niality and Russian colonialism, their contradictions and yet their intense compatibilities.

A discussion of post-Soviet culture must proceed within these parameters, taking into account the differences between the symptoms of the contiguous empire and those of the more familiar thalassocratic model of British postcoloniality. Russia differs in its markers of modernity; the relative impoverishment of its center in contrast to its Western borders; its constructions of ethnicity, nationality, and race; its state-driven, highly centralized structure; and—as Geoffrey Hosking has eloquently argued—the relative weakness of its own national formations. Yet these conditions provide only the merest guide to the complex tasks of cultural analysis, for Russian contiguity produces not cultural homology but rather, at times, its opposite: a libidinal engagement, under certain conditions, with the great overseas empire, as is surely suggested, for example, in Aivazovsky's evocative seascapes. In a similarly contradictory fashion, the cultural tropes of landscape in cinema, literature, oil painting, and mass song—figuring, on the one hand, Russia's "unencompassibility" (необъятность) and, on the other, the need for constant vigilance at the borders—share a common anxiety about the outer reaches of Russia's expanding drive, a response to its shifting boundaries as encoded cultural wish and fear. We must read these marks against the grain in two distinct fashions: first, against a postcolonialism that fits uneasily with our subject of study and, second, against our own discipline, which has understood these debates as occurring between the First and Third Worlds, with little resonance for Russia. The largest country in the world, still very much in possession of its imperial holdings, Russia remains a challenge to scholars of the First and Third Worlds who would see modernity as inextricably intertwined with capitalism, the nation-state, and liberal democracy.

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Notes

1. Habermas's writings on the postnational constellation and coordination of sovereign discourses might invite such a polemical response from those who have weathered the twentieth-century "friendship of peoples," with all its federalist claims. Here work by Terry Martin and Ronald Suny has been at the center of the debates on the legacy of Austro-Hungary and the emergence of what Martin has dubbed the Soviet Union's "affirmative-action empire."

2. I refer to work by Mark Beissinger, Geoffrey Hosking, Dominic Lieven, Terry Martin, Ilya Prizel, Ronald Suny, and Mark von Hagen, among others.

3. Filofei (Philotheus), an early-sixteenth-century hegumen of Pskov's Eleazarov Monastery, is said to have written a letter containing the admonition that after the fall of Rome and Constantinople, Muscovy had inherited the burden of preserving the true faith: "Two Romes have fallen. The Third stands. A fourth there shall not be" (qtd. in Malinin, app. 54–55).

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Between 1917 and 1947: Postcoloniality and Russia-Eurasia

Has the postcolonial become a new universal, one capable of subsuming under one conceptual rubric such very different historical experiences as the emergence of New World states out of the legacy of white-settler colonialism, the decolonizations of Africa and Asia, and the much more recent disintegration of the Soviet bloc? If so, what is gained and what is lost by such a way of viewing history?

Postcolonial theory has a specific political history and intellectual genealogy that are distinct, but not entirely divorced, from Soviet history. Postcolonial theory became possible with the postwar decolonizations of Africa and Asia and the related ascendancy of various national intelligentsias. The success of secular nationalism enabled these intelligentsias to reexamine the recent past, just as the subsequent crisis of secular nationalism enabled them to critique the failures of the postcolonial state and its complicities with older and newer imperialisms. The resulting proliferation of revisionist historiography and theoretical critique was further empowered by the increasingly transnational location of its practitioners, manifested most visibly by the emergence of postcolonial diasporas active in the American academy and by related shifts in student demographics.

Although Nasser, Sukarno, and Nehru clearly looked in part to the Soviet state for inspiration, the twentieth-century encounter between the

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900165927 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Second and Third Worlds can no longer be read as one of inspired continuity. The gap between the two emblematic dates 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution, and 1947, the year of Indian independence, seems far greater today than during the heyday of nonalignment, formulated at the Bandung Conference of 1955. Taking place some thirty years before the South Asian and African decolonizations, the first decolonization of the Russian empire was proclaimed in the name of a revolutionary socialism that would crucially equivocate on what was called the national question. The Soviet Union was expressly internationalist yet zealously territorial and expansionist, denying the autonomy of its constitutive peoples while retaining a federal structure that would nonetheless permit an elaborate discourse of local specificity. This equivocation led to the paradoxical emergence of what Nancy Condee recently called an anti-imperialist empire. If the Soviet Union was an empire, it was one that combined an exceptionally violent and coercive centralism with a paternalistic internationalism whose relation to the peripheries of the USSR was by no means purely exploitative. The subsidizing of republican economies, the indigenizing of regional party structures, and the fostering of national cultures from the Uzbek to the Armenian were pursued in tandem with the ostensibly homogenizing vision of "Soviet man." It was surely the sustained, official Soviet cultivation of national republican elites, as much as the efforts of local nationalisms, that permitted the rapid emergence of a plethora of post-Soviet nation-states.

The distinctness of Soviet experience finds an inverted corollary in the evolution of Russian studies in the United States. A child of the cold war, Russian studies combined historical investigations that largely reproduced a centralist or metropolitan vision of Eurasian history with a study of literature that fashioned a canon out of the Russian nineteenth-century classics, the modernists, and the postwar dissidents. The influx of Russian émigrés did little to upset these assumptions, since one of their primary intellectual and existential reflexes was to counterpose politics and culture. The underrepresentation of other Soviet ethnicities in American universities and in America at large, not to mention their regional isolation from global intellectual debates, is probably as much responsible for the underdevelopment of Eurasian postcolonial studies as the purely methodological question of postcolonialism's applicability to the post-Soviet region.

