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ON LOST CRISITUNITIES,  
VANISHING POSTSOVIET AND DECOLONIZATION OF THINKING, BEING AND  
PERCEPTION

Lisa: "The Chinese use the same word for crisis and opportunity".  
Homer: "Ah, yes, crisitunity".

--The Simpsons episode *Fear of Flying*

*Coloniality and Global Crisis*

Modernity in its neoliberal stage is marked by ubiquitous bio-politics<sup>1</sup> within which life becomes extremely fragmented and human being either turns into a dispensable material (*homo sacer*)<sup>2</sup> or maniacally focuses on the idea of competing with those around for a more prosperous life. This consistent cultivation and maintaining of the economic, social, cultural, ethical, epistemic and ontological bondage in the terminology of decolonial option is called a global coloniality. For a decolonial thinker the problem lies not in saving capitalism or in dismantling it for the sake of various post-leftist models. The focus is not in the capitalist economy alone but rather in the darker side of modernity – that of coloniality including the spheres of being, of knowledge, of gender and of perception.

Throughout the last five hundred years the West/North has determined the single norm of humanity, of legitimate knowledge, of acceptable social and economic systems, of spatial and temporal models, of values and cultural norms, while all other people and knowledges have been classified as deviations, dismissed to alterity, or subject to various changes with the goal of making them closer to the western ideal. Market competition, political democracy, egalitarian law, individual rights and freedoms have always belonged to the sunny side of modernity, while those who were confined to the darker side, who were not White, European Christian males of particular economic and social status, and hence, were not considered fully human, have been subject to the ethics of war<sup>3</sup> and to what F. Hinkelammert called "the inversion of human rights."<sup>4</sup> The ongoing economic crisis made it obvious for the Western middle class observer that he/she is not exempt from the logic of exhausted modernity, his/her life also becomes dispensable and his/her rights inverted in its deadly game which sacrifices people in order to save capitalism, modernity and progress. Yet, mental enslavement

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, M. (1998) *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1 : The Will to Knowledge, London: Penguin.

<sup>2</sup> Agamben, G. (1998) *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Maldonado-Torres, N. (2008) *Against War. Views from the Underside of Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Hinkelammert, F. (2004) "The Hidden Logic of Modernity: Locke and the inversion of Human Rights". — *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise*. A Web Dossier. Volume 1, Dossier 1, Fall. <http://jhfc.duke.edu/wko/10.10.08>

remains intact even today, when the global crisis has clearly demonstrated the void in epistemic, ontological and ethical dimensions of modernity, and its continuing projecting of its own irresponsibility, cynicism, and arrogance onto humankind.

The utter confidence in rational, calculable, managerial, seemingly objective models grounded in agonistics, attempts to shift the attention from the fact that there are other options than saving modernity/coloniality; there are other kinds of life, different social and economic models and axiological and epistemic systems that need to be listened to, taken into account and given a chance to follow their own path in the new architecture of the world where many worlds would co-exist and interact inter-relationally, instead of one narrow western model demagogically propagating its self-interested myths and notions erasing and negating anything and anyone who falls out of this logic and refuses to be lulled by the myths of progress, capitalism, happy consumption and eternal material success. It is becoming more and more clear that in the post-crisis world if it ever succeeds to come to reality, progress should be measured not with quantitative indices of the GNP but at least with subjective gratification of capabilities<sup>5</sup> as suggested by Amartya Sen, which even within the Western thought has been lately recognized and labeled as the economics of happiness or eudemonic economy. But development still regarded by Sen as the main horizon of humankind can be further questioned and counterbalanced with other ideals which have been systematically suppressed within the deadening rhetoric of modernity. This approach requires an *other* paradigm, politically determined by the needs to production, reproduction and development of human life - not a reformed capitalism with a human face<sup>6</sup> but an economy with a human heart, instead of a mask on its face, in Vandana Shiva's formulation<sup>7</sup>.

#### *Toward a positive philosophy of crisis*

By definition crises (stemming from the Greek word *krenein* – to choose) are related to change. They provide an opportunity for a more or less conscious choice of the future, for making a decision, particularly in the conditions of the global community of human destiny. Therefore they are potentially productive. In today's society this condition is realized only partially and for a narrow stratum of society, and people throughout the world are trying more and more actively and with varied success to gain this right to change for themselves struggling with persistent power asymmetries and hierarchies of the sick modernity. The systemic massive crisis of all modern elements that we face today touching upon subjectivity, epistemology, spirituality and ethics and leading to much more devastating and far reaching consequences than strictly economic or even social crisis, evolves so far in the logic of a vicious circle – the disease is being treated with its very causes and those who make decisions refuse to realize that, in Boaventura de Sousa Santos'

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<sup>5</sup> Sen, A. (2009) *The Idea of Justice*. Harvard University Press & London: Allen Lane.

