



Once More on (the Lightness of) Postcolonial Naming: Which Europe and Whose Eurocentrism?

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“What is Europe? It is the Bible and the Greeks”¹ – thus curiously suggests Emmanuel Levinas, the magisterial advocate of ethics as first philosophy of late Western modernity.

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, “The Bible and the Greeks” in *In the Time of the Nations* (Michael B. Smith, trans., London: The Athlon Press, 2001): 133. “The Bible” for Levinas signifies the imperative ethical impetus of Judeo-Christian religious traditions and “the Greeks” represent the “vocabulary, grammar and wisdom with which it originated in Hellas, the manner in which the universality of the West is expressed, or tries to express itself – rising above the local particularism of the quaint, traditional, poetic or religious. It is a language without prejudice ...” 134-135.

Of course, from more than one location of enunciation, including the deep internal peripheries (such as the Baltic region) of Europe as a geopolitical and not just metaphorical entity, a sweeping yet reductive pronouncement like this might beg more than one question. The poetic poise of Levinas' "Europe" resonates with a spectrum of historically embedded ethical questions, especially when Europe is named and theorized in the field of discourses comprising postcolonial criticism. And postcolonial criticism is itself not exactly a bystander in all matters ethical, at least in declamatory if not always performative ways. In this context, my essay is an interrogation of the casual and repetitive usages of the metaphorical construct "Europe" in postcolonial discourses as a matter of the ethics (and politics) of postcolonial recognition. Considering the historical context of an intra-European "underside" of pretty much everything – the Baltic region – the objective of the present essay is to search for an ethically vectored complexity curve in postcolonial naming.

It is hard to find a text originating out of the milieu of postcolonial criticism in which the terms "Europe/European" and "Eurocentrism" would not populate the pages. As theological inquiry of various positionalities and disciplinary domiciles is getting more adept in applying postcolonial critiques to theological topics, terms like "Europe/European" and "Eurocentrism" increasingly appear in theological texts as well. Against the best scholarly instincts, it does not seem conducive or even feasible to quote the scores of specific examples right away simply because they are virtually ubiquitous. The critical purchase of inquiring into the usages of "Europe" in postcolonial discourses is to

interrogate some rather resilient patterns of postcolonial representations/construals of “Europe” from a perspective of the ethics of representation.

My inquiry, therefore, has a twofold focus: first, it is underwritten by a historical suspicion toward the casual usage of homogenized thematizations of Europe in postcolonial and subaltern discourses, be they theoretical or explicitly theological. Second, it is sparked by a suspicion toward a certain “unbearable lightness” of postcolonial naming (to paraphrase the title of Milan Kundera’s famous novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*). This kind of “lightness” in postcolonial naming overlooks precisely some of those geopolitical, cultural, and linguistic minoritarian “others” in all their multilayered historical materiality, on whose behalf – or on whose shoulders? – the whole theoretical industry of postcolonial criticism has been successfully produced. The present inquiry is vectored toward the clandestine appeal that reductive representations continue to exert all the while such an appeal is seemingly being resisted, contested, and condemned. It does not seem to be the case that the casual use of the metaphorically saturated figure of “Europe” would essentialize and homogenize the geohistorical Europe deliberately, violently, or with a malicious intent. But it nevertheless robotically proliferates the identification between the colonial and hegemonic West/Occident/*Abendländer* on the one hand and Europe as geopolitical region and geocultural formation on the other. In the North American context, such an injudicious identification additionally serves to undermine pedagogical efforts to generate adequate discernment of historical movements and cultural particularities of other continents and cultures amidst the often oblivious consciousness of introspective self-

sufficiency – cultural, linguistic, military, economical and so forth – particularly in the United States.

Europe: Metaphor, Cliché, Codeword?

In postcolonial criticism Europe has typically functioned not primarily as a geopolitical entity but rather as, in Dipesh Chakrabarty's words, "an imaginary figure that remains deeply embedded in *clichéd and shorthand forms* in some everyday habits of thought."² True, on some level, there is a well-grounded critical awareness that "Europe" is often conceived in hyperreal terms with indeterminate geographical referents.³ When so conceived, "Europe" becomes a conceptual and imaginative placeholder for the globally projected colonial power of Western modernity. As such, the shorthand "Europe" is made to stand for what Barnor Hesse aptly describes as the "Western spectacle" – "a discursive organization of an imaginary social representativeness that rests on a cultivated social exclusiveness."⁴ The Western spectacle functions by globalizing the

‘non-European’ (‘non-white’) other, outside the chosen people, as irredeemably deficient, deviant and disorderly. Invariably narrowly cast as an outsider, an inferior, a threat, a margin, an amusement, an exoticism, an after-thought; the ‘non-European’ as ‘non-white’, and vice-versa, is situated within the imperial vision and governmental landscape of an idealized Western panorama and paranoia.⁵

² Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000): 4. Italics found in the original text.

³ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴ Barnor Hesse, "Reviewing the Western Spectacle: Reflexive Globalization through the Black Diaspora," *Global Futures: Migration, Environment and Globalization* (Avtar Brah, Mary J. Hickman, Martin MacGhaill, eds.; New York: Palgrave, 1999):130-131.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Again, as handy and as habitual as the shorthand may be, there is an awareness that it “dissolves under analysis.”⁶ At the same time, however, the analytical dissolution does not mean disappearance:

... just as the phenomenon of Orientalism does not disappear simply because some of us have now attained a critical awareness of it, similarly a certain version of “Europe,” reified and celebrated in the phenomenal world of everyday relationships of power as the scene of the birth of the modern, continues to dominate the discourse of history. Analysis does not make it go away.⁷

Now the subdued situation that Chakrabarty so insightfully describes has supported the reinscriptions of certain margins and of certain versions of subalternity ever deeper in the cherished postcolonial canonicity while curiously excluding, nay appearing oblivious toward, others. That, to allude to my final reflections in this essay, instigates a tendency to conjure static, unproductive, and ultimately treacherous hierarchies of marginality and subalternity and even worse, of human suffering *tout court*. Moreover, the state of theoretical affairs that Chakrabarty has summarized may even raise the question whether my analysis is *a priori* doomed to be superfluous. However, being aware of the unpredictable and often fragile transformative reach of emancipatory theories and liberating imagination, I agree with Salman Rushdie that imagination is not a frivolous space, time and activity but rather it is a place where we “bring the world to being.”⁸ Theory, reflection, imagination, in other words, is praxis, too. It bodies forth betwixt and

⁶ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 28.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ I am referring to Salman Rushdie’s remarks delivered at “The Only Subject is Love: A Symposium with Salman Rushdie, Christopher Hitchens, and Deepa Mehta,” on February 26, 2010, at Emory University, Atlanta, GA, USA.

between other praxes of living in the world of labor, enjoyment, politics, and relationships without necessarily reigning over them. Thus, asking certain postcolonially colored ethical questions may be useful to facilitate if not the disappearance of reified and misleading “shorthand forms” then at least rendering the use of them explicitly self-conscious, selective, and hesitant. Theology, in this context, may offer an imaginary of a very complex and fragile hope as a way of moving beyond reified shorthands and clichés of the world of colonial power and enduring imperial formations in life and thought. Hope, of course, is by no means an instrumental optimism. In these circumstances the notion of the eschatological *memoria passionis* (Johann Baptist Metz) appears to be useful. But first things first.

Europe: Sifting Through the Postcolonial Cliché and Shorthand

Why bother with pesky nuances? Namely, why certain historical clichés and shorthand may be politically offensive and culturally trivializing (to some Europeans at least) when it is so often assumed that the hegemonic Europe of Western colonial modernity is the same Europe that is and has been for centuries the geographical and cultural home of many surprisingly entangled histories, ethnicities, religious traditions, and mostly unrecognized intra-continental colonial conquests? Because significant parts of what is known as Europe today – all those dearly beloved and often bloody internal queries about what starts and ends where in Europe notwithstanding – have not been participating in the campaigns of the modern colonial aggression overseas, which is, no

doubt, the magisterial and paradigmatic case of colonialism within postcolonial criticism as we know it.⁹

What needs to be said upfront is that the historical non-participation of certain Eastern, Central, Southern and Western European nations and peoples in the “discovery” and conquest of transmarine colonies does not automatically entail the absence of colonial desires. It does not automatically suggest a sustained resistance against colonialist ideologies and rationalities as those were coercively projected onto other, extra-European, cultures and territories. Yet the problem at hand in contemporary postcolonial discourse is the (non)recognition of the burden of complexity inherent in the representations of Europe as homogenized and unified originary locus of transmarine colonialisms vis-à-vis the histories of European intracontinental colonialisms. For postcolonial enterprise such an oversight cannot be an issue of mere historical accuracy alone; it is that too, but most urgently it is rather an ethically circumscribed theoretical conundrum.

To state a glaring example of routinely ignored intra-European colonialism, the temporal range of these “domestic” colonial escapades stretches from the medieval crusades into the territories of the Baltic rim to the often plainly ignored colonial conquests and imperial dominance of the Soviet empire up until only a little over 20

⁹ R.S. Sugirtharajah has even stated that postcolonialism, as the term is used in present, “does not allow an understanding of colonialism outside modern European colonialism,” *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 12. The vague adjective “European” is rather unhelpful here even though it hints at the classical postcolonial perception of the coloniality of modern power most closely associated with assorted European colonial cultures.

years ago. Admittedly, when the contextual attention turns to the Baltic region, it must tune in to one of the “small voices of history.”¹⁰ As disillusioned as one may be, in light of Chakrabarty’s remarks, about the transformative capacity of historical analysis, the aspiration here is what Ranajit Guha described as the power of the small voices of history to interrupt “the telling in the dominant version, breaking up its storyline and making a mess of its plot.”¹¹ With so much due attention being directed toward the analysis of exclusion in postcolonial milieu perhaps the time has come to focus rather intently on the postcolonial politics of inclusion and recognition of previously overlooked complexities. The aim here is to make the monolithically grasped “Europe,” the apparent slam-dunk-case of postcolonial theorizing and naming, a little messier. The itinerary of interruption will proceed through the Baltics as an obdurate interstice of Europe. The Baltics, however, is by far not the only such interstice in Europe – and this must be acknowledged at once and *a priori*.

