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EDITORIAL

The Soviet and the Post-Soviet in Dialogue with (Post-/De-)Colonial Studies: An Introducion / *O Soviético e o pós-Soviético em diálogo com os estudos (pós/de)coloniais: uma introdução*

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in authors, theories, schools of thought, and ideas that originated in the Soviet Union, particularly in the field of linguistics and literary studies. As time distances us more and more from that era, which for many is still emotionally resonant, memory gradually gives way to the analytic eye of historical inquiry. What once seemed, especially "from the outside," like a unitary block appears at a closer analysis as a fragmented and heterogeneous "semiosphere" (Lotman, 1984). This shift in perspective suggests that, bustled behind the numerous barriers imposed on the Soviet Union from within and without, exists a plethora of texts and sources whose relevance to our contemporary world remains largely untested. In this regard, it is worth clarifying that when we refer to a Soviet author, idea, or text, we are not implying an alignment with an official "Soviet canon." Instead, we are referring to something born out of the "Soviet semiosphere": something that did not necessarily coincide with the official ideology yet was compelled to confront it.

Among the various approaches and perspectives interested in the rediscovery and re-examination of the Soviet semiosphere, those dedicated to studying and analysing the "colonial" condition have been the most receptive. Under this umbrella we include both the postcolonial theory, which is primarily associated with the Anglo-Saxon world, and the decolonial theory, which originated in its earliest formulation within the academic milieu of Latin American Studies (Castro-Gómez, Grosfoguel, 2007). Recent research has revealed that Soviet intellectual history contained ideas, particularly regarding language and its relationship with culture and collective identity, which can be considered as precursors to the core principles of anti-colonial movements (Tolz, 2011). Many Soviet authors, either already known and studied, such as Bakhtin, or obscure and shunned, such as Nikolay Marr, were found to have a surprising anti-imperialist and anti-colonial potential (Brandist, 2016; Young, 2022; 2023; Allen, Young, 2024). This rediscovery has

been complemented by new studies on the impact that Soviet theory had on the anti-colonial and independence movements across the world (Drews-Sylla, 2022; Brandist, 2022).

As knowledge and ideas connect in unexpected ways, colonial theories – especially decoloniality (Gherlone, Restaneo, 2024) – have recently found a new connection with the so-called post-Soviet world. The "post-Soviet," as a geographic, historical, and intellectual space, found an affinity with its own issues in the dialogue with the colonial experience and a possible new framework in (de)colonial theory to better understand its condition and problems (Tlostanova, Mignolo, 2012; Tlostanova, 2015; Uffelmann, 2022). Notions originating from Soviet reflections on language and literature are once again at the forefront of this dialogue (see, for example, Tlostanova, 2007; Feldman, 2018; Djagalov, 2020).

This broad overview depicts a complex network of connections that emerged, in the last decade, between Soviet, Coloniality (post-colonial and decolonial), and post-Soviet. In order to explore this topical issue from different disciplinary and thematic perspectives, we invited researchers to submit articles that explore the encounters, possible dialogues, and cross-fertilisation between (post/de)colonial studies, on the one hand, and the intellectual and cultural history of the Soviet and post-Soviet world, on the other.

We identified various areas of inquiry: the study of a Soviet author, text or school and its possible relevance within colonial discourse; the history of the relationship between the Soviet world and anti-colonial movements and theories; the relevance of Soviet ideas on the history of language to contemporary discourse on coloniality; minority literature and other "marginal" cultural expressions or artefacts from the Soviet era analysed through a post/decolonial lens; the contributions of Soviet theory to the analysis of coloniality; possible dialogues between Soviet theory, postcolonial/decolonial discourses, and scholarship on the post-Soviet landscape in the era of globalization; comparative analyses between the Soviet and post-Soviet space and different geocultural contexts, making use of the critique of colonialism/coloniality; the study of narratives and counter-narratives on current concerns in the post-Soviet space (security, independence, etc.) according to a post/decolonial framework.

The final result is a thematic issue that we are confident will enrich the contemporary discussion around key notions such as Orientalism, imperialism, universalism, identity, and minorities, while adding complexity, both retrospective and prospective, to historical readings of the former Soviet Union – a "ghostly" yet pulsating geopolitical entity today. The volume is a tribute to interdisciplinary and polyphonic reflection that, through seven articles, explores different bi- and multi-way processes between the Soviet and the colonial, taking on different disciplinary approaches (philology, history of ideas, literature, history of linguistics, cultural studies, and critical theory).

The first article, "Soviet Indology and the Rise of 'Insurgent Philology'" by Craig Brandist, explores a specific aspect of the context of Oriental studies in which Russian and Soviet thinkers of the early 20th century developed a philological perspective that valued the scholarship and perspectives of indigenous researchers. The author examines the relationships between pre-revolutionary Russian Indologists and Soviet specialists in Oriental Studies, and a group of textual sources and scholars from India. He demonstrates that this encounter, among others, helped the early Soviet intellectual space to conceptualise a perspective capable of challenging the dominant trends within European Indology, not only anticipating important aspects of postcolonial theory, but also developing an insurgent scientific stance, which was in turn incorporated into a radical critique within India and its nationalist aspirations for liberation. Brandist emphasises how this "insurgent philology" ended up undermining the dichotomy between West and East, revealing complex dynamics of collaboration and opposition within Indian society and culture.

