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Cosmopolitanism and the Infidelity to Internationalism: Repeating Postcoloniality and the World Revolution

What we do know is that social progress can only result from a position that bridges the gap between the universal goals of humanity and their expression, which can only be particular. This is what internationalism is all about.

— MICHAEL FORMAN

Although *cosmopolitics*¹ theorists maintain that cosmopolitanism and internationalism are neither identical nor incompatible, these theorists generally omit and erase narratives of radical internationalism from their accounts of cosmopolitanism. In their work, “cosmopoliticians” such as Daniele Archibugi, Bruce Robbins and Pheng Cheah promote the utopian possibilities of a postnational world that can presumably facilitate the subject’s (usually disembodied) modes of sociability and belonging in and out of communities at will. That is, they valorize multiple and overlapping allegiances to different communities through forms of “flexible citizenship”,

1 As it is used here, cosmopolitics refers to the theory that suggests that the particular inscription of the universal dimension of cosmopolitanism through an emphasis on the local and the marginal is possible. It also tends to emphasize agency and praxis. To this extent, cosmopolitics theorists may appropriate the lexicon of nationalism and ethnic particularity as well as the rhetoric of empowerment, while framing their discussion within the rhetoric of postnationalism and universalism, ignoring, it is argued here, the contradictions and logical inconsistencies in their conceptual framework.

without paying enough attention to the ways in which these postmodern forms of identity reproduce the power structures and relationships of the neoliberal, global capitalism regime. As such, cosmopoliticians usually disregard the extent to which the nation-state is still the most important site for the protection of the millions of disenfranchised communities around the world from the neoliberal encroachments of the global capitalist system.² Consequently, cosmopoliticians subtract the dialectical articulation of national modes of sociability from international narratives of solidarity and struggle, thus omitting and suppressing histories of oppositional narratives of anti-colonial resistance, especially national liberation struggles, decolonization projects, hemispheric indigenous solidarity, communitarian forms of alliances and resistance and, also, socialist internationalism.³ Lacking a meaningful articulation of the social bases of long-lasting solidarities, cosmopoliticians thus transmute histories of colonial and capitalist exploitation and the struggle against it into triumphant narratives of unfettered mobility and border crossings, in a way that obfuscates the possibilities for constructing alternative forms of international politics that remain grounded in collective modalities of local difference,

- 2 At the heart of this debate surrounding *cosmopolitics* is the problematic of the nation-state and national sovereignty and their relevance to living in a “borderless world”. Tim Brennan’s phenomenal book, *At Home in the World* (1997), offers by far the most eloquent defense of national sovereignty and the best critique of the premature inauguration of postnationality in academic discourses as well. Central to Brennan’s critique is the cosmopolitical complicity with neo-imperialism and the hegemony of US power in this new world order, a fact that has clearly escaped cosmopoliticians but not the large number of media pundits in the U.S.A. that promote capitalism’s borderless world fantasy.
- 3 At stake here is an Engelsian understanding of the dialectical relationship between national consciousness and such transnational forms of solidarity—what Engels in his letter to Karl Kautsky regarding Polish independence refers to as the “basis of any common international action”, an idea mirrored in Frantz Fanon’s argument that “national consciousness [...] is the only thing that will give us an international dimension” (Fanon 1968, 198). For more on Engels’s letter, see Talmon (1991).

especially nationalism, ethnic particularism and subalternity.⁴ Instead, there is a clear cosmopolitan investment in the ethics of the fragmented multitude, one that is embodied in the ideals of transnational civil society and social movements which are mostly grounded in the abstract language of rights of the hegemonic, neoliberal regime and which are not yet available to the subjects of internationalism.⁵ As such, cosmopoliticians question and elide an essential part of international political culture that can reinvigorate cosmopolitanism, by linking it with a theory that allows for mapping alternative collective technologies of subjectivization, agency and praxis, and for rethinking and transcending the dominant social relations under the neoliberal, capitalist regime.

In this chapter, I argue that cosmopolitanism can affect a meaningful change in the social relations under the neoliberal, global capitalist system only within the broad context of the history and theory of radical, essentially revolutionary, internationalism that retroactively reinscribes the post-colonial dimension of internationalism back at its centre. In what follows, I will first show that normative discourses of cosmopolitan democracy and cosmopolitics, predicated upon a neoliberal corporatist rhetoric and logic, erase *revolutionary* internationalism from their accounts of cosmopolitanism, even when references to it are made or fondness to it is feigned. Second,

- 4 I use subalternity here in the sense proffered by Gayatri Spivak (1999) namely, as the colonized Other, whose subjectivity is foreclosed within dominant discourses of power and knowledge at both local and international levels.
- 5 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue for the revolutionary potential of the multitude that seeks to articulate a new revolutionary language among diverse struggles based on the “communication of singularities” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 57). In the context of this discussion, their concept of the multitude which privileges the migrant labourer as a radical political subject under dominant configurations of global capitalism inadvertently reproduces the primacy of travel and other metaphors of mobility that typify the common cosmopolitical strategy of homogenizing all forms of mobility under the category of the cosmopolitan. In his search for “Lenin beyond Lenin”, moreover, Negri repeats the same gesture—that the mobility of immaterial labour, its flight and flexibility, is a “sign of political autonomy, the search for self-evaluation, and a refusal of representation” (Negri 2007, 300). See also Žižek’s (2006, 53) critique of the notion of the multitude.

drawing on and extending Slavoj Žižek's exhortation to repeat Lenin, the Russian communist revolutionary,⁶ I will argue for the need to recuperate revolutionary internationalism today within a revisionist, even redemptive, project that retroactively reads postcoloniality as one of the central referents of the history and theory of this form of internationalism especially then, in Lenin's writings. It is exactly a true commitment to what is here referred to as revolutionary internationalism, I contend, as it is bound to emerge from within the specific material conditions of postcoloniality—where the field of revolutionary possibilities is still open for the construction and stabilization of an alternative egalitarian world order—that can maintain the relevance and critical edge of cosmopolitics theory.