The Baltic region is one of the interruptive “nuances” within Europe as a multi-tiered configuration of powers and rationalities in the colonial context. It is precisely as a nuance that it should merit a postcolonial attention since, as Ella Shohat argued in her famous essay almost two decades ago,

the term ‘post-colonial’ would be more precise, therefore, if articulated as ‘post-First/Third Worlds theory,’ or ‘post-anti-colonial critique,’ as a movement beyond a relatively binaristic, fixed and stable mapping of power relations between

¹⁰ Ranajit Guha, “The Small Voice of History,” *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty, eds.; Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996): 1-12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

‘colonizer/colonized’ and ‘center/periphery’. Such rearticulations suggest a more nuanced discourse, which allows for movement, mobility and fluidity.¹²

What could be the critical purchase of interrogating the notion of Europe with an interstitially nuanced vision, i.e., hearing one of those disrupting “small voices”? It has something to do with ethics, or, in other words, with the testing of the endurance and commitment of the postcolonial desires to embrace the ethical in its deconstructive and representational practices and their aptitude for resisting what Barnor Hesse calls “de/colonial fantasies.”¹³ And postcolonialism has much to do with ethics and justice – or lack thereof. Thus Homi Bhabha magisterially stated that

postcoloniality, for its part, is a salutary reminder of the persistent ‘neo-colonial’ relations with the ‘new’ world order and multinational division of labour. Such a perspective enables the authentication of histories of exploitation and the evolution of strategies of resistance. Beyond this, postcolonial critique bears witness to those countries and communities – in the North and the South, urban and rural – constituted, if I may coin a phrase, “otherwise than modernity.”¹⁴

¹² Ella Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial,’” *Social Text*, 31/32 (1992): 108.

¹³ Barnor Hesse, “Forgotten Like a Bad Dream: Atlantic Slavery and the Ethics of Postcolonial Memory,” *Relocating Postcolonialism* (David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson, eds.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2002):159-160. De/colonial fantasy for Hesse is fabricated by “those Western attitudes, practices and discourses that imagine against the evidence, against counter-interrogation” (159) and which is stimulated by a compulsion to imagine one’s current “post-colonial” situation as having resolved or avoided any disruptive legacies of the failures to decolonize (160). Hesse primarily emphasizes the Western compulsions, even though his analysis can certainly be interpreted to include a much broader terrain – even the terrain of postcolonialism itself.

¹⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, “Introduction”, *The Location of Culture*, Reprint edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2006): 9.

From Bhabha's finely nuanced perspective, the ethical diapason of witness – by intervention in and revision of colonialist discourses – encompasses broad terrains of subjugation and subalternity:

Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged histories of nations, races, communities, peoples.¹⁵

It is within the above trajectories of postcolonial ethos that the relevance of interrogating the cliché-ic "Europe" obtains as an ethical objective for postcolonial critical endeavors.

Which Europe: One, Eurocentrist, Manichean?

It comes as no surprise that there is no surplus of elaborate "thick" descriptions of Europe/Eurocentrism in most postcolonial texts. The trend can be detected already in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* – a work that is not, strictly speaking, "postcolonial" but nevertheless exerts a magisterial genealogical influence in the field. In Fanon's book it is not only the passionate "Conclusion" in which Europe features prominently as a monolithic and self-identical hegemony on the cusp of its downfall that merits attention. Fanon's "Europe" makes frequent appearances all through the book and virtually everywhere it appears as a singular, seemingly transparent, entity: "the European

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern", pp. 245-246.

sector,”¹⁶ “European opulence,”¹⁷ “European culture,”¹⁸ to mention only a few instances. When Fanon actually turns to the more specific “European nations”¹⁹ the same broad strokes continue, inducing the question – which nations are then part of this “Europe”? Which “nations achieved the national unity at a time when the national bourgeoisies has concentrated most of the wealth in their own hands?”²⁰ In which Europe “because of the nature of their development and progress, no nation really *insulted* the others?”²¹ To put it bluntly, Fanon’s expressions are simplifications – particularly ironic in relation to his own notion of Manicheanism – but also a trendsetting precedent of a certain unbearable lightness of naming, to be observed in scores of later texts originating within the arena of postcolonial criticism.

Another paradigmatic instance of homogenizing Europe with a long rhetorical posteriority appears in Edward Said’s magisterial *Orientalism*. Here the case is more subtle since at the very beginning Said already distinguishes between the type of relation that France and Britain have had with the “Orient” as compared to Germany, Russia or Switzerland, clearly indicating that “Orient” and “Orientalism” paradigmatically obtains in “European Western experience.”²² Apart from repeating the freezing gestures of the

¹⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Richard Philcox, trans.; New York: Grove Press, 2004): 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 53. Fanon’s italics.

²² Edward W. Said, “Introduction to *Orientalism*” in *Relocating Postcolonialism*, 71.

binary East/West, Said nonetheless equates Europe with the West²³ of which the “Orient” is the contrasting imaginary and experience. Beyond doubt, the imaginaries such as “Orient” and “Occident” are “man-made.”²⁴ But if so, then Europe as identified with “the West” is “man-made” as well. The terminological inertia of generalized, manageable, and habitual singulars appears alongside Said’s careful and insightful analyses. For example, what exactly are the “European culture”²⁵ and “the European identity”²⁶ in the singular? Is it like European chocolate except that when one wants to savor it one needs to eat either Belgian, or Swiss, or Latvian, or any other locally produced and distinctly tasting chocolate? In the present context of undefeatable vexations with the “search for the soul of Europe”²⁷ within the recently expanded and economically battered European Union, a notion like “European identity” is suspected to always have possessed the ambiguity of an egalitarian hope mixed with deeply ingrained ideological fictions, and perhaps even more than ever begs the curious question – when was this “European identity” in singular?

More recently similarly curious slippages into a strangely uniform category of the “European culture” make appearance even in such careful and attentive studies such as

²³ *Ibid.*, 71. Said writes, “in addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.”

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 73, 76.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁷ For an interesting, though postcolonially color-blind, theological reflection, see Richard H. Roberts’ “The construals of ‘Europe’: religion, theology and the problematic of modernity,” *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* (Paul Heelas, ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1998): 186-217.

Ania Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*.²⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts the case rather clearly and states the obvious: the codename "West" represents Northwestern European tradition²⁹ and that is what postcolonial thinkers usually have in mind, at least when pressed, when "Europe" as a master signifier of colonial regime makes its appearances in postcolonial texts. This is an awkward acknowledgment of G. W. F. Hegel's idea, who in *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* pointedly identifies "*das Herz Europas*" or the "*Mittelpunkt*" of Europe as the Northwestern regions to the north of the Alps to be distinguished from the Southern parts like Italy and Greece and from the Northeastern, mostly Slavic as Hegel saw them, regions.³⁰ The Hegelian "center" (*das Herz Europas, der Mittelpunkt*) of Europe unsurprisingly consists of France, Germany and England. These three, however, are described as the most important countries (*die Hauptländer*) within "the heart," indicating that there is yet another, interior hierarchy even within the posited center.³¹ For Hegel, it is here that the *Weltgeist* has found not just a temporary home – as it was the case with Greece and Italy before the Reformation – but its consummation. Even more ironically, Donald Rumsfeld captured the same uncomfortable imaginary of multi-tiered Europe with a characteristic bluntness when he referred to roughly the same region where Hegel found his *Herz*

²⁸ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Reprint edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2005): 85, 94.

²⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999): 6.

³⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen ueber die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Werke 12 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970): 133.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Europas as the “Old Europe” of France and Germany vis-à-vis the “New Europe” of the former Eastern Bloc among other contemporary maverick states of Europe in his controversial remarks surrounding the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.³²

Historically speaking, Hegel was by no means the only one wondering about *das Herz Europas* from within the Enlightenment-inspired Northwestern European metropolises. Before Hegel, Voltaire’s enlightened “discovery” of “Eastern Europe” in *Histoire de Charles XII* (1731) not only worked out the “crucial eighteenth-century demarcation of the continent into the domains of ‘Western Europe’ and ‘Eastern Europe,’”³³ but also posited the mature, self-congratulatory Western gaze, for which this diffuse, awkward and backward terrain became *l’orient de l’Europe*. Obviously, a significant and paternalizing asymmetry is established here by, ironically, “orientalizing” gestures aimed at Europe itself, as Larry Wolf indicates. For Voltaire, “there was a Europe that held certain beliefs, whether true or false, and another Europe which appeared only as an object or regard, an item of news, a point of controversy. There was Europe as subject and Europe as object, geographically aligned according to west and east, and the former assumed a public persona in which it appropriated the latter.”³⁴

At this juncture, the homogenizing theoretical gesture that Spivak alludes to when she mentions the “codename West” needs to be explicitly recognized. Namely, Europe is

³² See, for example, “The outrage of ‘Old Europe’ remarks,” available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2687403.stm> among other sources.

³³ Larry Wolf, “Voltaire’s Public and the Idea of Eastern Europe: Toward a Literary Sociology of Continental Division,” *Slavic Review* 54:4 (1995): 933.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 935.

metaphorically identified with “the West/the Occident” – quite often in equally essentialist terms – as the placeholder for what Hesse called the Western spectacle, or for the colonial conquest and exploitation, or for the coercively projected political and scientific modernity, and so forth. Spivak’s fleeting acknowledgment of the “codename West” captures the collusion of historical, geopolitical entity and a cultural construct as Stuart Hall suggested.³⁵ In this context, the West/The Occident indeed “is a not a place, it is a project”³⁶ in Édouard Glissant’s words. Glissant and Hall’s laconic perception of the West as a sociocultural and even theological construct is doubtlessly appropriate as a tool of epistemological and cultural analysis to understand the present global scope of modernity as cultural, scientific and economic imaginary. At the same time, Europe was and is a geopolitical and existential reality for those who actually live there and have not been enabled or willing participants of the oppressive colonial regimes that specific historical European colonial powers tragically projected onto the cultures and peoples outside and even inside Europe. Now to continue using homogenizing “codenames” to casually identify a certain part, i.e., the Occidental or Northwestern Europe with the whole of Europe is an ethically problematic gesture within precisely those postcolonial trajectories of thought which, supposedly, pay more than a fleeting attention to nuance. This collusion also renders the casually used notion of “Eurocentrism” theoretically vacuous precisely because it ends up, willingly or accidentally, reinscribing certain

³⁵ Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” *Formations of Modernity* (S. Hall and B. Gieben, eds.; London: Polity Press 1992).

³⁶ Édouard Glissant, “*L’Occident n’est pas à l’ouest. Ce n’est pas un lieu, c’est un projet*,” *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997):14.

presumptive and arrogant cultural constructs, demonstrated so well in Hegel's *Vorlesungen*, in the postcolonial context.

What about Eurocentrism? The theoretical trio of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin provide a classic entry on "Euro-centrism" in their dictionary of the key concepts of post-colonial studies: "Euro-centrism" is "the conscious or unconscious process in which Europe and European cultural assumptions are constructed as, or assumed to be, the normal, the natural or the universal."³⁷ Walter Mignolo alludes to the typical understanding of Eurocentrism being a "metaphor to describe the colonality of power (which for Mignolo is the "conflict of knowledges and structures of power"³⁸) from the perspective of subalternity."³⁹ Of course, the subalternity in question here seems to be automatically located outside the geographical Europe.

One of the most prolific and trailblazing postcolonial theologians Kwok Pui-lan points out that "Eurocentrism means placing Europe at the center of attention, as the focus of the production of knowledge and reference point with which to judge human development and civilization of the world."⁴⁰ She shares the proposals of Dipesh Chakrabarty to "reterritorize" and "provincialize" Europe, but the question in all these cases is not about the rightly described and rightly deplorable *modus operandi* of

³⁷ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004): 90-91.