<sup>6</sup> Batra, R. (2011) "The Occupy Wall Street Movement and the Coming Demise of Crony Capitalism". – *Truthout*. New Analysis. October 11, 2011. [http://truthout.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=3889:the-occupy-wall-street-movement-and-the-coming-demise-of-crony-capitalism](http://truthout.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=3889:the-occupy-wall-street-movement-and-the-coming-demise-of-crony-capitalism)

<sup>7</sup> Shiva, V. (2005) *Earth Democracy. Justice, Sustainability and Peace*. N.Y., Boston: South End Press, p. 75.

words<sup>8</sup>, there are no modern solutions to modern problems, or in other words, we cannot get over the crisis from inside of modernity. We need a complex and dialogic contemporary philosophy of the crisis formulated from multiple border positions marked by relationality which in decolonial terms can be called pluritopic<sup>9</sup> or multi-spatial and is grounded in exteriority, i.e. a position of the outside created from the inside.<sup>10</sup>

As many commentators pointed out, crisis and criticism are cognate words. However criticism and particularly self-criticism is precisely what is lacking in most neoliberal Western interpretations of the crisis on the level of the state, the corporations, or the mainstream experts who are trying to save or moralize capitalism instead of questioning its very validity and/or prescriptive status for the present and future world. Yet it would be unfair not to notice that constructive criticism comes more and more forward on the level and from the part of the civil and political society (in Partha Chatterjee's<sup>11</sup>—and to an extent Aristotelian—sense of social movements) as the so called "everyman" is rapidly coming to realize that no matter if he/she resides in the global North, the global South, or the global void of the ex-Soviet space, his/her life is becoming depreciated.

This critical sensibility has a potential for a future global solidarity working in the direction of not merely resistance and negativity but re-existence in Adolfo Albañ-Achinte's words<sup>12</sup>. Its grounds must be thoroughly and vigorously thought over and globally discussed across the colonial and imperial differences and with an honest and unselfish willingness to part with one's (not always) comfortable place in the hierarchical structure of modernity for the sake of a different multiple and trans-modern world, if we want to really use this crisis as an opportunity for the humankind and not a sign of its final demise. These processes, intuitions and revelations have been noticeable for some time but before they acted in a rather restricted and often impulsive form of civil society's reaction to the excesses of the so called "disaster capitalism" in Naomi Klein's words<sup>13</sup>. Today these tendencies are becoming truly ubiquitous as the shock doctrine in social, political and economic management rapidly evolves as a new morally accepted global model.

In their insightful book *Of Divine Warning. Reading Disaster in the Modern Age* Jane Anna and Lewis Gordon suggest an internal connection of heavenly bodies and crisis: "It summons choices to be made. Since the results of making wrong choices could be catastrophic, these kinds of divine warning occasion not only anxiety, the struggle of choices one must make, but also fear. The initial sign then warns of the catastrophe but the disaster produces victims who are a continuation of the initial sign: they in effect become signs, carrying like plague disaster wherever they go.

<sup>8</sup> Santos, B.S. (2006) *The Rise of the Global Left, the World Social Forum and Beyond*, London: Verso.

<sup>9</sup> Mignolo, W. D. (1995) *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Dussel, E. (1985) *Philosophy of Liberation*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

<sup>11</sup> Chatterjee, P. (2004). *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Albañ-Achinte, A. (2006) Conocimiento y lugar: más allá de la razón hay un mundo de colores. En Texiendo textos y saberes. Cinco hijos para pensar los estudios culturales, la colonialidad y la interculturalidad. Popayán, Editorial Universidad del Cauca, Colección Estiodios (Inter)culturales.

<sup>13</sup> Klein, N. (2007) *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Toronto: Knopf Canada.

They become in other words, monsters".<sup>14</sup> There are more and more of such monsters created by the systemic crisis and even one's belonging to the global North does not save anymore from the possibility of becoming such a monster overnight. Transferring their logic to the existential and ontological area the Gordons point out that racism and colonialism generated people "marked as the continued sign of ill fate and ruin. Problem people."<sup>15</sup> I argue that the post-Soviet space in today's world for different reasons has also become such a *problem region* both for the outside and the inside.

The inhabitants of the post-Soviet space for the last twenty years have been universally regarded as the annoying remnants of the collapsed system. We have been unwelcome in any part of the world where we have been trying to move to – escaping from the barely keeping afloat sinking ship. Today we remain the essential outlaws of the new world, the doomed mytho-poetic ogres, even if the othering emphasis has shifted after 9/11 to the Muslim others as the new global emblematic monsters, and lately to whole countries, particularly in the South of Europe, seriously effected by the crisis. Anyone today can become such a victim-monster symbolizing and signalizing the crisis and annoying for those who are still precariously afloat. Yet the post-Soviet case is specific or even specifically doomed due to several reasons which I will address below.

The Gordons also point out another important dimension of crisis thinking—namely a refusal to fully engage and read the signs before one by making the accused individual a continuum of the sign. The failure turns on a desire to distance oneself from what is discomforting, to make it impossible that one might be responsible for such an abomination... In our aversion to addressing disasters as signs and our mythopoetic understanding of them as falling stars or monsters as divine warnings, we actively create monsters and enemies and thereby maintain moments of hysteria, refusing actually to interpret and take responsibility for the kinds of collective response that maybe needed to alleviate human misery. Responding requires genuine thinking and acting...<sup>16</sup> But this reconsideration of values and criteria is precisely what does not happen or rather it happens not where global decisions are still being made.