Displacing Internationalism: Cosmopolitics, Ethics, Global Civil Society

In this section, I will examine the manifestation of this strategy in different influential cosmopolitan theories namely, Daniele Archibugi's cosmopolitical democracy and Bruce Robbins' and Pheng Cheah's cosmopolitics. These theorists reject the term internationalism for its valorization (*Verwertung*) of national sovereignty, and they tend to overshadow the realities of global capitalist exploitation and class struggle with the abstract language of rights and ethics, thus substituting the exclusive concerns of global civil society and transnational solidarity movements for its comprehensively transformative program. For Archibugi, the project of cosmopolitical democracy

6 Vladimir Lenin (originally Ulyanov) was born in Imperial Russia in 1870 and died in 1924, as the Soviet Union's original "premiere". In the late 1880s and 1890s Lenin became a revolutionary Marxist and emerged as an anti-tsarist activist and a political theorist. He played an instrumental role in the split between Social Democracy and Communism and, eventually, led his own faction, the communist "Bolsheviks", to a takeover of power in October 1917, a position from which the dictatorship of the proletariat, in reality a one-party system, could be instituted.

seeks to reconstruct democracy as a form of global governance at a planetary level, for the extension of democracy internationally today “must transcend the borders of single states and assert itself on a global level” (Archibugi 2003a, 7). This requires, as he explains, establishing transnational democratic institutions that can articulate the concerns and agendas of the world’s citizens and involve them in global decision making. These world citizens, the “new social and political subjects [who] are appearing in international life” (Archibugi 2003a, 9), are none other but global civil society itself, including movements for peace, human rights and environmental protection. As such, Archibugi writes off socialist (and communist) internationalism, because it remains confined to a defunct and backward international system that regulates national relations within and between states (Archibugi 2003a, 9).

Interestingly enough, in his rejoinder to Brennan’s critique of cosmopolitical democracy, Archibugi seems to hold proletarian internationalism in high regard, referring to it as that “glorious tradition” which is “still an inspiring beacon in the fight for a just global society” (Archibugi 2003b, 264). Nonetheless, he rejects the term internationalism as it was theorized by Jeremy Bentham, because it envisions an international society based on “single state governments” (Archibugi 2003b, 263). While he calls for retaining the spirit of proletarian internationalism, moreover, he urges to rethink its political program, because proletarian internationalism, whose objective is the establishment of a classless society, falls short of ensuring that “the demands of citizens, irrespective of their class, are directly represented in global affairs” (Archibugi 2003b, 264). Resolutions, he states, must be taken “by the majority, not by a single class” (Archibugi 2003b, 264). But if proletarian internationalism calls for abolishing classes altogether, how can it reflect the interests of a single class in a hierarchy of classes? Will that single class not be the majority? What Archibugi in effect does here is a projective displacement of proletarian internationalism: While he admits that cosmopolitical democracy is predicated upon “substantial disparities [...] in access to global resources” (Archibugi 2003b, 264), Archibugi refuses to admit that only the creation of a classless society can produce the right conditions for the equitable distribution of wealth and power. Ironically, the virtue of proletarian internationalism becomes here its main vice.

Even critics of this inherent unequalitarianism of Archibugi's cosmopolitical democracy, the forms of democracy that are founded upon cosmopolitical principles, fail to recognize the significance of revolutionary internationalism, even when their analysis leads nowhere but to it. Craig Calhoun, for example, criticizes the complicity of cosmopolitan democracy with neoliberal capitalism, arguing that some form of cosmopolitanism is still needed, but does not specify which form of cosmopolitanism he has in mind. One thing his analysis makes clear, though, is that such an alternative vision of cosmopolitanism must depend on developing strong social solidarities and must be clearly distinguished from capitalism (Calhoun 2003, 110). As such, Calhoun rejects the claims of international civil society, for the language of rights upon which it is based cannot replace the need for strong social solidarities and networks that must constitute the basis for struggles for a more just and democratic world order.

Nonetheless, Calhoun comes very close to identifying proletarian internationalism as that alternative form of cosmopolitanism that is much needed today for eliminating material inequality and promoting radical change, but falls short of referring to it by name. He writes: "If there is to be a major redistribution of wealth, or a challenge to the way the means of production are controlled in global capitalism, it is not likely to be guided by cosmopolitanism as such. Of course, it may well depend on transnational—even cosmopolitan—solidarities among workers or other groups" (Calhoun 2003, 109). Calhoun then specifies that such an alternative form of cosmopolitanism must "contend with both capitalism's economic power and its powerful embeddedness in the institutional framework of global relations" (Calhoun 2003, 109). It remains unclear, however, why particularly proletarian internationalism cannot "contend" with these issues. In fact, proletarian internationalism seems to speak to all the specifications he sets for viable forms of cosmopolitanism, namely, ending the structural disparities under global capitalism, reinscribing the political over the obsession with the ethical, and establishing connection to ideas of "political action rooted in immanent contradictions of the social order" (Calhoun 2003, 102). This refusal to identify proletarian internationalism can be attributed to his conviction that there is a need for forms of solidarity "outside of political organization" (Calhoun 2003,

