. One of them finishes the scene of the atrocious torture with the words 'How nice, f**k!' This is not merely an expression of his sexual satisfaction but also the joy he takes from humiliating a representative of the elite.

The opposite side of these metastases of violence is a dehumanizing fear making people erase their identities and invent new ones to survive the Soviet/colonial system. This sick power often acquires sexually violent forms and resonates with (post)colonial psychic deviations analysed by Fanon. There is no way out of this system except into a non-systematic exteriority abundantly represented in Soviet and post-Soviet fiction and cinema in many lumpenized characters – the cleaners, homeless, drunks, stockers, or train conductors as in the case of German's general who refuses to come back to his 'successful' life and opts for eternal transit, in-betweenness, and rootlessness in his huge and enigmatic country resembling an endless empty field where everyone is alien to each other.

7.6 A Visit of a Monster, or a Father with No Face

An important theme re-emerging in all post-dependence narratives is the encounter with the rapist or his ghost which drastically changes the characters' way of life. This unpleasant event can also be eventually helpful as it allows them to liberate from the coloniality of memory, but can also lead to despair and death. The bio-political violence of the repressive system is easily materialized through monster figures. Therefore structurally several of the analysed works use the same element pushing the narrative forward. It is the visit of the monster from the past which turns on the work of memory and revenge. Because 'history has a remembering process of its own, one that gives life to its imaginary monsters' (Dangor 2001, p. 32). This device is particularly

dramatic in Dorfman's play, where Gerardo literally brings the monster home with him. But in Dangor's narrative as well, Silas's reminding of Du Boise becomes for Lydia a reiteration of violence: 'I can't rest peacefully with both of you around, your bodies, your smells, even your sounds have become all mixed up. It's like he raped me on your behalf, so that one day I would live with him through you . . . He made you his instrument' (Dangor 2001, p. 123). In Žbanić's film the monster is not materialized even in flashbacks or the main character's dreams as Esma's mind and imagination remain opaque to the audience throughout the narrative. But the expression in her frightened eyes and her clumsy bodily movements when confronted with physical contact of any kind, betray the invisible monstrous presence.

The faceless Sofi's father who raped a 16-year-old Martine in a cane filed is most probably a Tonton Macoute that is literally, a monster who is defined in Danticat's novel very meagrely through several indirect details like the eggplant colour of his hair. He never appears personally in the book but the place of the crime itself becomes an important ritual space of liberation for Sofi, and by association, for her already dead mother. Spaces carry traces of the past crimes but also possibilities for resurrection. The novel ends with the scene through which Danticat proclaims the superiority of Haitian women's family ties of genuine love and their more powerful liberating drives of compassion and empathy than any kind of Western (often male-centred) psychoanalysis or even voodoo exorcism can offer.

The keywords in this sense are Sofi's clairvoyant grandmother's words in the manner of Haitian oral narrative call and response tradition: 'Ou libere?' calls the grandmother, as Sofi is fiercely tramping, beating and pounding the sugar-cane field – the symbolic place of her mother's rape and her own conception, but also in more general terms, the curse of Haiti. This lets her finally get rid of her trauma, and reconcile with the burden of her memory, with the past, which is carried from a place like Haiti, 'like the hair on your head' (Danticat 1994, p. 234). She is then able to answer positively that she is indeed free. The past which we cannot escape, which is as naturally inherited from our parents as the hair on our heads, is one of the most powerful images in this novel and an indirect way of reconciling even with Sofi's rapist father, whose eggplant coloured hair she literally inherited. The magic of this liberating place in Danticat's book is ambivalent; it is a rape-site but also a space where a child was made and later became free, a space where the dead mother and her daughter can

communicate and exchange the traditional Haitian 'ou libere' call and response that in their case acquires deeply personal overtones.

Curiously both *Grbavica* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* also invert the monster's archetype through the images of disturbed mothers turning into monsters. Both works start immediately with an ominous and traumatic mood. It is disturbing mostly because the mother figure in the novel and in the film contradicts the generally accepted and normalized mother archetype. The mother is supposed to love, protect, and educate. But if the mother herself is a rape victim, a creature haunted by nightmares and phobias and/or forced to leave her child, and is later unable to reunite with her or express love in any human way, the story immediately becomes less idyllic. Therefore we find a variety of substitute images such as the missing mother, the mother as a monster or as a madwoman, and potentially a self-damaging actor. Thus, in Danticat's book the little girl Sofi, who is blessed with her aunt's love and protection for the first twelve years of her Haitian childhood, identifies her missing mother with a framed picture and a panopticon surveying eye. The child suffers from nightmares in which the mother chases her and attempts to squeeze her into the picture until the aunt saves the girl.

Later the monstrous image of the mother gives way to a pitiful victim suffering from her own nightmares. And now it is Sofi who saves her, acting in the unnatural role of her own mother's protector which is at times too hard for a young girl. Sofi also inherits her mother's nightmares and is haunted by suicidal thoughts and affected by bulimia. Her own childhood mother archetype so strikingly different from the real emotionally immature and vengeful mother, is the powerful goddess Erzulie, the 'lavish virgin mother' (Haitian African spirit of love and beauty) who is protecting and understanding of all women and desired by all men.

The monsters that we actually encounter in Dangor's and Dorfman's cases are presented as disgusting and pitiful beings desperately claiming their innocence to save their lives and the remaining semblance of 'honour'. They never repent. The authors reflect on this sad result even if they attempt to find more illusory variants of exodus for their characters. Thus, Lydia has gradually reacquired her sense of dignity but has continued to feel the double dictate of humiliation and dehumanization both on the part of the rapist and on the part of her own husband. Moreover they are merging in her perception, when she refuses to take part in the hearings and publicly accuse Du Boise, thus depriving Silas of the opportunity to

play the courageous and stoic husband, in reality remaining quite insensitive to her trauma.