#### *After the crisis scenarios: a comparison*

The systemic crisis of modernity offers different opportunities for different actors—from a pathetic reinstatement of Western modernity or re-westernization which would rapidly lead humankind to its demise and which even the leading European countries are already starting to thoroughly question, to de-westernizing tendencies which in my view should not be lumped together in some homogenous imagined path because the internal motives, grounds and sensibilities behind de-westernization are quite diverse. The most radical in its delinking drive is obviously the decolonial trans-modern (in the sense of overcoming modernity) option which longs for crisis in order to delink from modernity/coloniality to open up alternative and forever unfinished models of the unpredictable world-in-the-

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<sup>14</sup> Gordon, J.A. and L.R. (2010) *Of Divine Warning. Reading Disaster in the Modern Age*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> Gordon, A.J. and L.R. Op. Cit., p. 19.

making, the open and non-final utopias of the future whose result we do not know yet as opposed to closed conservative utopias of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup>

Reflecting on the crisis from inside and often being its victims is a rather thankless task. Yet we cannot sit and wait until it is over and time comes to analyze it because it may be too late and there will not be anyone left to do the job. The task of decolonial intellectuals is twofold: along with re-inscribing and reconsidering the past we must project a transmodern imagery into the future and consciously work for realization of its favorable models. Most of us—the decolonial intellectuals (with several notable exceptions)—remain marginal in our respective countries. We are tricksters who leak into the mainstream discourses from time to time and interrogate modernity from a border position. Decoloniality itself is a crisis in the sense that it brings critical rethinking into the agenda of human subjectivity and agency. But it is a peculiar crisis — a long term and not a revolutionary radical endeavor. It mainly takes place in the realm of thinking, of knowledge production, of spirituality, of subjectivity, of ethics, of perception, of the new political models that still have no or little place for their implementation in the existing normative frames. Our task is to slowly and gradually change the consciousness, in a way inoculating people with decolonial drives and working for the creation of a global decolonial “community of sense.”<sup>18</sup> In some locales like Latin America it is more feasible to implement such an approach. In police states like many of the post-Soviet countries, including Russia, this sensibility is still exiled into the realm of unofficial non-academic and so far silenced discourses and practices.

If the tendencies for the reinstatement of modernity continue to prevail, all of us, including those who dissociate and delink, will perish. And this unfortunately seems like the most probable (if bitter) of all scenarios. If the present humankind is to remain on Earth it has to cardinally change — not in a superfluous direction of more and more technological gadgets including the trans-human and post-human ontological shifts, and not in the direction of triumphant consumerism gone mad, but rather in the course of reconsidering and reopening alternative, erased, discredited and forgotten human spiritual orientations, ethical and political models, existential sensibilities, etc. Such processes are in full swing today but it seems that we still need a major impetus from the outside, some global cataclysm perhaps which would initiate an equally global qualitative leap as a result of which our planet would get rid of the obsolete modernity-post-modernity-altermodernity rhetoric. The present economic and social crisis is obviously not serious enough. It seems that a challenge to humanity’s very existence on larger than applied ecological level is what is necessary to awaken a truly global transformative drive. It is so because today there is still the chosen billion who can buy their economic and social security even in the most critical conditions. As soon as this struggle for prosperity turns into a struggle for physical survival of human beings on the planet, as soon as the rich and the poor become equal in the precariousness of their lives in front of the ecological and man-made catastrophes, a new global fraternity or unity of all those living on Earth would have to emerge on the ruins of the perished presumptuous humanity.

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<sup>17</sup>Santos, B.S. (2004) The World Social Forum: A User’s Manual. [http://www.ces.uc.pt/bss/documentos/fsm\\_eng.pdf](http://www.ces.uc.pt/bss/documentos/fsm_eng.pdf)

<sup>18</sup>Ranciere, J. (2009) Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics. *Communities of Sense. Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, pp. 31-50.

Honest capitalism, capitalism with a human face or polycentric capitalism would only weaken the spring for a while but there is no guarantee that everything would not soon collapse into another misanthropic model if we do not question the axiological and epistemic grounds of late modernity. Dewesternizing tendencies are becoming global yet they are still too engrossed in concrete local geopolitical and geo-economic interests of the powerful strata of respective societies and in this sense they simply correspond to the process of one more repartition and redrawing of the world which we all witness today.

Human life remains equally dispensable in any of the existing scenarios – under the uni-polar hegemony of the North or under the local repression by various mostly neocolonial or quasi-neo-colonial regimes or smaller local “centers”. It is easy to occupy a safe Western/Northern spot and reason abstractly on the importance of anti-Western initiatives of the countries with unjustified claims to greatness. This is a convenient but morally unscrupulous position of blindness to similar suffocating results in case of demagogic foreign and draconian domestic policies of various dictators and authoritarian states. Such an aberration does not take real human lives into account as they are treated as merely flat personages of various far-fetched theoretical schemes. Discussing global tendencies, such would-be critical intellectuals often lack a sense of true (inter)relationality and interconnectedness of everything and everyone on Earth found mainly in Indigenous thinking and in a number of alter-global social movements.