100).⁷ Invoking Oscar Wilde's infamous phrase, that socialism requires too many evenings, Calhoun strangely enough dismisses the socialist tradition as a political ideology that, in its demand for intense commitment and fidelity, forecloses enjoyment of "a non-political life in civil society" (Calhoun 2003, 100).⁸

Like Archibugi's cosmopolitical democracy, Robbins' and Cheah's cosmopolitics is predicated upon an abrogation of the term internationalism itself and the valorization of international civil society and the ethical over radical politics. In his pursuit of a form of belonging that he refers to as "denationalized internationalism", Robbins rejects the term internationalism for its alleged inadequacy for describing "the sensibility of our moment", a sensibility that is obviously framed not only within the hegemonic renunciation of "the naïve Third Worldism of the 1960s" and anti-imperialist politics in the USA, but also within absolutist discourses of cultural relativism that preclude the possibility of any "right place to stand" (Robbins

- 7 The question of the efficacy and viability of the (socialist or communist) party to serve as the vanguard of the proletarian revolution constitutes one of the major debates among the neo-Communist intellectuals today, especially Žižek and Badiou. While Žižek argues for the need to re-actualize Lenin, he also recognizes the dark side of many of Lenin's practical solutions. Drawing on the relatively recent rise to power of indigenous and populist movements in Bolivia and Venezuela, nonetheless, Žižek still maintains that the only way to mobilize the masses in the current historical juncture is a reloaded version of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," or new forms of popular participation outside the formal state structures of organization that affect direct mobilization among the masses (Žižek 2008, 379). On the other end of this debate, the French Maoist philosopher Alain Badiou favors new political forms embodied in what he calls a "politics without a party", renouncing thus the party system as no longer appropriate for the actualization of the Communist Idea. In his revisionist reading of Mao's politics, Badiou goes as far as stating that "Mao's dialectical thought helps to relativize the power of the Party" (Badiou 2010, 272).
- 8 Compare this pleading for enjoyment of non-political life with Žižek's call for adopting "aggressive passivity" as a "proper radical political gesture" which urges the radical subjects to "withdraw into passivity, to refuse to participate". This, according to Žižek, is the "necessary first step that, as it were, clears the ground for true activity, for an act that will effectively change the coordinates of today's constellation" (2006, 223).

1993, 196).⁹ More recently, Robbins went as far as stating that although cosmopolitanism is not as “politically ambitious” as internationalism, the former referent is more useful conceptually and analytically in delineating various modalities of liberal Western cosmopolitanism, including Kantian universalism and the diverse social movements, non-governmental organizations and organizations of international civil society—namely, the human rights, ecological, peace and women’s international movements (Robbins 1999, 7–8). Privileging these forms of cosmopolitanism, Robbins places the specific histories and traditions of radical internationalism under erasure—he omits them from his narrative of cosmopolitanism, even when he makes explicit references to them. For example, he discusses Raymond Williams’s *Culture and Society*, which he considers to be an exemplary narrative in the “genre of the allegory of vocation” that traces the emergence of the “leftist” intellectual tradition (Robbins 1993, 190). Instead of situating this leftist work within the Marxist and internationalist tradition in which it belongs, a tradition that is under constant attack and obliteration in the US academy and capitalist culture, Robbins opts for obfuscating it and privileging instead models of cosmopolitanism that reflect “our ambivalence about cosmopolitanism” (Robbins 1993, 190; cf. also the idea about a “reluctant cosmopolitanism” sketched out in the chapter by Vincent in this volume). Ironically, his efforts at reconfiguring other forms of cosmopolitanism end up purposefully disavowing the same internationalism, which he admits is potentially capable of “mobiliz[ing] cosmopolitanism differently” (Robbins 1993, 190).

- 9 This vision of world citizenship is grounded in what Bruce Robbins calls “overlapping allegiances”, or the development of a sense of belonging to various places, to which the connection of the cosmopolitan subject may be disembodied or virtual; in short, it is predicated upon reattachment from a distance. Robbins believes that these allegiances include places to which we have never travelled or ones that we have seen only on TV. Drawing on Lefebvre, however, Meyda Yegenoglu (2005) criticizes this paradigm, which renders irrelevant the concrete and embodied locales and spaces, whose materiality are fundamental for the formation of identity, consciousness and habits.

