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

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of the former Soviet Union and its former satellites in Eastern Europe and elsewhere? The intellectual communities in those countries? The diasporas with roots in those countries? The foreign-based (especially Western-based) scholars of the region's cultures? As a citizen of a former "white" colony of the Russian and Soviet empires and as an academic now based in the United States, I would argue that yes, definitely, I am postcolonial; however, my remarks here will not focus on autoethnography.

The questions outlined above are tangled up with another, related set of questions. How does one assert postcoloniality? Is it sufficient merely to claim it, as I just did? Should a legitimation of this claim proceed by way of argumentation, or does it require a sanction from some external disciplinary authority? (In a similar vein, when some fifteen years ago many Slavic and Eastern European intellectuals asserted the need to consider their countries' cultural conditions as part of postmodernism as a global phenomenon, many Western cultural theorists voiced their reservations, and at times even strong opposition, to the assertion.) Simultaneously, other questions arise: What kinds of uses or appropriations of the discourse on postcolonialism can be documented in the cultures of this region and in scholarship focusing on them? Is a representative of an imperial culture postcolonial too? Is postcolonialism indeed a category with global applicability, as David Chioni Moore argued in *PMLA* in 2001? Is postcolonialism an appropriate designation for empirical sociopolitical reality—the broad spectrum of cultural production—or only for academic discourse? Why is it that when representatives of academic communities studying non-Russian cultures in the region asserted the need to look at the ex-Soviet world through a postcolonial lens as early as 1992 (one of the earliest such attempts was made by the Ukrainian Australian scholar Marko Pavlyshyn), they were ignored or ridiculed by the overwhelming majority of Russian intellectuals and Western-trained specialists on Russian culture? Why, a dozen years later, did many of the same intellectuals and specialists, in Russia and the West, suddenly have a change of heart?

One possible explanation for this change lies in their strategic move to stake out disciplinary authority. In terms of disciplinary designations, a distinction between colonial discourse analysis and the focus on postcolonialism needs to be borne in mind. If the former has a venerable history in the study of the Russian and Soviet empires (Walter Kolarz's 1952 study *Russia and Her Colonies* is an example from the West), the latter is a recent and contradictory phenomenon. The remainder of my remarks will focus on the strategic appropriation of some elements of the discourse on postcolonialism by Russian academics. Throughout the 1990s, postcolonialism was perhaps the only major contemporary theoretical discourse persistently ignored by Russian academics. As recently as 1998, for instance, a Russian survey of the Western discourse on postmodernism labeled Edward Said a "well-known literary scholar of a leftist-anarchist orientation" and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak a "socially engagé feminist deconstructionist" (Il'in 107–08, 125).[1] As it begins to register on the intellectual radar of some Russian scholars, postcolonialism is finding a somewhat unexpected application—in support of a view that Russia, starting with Peter the Great's reforms, developed as a self-colonizing state.

The roots of this argument have been traced to the writings of the nineteenth-century philosopher Petr Chaadaev, but its rediscovery in contemporary cultural discourse has been credited to a 1990 essay by Boris Groys. The reforms of Peter I, asserts Groys,

> constitute a sui generis act of self-colonization by the Russian people: one of its parts, as it were, pretended to be foreigners, in their most frightening and threatening incarnation, and started consistently and radically persecuting everything Russian and imposing everything that by the standards of that time was considered modernized and Western. . . . [A]s a result of this cruel inoculation, Russia saved itself from real colonization by a West that surpassed it technically and militarily. (358)

Aleksandr Etkind has attempted to integrate Groys's thesis with the postcolonial paradigm. In the Russian historiographical tradition, he argues, Russian colonization is viewed as being of a settler type, "an expansion of the Russian people" as it created "its own territory," while Western coloni-

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zation is seen as a product of geographic discoveries and military conquests. "The notions," Etkind writes, "are used in a way that makes Russian colonization come across as a good deed and European as bad. In the case of Europe, colonization is defined in a manner that presupposes decolonization, while in that of Russia the definition makes decolonization logically impossible" (64–65).

A critical tone barely registers in Etkind's analysis of this model; even the conquest of the Caucasus was "not quite colonial" for Etkind, since "after the incorporation of Georgia it [the northern Caucasus] found itself inside the empire's territory" (63). In other words, once a noncontiguous colony is appended to the Russian empire, the imperative is to naturalize it by conquering the territory in between and restoring contiguity. In effect, Etkind perpetuates aspects of Russian colonialist ideology, providing evidence of how far Russian culture still is from "find[ing] a positive, enlightened solution" to the enduring legacy of colonization, a solution Etkind calls for at the end of his essay.

Perhaps the most thought-provoking instance to date of Russian engagement with postcolonial theory can be found in Madina Tlostanova's 2004 book *Postsovetskaia literatura i estetika transkul'turatsii* ("Post-Soviet Literature and the Aesthetics of Transculturation"). Her book, more conversant with theorizations of postcolonialism and globalization than any previous work in the Russian academy, carries a strong autobiographical investment and highlights the author's intellectual position as a representative of russophone non-ethnically-Russian intelligentsia.

This volume's primary trouble lies in its excessive privileging of the position of a postcolonial hybrid intellectual who is speaking to, and in the context of, the academic institutions of the former metropole and in its disdain toward all nationalist discourses of resistance. Tlostanova's strategically difficult self-positioning as someone multiply colonized and "othered"—someone who rejects the humiliating positions of a "native informant" and of "a political activist who uses his otherness in his favor"—is productive when Tlostanova critiques the mainstream Russian intellectual discourse but is problematic in its rejection of the possibility of a meaningful politics of resistance.

Tlostanova's interest in transnational writing in English prompts her to seek similar manifestations in post-Soviet Russia. She limits her results by solely examining conventional, plot-driven narrative fiction: the only "positive heroes" that emerge in her book are Andrei Volos, an ethnically Russian writer who grew up in Tajikistan and is best known for his novel *Khurramabad*, which allegorically portrays the collapse of the (imagined) multilingual and multicultural utopia of the Soviet project and its descent into ethnic hatred and the ruthless violence of civil war, and Afanasii Mamedov, a writer of Azeri Jewish background whose work focuses on the similar collapse of the multilingual and multiethnic city of his childhood and youth, Baku. Both writers are nostalgic for the purported multiculturalism of these colonial Soviet sites, and Tlostanova appears to find solidarity with them. Her approval of these texts contrasts with her scorn for the only non-Russian-language post-Soviet texts she considers: two Ukrainian novels, Yuri Andrukhovych's *The Moskoviad* and Oksana Zabuzhko's *Field Work in Ukrainian Sex* (270–81; 173–82). Published months before Ukraine's Orange Revolution, Tlostanova's book is a paradoxical combination of a call to rethink the Russian imperial legacy, a symptomatic representation of persisting imperialist prejudices, and a cautionary instance of a strategic discursive appropriation gone awry.

Although the works discussed above constitute a somewhat dispiriting instance of theoretical travel from the West into Russia, the fact that Russian scholars are beginning to engage with the discourse on postcolonialism can only be welcomed. One hopes that the recent cultural and geopolitical realignments within the former Soviet empire sometimes referred to as the "colored revolutions" will eventually prompt a more radical rethinking, and working through, of Russia's imperial legacy, not only by scholars outside Russia but, crucially, by those participating in the country's internal intellectual debate as well.

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Note

1. All translations are mine.

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