³⁸ Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/ Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000): 16.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁰ Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005): 67.

“Eurocentrism” as a distinct colonial cosmology of power but about the geo-political pertinence of this *modus operandi*. What remains unclear in the above definitions is *which* Europe is to be decentered or provincialized for cultural, economic, philosophical and theological reasons? For there has never been and still is no one, single, uniformed, transparent, and historically consistent Europe as the subject of perfectly matching geographical, cultural, economic and ideological characteristics – either in the past or in the present.

It is fairly obvious that to describe “centrism” is a much easier task: there is no shortage of the evidence of colonialist aggressions from the glorified center of everything that counts into the undeveloped peripheries that have been marshaled across the globe triumphantly and bloodily, across the frontiers of subjugated cultures, knowledges, and selfhoods in a largely unrepentant orgy of self-righteousness. But apart from at least a theoretical illumination of the construed/assumed hegemonic center(ism), what about the stubborn “Euro-” prefix? Here the inertia of the postmodern arbitrary production of signification does not suffice unless an inverted Orientalistic construction of an essentialized imaginary “Europe” is somehow deemed appropriate by critical (perhaps ideological?) disregard.

Among postcolonial theorists, Robert J.C. Young has acknowledged this situation and the “tendency of anti-eurocentric writing” which tends to “homogenize not just the ‘Third World’, but also the category of ‘the West’ as such” since “most forms of

colonialism are after all, in the final analysis, colonialism.”⁴¹ Yet, such moves, out of theoretical inertia or historical carelessness, continue down the road already much traveled before. The ongoing use of the essentialized notion of “Europe” understood as an equally homogenized “West” continues its tenure as one of those convenient intellectual fixtures that Achille Mbembe has termed “lazy”⁴² and Deepika Bahri – “intransigent”⁴³ – categories. And, as postcolonial discourses become more commonplace in global theological milieus, the lazy and intransigent “Europe/Eurocentrism” keeps up steady appearances there as well. Consequently, the state of affairs that Fanon described as “the Manicheanism of the colonist produces a Manicheanism of the colonized”⁴⁴ is far more resilient than the mega-voiced, mostly English-speaking, postcolonial discourses have been willing to admit. In other words, whenever the notion of unqualified “Europe” or

⁴¹ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995): 165. Ania Loomba corroborates Young’s point on proper differentiation among the various versions of European colonialisms: “... it is impossible for European colonialism to have been a monolithic operation. Right from its earliest years it deployed diverse strategies and methods of control and of representation. European discourses about the ‘other’ are accordingly variable. But because they produced comparable (and sometimes uncannily similar) relations of inequity and domination the world over, it is sometimes overlooked that colonial methods and images varied hugely over time and place. Most contemporary commentators continue to generalise about colonialism from their specific knowledge of it in a particular place or time,” Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 16. Note the absence of any references to those parts/cultures of Europe that did and could not engage in any historical form of colonialism as we know them.

⁴² Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001): 8.

⁴³ Deepika Bahri, “What Difference Does it Make? Hybridity Reconsidered,” *South Asian Review*, 27:1, (2006):7.

⁴⁴ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 50.

“European ...” or “Eurocentric” is encountered in postcolonial discourses, Fanon’s notion of “a terrain already mapped out”⁴⁵ should serve as a wake-up call.

In light of the above, the relevant critical question has an ethical slant: should such homogenization continue as a virtually unchallenged trajectory of representation for the sake of pedagogical manageability of the already dense postcolonial critiques? If the lip-service is paid to the effect that there is a certain “awareness” that things are more complex than just metaphorical clichés seem to suggest – is that sufficient especially for those conjectures of postcolonial critical practices that detect an ethical constraint involved in the particularly *postcolonial* politics of recognition of otherness? Such a pragmatic consensus for pedagogical or whatever other reasons appears to be theoretically blunt and inconsistent, I submit. Persevering and ethically fine-tuned postcolonial analysis, on the contrary, would benefit from the sharpening of its critical and creative eye through allowing itself to be interrupted by history when history and particularly its “small voices” join “hands with literary criticism in search of the ethical as it [history] interrupts the epistemological.”⁴⁶

The small voices of convoluted postcolonial histories – and the Baltics is one of them – exercise the function of what Gyanendra Pandey has termed “fragment”⁴⁷ in the enterprise of the historical interruption of the epistemological. The small voice or the fragment, in this sense, is

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Empire, Union, Center, Satellite,” *Ulbandus* 7 (2003): 16.

⁴⁷ Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006): 66.

a disturbing element, a disturbance, a rupture... in the self-representation of particular totalities and those who uncritically uphold them. The mark of the fragment is that it resists the whole (the narrative). It cannot be assimilated into the narrative and its claims to wholeness.⁴⁸

A historical and cultural memory of the intra-european colonialism – that is, the memory of being at the receiving end of it – can appropriately be appealed to to interrogate the seduction of a reductionist postcolonial wholeness for such a forgetful wholeness and completeness cannot fail but to “perpetuate the standpoint and privilege of those in power.”⁴⁹

So far I have listed the suspicions, inconsistencies, and grievances in relation. At this juncture the question is – how would one speak of Europe from a particular “difference within”⁵⁰ Europe – from a locus of enunciation just outside the “Old Europe,” from a diasporic space rooted in the Baltic region, and geographically far away from one of its former transmarine colonies yet with a historical memory of having tasted its colonial conquest *inside* Europe?

Once Again: Which Europe?

Enrique Dussel has claimed that the traditional Eurocentric fallacy of understanding colonial modernity gravitates toward the presumption that “everything occurred in Europe” as a purely intra-European phenomenon.⁵¹ According to Dussel, the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁰ Here I refer to Homi Bhabha’s term from Preface, *The Location of Culture*, xv.

⁵¹ Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity* (Michael D. Barber, trans.; New York: Continuum, 1995):10.

modern, self-discovered and valorizing centrality of Europe is the outcome, and not the cause, of the process of emergence of modernity through the “discovery”, conquest, and colonization. Thus, the

birthdate of modernity is 1492, even though its gestation, like that of the fetus, required a period of intrauterine growth. Whereas modernity gestated in the free, creative medieval European cities, it came to birth in Europe’s confrontation with the Other. By controlling, conquering, and violating the Other, Europe defined itself as discoverer, conquistador, and colonizer of an alterity likewise constitutive of modernity. Europe never discovered (*des-cubierto*) this Other as Other but covered over (*encubierto*) the Other as part of the Same: i.e., Europe. Modernity dawned in 1492 and with it the myth of a special kind of sacrificial violence which eventually eclipsed whatever was non-European.⁵²

Reflecting on Europe – not “the West” – it may be worth taking a closer look at the “period of intrauterine growth.” Considering the “discovery” of the Baltic rim in the 11th and 12th centuries, for example, I suggest that we are dealing rather with a case of ectopic pregnancy in relation to the *modern Western Europe* (not simply Europe) as a configuration of colonial powers. Parts of Europe were “discovered” rather than been “discovering” and are therefore rather familiar with the mechanisms of “covering over,” “eclipsing,” and making the Other into the Same. This, however, started long before 1492. Whether “gestation” obtains as a useful and non-reductive description for the birth of modern Occident or Westernism/Westernness⁵³ with all its connotations of an organic and nurturing process remains highly suspicious from a Baltic perspective. Here are some reasons as to why it remains so.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵³ These are the terms used by Achille Mbembe, who is one of the minority of postcolonial thinkers who uses the term “Europe” carefully, see, for example, *On the Postcolony*, 10.

In a recent study of the Baltic “discoveries” – and here I am looking deeper into just one among many “differences within” Europe⁵⁴ – Swedish historian Nils Blomkvist suggests that “the High Medieval ‘Making of Europe’ was an effort of a magnitude comparable to that of the Roman Empire, and *mutatis mutandis* to some extent to the Early Modern European global expansion.”⁵⁵ The region in question here is the Baltic rim, the drainage basin of the Baltic Sea. The process of medieval continental expansion included the typical dimensions of what evolved into the classic forms of colonialism – the unholy “synergy of conquest, commerce, and Christ.”⁵⁶ From 1147 onwards, supported on the track of crusade by the popes from Eugenius III to Innocent IV⁵⁷ to Christianize the indigenous tribal lands and people of the Baltics, including the indigenous Slavic peoples, the Northwestern European Christendom and its muscular Teutonic Order executed the Christianization of the Livs, Curonians, Semigallians,

⁵⁴ Maria Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) investigates the perennial intra-European dis-ease around difference of all sorts in the Balkan context to present a sufficiently complex image of Europe to warrant great caution with convenient generalizations, including those that could streamline European interstices and marginalities.

⁵⁵ Nils Blomkvist, *The Discovery of the Baltic: The Reception of a Catholic World-System in the European North (AD 1075-1225)* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005): 9.

⁵⁶ Introduction, *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner and Mayra Rivera, eds; St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004):34.

⁵⁷ See Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt, *The Popes and the Baltic Crusades 1147-1254* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007). See also the essays in *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic Frontier 1150-1500* (Alan V. Murray, ed.; Aldershot, Burlington, Singapore: Ashgate, 2001).

Selonians, and Latgalians not only by fire and sword, but also through the collaborative commercial efforts of the nascent Hanseatic League.⁵⁸ As Christopher Tyerman notes,

The Baltic crusades acted as one element in a cruel process of Christianization and Germanization, providing a religious gloss to ethnic cleansing and territorial aggrandizement more blatant and, in places, more successful than anywhere else.⁵⁹

It ultimately led to the establishment of a crusader confederation of Livonia in the early 13th century through a military invasion and efficient appropriation of what are the present territories of Latvia and Estonia. As Andrejs Plakans notes, “though ostensibly fighting on behalf of the church, the Teutonic Order had its own material interests and it was also a defender of the political interests in the area of the Holy Roman Empire.”⁶⁰ During the 12th century “the Baltic world was not only discovered, but in a conclusive way also penetrated and economically and politically integrated with Western Europe.”⁶¹

Historical analysis has led Blomkvist to observe:

The discovery of the Baltic belongs to the interval of 1075-1225, which can be called the ‘long 12th century’. During these 150 years it was somehow decided that people living in and around the Baltic were to become Europeans in the

⁵⁸ On the mechanics of this spiritual, political and economic collaboration see Mark R. Munzinger, “The profits of the Cross: merchant involvement in the Baltic Crusade c.1180-1230,” *Journal of Medieval History* 32 (2006):163-185.

⁵⁹ Christopher Tyerman, *The Crusades: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 47.

⁶⁰ Andrejs Plakans, Article “Crusading Orders,” *Historical Dictionary of Latvia*, Historical Dictionaries of Europe, No.60, Second Edition (Lanham, Toronto, Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2008): 71-72.

⁶¹ Blomkvist, *Discovery of the Baltic*, 11.