More perplexing is Robbins's more recent applaud of "socialist internationalism" as an example of the "worldly, limited, less-than-ideal alternatives" to the normative Western forms of internationalism. Unexpectedly, Robbins endorses internationalism, arguing for a "translation or transmutation of *cosmopolitanism*, usually understood as a detached, individual view of the global, into the more collective, engaged, and empowered form of worldliness that is often called *internationalism*" (Robbins 1999, 5). Not only that now Robbins locates no necessary tension or opposition between cosmopolitanism and internationalism, on the one hand, and between both ideologies and nationalism, on the other, but he also uses these concepts interchangeably. In a surprisingly Fanonian articulation, Robbins maintains that "cosmopolitanism or internationalism", as he says, is "an extension outward of the same sorts of potent and dangerous solidarity" that typify nationalism (Robbins 1999, 6). As such, he overlooks the ways in which cosmopolitanism and internationalism are, in Brennan's words, "theoretically incompatible" (Brennan 2003, 41). His references to internationalism notwithstanding, Robbins obliterates and excludes the specific histories and traditions of radical internationalism from the rest of his book. Quoting Peter Waterman, Robbins thus states that "proletarian and socialist internationalism [...] have become embarrassments to contemporary socialists" (Robbins 1999, 7–8). Instead, and in alignment with James Clifford's inclusive definition of the cosmopolitan subject as both Western and non-Western, elitist and non-elitist, including servants, migrant workers and refugees, Robbins now cites guest workers, au pairs and metropolitan postcolonial intellectuals like Edward Said as exemplars of "cosmopolitanism from the margins" (Robbins 1999, 31, 100–101). In a sleight of hand, forced exile and the recodification of peripheral labour, especially the millions of the subjects of colonial difference and subalternity around the world and their reintegration within the global capitalist economy, are conflated with the privileged, middle-class subject of the normative claims of Western cosmopolitanism. Robbins thus obscures the extent to which cosmopolitanism has been enabled by global capitalism, which recodes the exploitation of the subject of colonial difference within the global economy as the teleological emergence of the global citizen consumer. As Gayatri Spivak has argued, "The current misuse, abuse, and

overuse of the rubric *cosmopolitanism* to recode labor export” is another example of the “incessant recoding and reterritorializing of capital” (Spivak 2008, 187). Robbins’s failure to engage with the impact of the restructuring of the global economy on the subject of colonial difference thus conflates leftist internationalism and the globalism of the “circuits of imperialist capital” that Aijaz Ahmad insists “must always be demarcated as rigorously as possible” (Ahmad 1992, 45).

Similarly, Pheng Cheah, Robbins’s co-editor of the influential collection *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (1998), evacuates cosmopolitical agency from the viable narratives and political histories of revolutionary internationalism. Citing the Algerian feminist Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas’s international “activity”, not activism, for the legal reform of Islamic personal codes, for instance, Cheah downplays her belief in radical, Leftist internationalism, one that is predicated on a long history of decolonization and liberation struggle against French colonial rule and on the recognition of “all the differences of interests and in wealth and class” between Muslim feminist internationalists and their Western counterparts. Instead, he foregrounds emergent forms of ethically responsible cosmopolitical agency that reflect a “practical awareness of our structured co-implication with the world, everything that we take for granted when we begin from the claim of an existent condition of freedom that transcends the given” (Cheah 1998, 322). Cheah thus argues that the only possible articulation of this ethical responsibility to the given as a cosmopolitical practical awareness cannot be enunciated under the sign of Kantian universal cosmopolitanism, global capitalism, cultural hybridity or proletarian internationalism, but can only be embodied in international civil society, including popular women’s and human-rights groups that “try to link up with international networks and seek immediate support from international aid donors” (Cheah 1998, 322). But such activity, as he recently claims, is not “political in highly organized, self-conscious sense but is instead a form of low-profile pragmatic activism within the milieu of the popular-religious and national everyday” (Cheah 2006, 114). As such, he reduces the struggle for the redistribution of resources within an internationalist politics and praxis to pragmatic transnational alliances that are grounded in forms of vernacular cosmopolitanism. More importantly,

Cheah seems to discern no contradiction between linking up with international civil society and the undermining of the sovereignty of the nation-state that the subjects of postcolonial difference and subalternity must, in his words, “lovingly inhabit” (Cheah 1998, 318). One wonders how effective these subjects can be as adherents of “unblind nationalism” (Cheah 1998, 320), when the fight for equality and greater personal autonomy among members of international civil society happens without any redistribution in wealth and power. Indeed, the achievements of global civil society have been limited to information sharing, without any actual possibility of structural change. Hence, my contention here is that only an emphasis on collective rights and redistributive mechanisms through the language of radical, that is, revolutionary, internationalism can at this historical juncture translate the empty rhetoric of empowerment into structures of political agency and transformation.

Repeating Internationalism: Going Back and Following a “Different Path”

Drawing on the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek’s call to repeat Lenin, I argue that it is imperative at this historical juncture to recuperate and reinvent this form of revolutionary internationalism, but within a revisionist project that retroactively reads postcoloniality as one of the central nodes for the articulation of revolutionary internationalism, especially in Lenin’s work. While Žižek is correct in his critique of the hegemonic, poststructural brand of postcolonial thought for its preoccupation with the “pseudo-psychoanalytic drama of the subject [who is] unable to confront its inner traumas [the Other within]” (Žižek 2002, 171), I identify postcoloniality here with the long history of anti-colonial struggles of the national liberation movements that postcolonial critics and historians locate precisely in the traditions of Marxist internationalism (Ahmad 1992; Brennan 1997; Young 2001). As such, reclaiming internationalism, as I see

it, requires a re-engagement with Lenin's mediation of anti-colonialism and the national question that can retroactively redeem postcoloniality, especially the constitution of the postcolonial subject as one of the main loci of the production of no less than a revolutionary internationalist subjectivity and its world-historic mission. I will show that Lenin did not simply provide a new language and broader theoretical vocabulary for articulating the concerns of the national liberation movements in the colonies, as the standard critiques of Lenin have it, but that he located the language of hope and messianism that characterizes socialist internationalism in the postcolonial field of possibilities. This is not an attempt at assigning an *a priori* ontological privilege to the postcolonial subject today, but an effort at re-visiting and reconstructing one of the main forms that could embody the subject of revolutionary internationalism, especially in Lenin's writings, even though a wager can be made that postcolonial spaces can still provide that unique opportunity for reconstructing and reimagining alternative communities grounded in radically egalitarian politics.