At the same time strategically de-westernization is crucial as it works for destabilizing of Western/Northern dominance from various local positions. Decolonial initiatives often find a lot in common with de-westernizing projects and sensibilities. We only must remember that de-westernization is not a goal in itself but only a means. After all, do we really care about establishing which countries are more responsible for air pollution and global warming and who has the right to continue this pollution in order to do justice to historical asymmetries, if tomorrow there is no air left to breath for anyone, or most of the continents are flooded by the oceans? This suicidal justice is obviously not what we should be after.

#### *Dewesternization as a false universal: the contradictory BRICS project*

As pointed out above, the contemporary world system is quite uneven in its chances for the implementation of decolonial impulses and various locales and countries have also different chances for their post-crisis existence. I am far from presenting the decolonial option as a new travelling theory fit for everyone. For example Turkey as the heir of the Ottoman Sultanate and Russia are both second class empires of modernity marked by an external imperial difference. One of them is quasi-Western and the other is quasi-Muslim and both are marked by catching up to the logic of modernization. Yet their chances in the post-crisis world are quite different and much more diverse and favorable in the first (Turkish) case. What stands behind this difference? Obviously, it is the axiology. Now if we go back to de-westernizing model and point out the internal discrepancies and teleological conflicts between its agents we would have to question the validity of the model itself and the applicability of such artificial alliances in the post-crisis world. For example, BRICS is often regarded as one of the successful de-westernizing

projects<sup>19</sup>. But there is an obvious striking difference between Russia and the rest of BRICS countries most of which (except Russia) used to be colonies of the modern Western capitalist empires. It is manifested even in such a simple criteria as economic growth which allowed Nouriel Roubini and Ian Bremmer to suggest that Russia is to be excluded from BRICS and replaced with Indonesia or in the future, with Turkey.<sup>20</sup>

The goals and subjectivities of the ex-empires and ex-colonies are quite different as is different their real economic and social situation and their hypothetical roles in the future world economy. Brazil in BRICS is responsible for agriculture, South Africa – for natural resources, China – for cheap labor force and India – for cheap intellectual resources, while Russia squarely stands for a supplier of oil and gas. This is a notable shift in itself quite shameful for the ex-Soviet Union: from a producer of knowledge (though mainly scientific) and a country with one of the best education systems (in strict and natural sciences) in the world Russia rapidly slides down to a policy of conscious state-induced destruction of education along with health care going hand in hand with demographic catastrophe characterized by first world birthrate and third world death rate.

Education is indeed a litmus test for the elites as it clearly demonstrates their real intentions. Russia is hysterically protesting its universities being excluded from all international ratings and at the same time is drastically cutting the higher education budget allocations, dismantling dozens of universities, throwing professors into the streets, rapidly commercializing and pruning down all higher education institutions to make them fit the new ideal of an effective applied two-year college producing loyal service personnel. At the same time the Chinese and Indians have been quietly and slowly improving their education systems, so that today the previous generation of students who had to be sent to study abroad are coming back to become professors of their respective national universities so that there is no need any more to send your children to the West. This is a real step in de-westernizing. And not a shamelessly double standard Putin's Russia's rhetoric and practice, when according to Vladislav Inozemtsev:

The extreme rootedness of power beyond the borders of their motherland makes its anti-Western rhetoric simply grotesque; the denunciation of the states where our ministers' capitals are "parked" and where their children go to school, is nothing but laughable. To get rid of this grotesque – hourly reproduced by the system of "sovereign democracy" – means to attempt to survive. Continuing to reproduce it equals a political suicide. If the elite links its future in some way with the country which it still runs it must agree to a slow dismantling of the built system, a kind of an organized retreat.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Mattison, Ch. (2012) Delinking, Decoloniality and Dewesternization: Interview with Walter Mignolo (part II), May. – Critical Legal Thinking. <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2012/05/02/delinking-decoloniality-dewesternization-interview-with-walter-mignolo-part-ii/>

<sup>20</sup> Roubini, N., Bremmer I. (2012) "Time to Black-ball Russia's Autocratic State", Opinion, *Financial Times*, May 29, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/b9cb5870-a975-11e1-9772-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1wGDmKI2K>

<sup>21</sup> Inozemtsev, V. (2012) Preventive Democracy, – *Vedomosty*. June 8, 2012. [http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/news/1833007/preventivnaya\\_demokratiya](http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/news/1833007/preventivnaya_demokratiya)

The point is that the elite is obviously not linking its future with this country. In a way we are dealing here with a form of self-colonization or re-colonization when the elites are regarding the citizens of their own country (and people of the same race/ethnicity) as a modern equivalent of slaves with no human dignity and a questionable humanity. This has been a norm for the Russian elites at least starting from Ivan the Terrible, and particularly after Peter the Great. Before the legitimacy of such a control based on autocratic lawlessness, was grounded in aristocratic blood or/and high culture whereas today instead of the elite we have an ignorant gang of people who came to power and to wealth accidentally or criminally and which in many cases is also a hair of the infamous Soviet "nomenklatura" consisting of "cooks governing the states" quickly adjusted to the wild capitalism environment.

BRICS members are the most rapidly developing and industrializing countries, whereas Russia is looking in quite a different direction in the sense that it is rapidly de-industrializing, going through involution and depopulation. This prostrate poor North of today (the ex-Russian/Soviet empire) cannot hope to take a decent place even among the BRICS ex-colonies of the West. If the real economic growth factors and real indicators of human welfare were taken into account instead of superfluous GDP, Russia would not have been able to dream of joining BRICS even if it initiated the project itself.