Western sense, while more eastern parts of the Viking world began disappearing behind a cultural border.⁶²

Yet the process of “becoming European” was by no means an uncomplicated “gestation” under the auspices of some grand narrative of unproblematic hybridity. First of all, the intense cultural and linguistic diversity without a common unifying political or economic purpose of the eastern Baltic Rim predates the arrival of the Northwestern European crusaders and merchants. This fact is not lost in the Baltic region at present despite the acknowledgment that the crusades were “a clash between two opposing identities and watershed in the transformation of the local one.”⁶³ Also, the establishment of feudal and nominally Christian states in these indigenous and tribal territories – and the significance and value of this fact again remains hotly disputed regarding the historical, cultural, religious and ethical implications among the scholars in the region⁶⁴ – does not hide the dominating presence and efficacy of Dussel’s trinity of markers of colonial modernity – control, conquest and violation of the other. By 1400 a system of apartheid was functioning as a well-oiled mechanism through which “the nobility was German in the present Latvia and Estonia, Polish or Polonized in Lithuania, while those

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Eva Eihmane, “The Baltic Crusades: A Clash of Two Identities,” *The Clash of Cultures on the Medieval Baltic Frontier* (Alan V. Murray, ed.; Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009): 37. The fate of the internally adversarial Baltic tribes is sometimes compared to the situation among American Indians in the context of the “frontier thesis,” see, for example, William Urban, “The Frontier Thesis and the Baltic Crusade” in *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic Frontier 1150-1500*, 45-71.

⁶⁴ For example, see Eva Eihmane, “Līvzemes kristianizācijas periods kā bāze paliekošiem mītiem” in *Mīti Latvijas vēsturē* (Kaspars Zellis, ed., Rīga: Kultūrkapitāla Fonds, 2006): 13-18.

who worked the fields were of various Slavonic, Baltic or Finno-Ugric ethnic groups.”⁶⁵

The alliance of *ecclesia* and *mercatura* (the emergent trans-national commodity market in Europe) produced in the Baltics a configuration of power which became

(...) an arena in which two entirely different groups of people lived together ; a tiny, foreign elite, and a grey mass of barely Christianized ‘barbarians’, separated by apartheid, constantly suspicious of and from time to time confronting each other. The original aim of Christianization gradually failed. In the failure to establish a functional state and the failure to merge into a nation, the European making of Livonia produced one of the first examples of a social entity that was later to be well known around the globe – the transmarine colony.⁶⁶

As far as the “gestation” imaginary is concerned, indeed the Baltic frontiers became Europe – violently, profitably, sporadically, and painfully. During this time the attitudes of the Northwestern European religio-political self-righteousness matured into the functional ideologies of modern colonial superiority. The Baltic frontiers were “gestated” into Europe by crusade whereby the cultural imaginaries of the “discovered” Baltic peoples took the typical route of producing nativistic cultural undercurrents for centuries. These are by no means extinct at the present time. The historico-cultural and religious memory of the geopolitical predicament “where two different breeds of people coexisted: a tiny, European elite, and a mass of barely Christianized ‘barbarians’ kept in apartheid”⁶⁷ is well and alive in the present day Latvia, for instance. Contemporary

⁶⁵ Blomkvist, *Discovery of the Baltic*, 14.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 668. Blomkvist argues that “the invention of apartheid is perhaps thought to be one of the many cruelties of the 20th century. It is not. The South African contribution was to formulate a robust term for a long-standing Christian practice (...) – to keep various ethnic categories apart ... Apartheid is of course normality in all forms of colonial rule. One of the earliest clear cases is Livonia ...” 671.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 704.

Latvian Christianity is inextricably overshadowed by the persistent cultural memory and history of the colonial conquest.

Let me mention a case in point: in June 2009 a book burning of allegedly “pagan” literature was instigated by a charismatic, predominantly Russian speaking, Christian group “The New Generation” during the usually rambunctious Latvian indigenous Midsummer celebrations (*Jāņi*) to mobilize against what they called the resurgent pagan practices of occultism and fetishism associated with the Latvian ancient wisdom traditions. Amidst the raging cultural controversy and public outrage about religious intolerance, the Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia Jānis Vanags responded to these disturbing events in a widely publicized address. In it Vanags underscored the enduring ambiguity that continues to surround Christianity as a colonial phenomenon in the North-Eastern borderlands of Europe with an incisive, perhaps a bit surprising for some, socio-historical observation:

However, Latvia is not a religiously monolithic country and Christians must remember that they are not the only religious people here. Yes, Christians are called to share their faith with others. Let us mention, however, that the greatest harm to the Christian message in Latvia was not perpetrated by pagans, and possibly not even by Communists, but by the crusaders who had presumed to impose the good news of love by fire and sword. The wounds that they inflicted have not yet been healing in many Latvian souls. Let us not resemble the crusaders!⁶⁸

The postcolonial ambiguity regarding the original entrance of Christianity by “fire and sword” undoubtedly continues to influence the palpable syncretism of the creolized popular religiosity. Yet whatever the penultimate balance of gains and losses of

⁶⁸ Jānis Vanags, “Arhibīskaps: Par baznīcu, Jāņiem un grāmatām,” (*The Archbishop: On the church, Midsummer and books*) published July 30, 2009. Available online at <http://www.lēlb.lv/?p=news2arch&fu=sh&id=776&month=7&year=2009>. Accessed June 21, 2010.

Europeanization of the Baltic rim – and this continues to be debated rather passionately among those Europeans formerly known as “barbarians” as well as among those Europeans who once named them so – in the postcolonial imaginaries it is the “method in the madness” that is important to consider. As Blomkvist sums it up, the eastern Baltic Rim lands attracted the “discovering” gaze not only by possessing the most attractive commodities of the time, but also by

the possibility of reaching cheaply exploitable peripheries by the superior means of ship transport, rarely achieved elsewhere until the Portuguese exploration of the South Atlantic began in the 15th century. This presented the peoples of the Rim with particularly dramatic and decisive process of Europeanization, from which they emerged as dependents of core area institutions and its culture in general. In that sense, the Discovery of the Baltic stands out as a small-scale rehearsal of what was to come in the Early Modern period.⁶⁹

The model of “gestation” of the modern Europe here receives a corrective local modulation through the theory of “small-scale rehearsal” before the 1492 premiere.

Robert Bartlett also points to the linkage between conquest, colonization, and Christianization in the Baltics and the paradigmatic colonial modus operandi outside

Europe:

The European Christians who sailed to the coasts of the Americas, Asia and Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries came from a society that was already a colonizing society. Europe, initiator of one of the world’s major processes of conquest, colonization and cultural transformation, was also the product of one.⁷⁰

Clearly, at least from the perspective of a “difference within,” the making of Europe itself through the synergy of Christ, conquest, and commerce antedates 1492.

⁶⁹ Blomkvist, *Discovery of the Baltic*, 704-705.

⁷⁰ Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): 314.

This “Europeanized” (conquered) Europe as *the* center out of which the discoveries, conquests and subjugations were projected upon the transmarine others has not exactly been a monolithic, monochromatic center without profoundly repulsive undersides.

It is this usually forgotten genealogy of colonial modernity within Europe that contextualizes David Chioni Moore’s critique of the dominant concepts of colonialism and some of its rather curious imaginative stereotypes: “...what is puzzling about this explanation [of what qualifies as colonialism] is not only how it seemingly ‘excuses’ brutality by adjacence but also how it grants off primacy to water.”⁷¹ In specifically medieval and modern periods of history Europe was – and in certain aspects still is – a small-scale “domestic” version of what ultimately became the modern transcontinental colonialism with its global hierarchies of racial, cultural, economical and religious superiority.

Testimonies to the “small-scale rehearsal” can still be found across the “New” or “second (class)” Europe – which remains a very persistent and sadly resilient reality in more than one sense. For example, it is witnessed to in the Latvian *dainas*, the lyrical two-couplet folk songs, many of which were composed and transmitted orally during the era of Voltaire and Hegel. Of course, to pay attention to these vehicles of cultural memory is to assume that subaltern can speak, recognizing the variety of impingements ever present in such speech. Over two million *dainas* have been now collected in written format and according to Maruta Lietiņa Ray, at least 1300 of those reflect directly on the

⁷¹ David Chioni Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique,” *Baltic Postcolonialism* (Violeta Kelertas, ed.; Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006): 23.

brutal life of apartheid and serfdom of the Latvian peasants, which lasted until the middle of 19th century.⁷² Lietiņa Ray argues that “in the interests of democratizing history, validating the enserfed and enslaved experience of the Baltic peoples, and ending the hegemony of history written by the colonizers, this voice should be added to the historical record of the Baltics.”⁷³ The *dainas* present a cultural and historical voice of the colonized peasant-poets, predominantly women, speaking in their despised *Bauernsprache* about the experience of both oppression and resistance. Serfdom or life as a member of the indigenous *Erbbauernstand* entailed being a property of the German speaking colonial nobility. Serfs were subjected to corporeal punishment or death, deprived of personal property, deprived of the right to choose a spouse without the master’s approval, while women were subjected to the *droit du seigneur*, and child labor was the rule.⁷⁴

Baltic German pastor August W. Hupel in his *Topographische Nachrichten von Lief-und Estland 1774-1781* notes that the Baltic peasants were not as expensive as “Negroes in the American colonies” and “are sometimes sold or traded for other things – horses, dogs, pipe bowls, etc.”⁷⁵ Up until the so-called First National Awakening in the middle of the 19th century during the reign of the Russian emperor Alexander II and the

⁷² Maruta Lietiņa Ray, “Recovering the Voice of the Oppressed: Master, Slave, and Serf in the Baltic Provinces,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 34:1 (2003): 3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7. The Estonian sources reveal a similar outrage and lament about the German colonial domination, Lietiņa Ray points out (*ibid.*).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

gradual abolishment of serfdom in the Baltic provinces from 1816-1861, the *dainas* presented the only possible form of lament, describing suffering, injustice, shame, resentment, desire for revenge as well as sarcasm as resistance toward the Baltic German colonial rulers inside the Russian empire.⁷⁶ Certainly the scope of the *dainas* is not limited to the colonial engagement alone. Rather, the *dainas* attest to a poetically engendered integrative world-view of the culture in the process of survival. They include reflection on the matters of religion, nature, sexuality, afterlife and a version of virtue ethics while struggling with realities of violence and namelessness. But the intra-European colonial division as attested to through the voices of the *dainas* – among other subjugated knowledges of Europe – specifies the multi-tiered colonial dimensions of the

⁷⁶ Karlis Racevskis, in his *Modernity's Pretenses: Making Reality Fit Reason from Candide to the Gulag* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), has described the *dainas* as the “value system of the ancient Latvians” which “stands in complete contrast with the obsession to dominate nature and others, to dominate the Other – that could be considered a central tenet of the modern Western ethos since the time of Bacon and Descartes. Moreover, not only does the fail to elaborate any notion of cultural or ethic superiority, the value system of the Letts even lacks what we would consider a commonsensical distinction between good and evil; there is suffering, there is misfortune, but there is no evil, no talk of vengeance, of retribution, or of damnation (120-121).” Racevskis’ observation is somewhat simplifying and only partially accurate, since Lietiņa Rey’s article meticulously exposes the *dainas* as nearly the only outlet for desired vengeance and retribution for injustices perpetrated on the enserfed people. Yet Racevskis is correct to underline the notable differences in comparison with the better known European “value systems” that “the responsibility for composing, performing, and transmitting the *dainas* belonged to women. This task of giving a voice to a people’s experience of life was not carried out by old men, by a priestly caste, or by an artistic or philosophic elite, as has been the case in all the so-called axial civilizations. It was a project that was fundamentally disinterested since it was both communal and anonymous” (121).

content of Voltaire's *l'orient de l'Europe* as the "other" close at hand, and yet invisible in its perceived irrelevance of otherness.