Du Boise on the contrary, files an appeal for the public hearings, claiming his innocence in all rape and torture cases including Lydia (Dangor 2001, p. 161) and thus reinstating once again the situation of lawlessness and lack of choice for Lydia even after the end of apartheid. Dr Miranda up to the very end keeps insisting on his innocence and Paulina's fatal mistake, using the fact that she was blindfolded and therefore cannot remember anything but the voice and the sound of the music and these are quite unreliable proofs. In Dorfman's play the question of Miranda's guilt remains open till the end whereas in Polanski's film the accents are more obvious and the audience understands that he indeed is guilty. The same is true of the Moscow 'Other Theatre' performance (2009) based on this work.

In *Bitter Fruit* the meeting with the monster is a mirror situation of the one described in St Petersburg poet Olga Berggoltz's poem. She was tortured by NKVD officers while being pregnant and as a result she lost her child. Many years later, after Stalin's death Berggoltz met her torturer at some public meeting. In contrast with Du Boise who is afraid of revenge the NKVD torturer is not afraid of anything and approaches the poet himself with the words: 'Olga Fyodorovna, do you remember me?' Berggoltz silently turns and walks away (Berggoltz 2011), something which Lydia probably would like to do as well. The reason is the difference between the way the situation is seen by the victim herself, as anyone who went through torture would never again be able to trust people in general, and the more detached and objective stance of the victim's relatives, such as Gerardo and Silas.

The authors draw attention to the disgusting bodily expressions of the torturers' and rapists' nature, testifying to their internal decay: the balding Du Boise with dandruff and false teeth, not particularly well off, judging by the items in his supermarket basket, a man with a sickening smell, which for almost twenty years has been cautiously sniffed by Lydia in her son Michael, similarly to Esma watching for the possible signs of the alien presence in the blue eyes of her daughter Sara, the colour of which she probably inherited from one of her mother's rapists. Du Boise has skin cancer, which marks him like some stigmata. He is doomed yet attempts to plead non-guilty, fitfully grabbing at his semblance of life.

Roberto Miranda in *Death and the Maiden* is humiliated by Paulina in a demonstratively corporeal way in her act of reciprocal sexual cruelty and a

problematic change of gender roles – in this case the roles of the torturer and the victim. In Polanski's film this theme is presented even more clearly, intersecting with the general link of sexuality and violence. In imitation of sexual humiliation Paulina publicly takes off her underwear and stuffs it into the doctor's mouth as a gag, bites off the wires on his ankles with her teeth, straddles him and takes him to the toilet herself to humiliate the doctor even more, nonchalantly discussing with Gerardo if they should rape Miranda with a broomstick. But ultimately Paulina is doomed as she is locked with her husband in their own little hell and also in the civilization of violence – both in the form of rape and in the form of betrayal.

Something similar but with a racialized post-apartheid shade we find in Dangor's novel, although he certainly offers a more optimistic culmination – having gone through twenty years of associating her husband with the rapist and the impossibility of breaking free from the civilization which disciplines women, Lydia abruptly ends her marriage to experience sexual pleasure from a contact with a different man for the first time in many years, an encounter not grounded in the sick logic of humiliation, suppression, and betrayal.

In German's film several characters act as monsters in their turn – the general's son who reported on his father, though is later casually informed by this very father that it is too late to call the NKVD now and he is already rehabilitated; the general himself on several occasions before his arrest, when he still belongs to the elite and to the Soviet system; and minor characters through whom the violence of the system speaks, as this system is capable of violating anyone at any time using anything as its instrument. Finally, there are the negative-corporeal manifestations of monstrosity expressed in the image of the dying Stalin, lying in his own excrement and farting in the face of unsightly death.

In *Grbavica* we also find the sickening aura of fear and pain around the victim who is carrying her monster inside herself and unable to get rid of the post-traumatic syndrome. Moreover, Grbavica itself is a 'site of memory', which is not lovingly cherished but rather artificially destroyed and driven into silence and nothingness. However, the mute walls of the cheap Socialist buildings, in Žbanić's words, betray 'the presence of something unspoken and invisible, the strange feeling that you have when you are in a place that was marked by a big human suffering' (Žbanić 2015). Esma's stooping figure, her demonstratively unfeminine sideways walk, her whole constrained and awkward body – all of these visual details as well as the

abundance of Esma's silent close-ups (she is not yet able to reacquire her voice and rational words to tell about her pain, but is just staring directly into the camera never even blinking), hint to the clueless audience at some psychological complex, depression, and fear.

The film also has a telling title – Grbavica is not only a real suburb of Sarajevo, which went through a siege and later became a site for a Bosnian war prisoners camp, where thousands of women were systematically raped, but also a word meaning a woman with a hunch. The main character recollects corporeally her humiliation and pain, as she cringes every time when she finds herself in physical closeness to a man or in a situation of physical restraint.

In German's case as in *Grbavica*, there is no actual meeting with the monster, but the voice of the narrator who turns out to be the general's grown-up son reflecting on the past from the present, is in fact that monster who is telling the story. This makes us realize once again that nothing has really changed and there is no difference between the past and the present, that the nightmare has never ended with a happy ending and our lives are as fragile and precarious as before. German's last work *Hard to be a God* (2013) is an almost Fanonian reflection on the tragic universe and a tragic humankind refusing to grow up and take responsibility and therefore doomed to perish (Fanon 1963, p. 307). This theme is repeated in Žbanić's film – 'a film about truth, a cosmic power necessary to progress, and very much needed by society in Bosnia and Herzegovina who must strive to reach maturity' (Žbanić 2015).