#### *On the crossroads of economy, ecology and axiology: the Russian case studies*

The real goals and ethics of Russian as well as some other loud anti-Western populist and nationalist orators is obvious in dozens of case studies where the economic and ecological problems and spiritual values are closely interwoven together. Such is the case of the Ukok Plateau \$10 billion gas pipeline designed to go from Russia to China. The indigenous Altai people (Telengit) have used permafrost Ukok and the Golden Mountains (UNESCO World Heritage Site)<sup>22</sup> for millennia to bury their dead and worship the spirits of heavens, the mountains, and the waters. The pipeline would bisect the Plateau and the Kanas National Park in China—one of China's last wilderness areas. Ukok was chosen because it is the only area where Russia and China have a direct border whereas less ecologically detrimental and more economically feasible projects would have to go through North Korea, Mongolia or Kazakhstan. This Gazprom project has caused indignation and active protests of the Telengits exemplified by the activity of such organizations as Ere Chui (Sacred Chui)—a Telengit Small-Numbered People's Association of Communities. The religious feelings of the indigenous, the ecological importance of this territory which is not only the habitat for many rare species but also the catchment place for Katun river and a seismically unstable territory, the prospective ablation and climate change of the whole South-Western Siberia as a result of the pipeline construction, the violation of international and Russian laws—are all unimportant for Gazprom.

It would have been just one more corporate capitalism accusatory story if it was not for a small and typically Russian detail—the project is obviously unprofitable but the goal is not the pipeline itself. Rather it is exercising the questionable and totally symbolic role of the global guarantor of energy stability and even more

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<sup>22</sup> Pipeline Update: UNESCO Leaves Altai with Concerns (2012). The Altai Project, June 8. <http://altaiproject.org/?p=2240>

importantly, it is a chance for the bureaucrats to make hay. China does not need Russian gas at the offered inflated price and is not ready to take part in the usual Russian corruption schemes (the so called "corruption rent" in Russia rises as high as 300%) in order to "saw up" the money allocated to this construction to stuff the bureaucratic pockets. Similar projects are to be found in other areas and economic spheres of the Urals, Siberia, the Far North and the Far East, for instance, Russian tycoon Oleg Deripaska's colossal project of flooding huge areas in the said regions in order to build hydro-electric plants on Shilka, Angara and other rivers to sell electricity to China. These projects are ecologically disastrous as they will destroy the hydra-system of Siberian rivers—one of the most powerful sources of fresh water on Earth. They would also destroy the remaining villages and towns and force people to move (without even any compensation for their lost housing in the new Russian anti-social state), not to mention the complete and final destruction of the remaining Indigenous people live styles and heritage.

However, the Russian state supported by the pocket parliament and corrupted by a handful of tycoons was not satisfied with such relatively small-scale projects and has made a radical decision on Siberia which in fact equals its re-colonization, a kind of a new East-Siberian mega company or state corporation which is an anachronism quite justified within today's Russian state criminal triad (corruption, peculation, despotism)<sup>23</sup>. Colonial companies of the 17-18<sup>th</sup> centuries were marked by massive corruption and by the ousting of the local bourgeoisie from the colonial riches using the monopoly to control the overseas territories, the national sales markets of colonial goods and all foreign economic links of the colonies, as well as unscrupulous exploitation of local people who could be always detained or replaced if need be with imported slaves. In many cases these factors caused the demise of obsolete companies and led to successful decolonization of respective countries.

Siberia is 60% of Russia's territory and a reservoir of all of its natural resources, which today creates Russia's wealth. Nevertheless, what it gets in return are masses of spent nuclear waste from Europe and Western Russia and toxic and carcinogenic industries instead of roads, schools, or hospitals. A 2012 decision to turn Siberia into an old-new colony, makes it exempt from the legal system for the next 25 years. This exemption allows it to ignore the laws on mineral resources, forests, land and town planning, as well as work and citizenship. Protected from federal, regional and any civil control, this corporation would in fact create its own labor code and idea of citizenship, supported by a kind of mercenary a la Sepoys troops (consisting of guest workers from Central Asia) to fight the possible local resistance. This archaic way of "keeping" Siberia through a gang state corporation signals an extreme weakness and bankruptcy of the Russian statehood when the country rapidly becomes a conglomerate of colonial possessions. What comes next we all remember—the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny which initiated a massive Indian rebellion. So Russia as one of the last and least viable forms of criminalized autocratic authoritarianism aiming mainly at protecting itself from the society and from any social responsibility, indeed has no place in BRICS. It is not because Russia is less rapidly developing economically than India or China but because any

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<sup>23</sup> Melnikov, K., Gudkov, A., Panchenko A. (2012) "Vsya Vlast v Sibiri" [All the Power in Siberia].—Kommersant, No 71 (4856), April 20, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1919404>

development is not in its agenda at all. It is heading to catastrophe and partition and not to any reforms. A handful of tycoons spliced with the government do not link their future with Russia. It is difficult to imagine an Indian or Chinese president who would shamelessly calculate how he and his henchmen can withdraw from the jurisdiction the richest regions of their countries to quickly ransack and pump them, and then escape.