Which Europe? The Stubborn Postcolonial Nuance Today

The polarizing divisions within Europe reflect the well-entrenched patterns of obsession with self-congratulatory classifications of otherness. These are alive and well today after the demise of the Communist colonial empire of the Soviet Union with all the re-emerging versatility of the formerly dominated "Eastern Bloc" now being intensively re-"discovered" as Eastern, Central, or Southern Europe, and as the "new others" of African, Middle Eastern, and Asian migrations complicate the desire for neat and transparent differences and boundaries. And then, of course, there is always the perennial subaltern "other" of Europe – the Roma – constantly being forgotten even in the postcolonial studies and sporadically (profitably?) "discovered."

In the midst of this, there stubbornly persists a "disagreeable 'Second World'"⁷⁷ – somewhere among the self-proclaimed "unity in diversity" provincial grand narrative, ironically mimicking the unease around Europe as geocultural singularity precisely because of its intra-colonial histories. Reflections on the same old trope of the "soul" or the identity of Europe continue to disclose an inability (perhaps a pragmatic unwillingness along the lines of a certain strategic essentialism?) to recognize historical

⁷⁷ I refer here to the title of essays "The Disagreeable 'Second World'," *Common Knowledge*, 10:1 (2004). Interestingly, the subtitle points to the ambiguities involved – "Essays on the Inconstancy of the West."

disavowals. For example, the project of *Redefining Europe*⁷⁸ offers a telling example of how hierarchies of suffering/victimology are constructed:

The need for a possible redefinition of Europe certainly pivots on the May 1, 2004, admission of the ten accession states to the European Union. No longer is the EU a Western European club. No longer are states and peoples formerly victimized by Soviet imperialism illegitimate members of the European community.⁷⁹

Now after the collapse and after the altogether warranted condemnation of the Soviet totalitarianism and imperialism throughout the cultural orbit of the Western political postmodernity, it is certainly safe, gallant, and most importantly comparatively painless to admit the victimized “second class/New Europeans” to the table of power brokering after their ordeal under the Soviet imperialism. However, the antecedent histories of Northwestern, “Old European” histories of victimization through conquest, Christianization, and centuries of colonial apartheid are in the meantime comfortably ignored. The victimology of the “redefined” Western European club undoubtedly points the vector of indignation in a deserved direction as if to expiate its deeply ambiguous dealings with the Soviet empire and its no less imperialistically bent successor. Yet the newfound, premature indeed, wholeness of this post-Soviet world order is underwritten by a historical memory too selective and too short for a postcolonial taste.

In view of Peter Nadas, the Schiller/Beethoven premise of “*alle Menschen werden Brüder*” is not quite working in the post-Soviet Europe. Sure, the genealogy of conflictual local histories is much more ancient than the unrelenting structuring

⁷⁸ *Redefining Europe* (Joseph Drew, ed.; New York and Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005).

⁷⁹ Joseph Drew, “Conclusion: Europe on the Road to Redefinition,” *Redefining Europe*, 208.

presence of World War II and the specters of both Nazi and Soviet totalitarianisms in Europe. Reflecting in the context of the Balkan wars in the 1990s, Nadas decried the *de facto* existence of “two entirely different Europes.”⁸⁰ In the context of the more recent “redefining” efforts and amidst the ongoing economic recession that has impacted the “Old” and the “New” Europe in remarkably different ways, Nadas’ observation retains its poignant insight: the “Old” Europe presents itself as a cultural formation that has “preserved, still preserves, an angelic innocence and noble self-discipline.”⁸¹ To these observations one might add an eerily Hegelian imaginary of the “Core Europe” or *Kerneuropa*. It emerged during the aftermath of 9/11 from within prominent Western European and North American intellectual circles, including Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas. The post-9/11, oppositional “Core Europe” debate again reinscribed the well-known but profitably camouflaged intra-European “difference within.” But this time around it was a de-romanticized Hegelian *Herz* of the “Old Europe” *sans* Britain. This time around it was explicitly re-conceptualized as a mature and responsible “core” in juxtaposition with the “infantile” and “dangerous” cultures of the Eastern Europe which in their pragmatic support of the American invasion of Iraq were accused of

⁸⁰ Peter Nadas, “Dialogical Introduction,” “The Disagreeable ‘Second World’,” 35. On the other hand, Nadas also insisted, in a move not unusual for the “New” Europeans, that “no one is going to convince me there are two Europes. There is solely one Europe, that of the maimed... We are all of us initiates into rites of destruction, 36.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

failing to show their “European” maturity by frivolously missing, in Jacques Chirac’s unforgettably notorious words, “a good opportunity to shut up.”⁸²

A nuanced analysis of Europe and its polyphonic life-forms recently emerged in Maija Kūle’s monograph *Eirodzīve: Formas, Principi, Izjūtas*⁸³ (Eurolife: Forms, Principles, Sensations) in which the Latvian philosopher repeatedly comes back to the image of mosaic⁸⁴ as a useful metaphor for Europe. The history of Europe has overwhelmingly been so diverse that the very question “is there such a thing as *the* history of Europe?” remains ever legitimate Kūle argues. Clearly, “Europe as a contemporary phenomenon is not identical with the West.”⁸⁵ Hence, mosaic is a cautious and multivalent image (even if a bit too benign or utopian for some explicitly postcolonial tastes). It engenders the diversity and arguably, the assumed capacity of Europe to be “united in diversity.” Of course, the crucial interrogation – postcolonially and ethically – is about the nature of such unity and the measure of inequality, coercion,

⁸² On President Chirac’s remarks, see, for example, “Chirac lashes out at ‘New Europe’,” available at http://articles.cnn.com/2003-02-18/world/sprj.irq.chirac_1_french-president-jacques-chirac-eu-leaders-romania-and-bulgaria?_s=PM:WORLD, accessed June 21, 2008. Also, see “Eastern Europe Dismayed at Chirac Snub,” available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/feb/19/iraq.france>, accessed July, 2010. For an insightful background analysis of the cultural and historical milieu of this telling incident see Adam Krzemiski’s “First Kant, Now Habermas: A Polish Perspective on ‘Core Europe’,” *Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe: Transatlantic Relations After the Iraq War* (Daniel Levy, Max Pensky, and John Torpey, eds.; London and New York: Verso, 2005): 146-152. Other non-core-European contributions in this collection are also rather educational.

⁸³ Maija Kūle, *Eirodzīve: Formas, Principi, Izjūtas* (Rīga: LU Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts, 2006).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 15, 133.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

and imperialism involved, in the past as well as in the present. Here Kūle's text shows considerable hesitation toward sustained reflection on the issues of power, especially colonial power, beyond a candid acknowledgement of the "European arrogance," i.e., "Eurocentrism."⁸⁶ These significant and perhaps defensive (vis-à-vis the yet critically unprocessed historical pain of the Baltic colonial histories in the locally produced humanities and social sciences) oclusions notwithstanding, the image of mosaic resonates with Nadas' ambivalence about the (interrupted) reconciliation. It does so especially from the perspective of hierarchical projection of geopolitical power in Europe. On the other hand, the image of mosaic represents the fervent desire to imagine and construct a righteous equilibrium of unity and solidarity. Kūle's image of the mosaic privileges an interconnected and interdependent difference, a difference of not simply mechanical relation, but a difference of reciprocity and mutuality. Certainly there is quite a bit of utopian air about it. Yet, the acknowledged but not sufficiently probed diversity is allowed by Kūle to persist in interrupting the otherwise somewhat placid mosaic – "diversity appears all the time, unity has to be achieved with effort."⁸⁷ Furthermore, for her the structuring core of an European identity – if it makes sense to talk about such a thing in singular – is precisely the lack of unified identity of the continent as a geocultural imaginary too well aware of its own hierarchical diversity. Even though Kūle downplays (prematurely, I suggest) the conflictual genealogies of this diversity, it is this diversity

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

that constitutes the overarching context of attempting to name Europe attentively and ethically from a postcolonial perspective:

To be a European means entertaining a different vision based on history, traditions and habits. In France it means to think about Europe, which under the leadership of France would preserve its French charm and the importance of the French language. In Germany it means to continue dealing with the reunification of the two Germanies, to repent of the Nazi past and turn against nationalism. To be a European in Italy means to hold dear one's family and nation. But to be a European in Latvia, Lithuania, Scotland or Catalonia means to defend one's ethnicity and language, and to desire to be liberated from the influence of Moscow, London or Madrid. To be a European in Finland means to travel to Brussels and to lobby actively for the Finnish interests. The list could be continued because everyone has their own experience, their own vision. Therefore one must be careful not to transfer their particular understanding of Europeanness to those whose perception of life is different.⁸⁸

It is rather disappointing that Kūle, like many other philosophers and literary theorists residing and working in the Baltics, steers clear of inquiring into the European colonial nomenclatures of difference as having at least something to do with the peculiarities of their own particular locus of enunciation. Yet her concern unmasks in a nutshell the tremendous scope of differences that pertain to Europe as a cultural, political, religious, racial, economic formation. Accordingly, it is the tremendous scope of “difference within” that warrants temperance when it comes to naming Europe in singular – from within and from without, from the “top-down” and from the “bottom-up” and certainly, with a postcolonial twist to it out of elsewhere.

Kūle's text points towards another particularity of theorizing Europe from within the cultural milieu of the former “Second World.” There is no observable haste in the contemporary Eastern European critical discourses, especially those originating from the Baltic, to join the postcolonial club for various reasons. In the Latvian context, there is a

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

growing sense of exhaustion regarding the invocations of more ancient colonial and more recent totalitarian victimhood which are seen as politically and economically useless today.⁸⁹ At the same time, alongside an emerging field of thoughtful historical analyses of the various colonial legacies, the cultural memory and perceptions of victimhood endure as an ever agile and far from innocent instrument of political praxis and ideological manipulation. Additionally, there is also a rather concerted effort to steer clear of what Peter McCarthy calls the “new” or “pathological” marginalist disposition in cultural criticism with its quest to presumptuously and metaphorically inscribe the theorist in the actualities of marginal predicament.⁹⁰ Instead, since the early 1990s up till now there has been a rather emphatic academic and artistic culture of embracing the theoretical, literary, and artistic paradigms of Western postmodernity with a vengeance that only the “defrosted liberty”⁹¹ originating from a postcolonial context of a very peculiar complexity can account for.