The composition of the analysed works is directly linked with a specific interpretation of time and narrative viewpoint. Practically all the victims of violence live in the present and by the present. In fact, they can survive only by rejecting their past and avoiding thinking of the future. According to Culberston (Culbertson 1995, p. 170), the semblance of life in the present, hides the real presence of the unfinished past in every minute of the rape victims' existence. Here we deal with a memory-knowledge, which is not locatable in time or easily narrated. As a result the traditional narrative forms make the embodied memory of physical violence become silent, as it cannot be expressed in any usual language. Such is the case with Lydia, whereas Silas is repeatedly associated with the past which the characters are trying to get rid of, and Michael who faces a problematic future. Such is the case with Esma, sucked dry by the tyranny of the mundane. Yet *Grbavica* does not have any traditional flashbacks taking us back to the scenes of violence, rape, or torture. In Dorfman's play they

are presented quite sparingly and exclusively in the characters' conversations and not on stage.

Dangor's chorus narrative has a complex and spiral composition turning into a divergent circles model at times. It is built around several key events, of which we learn many times in different interpretations, and usually not directly from the characters themselves, but through the author's omniscient retelling and reinterpretation, accentuating the lack of understanding of this or that event on the part of various characters. Thus the details of the old rape acquire additional overtones from Silas's recollection to Lydia's diary, from Michael's reflections to the voices of secondary characters that also happen to be linked with this tragic story. Dangor links various events according to the associative principle, reminiscent of Proust, but in his case the palpable recollections are usually traumatic and unpleasant. As a result the author creates an impression of the character's real internal monologue or even a stream of consciousness although in reality it is a much more traditional third-person narrative. The novel's complex and thickening spiral is gradually saturated with more and more additional characters and mysteries: first they are introduced with just one lapidary phrase or a hint and many pages later the reader finally learns what it was all about, adding the missing details from various characters' accounts and putting the narrative puzzle together. In Dorfman's play such an effect would be impossible due to the specificity of drama as such and the author had to choose a more linear and intimate narrative. This effect is preserved in Polanski's sparsely populated movie as well.

7.7 Doubling as Healing

As pointed out above the women's views on political violence, trauma, and memory are different from the male versions in several points. The most important of them is the women's accent on re-existence which may take different forms. Let us look at *Grbavica* and Danticat's novel from this perspective. It is important to avoid an ethnographic antiquarian reading of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and interpreting its second mythic layer in a folkloric way. The actually existing Haitian myths and fairytales are never reproduced verbatim. Through her characters' narrating skills the author transforms and weaves together a unique myth which is a second reality with its own personal features, creolized with more general landmarks of Haitian imaginary. This mythic creolization is achieved through what

Danticat calls doubling. The cruel and violent events in the novel are always accompanied by their mythic or fairytale rereading and remodelling by the main characters, which is their specific way of coping with unbearable reality, a Haitian form of therapy. Once reality is transformed into a myth, it becomes possible to keep one's sanity by transcending reality and affirming re-existence.

In other words, the mythmaking and storytelling in this novel are not archaic remnants of the past inhabited with stock characters, but rather, a live and open improvisational process that we witness as readers, a process in which gods and goddesses mingle with ordinary people, including the main characters of the book. Moreover, this is also the most effective therapy for coping with trauma, a therapy of loving words 'that can give wings to your feet' (Danticat 1994, p. 234) as the grandmother says to Sofi in the end of the novel.

Many of the stories told by the grandmother or tante Atie are in fact well-known travelling plots found in many traditions, but they are contextualized by Danticat in such a way that these stories often acquire additional personal dimensions as well as ambiguities usually not so typical for folklore with its clear ethical standards. Thus the grandmother's story of the little girl seduced by a lark with a pomegranate, only to be kidnapped and taken to a faraway land to its king who needs her heart to survive, is suddenly transformed into a parable in which the king's urge can be interpreted not merely as a murderous act but rather as a love angst. The little girl's cunning and her desire to stay home (literally – to keep her heart at home) acquires clear reverberations of Sofi's hard choice between a loving husband and a helpless and immature mother.

Doubling as a leitmotif of Danticat's book functions on both personal (and very intimate) and political levels and is regarded as a Haitian feature throughout its history. Sofi's body remembers pain and humiliation from her mother's testing, and soon she develops an ability to double and thus protect herself from the corporeal ordeal by completely detaching from her body and transferring into a world of pleasant emotions and recollections. Later she transfers this technique of evading pain and humiliation associated with sexuality as such, onto sexual contacts with her loving husband effectively shutting herself down during intercourse.

Doubling is taken to a political level and regarded as a Haitian feature not because of its famous voodoo practices, but more as a strange combination of self-defence mechanisms of the weak and at times schizophrenic bifurcations of the powerful, that are to be found in many repressed

societies: 'There were many cases in our history when our ancestors have doubled. Following in the voodoo tradition, most of our presidents were actually one body split in two: part flesh and part shadow. That was the only way they could murder and rape so many people and still go home to play with their children and make love to their wives' (Danticat 1994, p. 156). In Abuladze's film one of the most striking scenes is also the image of a cruel dictator who at the same time loves poetry, sings opera arias almost professionally, and is fond of children.

Haitian storytelling with its soothing redoubling of cruel and violent events is also needed to make the rape, and the way Sofi came to life, more palatable for the girl herself. First Sofi learns a fairytale version invented by her aunt – the story of a girl born out of rose petals, creek water, and a piece of sky. Then her mother gives the 12-year-old innocent girl a true account of a rape victim for which the daughter is not yet ready.

During *Grbavica*, Esma – the main character – also feeds Sara with a fairytale of her non-existent martyr father until the climactic moment when she is forced to tell the truth. These are two different mothers. Esma is a strong woman in spite of everything, and she would do anything to protect her child from any complexes of a rape victim or its progeny, and only circumstances (her daughter's cocked gun) force her to tell the truth. By contrast Martine is a weak and almost insane and therefore selfish and immature woman who needs friendly support and imposes this role onto her too young daughter. The results are similar though as both children develop the same kind of self-hatred and self-negation for being the bitter fruit of rape.

