

Hans-Peter Grosshans, Pantelis Kalaitzidis (Eds.)

Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age



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Orthodox Christianity in the Context of Postcolonial Studies

Vasilios N. Makrides

Introduction

The emergence of postcolonial studies can certainly be considered a seminal development in the modern cultural sciences with numerous applications and repercussions in a variety of other domains and disciplines (including religious studies¹) that have radically changed traditional perspectives, evaluations and orientations.² It was a paradigm change that went hand in hand with the gradual political decolonization process, especially from the 1970s onwards. The main aim was the critical examination of the culture and identity of countries, nations or population groups that were historically shaped by colonial control and contexts, mainly under the influence of West European and generally Western powers. This implied a critical questioning of the long history of Western colonialism, which was also combined with concrete emancipatory interests, not only in political but also in cultural and intellectual terms. It is about a multifaceted and multilayered development to combat the lasting effects of colonialism on native peoples, given that there are various legacies of colonial agency and practice, as well as numerous modes of colonial hegemony and interdependencies (with regard to power, subordination, race, gender, inequality, and class struggles).

Needless to say, we are talking about a development that is still evolving, calls into question established certainties and commonplaces, and exhibits various

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- 1 Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); David Chidester, "Colonialism," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun & Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 423–37; Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Richard King, "Orientalism and the Study of Religions," in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnells (Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 275–90; David Chidester, "Colonialism and Religion," *Critical Research on Religion* 1 (2013), 87–94; Daniel Dubuisson, *The Invention of Religions*, trans. Martha Cunningham (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2019).
 - 2 Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray, eds., *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000); Gregory Castle, *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001); Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2001).

new and controversial facets. Suffice it to say that the latest protest actions in the context of the wider “Cancel Culture” movement³ and the Afro-American criticism of Classical Studies in academia as perpetuated and disseminated by Western colonial powers and ideologies⁴ owe much to the postcolonial turn. It is thus not unusual to observe major academic and public institutions as well as organizations and states in the Western world today officially initiating their own self-critical decolonization process.⁵ Even if there are reservations sometimes regarding the extreme application of postcolonial perspectives on concrete cases and their potential repercussions or regarding other epistemological issues at stake,⁶ postcolonial critique is generally an established research paradigm nowadays, both within academia and in society and culture at large.

Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, first published in 1978, is commonly considered as the birth of (or at least a turning point in) postcolonial studies. Basically, he tried to show that Western experts on the Orient constructed the subject of their research as an inferior other. Moreover, the knowledge produced in this way was used to consolidate and legitimize colonial power structures (e.g., in the educational canon of the colonized subjects). Said used material on power structures, production and dissemination of knowledge and concomitant relations of dependence (e.g., by Michel Foucault⁷). This shows the affinities between postcolonial and postmodern studies, two parallel yet not identical movements, which engaged in a strong critique of various Western patterns of development and worldwide dissemination in recent decades. This publication triggered a huge “Orientalism debate” that still continues in various forms, especially in connection with Islam and its quite problematic relations to the Western world.⁸

3 Pippa Norris, “Cancel Culture: Myth or Reality?” *Political Studies* (2021), 1–30; doi: 10.1177/00323217211037023.

4 Dan-el Padilla Peralta, “Citizenship’s Insular Cases, from Ancient Greece and Rome to Puerto Rico,” *Humanities* (MDPI) 8 (2019), 134; <https://doi.org/10.3390/h8030134>.

5 Jan C. Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel, *Decolonisation: A Short History* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press; 2017); Priyamvada Gopal, “On Decolonisation and the University,” *Textual Practice* 35 (2021), 873–99.

6 Vinay Lal, “The Politics of Culture and Knowledge after Postcolonialism: Nine Theses (and a Prologue),” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 26 (2012), 191–205.

7 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge; Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* (Brighton: Vintage, 1980); see also Richard Fardon, ed., *Power and Knowledge: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985).

8 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Vintage, 1978), 1–8; see also the new “Preface” and “Afterword” in a later edition of the book (2003).