Arguing against all unwritten discursive taboos (the so-called *Denkverbot*) that waste no time invoking the spectre of totalitarianism, its history of the Gulag and Third World catastrophes, Žižek makes the case for the need to re-actualize the Leninist act of the October Revolution today (Žižek 2002, 168). Elsewhere, he calls this critical confrontation with the Leninist legacy as "retrieval-through-repetition" (*Wieder-Holung*) (Žižek 2007, 95). While Žižek is more than ready to recognize the monstrous failure of the solutions that Lenin's legacy embodies (the one-party system and the dictatorship of the proletariat, and with it, if one might add, the institutionalization of terror and repression), he still believes that there is "a utopian spark in [Lenin's legacy] worth saving".¹⁰ For Žižek, the Lenin

10 When Ernesto Laclau (2000) faults Žižek's call to repeat Lenin, he is wary that such a call risks re-implementing the one-party political system and the dictatorship of the proletariat. But, as I will argue below, Žižek's weak form of "positive Marxism" makes it almost impossible to tell *a priori* the precise substance of such a repetition; hence, the emphasis on the Badiouian event in Žižek's formulation of the act. For Žižek's response to Laclau, see his "A Leninist Gesture" (2007) and *In Defence of Lost Causes* (2008).

to be reloaded is, accordingly, the “Lenin-in-becoming”, the one that has not yet become a part of the Soviet institution; this is the Lenin who is “thrown into an *open* situation” (Žižek 2002, 6). As such, the Lenin to be recovered is the Lenin full of potentialities, whose language of possibilities can be located in “what he *failed to do*, his missed opportunities” which can never be predicted or foreclosed (Žižek 2002, 310). To repeat Lenin is to recuperate, as Žižek memorably says, what was “in Lenin more than Lenin himself” (Žižek 2002, 310). Above all, this excess in Lenin represents for Žižek the freedom to think outside the common discursive prohibitions of the neocolonial, global capitalist regime. This Lenin, he writes, “stands for the compelling freedom to suspend the stale existing (post)ideological coordinates, the debilitating *Denkverbot* in which we live—it simply means that we are allowed to think again” (Žižek 2002, 11). As Adrian Johnston succinctly puts it, repeating Lenin “broadly signifies a disruptive break that makes it possible to imagine, once again, viable alternatives to liberal democratic capitalism by removing the various obstacles to thinking seriously about options forcefully foreclosed by today’s reigning ideologies” (Johnston 2009, 115).

For Žižek, however, Lenin signifies more than just this freedom to think outside the box of the neocolonial, global capitalist regime. For all his talk about “passive aggressivity” (Žižek 2006b, 209–226), Žižek’s invocation of Lenin’s name ultimately lies in his historic act, the event of the October Revolution, precisely in his call for immediate revolution. He thus notes Lenin’s anti-evolutionary conviction that there can be no waiting for the “right moment” of the revolution to mature on its own and explode, but that under certain conditions, it is legitimate, even advisable, to catalyze and force the revolution to come into existence (Žižek 2002, 8). Although he perceived the situation to be desperate, Lenin realized that it could be “creatively exploited for new political choice” (Žižek 2008, 360). In “Lacanesque”, therefore, Lenin’s revolutionary act would “not [be] covered by the big Other”—that is, for Žižek, Lenin was neither afraid of a premature seizure of power nor did he demand full guarantees for the revolution to succeed in order for him to embark on the road to revolution (Žižek 2002, 8). In short, because Lenin was capable of looking into the “abyss of the act” in the eye, he insisted that there is no right time for the revolution.

For Žižek, therefore, these completely hopeless times clear a space for enacting Lenin's freedom of experimentation and rejection of determinism, for "there is *always* a space to be made for an act" (Žižek 2008, 361). In his implicit response to Žižek's claim, Frederic Jameson asserts that Lenin's significance can be located neither in politics nor in economics, but rather in the fusion of both together "in that Event-as-process and process-as-Event we call revolution" (Jameson 2007, 68). Jameson thus states: "The true meaning of Lenin is the perpetual injunction to keep the revolution alive, to keep it alive as a possibility even before it has happened, to keep it alive as a process at all those moments when it is threatened by defeat or worse yet, by routinization, compromise, or forgetfulness" (Jameson 2007, 68). As such, Žižek reappropriates Lenin to foreground the need for reenacting another revolution, although not necessarily a communist one since Marx's Communist society, in his opinion, is an "inherent capitalist fantasy" (Žižek 2000, 19), but a revolution in the abstract whose content still requires remapping and specification. In this sense, Žižek's rejection of a Communist utopia is indeed an example of, in Johnston's words, a "Marxism deprived of its Marxism" (Johnston 2009, 112). Nonetheless, it is precisely this weak form of "positive Marxism", embodied in his insistence on keeping the revolution alive, that constitutes the highest expression of fidelity to Marx and to the Lenin who identifies "what is decisive in Marxism" as "its revolutionary dialectics" (Lenin 1923/1969, 476–477).