7.8 An Enemy Inside Your Own Body

Rape and either forced pregnancy as the most ancient form of genocide (as in the case of Dangor), or torture, deliberately meant to sterilize (as in the case of Dorfman) – are not simply examples of human rights violation, and not only political crimes but something rooted in the difference between male and female perception. In the women's interpretation of violence, even with additional political overtones, at a deeper level no male stereotypes dictate, associated with the transference of accent from victim to men, concentrating on shame, abstract male or national pride, and the necessity of revenge. Instead of that in the centre of attention is the suffering woman herself, a being with an inerasable bodily memory 'of

them [penises] being there [up our fannies]. Even the ones we never invited in' (Dangor 2001, p. 16).

To understand and feel this corpo-politics of being and perception is possible in its entirety only for those who themselves went through an ordeal similar to the one experienced by the general in German's film, and most importantly, who were able to conceptualize this experience. It is not by chance that the director does not show us such a radical change. The viewer is forced to look at the raped general from above, led by the cold and objective camera eye, almost mingling with the NKVD officers' viewpoint. We seem to be looking from their perspective at the miserable man crawling on the frozen earth striving to cool off his aching ass in the dirty snowy pool. He is completely devoid of any human characteristics, which is precisely the goal of such a political rape.

The exaggerated affectivity of victims and the importance of embodied memory and embodied knowledge, transcending the verbal world incapable of bringing catharsis any more, and hence, accentuating non-verbal sensations such as smells, sounds, tastes, is expressed most graphically in the fruit of rape as permanent reminders of the rapists. Their mothers' attitude tends to be contradictory as it is a struggle of maternal instinct and rejection, a mixture of pain and guilt. In Dangor's novel Lydia cannot at first decide if she is ready to keep the child, and for her everything is determined by the smell (Dangor 2001, p. 128) – one of the most primordial if not animal instincts building a powerful connection between the mother and the son (Dangor 2001, p. 120). Lydia keeps checking whether Michael smells like illness and decay – that is, like Du Boise. She starts with reflecting on the possible murder of the unwanted baby (strangling it), but only up to the moment when she picks him up for the first time. In the South African repressive system race still dominates, so that the birth of the bitter fruit of violence first of all brings a negative connotation of the complicity of the raped woman with the whites as a particular form of betrayal.

The main character of *Grbavica* also tried to get rid of the baby which was the fruit of violence but in her case the visual and auditory perception is more important in making her change her decision. Having heard her baby crying and having seen the little unwanted daughter for the first time, Esma realizes that the girl was the most beautiful thing she had seen in months. Her subsequent relation to Sara is firmly grounded in complete dedication and service. Later the sounds of Ilahija – a traditional Bosnian religious song, with which the film starts and ends – give her back the ability to speak,

be empathic, and sensitive to other people's pain. The darkest and most helpless version of this motif we find in Danticat's case where the raped and pregnant Martine did not have any control over her own body or any will left, and did not even think of aborting the child yet was haunted by nightmares featuring the rapist tearing his fruit out of her womb.

Žbanić's film has a more life-asserting basis which makes it different from other versions. In an interview the director confessed that having given birth to a baby conceived in love, she could not imagine the situation of those women who lived next to her in Grbavica and who were raped, got pregnant and gave birth to the bitter fruit of this violence. The film's script was written in between breast-feeding her own daughter and could emerge only out of love and never out of cold hatred or trampled honour.

The specific women's stance involves a relative lack of reciprocal violence as a way of revenge. Neither Esma nor Sara would ever take vengeance on the rapists, as Michael or the going mad Paulina would do. Finally an important difference is the accentuating of the unity grounded in sisterhood and close mother–daughter relations. Thus Sara and Esma, presenting an ideal, in Luce Irigaray's view, family model consisting of the mother and the daughter (Irigaray 1993), rather than Dangor's Lydia and Michael with their psychoanalytic incestuous overtones, power games, and obviously low level of empathy and understanding, are capable of transcending the trauma of violence, of healing and creating their world anew. It is not an ideal path as it starts with the gun pointed by the daughter at her mother but it is a path that is at least possible. In my view, these women's interpretation of rape, trauma, embodied memory, and transcending is able to lead beyond the vicious circle of violence to a state and a form of active self-identification that Adolfo Albán-Achinte called re-existence. But in this case the previously disenfranchised and mute subjects – through actively reworking the sounds, smells, and tastes of this world – recreate specific forms of interaction, of being, of perception, of building their lives anew and in spite of violence, making a step from the negative model of anger and revenge to the creation of something different, taking its own path and removing the contradictions of the world and its perception by humans.

Notes

1. In 1999 the film was bought by the MOMA museum in New York for its famous fourteen thousand unit cinematic department's collection of twentieth-century art.

2. This disturbing motif is developed in several parallel details revealing the basic sustenance and safety differences between the USA and Haiti. When Sofi goes jogging to lose wight while visiting in Haiti, people assume she is running away from someone. In the USA her mother first gains thirty pounds because she cannot stop eating for the future when there is no food as is the case in Haiti (Danticat 1994, p. 179) while Sofi herself develops bulimia – a mirror reflection of the same nutrition problem.
3. Dangor's novel has a direct allusion to Dorfman's play *Death and the Maiden* with its central metaphor of Schubert's D Minor string quartet, opening the possibility of problematizing the so-called humanist democratic culture or 'civilization', in the words of the doctor-torturer in Dorfman's play. In the hospital Lydia listens to the records brought by her husband and finds that all of them are joyless, including Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*. It is not by chance that this musical piece appears in Dangor's novel. Why then would Lydia think looking at Schubert's disk that 'her husband is sinister without knowing it' (Dangor 2001, p. 122). This destabilizing of the habitual meanings is linked to the accent on the darker and repressive sides of the normative Western model, which invariably dehumanizes the rape victims, turning them into merely biological dispensable lives.
4. It is not surprising that one of the unrealized ideas of Alexei German was a film about the two Russian emperors – the tyrannical Peter the Great who was forgiven for the imperial grandeur that he brought to Russia, and Alexander II, who banned serfdom, established a rather democratic and egalitarian judicial system yet remained hated and forgotten.