*Russian faces, Western masks: decolonizing the ex-colonizer*

Decolonization has different vistas in different locales. Eurasia is obviously not the best place for its realization. It seems that this region would rather go through a period of serious geopolitical turbulence resulting in a remapping of the continent and dismantling of Russia and its partition among various players – some Western but mostly non-Western such as China. Frankly I do not see anything disastrous in this scenario for most of the people residing in Eurasia including those with decolonial drives and sensibilities. Now they are treated as trash by the Russian administration who for the last 500 years has interpreted even the ethnic Russians as its subalterns, its essential “others”. In the future the decolonially attuned groups most of which are indigenous people aggregated into various social and eco-sophic movements<sup>24</sup>, would have to negotiate their rights and autonomies with other more successful states and administrations and not with the remnants of the Russian/Soviet empire paralyzing their every effort at political, cultural and economic agency today.

As for Russians themselves who are rapidly losing their imperial stance, decolonization is a more difficult choice as it would mean getting rid first of all of their own racist, orientalist and colonialist ideas and rediscovering at least some of the cosmological and ethical grounds uncontaminated by modernity. This sentiment is practically unrepresented in the Russian “occupy” protest movement that only mimics recognizable Western ideologies of the right and the left. But among those who disagree to join any of the extremes and chose alternative paths (like various new-Anarchist groups) there are some grass roots movements to interpret local communities agency in Russian small towns through decolonial lens<sup>25</sup>. For ethnic Russians another problem is their “too successful and rapid” modernization grounded in amnesia and as a result – their losing of any spiritual, ethical, cosmological roots which could be opposed to modernity in its Western or Soviet forms – in other words, there is nothing to recollect or re-inscribe.

We can paraphrase the famous F. Fanon’s formula and say that in Russia for the last several centuries we have had a paradox of Russian faces and Western masks

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<sup>24</sup> There are many active organizations intersecting ecological, religious and wider indigenous cultural and spiritual agendas in Eurasian territory such as Baikal Ecological Wave, The Keepers of Baikal, The White Faith or Ak Jang – an Altai Burkhanist religious movement (a creolized form of Buddhism and selected local Shamanistic elements) repressed by the Soviets and revived today.

<sup>25</sup> Recently I had a chance to discuss this issue with a number of young activist artists who tend to apply decolonial option to local communities claims with an important deviation from the original – there is no race/ethnicity/religion/colonial/imperial divide here but a peculiar Russian “internal colonization” projected into contemporary reality.

generating inferiority complexes and schizophrenic dualities of the extremely mentally enslaved and more and more lumpenized people. It is not a surprise in this context that fashionable Slavic pagan revival groups mimicking Western downshifters are not very numerous or successful, mostly resembling computer games and mocking reenactments without any real basis which many indigenous people throughout the world still have an access to as to a living tradition. In Russia, in contrast with Muslim countries, China or India, there is a chronic inability and unwillingness to cope with the material world, a peculiar despise for this world and humans existing in it. In A. Pelipenko's words:

In Russia under the veil of monotheism one can detect the dualistic basis and the worst possible scenario is being realized. Eschatology died completely with the collapse of communist ideology while the renunciation of the world remained intact (in contrast with the West).

This sentiment lies deep in the Russian mentality, depriving of any will to improve the social order, or any motivation to existence. The world is awful and unchangeable. The wonderful future will never come, and reality is hopeless. That is why on the Russian planes entropy rules and life is meaningless and gloomy<sup>26</sup>

In a sense Russia has lived in a crisis condition for the last 20 years in contrast with Europe which has started to feel the pressure only recently. Yet this present crisis is above all a crisis of legitimacy. For Russia the direct economic and social consequences were not so far as sudden and disastrous as for Europe. But the spiritual, existential, and epistemic crises of modernity touch Russians to a much more profound extent because these spheres are precisely what Russia has been enthusiastically buying in the supermarket of modernity. Russians have managed to get used to this permanent crisis state and to the idea that it will always be like that unless the system collapses which it is very close to now in times of the hidden civil war and completely bankrupt and cowardly power<sup>27</sup>. A major value crisis has become our habitual condition accompanied by anomie, eschatological sentiments, vanished spiritual traditions and general inanity of existence. In this epoch of globalization all nation states are in crisis which is not necessarily bad as they simply went along their historical course and are about to finish their existence. Saving the state is probably as delusive as saving capitalism, just another manifestation of global coloniality. Having witnessed even the most democratic and plurinational states quickly changing their stance in the last years I more and more lean in the direction of the forgotten words of a Russian anarchist prince Pyotr Kropotkin, who wrote that the "state crashes the individual and local life, appropriates all the spheres of human activity, brings wars and internal struggles over power, shallow revolutions only replacing one tyrant with another and finally leads to the inevitable death. The state must be destroyed and in this case new life

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<sup>26</sup> Pelipenko A. (2007) *Dualisticheskaya Revolyutsiya i Smyslogenez v Istorii* [Dualistic Revolution and Meaning-genesis in History]. Moscow: Moscow State University of Culture and Art, pp. 311-312.