Although this exhortation to repeat Lenin has radical implications for the "gesture of reinventing the revolutionary project in the conditions of imperialism and colonialism, more precisely" (Žižek 2002, 11), Žižek's turn to Lenin is an example of the kind of repetition to salvage alternative history that Žižek claims as a critical gesture for maintaining a revolutionary stance. Yet strangely enough, Žižek himself misses one of Lenin's most useful linkages for promoting the revolution on a global scale—the revolutionary potential of the postcolonial subject.¹¹ After the

11 Although Žižek cites the postcolonial spaces of the Brazilian *favelas* as an example of "first 'liberated territories,' cells of future self-organized societies" that exist "outside the law" (Žižek 2006, 51–53), he also envisions a true revolution emerging only from a Europe-centred "Second World" (Žižek 2006, 183–208), where it becomes possible

1914 crisis and his disenchantment with the Second International, as I will show below, Lenin's writings increasingly reinscribe the subject of the national liberation movements in the colonies, not the Western working class, as one of the fundamental articulations of the "real" revolutionary subject. It is not that Lenin disavowed the proletariat and their world-historic mission altogether or that he assigned an *a priori* ontological value to the postcolonial subject as the ultimate locus of revolutionary subjectivity. Žižek is fully aware, of course, that there "*never was*" a "predestined revolutionary subject", not even the working class (Žižek 2008, 289). Rather, it must be recognized that in the years leading to the Third International and until his death, Lenin's faith in the "awakening of hundreds of millions" in the colonies became more pronounced.

"Beyond the Pale of History": Lenin, the National Question and the Postcolonial Legacy of Revolutionary Internationalism

Accounting for Lenin's faith in the power of the national liberation movements to lead the world revolution to come has radical implications for retroactively redeeming postcoloniality, especially the constitution of the

to put up a resistance front to the global hegemony of the US. Indeed, Žižek has been reluctant to locate the world-historic mission of socialist internationalism in the field of possibilities and potentialities that characterizes the history of postcoloniality, repudiating thus the capacity of the postcolonial subject to subjectivize the position of the proletariat and the revolutionary class that was envisioned by Lenin. In part, he represents the postcolonial as both an ideological supplement to global capitalism, specifically in the case of Tibet and Buddhism, and its excremental remainder, especially the favelas and slums of the Third World. Consequently, Žižek does not only obliterate the history of the national liberation movements in the postcolonial world, but also forecloses the possibility of the construction of the postcolonial as the subject-for-itself, or more specifically, the subject of history and revolutionary internationalism. For more on this, see Khader (2013).

postcolonial subject as one of the main sites for the production of a revolutionary internationalist subjectivity and its world-historic mission. Although Lenin did not simply abandon the potential of the proletariat for revolution, he seems to consider the subjects of the national liberation movements in the colonies more than just “one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the real anti-imperialist force, the socialist proletariat, to make an appearance on the scene” (Lenin 1972, 22: 357).¹² By embracing the subject of the national liberation movements, as Kevin Anderson writes, Lenin widened “the orthodox Marxist notion of the revolutionary subject” (Anderson 2007, 143). Lenin’s position on the potential of the subject of colonial difference to assume the leadership of the revolutionary movement, I maintain, developed in dialogue and debates with many Third World Marxist activists and intellectuals, most importantly the Indian M.N. Roy and the Muslim Mir Said Sultan-Galiev.¹³

It is important first to note that Lenin’s uncompromising socialist internationalist position on the problematic of the subject of colonial difference was first articulated at the 1907 Stuttgart Congress of the Second International (1889) especially, at the 1899 Brunn Congress. At Brunn, the solidarity of the oppressed, the Western proletariat and the subjects of colonial difference, took centre stage over the preoccupation with intra-European colonialism that characterized the First International and the early congresses of the Second (Young 2001, 116). Here, Lenin firmly rejected the pervasive conviction in the Congress that colonialism was an integral part of the socialist movement, criticizing its underlying racist bourgeois policies for “introducing virtual slavery into the colonies and subjecting the native populations to untold indignities and violence” (Young 2001, 116–117).

12 All subsequent references to Lenin from this edition of *Collected Works* (1972) will be cited by volume and page numbers in the text.

13 This reconstructive reading of Lenin’s position on the true subject of revolutionary internationalism draws on the work of John Riddell’s (1991) history and documentation of the Baku Conference and the Second Congress of the Third International. See also Young (2001, 115–139), and Kevin Anderson (1995; 2003) whose important work on Lenin’s position on the national question which was grounded in Hegelian dialectics has refocused attention on this neglected issue in the criticism of Lenin’s work.

Lenin's understanding of this common bond of oppression between colonials and proletarians and the importance of class struggle for forging a link between them was rearticulated three years later (1910) at a world conference of colonized peoples and at the 1916 Lausanne conference. In a 1916 essay, he asserted that the struggle for national self-determination in the colonies was a leading force in the opposition to imperialist capitalism (Young 2001, 125; Anderson 2007, 129). As Kevin Anderson notes, Lenin was "the first major theorist, Marxist or non-Marxist, to grasp the importance that anti-imperialist movements would have for global politics in the twentieth century" (Anderson 2007, 128). Indeed, his references and examples in *Imperialism* (1916) and *The State and Revolution* (1917) were mostly drawn not from Russia but from anti-imperialist national liberation movements in India, Ireland, China, Turkey and Iran. In his debates about the Irish Eastern Rebellion of 1916, in particular, with leading Marxists especially, Radek and Trotsky, Lenin dissented from their Bukharinian renunciation of all forms of nationalism as obsolete, distinguishing between the chauvinist nationalism of colonial powers and the revolutionary nationalism of the national liberation movements which he described as "the dialectical opposite of global imperialism" (Young 2001, 131). In the years leading to the October Revolution, moreover, Lenin reconciled the claims of nationalism and national self-determination with the need for the proletariat to "fight in conjunction with it against colonial oppression", by anticipating the dissolution and renunciation of bourgeois nationalism in favor of the establishment of proletarian internationalism (Young 2001, 121–122).