⁸⁹ The “uselessness of lament” argument is fuelled by the astute observation that the Baltic lands and cultures could not have lasted anyway through the modern colonial era as unaffiliated, internally divided, political entities and so instead of unceasingly lamenting the cruelties of the crusades, the Balts should rather pragmatically appreciate that they were conquered by the lesser evil – the West with its Latin Christianity rather than the Slavic East. On the uselessness of historiographies of victimhood, see William Urban, “Victims of the Baltic Crusade,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 29:3 (1998):195-212.

⁹⁰ McCarthy describes the pathological marginalism as mired in “representations of the marginal experience” which are “intricate in the marginal’s evolution into another ideological genus” as the theoretical “new marginalists” attempt to indwell the existential space of true marginals by the means of intratextual theoretical fantasies. See McCarthy, *Writing Diaspora in the West: Intimacy, Identity and the New Marginalism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), xx-xxi.

⁹¹ I’m using the term of Jean Baudrillard from his essay “The Thawing of the East,” *The Illusion of the End* (Chris Turner, trans.; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994): 28-29.

The above attitudes accommodate frequent acknowledgments of the colonization of the Baltic lands by various European empires until the First World War and then by the Nazi and Soviet empires from 1940 until 1991 in a matter-of-fact manner in historical research and political discourse in the Baltics despite the controversy about the Baltic and Eastern Europe's "eligibility" for postcolonial consideration in the Western academic industry. On the other hand, however, the Baltic region has not so far generated sustained engagements with postcolonial theories apart from sporadic scholarly engagements. The essay collection *Baltic Postcolonialism* (2006) stands out as an exception, notably representing the work of mostly diasporic and/or Western-trained scholars of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian origin. The volume reflects both the internal diversity of the Baltic histories and colonial experiences as well as common trajectories. The essay collection does not shirk away from explicitly connecting the ethical with the theoretical in postcolonial discourses. It gravitates around the non-recognition of certain forms of colonial exploitation as, so to speak, properly colonial – most notably the colonial policies of the Soviet Union because of “the collusion of Marxism-Leninism and of Western-Marxism”⁹² in postcolonial theory. Violeta Kelertas sums up the orientation so conspicuously present in Maija Kūle's *Eirodzīve* as well – which in itself reflects the rule rather than exception in the Baltic theoretical discourses – thus:

⁹² Violeta Kelertas, “Introduction” in *Baltic Postcolonialism*, p. 7. Similar conclusions are conveyed in the essays by Karl E. Jirgens (“Fusions of Discourse: Postcolonial/Postmodern Horizons in Baltic Culture”) and Karlis Racevskis (“Toward a Postcolonial Perspective on the Baltic States”) among others in the same volume, as well as by Jon Kyst in *Ulbāndus 7: The Slavic Review of Columbia University* (2003): 26.

Usually it is the center which is accused of being Eurocentric, while in the post-Soviet context the Baltic States perceive themselves as European and the Soviet metropolis as uncivilized, barbarian and ‘Oriental’ (because of its allegedly Mongolian roots – Ghenghis Khan and the invasions of the Golden Horde are always mentioned as determinants of Soviet mentality). Instead of turning away from Europe, the Balts generally turn toward it. Anti-European and especially anti-Western and anti-American feelings surface only later, to be expressed in a return to indigenous, mainly pagan roots, as tenuous and irrelevant to modern city life as these may be.⁹³

To exclude non-Western Europe from postcolonial discourse is a geopolitical gesture resulting from “too narrow Western postcolonial and too parochial post-Soviet studies”⁹⁴ argues Chioni Moore. Here the magisterial article “Notes of the ‘Post-Colonial’” by Ella Shohat, which I have already referred to, is again a good example. For Shohat, the only portion of the globe not pertinent to any type of postcolonial situation is the former Communist segment, the bygone “Second World.” This excluding gesture toward the former “Second World” remains as prominent now as it was two decades ago. At the end of the first decade of the 21st century postcolonial theorists still are reluctant to “recognize the postcolonial dynamic within the Second World. In addition, many postcolonial scholars, in the United States and elsewhere, have been Marxist or strongly on the left, and therefore have been absurdly reluctant to make the Soviet Union a colonial villain on the scale of France or Britain.”⁹⁵ Thus, Chioni Moore points out that in

⁹³ Violeta Kelertas, “Perceptions of the Self and the Other in Lithuanian Postcolonial Fiction” in *Baltic Postcolonialism*, 252.

⁹⁴ Chioni Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?” in *Baltic Postcolonialism*, 13.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

Shohat's essay the decolonization of the occupied nations of the former USSR is theorized in terms of a loss.⁹⁶

To reflect on the pertinence or perhaps even inflation of the term "postcolonial" to include the vast post-Soviet segments of Europe is to question a methodological inertia. It is about who prescribes the postcolonial normativity of certain discourses, concepts, and rules of reasoning, rules of inclusion and exclusion. This is where the specters of knowledge acquired and produced ethically – or not – touch upon the voluntary association of postcolonial studies with the "ethical pre-text:" the ethical pre-text "is the idea that postcolonial criticism is itself an ethical enterprise, pressing its claims in ways that other theories such as those of postmodernism and poststructuralism do not."⁹⁷ Keeping in mind that "for Western postcolonialist scholarship to privilege the Anglo-Franco cases as the colonizing standard and to call the Russo-Soviet experiences 'deviations' (...) is wrongly to perpetuate the already outdated centrality of the Western or Anglo-Franco world,"⁹⁸ the problem of naming too lightly only sharpens the recognition of non-recognition of certain prolonged struggles for justice in the very theoretical field

⁹⁶ What is remarkable is "the way in which a Western-located scholar enormously concerned with the fate of the colonized and recently decolonized peoples across the planet treats events that were widely perceived, at least in the twenty-seven nations from Estonia to Kyrgyzstan, as a decolonization, instead as a distant, indeed abstract (see Shohat's term 'model'), noncolonial event, as a loss, since it increased the anxieties of, for example, Palestinians and Black South Africans," *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹⁷ David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson, "Introduction: Scale and Sensibility" in *Relocating Postcolonialism*, xii.

⁹⁸ Chioni Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?" *Baltic Postcolonialism*, 28.

which is far from hesitant in admitting its “ethical pre-texts.” The “ethical pre-text” bears most directly – even though often implicitly – on the inherent “object relations referenced by the binary oppositions” so that the “destabilizations of the binaries are often proffered as attempts at rectifying disorders in the extra-textual world of social relations.”⁹⁹ Kwame Anthony Appiah links the particularity of postcolonialism – vis-à-vis postmodernism – as grounded precisely “in the appeal to an ethical universal” which is in turn grounded “in an appeal to a certain simple respect for human suffering.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, the postcolonial challenge of the oppressive legitimating narratives across the interlinked terrains of epistemological and cultural imagination all the way into political praxis of cohabitation, recognition, and inclusion, proceeds “in the name of the suffering victims.”¹⁰¹

To pay no heed to the deeply ingrained interstices or the “difference within” of colonial subjugation and terror in Europe – which is more than “the West” – is indeed to name Europe “lightly,” to give up on the “ethical pre-text” and the “appeal to an ethical universal,” as if the intra-continental colonial brutality were epiphenomenal or as if the colonial “rehearsal” would entail less human suffering than the performance proper. What is even worse, such a non-recognition risks fostering sinister efforts of fabricating hierarchies of suffering and victimhood based on an essentialized conception of race and

⁹⁹ Goldberg and Quayson point out the paradox involved in the “foundational” role of the ethical pre-text which confronts the suspicions of metanarratives within a generally anti-foundationalist theory as a sort of ethical foundation for critique of the structures of power, Goldberg and Ato Quayson, *Relocating Postcolonialism*, xii.

¹⁰⁰ Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” *Critical Inquiry*, 17:2 (1991): 353.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

strangely valorized prominence of water as the marker of a “real” coloniality of power. Such a proclivity facilitates precisely the proliferation and engorgement of the very colonialist binaries that are to be so necessarily deconstructed, hybridized and modulated into as many transformative “posts” as possible. In other words, the question about representing Europe in postcolonial discourses is most emphatically not about Europe *per se*; rather, it is stubbornly and repeatedly about all those beloved grand narratives and seductions of a premature “wholeness or completeness”¹⁰² of postcolonialism that are caught up in the transmigration of Manicheanisms without the ethical interruption of a genuinely transcending, not just chronological, “post.” The question is about the palpable cultural essentialism of ascriptive identities that are attributed by postcolonial theorists to their historical and existential referents – and there *are* material and historical referents to the figure and metaphors of postcolonial theory – from a distance in space, time, language, cultural traditions. It comes as no surprise that postcolonial theorists working out of Southeast Asian or West African cultural contexts within the Western academy would experience a multifaceted distance from the cultural and historical contexts of the “New” Europe – and vice versa. But as far as the genesis of ethically accountable postcolonial critiques is concerned, neither those working out of the postcolonially dominant Southeast Asian contexts nor those working out of postcolonially marginal contexts such as Eastern Europe or Ireland should neglect the possibilities of conversation across the distance – the distance that may not, after taking a closer and more nuanced look, be as long and as alienating as it often appears in terms of racial,

¹⁰² Panday, *Routine Violence*, 67.

economical, religious, and cultural markers that pertain to the experienced varieties of colonial subjugation. What is not useful for any critical and political purposes is the proliferation of simplistically monochromatic and essentialist ideas that endure with the typical ease of dualistic concepts.

On a practical plane, what difference could naming Europe with more attention to the postcolonial “ethical pre-text” make? Which nuances could be added to mess up the monochromatic postcolonial wholeness? In the present, qualifications as specific as possible appear to be useful in their aspirations to represent the historical colonialisms that developed in Europe from the long 12th century of the Baltic crusades onwards with a little more ethical sensitivity and historical accuracy. If talking about the initial stages of the transmarine colonial conquest it may be helpful to be as passionately contextual as possible without, however, degenerating into the elitist solipsism of not speaking at all. Deliberate use of qualifiers such as British, French, or Spanish colonialism might be pertinent whenever the situation calls for concreteness. A qualifier such as “Occidental Europe” might be appropriate to modulate the casual and vacuous usages of “Europe” in postcolonial texts. What the adjective “Occidental” signals, when used in a thick contextual manner, is what Hesse described as the “Western spectacle” or what Walter Mignolo’s notion of “Occidentalism” as “the overarching metaphor of the modern/ colonial world system imaginary”¹⁰³ refers to. Namely, Occidentalism or Westernism refers to the hegemonic cosmologies of power and the dualistic hierarchies of value, truth, and beauty that are typically implied in “Eurocentrism.” If Occidentalism or

¹⁰³ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 23.

another qualifier is substituted for the glib “Eurocentrism,” such a representational shift helps to modulate the homogenizing impulse and can foster a historically discerning critical sensibility to advance precisely that “more nuanced” (Shohat) discourse that postcolonialism aspired to be. An approach like this would encourage representations with a pronounced postcolonial ethical sensitivity, that is, with a nuanced attention to the historical materialities of injustice and the messy colonial “differences within” rather than continued marching to the tune of inversed “Rule Britannia” – as when the whole postcolonial field slants according to the prescriptive authority of theoretical voices almost exclusively coming out of the former domains of the British colonial empire and, to a lesser extent, of the French colonial empire.