<sup>27</sup> There are many other hidden and seldom discussed social phenomena in contemporary Russia making it a global "winner" in much less prestigious nominations – massive brain drain, corruption, unemployment, children and elderly suicides, alcoholism, an incredible death rate, one of the highest traffic accidents rate, etc.

would emerge in thousands and thousands of centers—grounded in energetic personal and group initiative, on the basis of free agreement.”<sup>28</sup>

The Russian state today is still if not more entirely grounded in repressions and requisitions instead of attempting to fulfill its elemental functions of protecting the citizens. In the rapidly approaching situation of the country’s partition, accompanied by regional wars, poverty and violence the grass roots initiatives of the civil and political society would be the most important factors for the future. Such drives all over the world are normally grounded in what the decolonial thinkers call “the communal” (as opposed to the liberal “commonwealth” and the Marxist “commons”).<sup>29</sup> In the vast spaces of Eurasia this communal is lost almost everywhere except for the limited enclaves of indigenous spirituality and agency in Altai, in the Far North, in the Far East, in several other regions, violently repressed

by the chronically disorganized yet repressive state, as well as in a number of eco-sophic movements which are likely to become more active in the near future when Russia finally joins WTO in full swing with detrimental consequences for the remaining local agriculture and industrial sector. Decolonial drives more easily emerge from the secondary colonial difference in Eurasia rather than from the external imperial difference. The majority of the endangered Russians today in spite of all proclaimed and endlessly repeated myths of the long vanished Orthodox Russian “sobornost” and Soviet collectivism, lack the communal in its constructive decolonial dimension, but they also lack the Western individualism and sense of civic and human dignity. All of this is a result of several centuries of artificial Russian/Soviet selection aimed at producing an obedient slave. In the end we face an unfortunate and non-viable creature which would soon have to make room for another community.

In this context it is important that the Russian political protests of the 2011-2012 violently repressed by the state have not been very persuasive so far (although I am far from denouncing their importance as they do indicate the final emergence of the new collective subjectivity questioning the legitimacy of autocracy). Among other reasons this is so because they are based on a negative community – against Putin or against the falsified elections failing to produce a joint positive program of any kind for such different actors as the neo-Nazis and the anti-Fascists, the left and the right, the communists and the nationalists, the liberals and the homosexuals. In contrast with the majority of protests in Europe, the anti-capitalist drive in the Russian case is much less pronounced. Volatile alliances marked by a negative fuse are dangerous as they can lead to a mere change of one autocrat to another and a new sliding into a typical Russian matrix of autocracy and its violent dismantling, leading to the next reproduction of monocracy in a still more repressive way. No doubt on a political level Russians urgently need a drastic rewriting of the unjust constitution, but more importantly spiritual, ethical, existential changes are long due. In other words we are speaking here of some fundamental goals of restoring justice, dignity and freedom. And this is probably what makes similar all the

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<sup>28</sup> Kropotkin, P. (1917) *Gosudarstvo i ego Rol v Istorii* [The State and its Role in History]. Moscow: Moscow Association of Anarchist Groups Publication. <http://review3d.ru/biblioteka-anarxista-21-p-a-kropotkin-gosudarstvo-i-ego-rol-v-istorii-gosudarstvo-i-ego-rol-v-istorii>

<sup>29</sup> Mattison, Ch. Op. Cit.

present protests all over the world — from European *indignados* to Moscow Bolotnaya Square, from international Occupy Movement to the Arab Spring.<sup>30</sup>

*The decolonial “community of sense” as a global ecosophic initiative*

The agony of modernity may last for some time more, but from a decolonial perspective it cannot possibly end with a recovery or improvement. In the case of the looming paralysis of the world economy, the collapse of the monetary system, or much worse, a global ecological catastrophe come true, none of the political parties, known state forms of control or international organizations as entirely modern products would be able to take humanity to something radically different and salvatory. Only humanity itself can do it through grass-roots locally cosmopolitan social movements or political society organized from below, non-aligned decolonial intellectuals-cum-activists, verbal and visual artists unbinding our imaginary, setting our aesthesis free, other yet unnamed actors woven together by a very specific emerging solidarity or a decolonial community of sense targeted at rebuilding the multiple worlds anew. The decolonial drive is more likely to emerge and to thrive where there is still a living nexus, a bond grounded in the geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge, a link with spiritual models denied or silenced by modernity, but still managing to survive.

Such decolonial spiritual agency often takes religious or cosmological forms though it is more likely to be a non-official, marginal, border and particularly non-state-aligned religion. This is important for the post-Soviet space with its long-going traditions of coalescence between the state and the Russian Orthodox church which today drifts more and more in the direction of suppression of dissent and money laundering through Church accounts. No less important is this problem for many Central Asian regimes which also allow for only specific official forms of Islam sanctioned by the state and repress everything else. Delinking religiosity from totalitarian power and corporate and financial greed is one of the important challenges in the present crisis urging us to use this opportunity for a future change — a decolonial unbinding of spirituality developing from the border stance in between modernity and its artificially constructed otherness.