As he began considering himself a leader of international Marxism, nonetheless, Lenin viewed the production of anti-imperialist subjectivity, one constituted through the dialectics of national struggle in the colonies, as central to his vision of world revolution and communist internationalism. Indeed, in his 1914 critique of Rosa Luxemburg's Eurocentric proletarian messianism, that only the "workers of the advanced capitalist countries [...] can lead the army of the exploited and enslaved of the five continents", Lenin forcefully argues that "the national liberation politics of the colonies will *inevitably* be continued by national wars of the colonies *against* imperialism" (Lenin 1972, 22: 307). While the First Congress of

the Third International, the Communist International or the Comintern (1919), mainly reiterated Luxemburg's faith in the messianic powers of the Western urban proletariat to overthrow the European colonial states, so that "the workers and peasants not only of Annam, Algiers, and Bengal, but also of Persia and Armenia [may] gain their independence", by the time of the Second Congress Lenin was becoming very skeptical about the ability of the Western proletariat to affect an immediate revolution in Europe (Young 2001, 128). With the encouragement of Sultan-Galiev, Lenin began increasingly to "identify the countries of the east as being of more potential revolutionary significance" (Young 2001, 129). In his July 5 1921 "Tactics of the Russian Communist Party, Report to the Third Congress of the Communist International," therefore, Lenin writes: "And it should be perfectly clear that in the coming decisive battles of the world revolution, this movement of the majority of the world's population, originally aimed at national liberation, will turn against capitalism and imperialism and will, perhaps, play a more revolutionary role than we have been led to expect" (Lenin 1923/1969, 289–290).

Beginning with the Second Congress, moreover, Lenin identified his critique of imperialism with that of the Indian Marxist M.N. Roy, putting thus "colonial revolution at the forefront of the priorities of the new communist government, regarding it as a central factor in the Soviet fight against capitalism" (Young 2001, 125). Indeed, Roy was instrumental in Lenin's recognition of the subject of colonial difference as one of the main loci of revolutionary subjectivity. Drawing on and revising Marx's analysis of Ireland in his debate with Lenin on the importance of Asia in developing world revolutions, Roy argued that "because of the economic dependency of imperialist powers on their colonial structures, the fate of the revolutionary movement in Europe depends *entirely* on the course of the revolution in the East. Without the victory of the revolution in the eastern countries, the communist movement in the West would come to nothing" (quoted in Young 2001, 131–132 [my emphasis]). While Lenin thought that Roy's use of the word "entirely" was hyperbolic, Lenin in his July 1920 address to the Second Congress, nonetheless, announced: "World imperialism shall fall when the revolutionary onslaught of the exploited and oppressed workers in each country [...] merge with the revolutionary

onslaught of hundreds of millions of people who have hitherto stood beyond the pale of history and have been regarded merely as the objects of history” (Lenin 1972, 31: 207–208). The power of the subjects of colonial difference is thus embedded in their rejection of that status as “objects of history” and their ability to reclaim the potential for embodying the idea of revolution. Indeed, in “On the Significance of Militant Materialism” of March 1922, Lenin stated that “the awakening to life and struggle of the new classes in the East (Japan, India, China) [...] serves as a fresh confirmation of Marxism” (Lenin 1972, 33: 234).

Lenin’s radical idea from the Second Congress until his death, then, was his ability to recodify the subjects of colonial difference into the vanguard subjects of socialist internationalism, an idea that he had presciently anticipated in a 1913 article entitled “Backward Europe and advanced Asia” (Lenin 1972, 19: 99–101). This idea took full form in The First Congress of the Peoples of the East, or the Baku Congress of 1920, which convened at his own instigation to underscore the revolutionary potential of the subjects of colonial difference. Lenin’s understanding of the primacy of anti-colonial struggle of the national liberation movements in the march towards socialist internationalism does not thus simply mean that he bracketed the potential of the proletariat to lead the revolution, but rather the opposite: that above all Lenin was increasingly convinced that the national liberation movements in the colonies provided a new language of anti-imperial struggle and liberation with which to inject the stale legacy of socialist internationalism. Even in the last article he wrote in March 1923, Lenin reiterated his faith in the future role of the subject of colonial difference in the envisaged world revolution, stating that the mobilization of the national liberation movements in the colonies will ensure socialist victory (Lenin 1972, 45: 416–417). Such a position would not be far from Lenin’s dialectical “concrete analysis of concrete situations” which, as Etienne Balibar maintains, “assumed incorporating into the concept of revolutionary process the *plurality of forms* of proletarian political struggle (“peaceful” and “violent”), and the *transition* from one form to another (hence the question of the specific duration and successive contradictions of the revolutionary transition [...])” (Balibar 2007, 211). This is not only to acknowledge that the socialist revolution is inconceivable without a

diverse and international insurgency, as Kevin Anderson (1995, 135–141) argues, but that the idea of the revolution itself will inevitably be, and will have been, “exported” to the world from without Europe. To invert Stalin’s statement on “The International Significance of the October Revolution,” it could be said in regards to Lenin’s position on the revolutionary potential of postcolonial subjectivity that the struggle of national liberation movements in the colonies created a “new line of revolution against world imperialism”, extending from the oppressed nations of the East, through the Russian revolution, and to the “proletarians of the West” (quoted in Young 2001, 126).