CHAPTER 8

Afterword: An Open Finale

The world is changing so fast and so drastically today that we cannot know what even the closest future will bring. Any concrete predictions on the development of the postsocialist and postcolonial dialogues in theory, social reality, or in verbal and visual arts would be inevitably speculative. The new cohorts of dispensable lives constantly join the global ranks of the disenfranchised and inevitably also become part of the unhealthy victimhood competition with other such groups that modernity/coloniality has been generating for centuries. This refers for instance to the recent increased migration flow into the European Union. Interestingly enough the so-called migration crisis has even pushed aside the previously more acute problem of fortress Europe refusing to accept Eastern European and post-Soviet migrants and/or racializing and subalternizing them to the extreme. Today's situation for the umpteenth time has deprived the postsocialist other of the opportunity to become a model minority in comparison with the demonized Muslims. In an openly racist sense this unhealthy discourse has flourished in Eastern Europe itself which has demonstrated not only a sad continuation of the catching-up and lagging behind logic in its eagerness to finally be considered European without the degrading epithets of 'new' or 'peripheral', but also a new overtone of grievances in not being favoured over the 'Arabs' and also being forced to buy European status through sharing responsibilities for the migrants along with much more economically successful and politically independent countries.

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This is connected with the differences in the interpretation of memory and responsibility. If in Western Europe the main event of the twentieth century is that of the Holocaust and consequently the sense of guilt and responsibility for it, in Eastern Europe it is more habitual for people to regard themselves as the main victims of the communist regime. This leads to various victimhood and suffering narratives and claims for retribution from both Russia and Western Europe which allowed the communist tragedy to happen. This is why Eastern European countries are unanimously against helping the refugees from the global South as they do not see them as their own responsibility.

In Russia the situation is even more unhealthy as it combines the manipulative misuse of decolonial arguments by the imperial propaganda with its Soviet-cum-Tsarist ressentiment and efforts to present itself as a victim of the West. This victim is presumably revolting against Western global dominance and attempts to restore justice. Such a discourse is unfortunately taken at face value by many leftist Western and non-Western activists alike. Another less officially propagated but always present malevolent reactionary discourse is celebrating the European failure to adequately address the refugee crisis and doing it from extreme right positions which are unfortunately becoming more and more frequent in contemporary cultural politics all over the world and especially in the Eastern European semi-periphery. Russia interprets the European migrant crisis as a justification of its own traditional xenophobia and racism and as a proof of the failure of tolerance and multiculturalist policies and hence the necessity to apply repression, strict order, and 'strong arm' approaches. In Russia, however, the de facto Nazi-style politics masks itself by an application of the so-called Godwin's law in reverse when the administration accuses its enemies of Nazism as the last argument, after which no further discussion is possible. In the original internet version of this law whoever mentioned the Nazis had automatically lost whatever debate was in progress. The Russian administration is not concerned with logical and rhetorical justice but simply manipulates the fear deeply engrained in the collective unconsciousness and the unconditional condemnation of Nazism which all the post-Soviet people presumably share. Therefore it is very important that in the emerging dialogues of the ex-second and ex-third worlds these extreme right and racist Eurocentric postsocialist ideologies do not prevail. We need to support other alternative gateways of interaction along the lines of subalternity, the shared rejection by and in modernity, and the realization of the necessity of becoming allies in

opposition and struggle instead of striving to build into modernity in a more advantageous role. My intention in this book was to attempt to open the eyes of the postsocialist and particularly post-Soviet and postcolonial others to their mutual conditions and destinies not to complain and not to fight for meagre resources but to build coalitions and solidarity in our struggles for better and more unbiased and fair worlds of the future, which would no longer be grounded in a colonization and enslavement of people's minds and bodies.

Today the postsocialist subject is losing in its rivalry with the postcolonial other. The temporal lag in the assimilation and acceptance process between the postcolonial and the postsocialist people is reproduced again but with a significant difference. In the 1990s the postcolonial other had already been part of the Western imaginaries and legal sphere for several decades while the postsocialist subject was new and often rejected. The postsocialist people were also fed with a typical progressivist fairytale of having to patiently wait and obediently develop in order for the desired place to be gained in the future. But it never happened and could never happen. Today's refugee crisis has re-accentuated the colonial and postcolonial legacies and histories and once again buried the postsocialist hopes of ever becoming a part of the sameness or its preferred white and Christian minority. Unfortunately the postsocialist groups both in their respective countries and in the diasporas abroad have erroneously attempted to play this white Christian vaguely European card and demonstrated the most reactionary and racist attitudes in major debates siding with the ultra-right and various fundamentalist and nationalist parties and NGOs.

At the end of the day it looks like Boris Groys's reflection on the postsocialist world being forced to come back to the normal flow, speed, and direction of history that I quoted in the introduction, does not hold any more. Instead of that the postsocialist people are expected to disappear, dissolve, and step aside from the historical highway into some ditch rather than move backwards but still stay on the same road. This danger of being erased from reality as we are erased from the media sphere, re-accentuates the old second world's condescending treatment of the third world grounded in its uncontested racism and persistent progressivism. But the only way of getting back to reality is to stop complaining about Western indifference, stop threatening the West and flirting with its most reactionary forces to push the postcolonial others from the trough. All of this would not allow delinking from the global coloniality into which we

were forced after the end of the Socialist modernity and since then only continued to confirm and reproduce the existing power asymmetries.