The second article, "Engaging the Difference: Multiperspectivist Themes in the Soviet History of Ideas," takes as its starting point the ideological distinction between Westerners and Slavophiles, which was a peculiarly Russian way of interpreting historical, social, and cultural reality, dividing it between the West and the East. The author, Pietro Restaneo, argues that, beneath this binary vision, "multiperspectivism" developed in the late Tsarist Empire and early Soviet Union: i.e. a different epistemological approach, more attentive to holistic and relational wholeness than to the emphasis on difference. Evoking the notion of monad and Russian Leibnizianism, Restaneo thus develops the concept of multiperspectivism, relating it, on the one hand, to

three seminal figures in the Soviet intellectual sphere – Vladimir I. Vernadsky, Nikolai I. Konrad, and Juri M. Lotman – and, on the other hand, to Soviet Oriental studies in a decolonial key. Multiperspectivism ultimately emerges as an epistemic perspective, a child of the Soviet era, capable today of shedding light on key issues of "coloniality," such as universalism, difference and pluriversality.

In the third article, "L. S. Vygotsky's Participation in the Debate on the Belarusian National Question: Between Art, Language, and Politics," Priscila Nascimento Marques and Volha Yermalayeva Franco explore the phenomenon of the creation of Belarusian national theatre in the context of the long journey towards linguistic emancipation and identity valorisation of the Belarusian-speaking people. The research focuses on three texts from 1923, unpublished in English and Portuguese, by the famous Soviet psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky (himself born in Belarusian territory under the Tsarist autocracy), revealing an unknown aspect of his intellectual production: his interest in Belarusian theatre and literature. The two authors demonstrate how, against the backdrop of the indigenisation policy [*korenizatsiia*] promoted by Lenin in the 1920s, Vygotsky echoed the need to break away from the Russocentric legacy of Tsarist colonial domination, contributing to the artistic promotion of the Belarusian language as a national pedagogical-educational task. Throughout the article, Vygotsky emerges as an anti-colonial and postcolonial intellectual ante litteram.

The fourth article, "Creoleness and the Soviet Union: An Unmapped Region of Intellectual Exchange," focuses on Caribbean anti-colonial thought – the Caribbean being a prominent place in the construction of alternative epistemologies – and analyses how ideas of a racially mixed nation and Creole language migrated from America to the early Soviet Union via Central Europe (in particular thanks to the mediation of German Romance linguist Hugo Schuchardt). Overall, Matthew Carson Allen proposes to explore the philological and epistemological connections between the projects of liberation from colonial oppression and subsequent nation-building in the Americas and the Soviet approach to emancipating the oppressed peoples of the former Tsarist Empire, namely the question of national self-determination in Bolshevik revolutionary political thought. The author emphasises the valorisation of indigenous and minority cultures as a starting point for a common sensibility of renewal between the two regions (America and the

Soviet Union), in order to then establish an unprecedented dialogue between the concepts of *mestizaje*, *korenizatsiia* and linguistic creolisation.

In the fifth article, Maria Glushkova and Ekaterina Vólkova Américo address the issue of teaching Russian as a foreign language and translation policies as part of the USSR's broader geopolitical strategy: a strategy that sought to exert cultural influence on the global stage through non-coercive means, anticipating the contemporary concept of soft power. The work, entitled "Multilingualism, Language Policies and Russian Language Teaching in the USSR and Russia," focuses on the period of de-Stalinisation and highlights how the methodology of Russophone teaching and the translation of Russian and Soviet literature into other languages and of foreign literature into Russian were inextricably linked to the anti-colonial question, in a pedagogical and ideological sense. When *korenizatsiia* was already a distant memory, Soviet Russocentrism and linguistic-cultural collaboration with "peripheral" countries (African, Asian and Latin American) under the slogan of brotherhood and "friendship of peoples" became a symbol of opposition to the "imperialist" Western bloc, not without critical aspects.

In the sixth article, "Towards a Decolonial Discussion on Mental Distress: Early Soviet Ideas of Consciousness through the Perspectives of Vygotsky, Vološinov, and Bakhtin," Mirelly Karolinny de Melo Meireles offers a critique of the hegemonic model that currently underpins the conceptualisation of psychological suffering and its treatment regime. The author emphasises the limitations of a biologistic approach, i.e. the psychiatrisation of the patient, and advocates a reinterpretation of the phenomenon in decolonial terms. This approach is capable of revealing how the neoliberal paradigm reinforces colonial patterns of thought that individualise and medicalise mental (un)health, diverting attention from systemic and structural conditions (such as long-standing inequality and injustice), which contribute to people's distress. De Melo Meireles identifies the intellectual context of the early Soviet Union as a conducive – potentially decolonising – milieu for addressing this reflection as reductionist approaches to the study of human consciousness were being questioned during that period, highlighting the role of social, historical, and cultural factors in mental health and illness.

The decolonial approach also occupies a central place in the last article in this special issue. In her work entitled "(Colonial) Technology: The Contribution of Lotmanian Culturology to Digital Coloniality Studies," Laura Gherlone addresses a

specific aspect of Juri M. Lotman's cultural theory, namely his technocritical perspective. The author argues that the Soviet scholar's reflections on the nature and function of technological progress in human culture were the result of his "resistant" dialogue with the distinctive environment of the Soviet semiosphere, and in particular with two intellectual projects, respectively from the 1920s-1930s and the 1960s-1970s: the planetarisation of technology postulated by Vladimir I. Vernadsky's cosmist vision and the machine-driven ordering of the world promoted by the cybernetic science. Gherlone puts forward the idea that Lotman's technocritical perspective can serve as a basis for a critical examination of the universalising claims of contemporary technology. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of current research on so-called digital coloniality.

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