The Postcolonial Hypothesis

The resurgence in 2011 and 2012 of the revolutionary ethos all over the world—spanning from the civil uprisings of the Arab Spring to the Occupy movement’s protests and demonstrations on virtually every continent—bears witness to the need for rethinking the efficacy of cosmopolitanism as a viable theory of social change under the neoliberal global capitalist regime. The problem here is that *cosmopoliticians* cannot oppose the neocolonial, capitalist ideology that reproduces cosmopolitanism itself as another dominant myth that conceals the class antagonisms underpinning the social relations within neocolonial, capitalist conditions and that reframes complicity with them as inexorable. By suppressing and erasing internationalism, cosmopoliticians obscure the extent to which internationalism is, as Gayatri Spivak notes, “not only possible but necessary” for contemporary subjects, for whom the increasing hegemony of global capital and World Bank economics has made “social redistribution [...] uncertain at best” (Spivak 2008, 198). This internationalism, as I have argued in the previous pages, must retroactively be reinscribed with the postcolonial trajectory delineated above at its centre. As such, Lenin’s October Revolution should be perceived only as “being one possible, and often even not the

most probable, outcome of an ‘open’ situation” (Žižek 2010, 86), and that the postcolonial impetus of Lenin’s revolutionary politics is the spectre that will continue to haunt the future of the radical left and the Western revolutionary theories and politics.

For cosmopolitanism, this reaffirmation of the postcolonial trajectory of revolutionary internationalism does not simply amount to re-enacting the troubled history of internationalism and communism in a teleological process as they are many times negatively understood in the humanities today. Rather, it could constitute a “repetitive movement, a movement of *repeating the beginning* over and over again” (Žižek 2010a, 210). As Žižek explains, to “begin from the beginning” does not simply mean to “build further upon the foundations of the revolutionary epoch of the twentieth century (which lasted from 1917 to 1989), but to ‘descend’ to the starting point and follow a *different* path” (Žižek 2010a, 210). Reframing cosmopolitanism within the internationalist history of postcolonial revolutionary experimentation can therefore be more productive, given a revolutionary agenda, for thinking through not only the practical difficulties of constructing a revolution, but also the ultimate end of the revolution. Despite the disparity in the success of postcolonial revolutionary practices, one cannot simply overlook the record of postcolonial revolutions that were thickly invested in reimagining extra-capitalist social totalities. As one of the major repressed points of exclusion under the hegemony of global capitalism today, postcolonial spaces indeed constitute the most important locus for exacerbating the antagonisms inherent to the capitalist system, turning them into a collective evental site that even in, or precisely because of, its failures can offer a radical challenge to the totality of the liberal-capitalist socio-symbolic order and actualize the “revolutionary explosion”.

As such, cosmopolitanism could be reconfigured to facilitate, in Žižek’s words, the “political mobilization of new forms of politics” which must not only be predicated upon a “practical alliance” with the “new proletarians from Africa and elsewhere”, as Alain Badiou states (Badiou 2010, 99). Rather, they must be organized from the beginning at the level of the *real* by those same new postcolonial proletarians who recognize themselves in the socialist revolutionary *Event*. Indeed, under the current hegemony of neocolonialist global capitalism, in which the majority of people have

been pauperized as a result of the polarization of wealth, it is the subjects of postcolonial difference that have assumed the position of Marx's "vanishing" proletariat. As Badiou correctly points out in regards to the Cultural Revolution, and by implication other postcolonial revolutionary acts, Žižek fails to understand not only the long series of postcolonial revolutionary acts that constitute the ultimate embodiment of the "principles of the Paris Commune", but also the "element of universality in [their] terrible failure" (Badiou 2010, 273, 274). As Žižek himself relatively recently noted, the subject's fidelity to a cause like the revolutionary Event can be only regulated through "incessant betrayals" (Žižek 2010b, xiv).

Despite the disparity in the history and practice of revolutionary ideology in the postcolonies, the postcolonial subject might seem to be the one best suited these days to reinvent and stabilize a radically egalitarian politics as well as alternative forms of political organization "in the immediate" (Žižek 2008, 427). The recent revolutionary developments in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain and Libya, and the increasing signs of social upheaval and unrest that are currently sweeping Yemen, Jordan and Syria, are the ultimate proof of the explosive, utopian potential of postcolonial emancipatory politics.¹⁴ In Tahrir square, that is, Žižek needs to see that we were "allowed to act as if the utopian future is [...] already at hand, there to be seized" (Žižek 2002, 260). Indeed, it is this revolutionary postcolonial moment that proves beyond the shadow of doubt that "the 'right choice' is only possible the second time, after the wrong one; that is, it is only the first wrong choice which literally creates the conditions for the right choice" (Žižek 2010b, 88).

14 Indeed, Hugo Chavez's call for a Fifth International might also be indicative in this respect.

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