The dialogue of the postsocialist and the postcolonial experiences, sensibilities, and discourses bypassing the necessity of embedding ourselves into global coloniality, is only starting today. Some of the possible lines of its evolution have been addressed in this book. Several existing points of confluence between the two human conditions and affective and creative reactions allow envisioning the postsocialist and postcolonial intersections on different levels and in a number of directions. As I tried to demonstrate, one of the main shared conditions of the former second and third worlds is their involuntary joining the global coloniality manifested in different ways yet always retaining and reproducing its basic restrictions in the areas of power, being, perception, gender, knowledge, and memory. What is important is that it is coloniality as a quality rather than any concrete colonialism and/or a state Socialist repressive regime as it used to be before. This global colonial dimension is accompanied by the persistent local varieties of repression in the continuing neocolonial and self-colonizing manifestations which demonstrate that the 'post-' in the postcolonial and postsocialist or in post-apartheid and post-dictatorship alike, unfortunately does not indicate the end of the respective dependencies but rather mark new forms and guises of human unfreedom.

Resistance and re-existence in relation to this global coloniality certainly differ in different locales, yet their peculiar local cosmopolitanism allows for specific models of solidarity-in-difference with possibilities for a dialogue, grounded in multi-spatial hermeneutics and, in the end, in a liberating and creative solidarity between different historical trajectories and aesthetic genealogies, such as the postcolonial and the postsocialist models.

In this book I focused mainly on different expressions of decolonial aesthesis manifested in postsocialist fiction, art, cinema, and theatre, in their multiple dialogues with postcolonial, post-dictatorship, post-apartheid, and other kinds of artistic embodiment of the post-dependence sensibility. A conceptualization of aesthesis in its specific decolonial understanding as opposed to the mainstream Western versions, presented in Chapter 2, was intended as a continuation and development of different decolonial aesthesis projects, publications, and events of the last several years. It was important to put side by side various interpretations of aesthesis coming from postmodernist Western theorizing such as post-structuralism and the theory of affect, and the decolonial delinking from these models and

problematizing any automatic understanding of aesthetic reactions and mechanisms of perception naturalized in contemporary disembodied high theory. It was important to not just talk about decolonial aesthesis separately from any other dominant or marginal aesthetic theories of today, but to see the possible parallels and divergences, to regard them within the context of the leading scholarly trends, yet with a clear positionality of the outside created by and from the inside, that is from Dusselian exteriority.

This was done not in order to assimilate or appropriate decolonial aesthesis into and by the Western aesthetic mainstream. On the contrary, it was vital to show why and how it is different from such well-known theories as Nicholas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, Bruce Robbins's sweat shop sublime, or aesthetics as politics in its Rancièrian understanding. I attempted to show how the decolonial aesthesis mechanisms allow touching upon or dealing with the same subjects and issues but make sense of them from specific decolonial post-dependence, geopolitical, and corpo-political situations and perspectives. This is crucial because it makes it impossible for the mainstream aesthetic theories to wave us away and tag our arguments as some outdated national and anti-colonial liberation discourses with their presumably archaic aesthetic devices sneered at by the high-brow aestheticians or seen as some exotic ghettos within contemporary art, thus erasing our difference once again. That is why I found it important to dwell on the mechanisms and the nature of the decolonial sublime whose centre is the specific decolonial catharsis which is not grounded in fear of nature but rather in restoring the human dignity and courage to withstand the social, economic, and political calamities of modernity/coloniality.

In short it was significant to trace the divergent developments of aesthesis in the Western axiology and in decolonial thought with a special emphasis on the gap between institutionalized aesthetics and affective aesthesis, which has been colonized by the normative aesthetic models of the past and of today. Aesthesis understood as an ability to perceive the world through the senses goes beyond the immediate goal of transforming art theory, literary and cinema studies and into the realm of regaining the links between the visual, verbal, and synthetic arts, and theorizing about these phenomena in the context of our agency.

In Chapter 3, I focused on the ways the decolonial aesthesis is remade and reconsidered in the works of actual contemporary artists from the postcolonial and post-Soviet regions of Eurasia. It was important to see how the intersectional ideologies, religions, and ethnic cultures effect the

specific features of the decolonial aesthesis in these regions. Although I touched upon many works the three main artists from Central and North East Asia stood in the centre of attention in this chapter – Saule Suleimenova, Erbossyn Meldibekov, and Zorikto Dorzhiev. The usual Caliban–Ariel dichotomy in this case is problematized and complicated by more nuanced intermediary options. The most linear form is Meldibekov's demonized Asiatic imagery and his clear penchant for Western values rather than any national ethnic culture which he interprets exclusively through its kitsch official forms. He simply equates the neocolonial local elites with the Soviet party bosses. Suleimenova's milder indigenous feminist and at the same time radical oppositional take on the native culture is much more positive although she also differentiates between the official sanctioned forms and the Kazakh aesthesis which she attempts to dig out and restore. The Buryatian tongue-in-cheek version is even farther from any black-and-white dichotomies as Dorzhiev acts as a Buddhist trickster and contemplative mediator rather than a crushing brutal Caliban. Yet his subtle works produce an even stronger emancipating effect due to their multiple meanings, multilayered messages, and rhyzomatic media forms. In these and other artists' trajectories discussed in Chapter 3, the element of positive and life-asserting re-existence as building one's existence and one's world anew, always prevails in the end over negative and destructive resistance.