So where does the question stand today, in our field?

In Russian literary studies, a small body of works examines the correlation of literature and empire. I will confine myself to noting two serious limitations of these works. First, they tend to read Edward Said's *Orientalism* as a synecdoche for postcolonial criticism as a whole, in order to assert its qualified applicability to Russian studies and to make a case for Russia's quasi-European, quasi-Asiatic particularism. This is combined with strategies of reading that largely focus on mimetic-representational categories at the expense of formal or rhetorical modes. All of this ignores a much larger body of literary criticism and historiography (e.g., from South Asia or Latin America) whose meditations on the distortions or mutations produced by the importation of Eurocentric modernizing and developmentalist models to the non-West might throw a useful light on the Russian-Eurasian region. More serious still has been our neglect of the non-Russian literary and intellectual traditions of the former Soviet Union. We remain trapped in the Petrine paradigm of Russia's eternally anxious opening to the West; where we look to the East, we remain content with Russian representations of it.

The postcolonial question has certainly been better articulated in related fields such as Russian history and post-Soviet anthropology. In a review essay–cum-manifesto on these developments, Mark von Hagen recently claimed the term "Eurasia" as an "anti-paradigm for the post-Soviet era" that "signals a decentering of historical narratives from the powerful perspectives of the former capitals, whether imperial St. Petersburg or tsarist-Soviet Moscow" (par. 2). Von Hagen takes strategic advantage of the toponymic crisis caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union and claims for a counterhegemonic intellectual initiative a term—Eurasia—that has in fact had a relatively muddy intellectual history. Far more than other toponyms (such as those for nations and continents), Eurasia remains to this day an indeterminate category with

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900165927 Published online by Cambridge University Press

an uneven history of discursive elaboration, and it had a weak institutional legitimacy until its recent, rapid adoption by area studies institutes and centers in the United States. Conceived of originally in the West to describe the landmass of Europe and Asia combined, the term has been used in Russia as part of attempts to rethink the relation between the European and Asiatic regions of the Russian empire, with a focus on the central Asian steppe as Eurasia's newly designated core. This conceptual history has been marked by a rich paradox: while serving to highlight the ethnically diverse nature of the former Soviet Union, to the point of displacing the Eurocentrism of received accounts of the region, the term Eurasia has also been marked by a strong totalizing impulse, a desire for spatial unity and for a principle to guarantee this unity. To be sure, von Hagen explicitly repudiates the "faith [of classical Eurasianists such as Trubetzkoy] in the Russian Empire's self-sufficiency, its 'exceptional path,' and their understanding of Eurasia as a closed system of interrelationships" (26).

Von Hagen necessarily limits himself to the work of Western and Russian professional historians of Eurasia who have been enriched by the insights of newer methodologies. This framework neglects one vital element that could become the legitimate object of Russian-Eurasian literary studies: the intellectual or creative interventions of writers, poets, philologists, and political activists of the Eurasian peripheries, whose work constitutes a set of alternative trajectories that seldom, if ever, coincided completely with the directives emanating from Moscow. The cultural production of the reformist as well as revolutionary national intelligentsias of central Asia and the Caucasus during the late tsarist and early Soviet periods is immensely rich, ranging from the aesthetic vangardism of the Georgian modernists to the national communism of the Tatar Sultan Galiev, whose critique of Leninist internationalism casts a more contradictory light on Comintern debates on the nationality question. This varied body of work might allow us spatially to reconfigure the convergence between politics and aesthetics that Neil Larsen has suggestively found in Lenin's critique of imperialism and the synchronous emergence of the artistic avant-garde as a new "internationale of form." Finally, let us not forget that the most imaginative critique of Russocentric epistemology was generated by the Kazakh poet-philologist Olzhas Suleimenov, whose book *Az i Ia* (1975) influenced Soviet culture as Fanon's or Said's work did other parts of the world.

What I am proposing, then, is a renewed focus on the regions of the Eurasian periphery, a commitment to the local archive that requires careful study of languages and sources outside Russian and an ability to contemplate cultural phenomena that exceed the Petrine paradigm of Russia and the West. This project must be complemented by an openness to the kinds of questions already being posed in other parts of the globe by transnational methodologies such as postcolonial studies. Such work might point to a convergence among Slavic studies, comparative literature, and work now pursued in various area studies institutes. For the past few years, I have been learning Georgian and studying revolutionary Tbilisi as a cultural site—a site far from the storming of the Winter Palace, to be sure, but also one of multiple languages and ethnicities, where anticolonial nationalism competed with both Menshevism and Bolshevism, where fin de siècle aestheticism coexisted with the futurist avant-garde and Near Eastern forms of bardic recitation, and where perhaps more modernities, local and imported, were imagined than in Paris or Saint Petersburg.

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On Some Post-Soviet Postcolonialisms

The title "Are We Postcolonial?" begs several related questions. First, who is "we"? The residents

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900165927 Published online by Cambridge University Press