Yet there is no unambiguous panacea to be recommended. Each and every qualification can be most useful for certain loci of postcoloniality and not for others. To use “Occidentalism” or “Westernism” instead of “Eurocentrism” can alleviate certain linguistic injustices of the “lightness” in the politics of postcolonial recognition. However, if used acontextually and carelessly, these terms can repeat the same reductive gesture as the “Euro” in Eurocentrism: in other words, it can lead to the point where “the metaphor is no longer noticed, and it is taken for the proper meaning.”¹⁰⁴ In addition, as Namsoon Kang succinctly puts it, “the West as a homogeneous whole exists only in

¹⁰⁴ Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” *Postmodernism: Critical Concepts* Vol. I Foundational Insights (Victor E. Taylor and Charles E. Winquist, eds.; London and New York: Routledge, 1998): 238.

imagination,”¹⁰⁵ meaninglessly proliferating all sorts of “we-they binarism” along the lines of the same old Orientalism.¹⁰⁶

Moreover, “Westernism/Occidentalism” can simultaneously occlude even deeper certain other experiences of colonialism in relation to Europe. To invoke the most obvious example, Ireland remains a colonial affair not to be forgotten precisely as far to the West of the “Occidental” Europe as possible, making the very qualifier “Occidental” unstable by yet another deep and long occluded (post)colonial interstice or “difference within” Europe. Thus, in resonance with the Baltic context, C.L. Innes draws attention to the fact that “the Irish example complicates the usual postcolonial paradigms and encourages us to think in terms of divisions which derive from class rather than race, and which are more fluid than much postcolonial theory allows.”¹⁰⁷ Thus terms like “Occidental Europe,” “the West,” or “Occidentalism,” or “Westernism” should not be mistaken for a theoretical slam-dunk that fits equally well all historical eras and colonial

¹⁰⁵ Namsoon Kang, “Who/What Is Asian? A Postcolonial Theological Reading of Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism,” in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner and Mayra Rivera, eds.; St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004): 103.

¹⁰⁶ On the pathetic unproductivity and ideological overload of the efforts to deconsecrate West-centrism and “Eurocentrism” by inverse proliferation of Orientalism see the above referenced Kang’s essay, “Who/What Is Asian? A Postcolonial Theological Reading of Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism,” in *Postcolonial Theologies*, 100-117.

¹⁰⁷ C.L. Innes, “Postcolonial Studies and Ireland,” *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures: Dislocations* (Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray, eds.; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000):28.

regimes.¹⁰⁸ The qualifiers – when used in a doggedly contextual mode – can potentially remind postcolonial theorists and theologians, once more with a feeling, to err on the side of caution when theoretically neat imaginaries threaten to curve into clandestinely ahistoric or purely textual modes of reasoning. On an explicitly theological note, like the apophatic trajectory of naming and unnamng God to avoid presumptuous and reductive naming of the ultimate mystery, the proliferation of contextual qualifiers in relation to Europe – or any other complex historical subject – is an analogical way to avoid idolatry in postcolonial terms. In addition, given the close genealogical relationship between the high poststructuralist literary theory and postcolonialism, a slippage into a self-consuming textuality can never be discounted. Staying as intimate as possible with the messy historical materialities in the acts of postcolonial naming and conceptualizing, no matter how steep, distant, and inconvenient the complexity curve may be, comprises an ethically answerable mode of modulating the painful “lightness” of reductive naming in postcolonial critiques – and thus also of resisting to render certain histories of suffering even more invisible.

It is here that the critical value, I submit, of those small voices of history and of those small interstitial locations of historical and political memory that are ritually “left

¹⁰⁸ As for, example, “the West” seems to function in Oswald Spengler’s nostalgic lamentations on the “going-under” (*Untergang*) of the Western, non-Slavic, European cosmos after World War I – *pace* Levinas’ idea of Europe quoted in the opening paragraph of this paper. Spengler asserts that “the word ‘Europe’ ought to be struck out of history. There is historically no ‘European’ type, and it is sheer delusion to speak of Hellenes as ‘European Antiquity’... ‘East’ and ‘West’ are notions that contain real history, whereas ‘Europe’ is an empty sound,” *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality* (Charles Francis Atkinson, trans.; London: Faber and Faber, 1926): 16.

behind” to drown among the traditional postcolonial megavoices resides. Again, my appeals to historical attentiveness constitute no straightforward theoretical or political panacea. The old questions that Guha asked so pointedly years ago – whose history counts as history, who decides what counts as history and according to what values and whose criteria¹⁰⁹ – can be invoked again here by those historiographic narratives which would adamantly oppose the particular “small voice” of interruption that I have posited here as a challenge to certain, almost invisible, yet resilient and reductive imaginaries within the contemporary postcolonial terrain. This is a question beyond the scope of the present reflections. But, be that as it may, the small voices of history continue to remind that any naming that reductively swoops a far-flung gaze over the unstandardizable diversity of postcolonial situatedness of peoples, cultures, languages and histories indeed borders on being unbearably light, regardless of what and who is on the receiving end of such naming – Europe, Asia, the Americas, or Africa...

Questioning the Hierarchies of Victimhood: An Unscientific Postscript

To ponder over Europe as the *origin* and *destination* of colonial violence and suffering at the first glance may seem illegitimate and offensive in the postcolonial milieu. But taking a long look at Europe with attention to some of its usually neglected “small voices” – this time out of the Baltics – is not about succumbing to an ideological lure toward a revisionary cult of innocence as far as the non-participation of certain

¹⁰⁹ Guha, “The Small Voice of History,” *Subaltern Studies IX*, 1.

cultures and nations of Europe in the global colonial aggression of the Western modernity is concerned. Non-participation of certain Europeans, or more precisely of certain subaltern Europeans, in the colonial violence outside Europe is by no means a synonym of their innocence. The experience of suffering oppression does not engender a metaphysical immunity against becoming an oppressor.

Moreover, as *Baltic Postcolonialism* appropriately highlights it, the former “Second World” or the “New” Europe has a rather complicated relationship with (post) colonial innocence – if there is such a thing. As I already emphasized, most of the former Soviet colonies have not shown any sustained interest in postcolonial discourses even though the historical and cultural memories of colonial violence saturate the public and intellectual space under many other headings. There are several profoundly ambivalent reasons for being so aloof toward postcolonial criticism. Among these are also some appalling reasons, including the well-internalized and scandalously projected compensatory assumptions of racial and cultural superiority vis-à-vis a despised and latently feared “Third World” as it continues to be associated, among other things, with the Soviet empire that several essays in *Baltic Postcolonialism* refer to. In present day Latvia it is hard to find anything more insulting than hearing comparisons of, say, Latvia with a “developing” or “Third World” country in Africa or Asia. At the same time, and particularly during the current economic crisis, the public space and cyberspace is buzzing with apocalyptic self-castigations of these “New” Europeans. Interestingly, the terms of choice to lament over the economic and political failures include bitter self-assessments such as “servant/slave nation” and “Banana republic” with clear allusions to

the colonial subjugation and victimhood with the resulting backwardness and injustice. These perceptions undermine productive solidarity with other postcolonial cultures and locations. The desire to be “properly” European, i.e., “Western,” while realizing that the postcolonial dynamic of hybridity and mimicry of “almost but not quite” frustratingly obtains more often than not in Latvia’s dealings with the “Old” Europe as other political powers near and far, is arguably a most fascinating and complex transitional phenomenon in its political and cultural history – at least from a postcolonial perspective.

Let me mention another example. No less interesting is the widespread success of the recent Latvian “tragi-comic” pop-*Singspiel* “Tobago!” It amply reveals both eerily romanticized colonial desires and a perplexing oblivion regarding the collision of differently colored and located subalternities. Produced by one of the most famous contemporary Latvian poets Māra Zālīte and composer Uldis Marhilēvičs, “Tobago!” was performed over several years with huge success at the *Daile* Theater in Rīga since it premiered in 2001. The historical events surrounding the colonial escapades of the Dukes of Kurzeme (Courland) into the Caribbean (Tobago) and West Africa (Gambia) in the 17th century serve as the background for a love story played out among the Latvian serfs who are dispatched overseas with their colonial masters to Tobago. They use the opportunity to seek a possibility for a better, or at least a different, life for themselves. The outcome of the adventure is tragic for a number of reasons, despite all the comic elements scattered throughout the show. Yet the fact that the colonial history was a history of aggression and invasion, and not simply a means of escaping their own constrictions of apartheid and serfdom, seems not to occur for either the *dramatis personae* of the play or

their creators. A few of the critical reviews pointed out this peculiarity, albeit in a very fleeting manner.

This situation is not surprising. It is customary to link the fixation on the past suffering with frenetic claims of victimhood as the master signifier of nativist discourses that gravitate around “the wound that never heals,” as Achille Mbembe has put it.¹¹⁰ The formation of identity in relation to the past yet *sans* fixation on that past, as Mbembe suggests, can occur whenever there is a “capacity to put the past in parentheses” and “open oneself to the present and the course of life.”¹¹¹ Of course, the “opening” that Mbembe proposes is not an elimination or, rather, a repression of the past and its remembrance. But what could such “opening” mean if one considers a postcolonial interstice such as Latvia in relation to naming Europe, naming that complex and internally colonized and multi-tiered geopolitical and existential home of the conquerors and the conquered, the “Europeanizers” and the “Europeanized”? What could a Baltic interstitial perspective add most pointedly to the sensibilities and politics of postcolonial naming and recognition?