In Chapter 4 I continued to investigate the ethical and political dimensions of the aesthetic sphere in postcolonial and postsocialist contexts but switched attention to its institutional and structural codes. In this context it was important to look at the contemporary museum as a knowledge production and distribution institution, and trace the possible decolonial paths for its change, questioning and destabilizing the kinds of historical narratives and imperial and national myths that the museum has traditionally transmitted. I focused on the analysis of the two examples of contemporary museum interventions in the postcolonial/post-Soviet context – the neo-imperial exhibition *Dictionary of the Caucasus* in Tzaritsyno museum in Moscow, and Taus Makhacheva's decolonial museum intervention *The Way of an Object*.

In Chapter 5 I concentrated on the analysis of the temporal/spatial dimensions and environment which determine the ontological and phenomenological context of postsocialist and postcolonial subjects. I was interested specifically in the aesthetic and poetological ways in which the spatial/temporal juncture was recreated in various art forms and genres. Time

and space are the key elements affecting all spheres of verbal and visual arts, from composition and narrative structure to visuality, characterization, and language.

I coined the term tempo-locality not for the sake of making up a new term but in order to differentiate this concept in certain ways from the well-known and established models of the interpretation of time and space – namely, Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope and Michel Foucault's heterotopia. Both of them are at times unable to express the multiplicity and complexity of spatial-temporal relations of the post-dependence condition being still marked by a universalist delocalized zero-point positioning and (especially in Bakhtin's case) by a progressivist positivist teleology. The main point of critique of both heterotopia and chronotope models lies in the tendency to a decolonization of space previously controlled by time, and a rehabilitation of topos.

Foucault in contrast with Bakhtin takes notice of the spatial turn yet his own understanding of heterotopia is still marked by Occidentalism and coloniality of knowledge and hence his neglect of the darker side of the 'ideal' heterotopias of the ship and the settler colony. Bakhtin's chronotope was in need of a more thorough deconstruction which I attempted to do along several lines, from general epistemic normativization of time's prevalence over space to a relatively restricted number of chronotopes he discusses in his works due to his concentration on a very specific literary material. That is why it was important to see what other types and kinds of chronotopes emerge in today's situations, in different kinds of fiction and arts which go beyond the Western European canonical social critical realist novels and into the postcolonial/postsocialist sphere.

The tempo-localities important for the post-dependence situations go far beyond the typology offered by Bakhtin. The list includes border and transit chronotopes, marked by protean and in-between states, the post-colonial and post-totalitarian city, unhomedness and migrantism, war and de-urbanization, post-apocalyptic and post-idyllic chronotopes, the specific heteroclitic topoi such as cemetery, museum, theatre, etc. at the juncture of the postcolonial and postsocialist experience.

I dwelled at some length on the phantasmal temporal and spatial models distorting the tempo-local characteristics of physical reality, and addressed the issue of the multiple spaces and non-linear times evolving both in the postcolonial and the postsocialist art forms. The tempo-localities analysed in this chapter often rehabilitate the contaminated topoi or the 'sites of memory' through painful decolonial sublime

mechanisms which lead in the end to the enrichment of the spatial histories with the forgotten and restored meanings and ultimately, making the world anew in various acts of re-existence. The ideal models of the tempo-local post-dependencies are the post/neoimperial and postcolonial and postsocialist cities. I analysed this urban juncture focusing on the books and films whose authors imagine the once real but more often invented and existing only in the characters' minds, urban and rural spaces such as Moscow, Baku, Tashkent, Tbilisi, Khurramabad, Gamsutl, and others. An interesting example of such an urban postcolonial and postsocialist imaginary is Azeri-Jewish writer Afanassy Mamedov's works analysed in more detail in Chapter 5. Here the unreality of the tempo-local dimensions came forward in a capricious mixture of many times and many cities in the imagination of Mamedov's alter ego.

Another focus of Chapter 5 was the specific tempo-localities of sadly frequent civil, ethnic, and postimperial wars of postsocialist and postcolonial contemporary histories. The optics and ethics of war is seen through the eyes of the common people and not the fighting armies, and the relations of the human and non-human, natural and manmade in the phenomenological experience of the postsocialist/postcolonial people who find themselves accidentally in the midst of someone else's war, are brought forward.

Another important motif of the post-Soviet/postcolonial tempo-localities addressed in Chapter 5 is rethinking Homi Bhabha's category of the unhomed, and generally, problematizing of the idea of home and native land, as well as war and exile up to the ultimate exile of the lost or unclaimed graves and unburied urns of ashes belonging to people who lost all their link with any real territories. The central question is what makes us all post-Soviet – the territory, the language, or some system of values. Most of the works I addressed reflect on this issue contemplating the disenchantment with the idyll and often the end of the idyll in some post-apocalyptic scenario of imminent neoliberal modernity.

In Chapter 6, I turned to qalandars – the Eastern versions of tricksters. I attempted to analyse their liquid identities and leaking selves, and at the same time, differentiate them from the postmodernist and Western feminist interpretations of tricksterism. My decision to call the postsocialist trickster character a 'qalandar', was connected with a decolonial urge to address the local histories and semantic nodes – in this case obviously Eastern, Central Asian, Southern Caucasian and Muslim – instead of

borrowing the ready-made postcolonial or Western terms and concepts, and focus on the significant differences and gaps between them. Such qalandars retain the metamorphosis element, as any trickster's modus vivendi, but this metamorphosis differs from the (post)modernist Western conceptualizations and artistic representations of tricksterism. It grows as much from Kafka or Romanticism, as from the non-Western local histories, trajectories, experiences, and life-worlds, from other ideas and perceptions of the self and of community, marked by the Fanonian sociogenic principle intertwining with Duboisean negative double consciousness and, once again, with the idea of 're-existence' as a positive world creation anew.