The most global in its drive and probably the most understandable for all humans is the ecosophic sphere of decolonial spirituality as opposed to traditionally ecological one (mostly applied and focused on conservation of nature for its future continued human exploitation and consumption)<sup>31</sup>. Ecosophic movements are truly

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<sup>30</sup> The Arab Spring events obviously accented not any specific ideology but a claim for dignity and respect for all people, but the West as usual interpreted it, guiding its self-interest. Rhetorically and hypocritically the Arab Spring was supported by the West but this support was grounded in the stale theory of oriental despotism. According to the main editor of the new and in many ways decolonial journal *Critical Muslim* Ziauddin Sardar, the “bogey of an Islamist takeover has served both the despots and the West”. Sardar, Z. (2012) Introduction: Surprise, Surprise! — *Critical Muslim*. 01, January-March, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> If decolonial rhetoric scarcely comes to stay in Russia because this country has never left its imperial rhetoric and does not agree to see its own colonialism as such, the ecosophic sphere is precisely that entry point where a Russian everyman disinterred in the fate of indigenous people or languages suddenly feels solidarity with their movements precisely because their agenda becomes urgent for him/her as well — he/she has to consume the same contaminated food and water and breath the same polluted air. As soon as prosperity competition turns into survival rivalry one can find unexpected unions and dialogues.

polysemantic as they cover not merely nature-culture relationship but go beyond to reflect on religious and cosmological ideas and values, economic modes and social and political structures. Such is Vandana Shiva's Navdanya movement and Earth Democracy, such is La Via Campesina and other food sovereignty principle movements, such is Arne Naess's Ecosophy T.<sup>32</sup>

*Is there any future for the post-Soviet?*

For post-Soviet people the present crisis is also linked to a specific configuration of our non-existence for the world: having been coded as time (after the Soviet Union collapse) and not as space or much less as people inhabiting the space, we are not important in any way for the bio-power – either global or local, we are the population of low quality expected to quickly vanish as unneeded to the world. What do we do in the absence of any living spiritual traditions to link to, except for the official empty and false form of Orthodox Christianity, particularly if we take into account the multi-confessional nature of Russian Federation and several dozens of millions who cannot associate with Russian Orthodox Church? Is the external imperial difference of which Russia is a clear example doomed? It looks like yes. Whereas the remaining ex-colonies and internal (ex)colonized spaces and people are slowly extricating from the Russian control to either chose a better governor or to embark on a voyage of their own. This delinking is an extremely difficult position on any level but it is the only possible way to a survival and future re-existence. The state and corporate capital's claim to control all knowledge production challenges the remaining critical individuals and groups exponentially in the situation of crisis. The Eurasian context does not offer many options for critically thinking people, confining us to virtual communications with decolonial colleagues abroad and putting in front of a simple choice – either flirting with the dominant knowledge regime and getting an audience at home and a number of symbolic and material privileges, or marginality and vacuum in return of freedom to write and say what you want – more and more often abroad, in countries with longer or more flexible traditions of legitimate alternative thinking.

Many of my students, who are in their early twenties today, do not remember the Soviet times and therefore cannot be authentically nostalgic about state socialism. Equally they have no interest in nationalism or consumerism and market teleology. They are free from black-and-white dualistic thinking and refuse to take the official historical myths at their face value. They long for some different self-realization which present-day decaying Russia cannot offer. This longing unfortunately may still be channeled into various perilous forms of cultural, racial and religious fundamentalism, moth eaten neo-imperial ideologies, extremism of different kinds. Yet this younger generation is not to be so easily cheated which is obvious in their many initiatives on the margins of the official legitimate epistemic and cultural forms, outside the institutionalized system of NGOs and established knowledge-production systems such as universities and museums. Among these initiatives from below the most interesting are various alternative museums and art grounds, "street universities" and virtual discussion groups, anarchism of different kinds, ecosophic movements, non-aligned activist groups defending the rights of prisoners, drug addicts, guest workers turned into slaves, sex workers, etc. Particularly powerful is the Russian students' movement against the accelerated

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<sup>32</sup> Drengson A., Devall B. (2008) *The Ecology of Wisdom. Writings by Arne Naess*. Berkeley: Counterpoint.

dismantling of the country's system of higher education as probably the most telling proof of today's elites real plans for the future — a fast plundering of Eurasian spaces and a quick and quiet retirement abroad while leaving this country with no education, no industry, no agriculture, no health system and no future.

The presence of these holdouts shows that there is hope after all even for the debris of the Russian empire. As a historical entity the external imperial difference probably comes to its end not being able to use the present "crisitunity" in order to radically change, delink and re-link on some other grounds and with some other agents. Yet the inhabitants of the Eurasian space which is pasted with many enclaves of decolonial sensibility and stubborn islands of re-existence, have a potential for the future even if the post-Soviet as a cultural, economic or linguistic totality finally is stepping back into history. What is urgently needed today is to work collectively on various levels and in various spheres — from social movements to universities and museums — to develop a global decolonial community of sense, which would focus on the fractured border spaces of neither/nor, inhabited by various dispensable and bereaved lives, and would bypass the West/North to start a dialogue between various Souths and also a long due conversation of the South and the poor North. This dialogue would have to start from below, and particularly from the decolonial political society, and not from the doomed pseudo-imperial state or the corporations — in order to finally leave behind the usual Russian false communication with the North as a cross between demagogic threats and running errands, or posing as a dominant member in BRICS for no real good reason.

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