Listening to these often ambiguous and indecisive “small voices” the conundrum of naming gravitates around more nuanced and discerning practices of recognition of human suffering precisely to delimit the proliferation of imaginaries of hierarchical victimhood, sometimes even rather profitably crafted victimhood. Keeping the Baltic

¹¹⁰ Achille Mbembe, “Subject and Experience,” *Keywords: Experience* (New York: Other Press, 2004): 11-12.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

postcolonial interstices in mind, such practices and habits of imagination entail more hesitation before being swept up in the lightness of naming inherent in routine reinscriptions of certain margins, certain subalternities, certain subjugations as somehow more valuable, more appropriate than others. Hesitation is mandated especially when it comes to the theoretical issues of postcolonial canonicity – the production of the hierarchical canonicity of certain oppressions, certain colonialisms, certain sufferings, certain apartheidisms – while soaring far above other historical remembrances that don't immediately fit the terrain already mapped out. Audacity to take a road so far less traveled starts by seriously, not accidentally or when pressed hard, paying attention to un-canonized cases of injustice and suffering. Such a practice of naming would be instrumental to resist the vacuity of blasé assignments of (post)colonial innocence or guilt *tout court* to any culture, geographical location, race, and religion, for as Hannah Arendt warned long ago, when all are guilty, then no one really is.¹¹² When all Europeans and all European cultures and nations are responsible for colonial ideology and violence to an equal degree, then no one really is. When the vague notion of “Eurocentrism” of so many postcolonial critiques is used copiously but indiscriminately, it accomplishes little else apart from ironically and relentlessly reinscribing the same old and jealously guarded *das Herz Europas* as the only legitimate and fully civilized Europe as a Manichean center of all that counts, even taking under its wing the rebellious North Atlantic mimicry of itself. If race alone constitutes the canon of postcolonial attention, then there will certainly be

¹¹² Hannah Arendt, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,” *Responsibility and Judgment* (Jerome Kohn, ed.; New York: Schocken Books, 2003): 28.

quite a few preemptively discounted small voices of history that will fade even further into – this time postcolonial – subalternity. This type of subalternity will continue to speak, mostly to itself and about itself with endless and suffocating circularity, but will not be heard elsewhere. If geographical location alone becomes the unwritten shibboleth of postcolonial canonicity and legitimacy then the postcolonial aspiration toward nuanced discourse starts appearing more and more as a mere façade of a geopolitically entrenched Western academic sub-industry with a rather inconsequential regard toward self-declared “ethical pre-texts” or “differences within.”

To remain loyal to the “ethical pre-text,” postcolonial imagination can usefully focus on the historical materialities of human suffering as it is named non-hierarchically. Namely, postcolonial imagination as the driving force of a “more nuanced discourse” can modulate its conceptual range to recognize an analogical interval or an analogical resonance among the multitude of keys in which pain and injustice, including colonial violence and oppression of this world are scored. This analogical interval accommodates a palimpsestic usage of critical categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, and class, especially when it comes to human suffering of injustice. And the relentless polyvocality of suffering is the only universal *always* worth being attentive to even in this arguably “post-metaphysical” era so suspicious of all invocations of totality and universality.

At this junction, theology can fruitfully assist postcolonial imagination, I submit. To remember the past usefully and to open up to the present complexities of global conviviality a recourse to what Johann Baptist Metz called *memoria passionis* may be particularly pertinent. Appealing explicitly to the Christian tradition from a constructive

viewpoint in the postcolonial context may raise some postcolonial eyebrows. Keeping that in mind, it is important to note that Metz's *memoria passionis* is above all a dangerous memory. Namely, Metz argues that the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi* is a subversively liberating memory, grounded in "the promise of future freedom for all."¹¹³ Far from being a "reactionary" category, an "opiate for the present," a "false consciousness' of our past," and finally a "bourgeois counter-conception to hope," the memory of suffering for Metz functions as a practical, critical and "even dangerously emancipatory force."¹¹⁴ Why? The subversive power of remembered history of suffering, through the interpretive lens of the suffering and victimized Christ, makes demands on the present as it resists any attempts to conscript by some *Aufhebung* the histories of the the dead, the conquered, the victimized, the vanquished, and the forgotten into the "History" of progress. The *memoria passionis Christi* articulates itself as an ethical comportment that "makes one free to suffer from the suffering of others and to respect the prophetic witness of other's suffering."¹¹⁵ This comportment or as Metz calls it, "anamnesic reason/rationality," obtains the character of legitimate universality when it is guided by specific memory of suffering which is however, not a form of "self-referential memory of suffering (the root of all conflicts!), but in the form of a memory of others' suffering, in the form of a remembrance of the

¹¹³ Johannes B. Metz, "The Future in the Memory of Suffering," *New Questions on God* (Johannes B. Metz, ed.; New York: Herder and Herder, 1972):18.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

stranger's suffering"¹¹⁶ besides one's own. Therefore, as Metz suggests, *memoria passionis* entails an "anamnetic solidarity or solidarity in memory with the dead and the conquered which breaks the grip of history as a history of triumph and conquest interpreted dialectically or as evolution."¹¹⁷ Therein resides the dangerousness of *memoria passionis*: it remembers more than itself and remembers without producing the hierarchies of death and victimhood. Such a *memoria passionis* enables what, to slightly paraphrase Anselm Min,¹¹⁸ is best expressed as a solidarity of suffering others.

Certainly, Metz anticipates the charge – remember Arendt? – that *memoria passionis* can be interpreted in the way that would make the actual historical suffering vacuous by claiming a universal consolation that ultimately consoles no one, since all suffer in a certain sense. To this, Metz's answer is an emphatic "no."¹¹⁹ *Memoria passionis* is interwoven with the "catastrophic essence" of history with regard to its forgotten, ruined, and disregarded victims and it demands that the "catastrophes must be remembered with practical and political intent."¹²⁰ *Memoria passionis* is not a historical

¹¹⁶ Johann Baptist Metz, "God: Against the Myth of the Eternity of Time," in Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Johann Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann, Eveline Goodman-Thau, *The End of Time: The Provocation of Talking about God* (J. Matthew Ashley, ed., trans.; New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004): 42.

¹¹⁷ Johann Baptist Metz, "Memory," *Faith in History and Society: Toward A Practical Fundamental Theology* (David Smith, trans.; New York: The Seabury Press, Crossroad Book: 1980): 184.

¹¹⁸ Anselm Min, *Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004).

¹¹⁹ Metz, "The Future in the Memory of Suffering," 21.

¹²⁰ Johann Baptist Metz, *Passion for God: The Mystical – Political Dimension of Christianity* (J. Matthew Ashley, trans.; Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1998): 40.

and theoretical voyeurism. It is the comportment of recognition, providing the space for anamnestic and emancipator remembrance of many specific sufferings and injustices, especially those which are so often deemed irrelevant and unworthy of acknowledgment. *Memoria passionis* as a solidarity of historical suffering others invites an opening for freedom from both the selective memories of self-aggrandizing pasts and from cruel teleologies of human torment.

Thus the historically and “practically” remembered histories of suffering – and for Metz there is never just a single history of suffering – are “dangerous” tools of not merely resistance but also emancipation from injustice and oppression as they subvert the temptations of any types of *Aufhebung* in order to still the past in a purely affirmative attitude.¹²¹ *Memoria passionis Christi* here functions as a non-hierarchical interface, as a space of rarely coveted solidarity, as a space in which various historical wretched and useless of the earth can meet without immediately competing for the top prize in victimhood. Within the interface of *memoria passionis* “vanquished and destroyed alternatives would also be taken into account”¹²² and yet a political enthronement of any

¹²¹ Johann-Baptist Metz, “Future in the Memory of Suffering”, in Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity and Modernity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995): 8-9.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 9. Additionally, Metz remarks that “The Christian *memoria* recalls the God of Jesus’ passion as the subject of the universal history of suffering, and in the same movement refuses to give political shape to this subject and enthrone it politically. Wherever a party, group, race, nation, or class – even the class of technocrats – tries to define itself as its subject, the Christian *memoria* must oppose that, and unmask this attempt as political idolatry, as political ideology with a totalitarian or – in apocalyptic term – a ‘bestial’ tendency, “The Future in the Memory of Suffering,” *New Questions on God*, 24.

classical or canonized cases of suffering, including the *memoria passionis Christi* itself, is stubbornly refused.¹²³

Memoria passionis is not solely an imaginary of remembrance *per se*. As Metz reminds again and again, it is an eschatological remembrance. It is a *memoria passionis et resurrectionis*. But there is no resurrection in any sense without the full acknowledgment of the suffering. The dangerous memory in its eschatological aspect stubbornly keeps reminding all that there is a hope for “the useless of the earth” under the eschatological proviso of God – under which there might just be enough courage to risk a genuine historical consciousness of “looking into the abyss”¹²⁴ of suffering non-voyeuristically.

In this sense it is an anticipatory, indeed utopian, memory if a less theological term would be helpful here. Namely, as Metz suggests, “it intends the anticipation of a particular future of man as a future for the suffering, the hopeless, the oppressed, the injured and the useless of this earth.”¹²⁵ In the ongoing struggle for memories, the eschatological *memoria passionis et resurrectionis* persists in listening to the small voices of history as they create enough room to recall

not only the successful but the ruined, not only that which been realized but that which has been lost, a memory that in this way – as dangerous memory – resists identifying meaning and truth with the victory of what has come into being and continues to exist.¹²⁶

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹²⁴ Metz, *Passion for God*, 40.

¹²⁵ Metz, “The Future in the Memory of Suffering,” *New Questions on God*, 24.

¹²⁶ Metz, *Passion for God*, 40.

From a vantage point of *memoria passionis, mortis, et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*, especially in postcolonial context, the whole history of Christianity as a lived religious tradition, having so often succumbed to and even incited the temptations of the unholy colonial synergy of Christ, conquest, and commerce, stands under indictment – among other indictments. Instead of remembering the vanquished and the ruined practically and politically, Christianity has often been an instrument of multiplying the numbers of the useless of the earth. And yet *memoria passionis*, equally dangerous internally (within Christianity) and externally (wherever Christians deal with the “others”) – precisely as long as it remains dangerously loyal to its original revelation despite all perversions past and yet to come – it is still capable of bringing newness into moral and political imagination with a hope, in Metz’s words, that it would “mature into a generous, uncalculating partisanship of behalf of the weak and unrepresented.”¹²⁷

What would such an uncalculating partisanship look like in the business of postcolonial politics of naming and recognition? I submit, it would look like remembrance without exclusive fixation on “canonized” cases of suffering alone, on “classical” margins alone, on the loudest and most contrastive minorities alone, on genuine wounds profitably made into petrified foundations of identity. It would look like making sustained efforts to look at oneself and at the same time hear the complex polyvocality of (post)colonial human suffering. In the case of Europe, well underway in the course of being provincialized in the emerging polycentric planetary constellation of power, and in the case of Europe as a lived geopolitical and sociocultural reality, the

¹²⁷ Metz, “The Future in the Memory of Suffering,” *New Questions on God*, 24.

ethical activity of naming through the lens of *memoria passionis* looks like challenging codewords, shorthands, figures, no-longer-noticed metaphors, and desires precisely whenever and wherever they seem to be so paradigmatically appropriate and so enchantingly transparent. And no, Europe as a historical entity and as the existential actuality for victors and victims is neither *das Herz Europas* alone nor the Bible and Greeks alone. If this bottomless ambiguity is not remembered – especially when postcolonial constructions of difference and identity are produced with “lightness” about Europe, or Asia, or Africa or whatever other messy historical reality happens to be under the theoretical magnifying glass – then the flights of theoretical virtuosity do come treacherously close to being, *ipso facto*, the construction of victimhoods that devour its actual historical victims. This is something that neither entrenched theory nor banal religion can alleviate; *memoria passionis* as an ethical comportment toward the polyvocality of suffering, however, can at least try.