In Chapter 6, I also devoted some space to the changing mechanisms of metamorphosis and mimicry as they evolve in the identities of the post-Soviet-cum-postcolonial qalandars. In this case mimicry is more complicated and redoubled in comparison with a simpler postcolonial model. This is connected with the impossibility of going back to any authentic cosmology which in most cases is forever lost and forgotten, and also with the multiplicity of intersecting influences of different imperial and colonial traditions cohabiting in our spaces and identities. Taus Makhacheva and Andrey Volos whose works I analyse in this chapter in more detail are among the most interesting visual and verbal artists who address the issues of mimicry and metamorphosis in the postcolonial post-Soviet space in unusual and critical ways. They reflect on the border trickster subjectivity marked by multiple and often negative identifications and creolizations of the human/animal/machine/other than human spheres. Each local history envisions these issues in its own terms and it is important to maintain this blossoming complexity instead of flattening and simplifying the social and cultural reality.

In Chapter 7, I mainly concentrated on different forms of decolonizing memory linked with reconceptualizations of and affective work with rape, violence, revenge, and repentance in post-dependence traumatic narratives. It has been noted time and again that political rape is a form of genocide. Several critics have also pointed out the obvious parallel of individual rape and the violence committed in relation to whole countries which makes it impossible for a long time afterwards to rehumanize them and restore their dignity. However, I was more interested in tracing the actual mechanisms of turning the apathy and inertia of the raped slaves into some form of re-existence and life-affirming agency.

It was important to analyse how in each political rape victim's case emerges the will for decolonizing memories and the opposition to the official state bio-political efforts to impose some legitimized view of history and memory and erase the inconvenient violent episodes and ruined lives. Yet the bodies of these victims stubbornly refuse to forget. And all the different works analysed in this chapter and coming from Russia, Haiti, Chile, Bosnia, and South Africa, testify to the decolonial re-existence drives evolving on a corporeal level of bodily memories and non-rational perceptions.

I have also dwelled at some length on the nature of violence in its suppressing and liberating cathartic versions which in this case is realized through the victim's revenge or refusal to take revenge. The Fanonian liberation through violence was interesting in its symbolic and existential forms in the way they are problematized in the three films, a play, and two novels analysed in Chapter 7. Here gender and racial differences in the treatment of political rape and its aftermath lead to two distinct trajectories – resistance as violent revenge (the men's version) and re-existence as a shift from violence to love (the women's version). The first case does not offer any way out of the circle of violence while the second one attempts a revival through maternal love, sisterhood, and reconnection with local communities and families.

It is important that each of the analysed cases starts with the same condition – people losing control of their own bodies as an extreme form of political violence and dehumanization, and the subsequent solitary efforts of the rape victims to cope with violence while their respective societies can offer only unsatisfying reconciliation draped as forgiving and forgetting and grounded in a collective psychoanalytic repression as opposed to negation or amnesia. I have also paid more attention in Chapter 7 to the analysis of poetological, aesthetic, and stylistic devices and narrative techniques of conveying the coloniality of violent memories and also decolonizing impulses applied by Achmat Dangor, Edwidge Danticat, Alexei German, Ariel Dorfman and Jasmila Žbanić. They include non-linear spiral narratives, multiple narrators and polyphonic narrative structures, the avoidance of the rape scenes or any direct depiction of rapists, the recurrent phenomenologies of disappearance in many repressive societies, and finally, a number of leitmotifs such as suicide or its symbolic re-enactment, and metamorphosis (echoing Chapter 6) as a form of liberation or a trickster strategy of survival.

An important leitmotif is meeting with the monster after many years, and an avalanche of nightmares and terrifying memories sometimes leading to revenge or making the victim (who is frozen in the present, afraid of the past, and avoiding thinking about the future) into yet another monster. In many cases the boundary between the torturer and the victim is blurred and reversed.

Yet all of the authors except for German and Dorfman do offer some versions of re-existence for their characters and some alternative exorcized imaginaries for the future. They vary from the Haitian storytelling transforming the terrible reality into a myth or a fairytale, to the mother–daughter bonds and sisterhood coalitions in spite of the sick and repressive societies in which they dwell, and even to a transcendence of this world and a re-existence in some other phenomenological reality. The affective side of these rape narratives and reconciliation stories is especially important as the sounds, sights, smells, and textures of the fruit of rape often act as the only triggers that keep their mothers from murder or suicide. In a sense all of the analysed works in different forms and to different extents attempt a collective violent shock therapy of the audience not letting us passively contemplate the story from a safe position but forcing us to set free our most raw affects and actively work them into an interrelational decolonial sublime.

The open finale does not require any concrete conclusions which in a sense sets me free as an author from any responsibility for unrealized predictions. I do not know what would emerge as a result of the melting of the multiple experiences and sensibilities of many multiplying others of modernity marked by the shared post-dependence condition. What would win in the end, an angry resistance or a positive re-existence? Our shared future depends on the answer to this question. Would it become an apocalyptic space of total war, or a complex and dynamic interaction of different but equal worlds, populated by people who would be aware of the past, of the destroyed lives, erased histories, and lost futures, yet continue their stubborn efforts to recreate and build anew the personal and collective identities and domains?

Reflection on the junctures of the postcolonial and postsocialist conditions presented in this book attempted to offer a humble way of looking at the world with the eyes and telling about one's experience in the words of the millions of dispensable lives regarded as problems and not as people. We must think of how to change our shared small world in such a way that we can finally discard the seemingly eternal dichotomy of the same and

the other, and create a space in which there will be no others any more, no people rejected by history, or forced to fiercely chase the train of modernity with no hope for success. The intersection of experiences and sensibilities of the postcolonial and postsocialist people must ideally lead us to the next step of building coalitions and solidarity for our mutual struggle to fulfil and bring to life this open utopia. And we can still try to make it real.

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