Two further developments are worth mentioning in this context. First, the “Orientalism thesis” has expanded *mutatis mutandis* to other cultures beyond the original ones and was considered – with all the necessary adaptations and modifications – a key perspective for understanding their overall development. This was also the case with Eastern and Southeast Europe, which were historically influenced in a decisive way by Western Europe⁹ and remain dependent on it in numerous ways, even today.¹⁰ This particular situation led to indignant inferiority complexes vis-à-vis the West as well as derogatory Western views about the “cultural lag” of the East. No doubt, this long-term process also had a colonial “Orientalist character,” albeit a different one than in the original case. Not accidentally, this fresh paradigm opened new vistas for understanding and evaluating the modern development of Eastern and Southeast Europe.¹¹ Ideas about “nesting Orientalisms”¹² or the ideology of “Balkanism”¹³ revealing the West European ways of dealing with and constructing the East have become quite prominent in recent decades, despite various critiques and different appraisals.¹⁴ Not least of all, this topic is particularly interesting for this contribution, given that it is exactly in the Eastern parts of Europe that Orthodox Christianity is predominantly found, both in history and at present. Characteristically enough, the Western mind has placed East Central Europe, which has been shaped religiously by Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, at a higher level than Orthodox Eastern and Southeast Europe.¹⁵ This is also

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- 9 Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).
- 10 Katherine E. Fleming, “Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography,” *The American Historical Review* 105 (2000), 1218–33; Kerstin S. Jobst, “Orientalism, E. W. Said und die Osteuropäische Geschichte,” *Saeculum* 51 (2000), 250–66.
- 11 Dorota Kołodziejczyk and Cristina Şandru, eds., *Postcolonial Perspectives on Postcommunism in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2018); cf. also various related book series, such as *Postcolonial Perspectives on Eastern Europe* (Peter Lang).
- 12 Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, “Orientalist Variations on the Theme ‘Balkans’: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics,” *The Slavic Review* 51 (1992), 1–15; Milica Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia,” *The Slavic Review* 54 (1995), 917–31.
- 13 Maria Todorova, “The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention,” *The Slavic Review* 53 (1994), 453–82; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Andrew Hammond, “The Uses of Balkanism: Representation and Power in British Travel Writing, 1850–1914,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 82 (2004), 601–24.
- 14 Holm Sundhussen, “Der Balkan: Ein Plädoyer für Differenz,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 29 (2003): 608–24; Diana Mishkova, “In Quest of Balkan Occidentalism,” *Tokovi istorije* 1–2 (2006), 29–62.
- 15 Maria Todorova, “Hierarchies of Eastern Europe: East Central Europe versus the Balkans,” *Balkan Review* 11 (1997), 5–47.

indicative of the role played by religious criteria in defining and classifying the other, thus creating related widespread “mental maps” next to geographical borders.¹⁶

Second, the initial “Orientalism thesis” was also extended beyond the dominant pattern of the West vs. the rest of the world. Even if it is the most prevalent form historically, Western colonialism is not the sole and exclusive form of hegemony, influence, dependence, classification and exploitation. Forms of colonialism can be located at varied frequency and intensity in numerous other parts of the non-Western world, sometimes even within the Western world itself. It is also not unusual that those who have been colonized and have experienced the many consequences of such colonization may themselves apply colonial policies and strategies to others under their direct influence or control. This can be observed even within Islamic cultures that have often experienced Western colonialism in extreme forms. This is due to the fact that there is a gradation of Islamic cultures according to internal criteria. For instance, following the reforms during the Tanzimat period (1839–1876), Ottomans started treating other Muslims in an “Oriental” way, especially those in the Arab provinces of the Empire. They looked down on them and viewed themselves as superior, as setting the pace, while “Ottomanism” became the role model for Islamic modernization.¹⁷ Hence, colonialism is a multilayered issue that does not only concern the West. Deconstructing colonial discourses of all kinds and in all possible settings has become one dominant goal of post-colonial studies.

It is also pertinent in this context to explain the various meanings of colonization and colonial dependence and how these terms may be conceptualized in different contexts. First, the terms may be used in a narrow sense to denote the military conquest, domination, control, exploitation and forced adaptation of a given culture to a stronger colonial power, be it Western or not. In the context of Western colonialism, this adaptation was usually understood and legitimized as a “civilizing process” for the colonized culture, which was regarded by definition as inferior to the colonizing one. This is basically the key characteristic that distinguishes colonial rule from mere foreign rule.

Second, there is also another understanding of colonization in a broader sense. Here, it is about the “colonization of the mind,” following the famous quote of social anthropologist Mary Douglas: “[T]he colonization of each

16 Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, “Mental Maps: Die Konstruktion von geographischen Räumen in Europa seit der Aufklärung,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28 (2002), 493–514.

17 Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *The American Historical Review* 107 (2002), 768–96.

other's minds is the price we pay for thought."¹⁸ This case basically applies to the unconscious of the colonized people who may adopt foreign thinking, without being politically subjugated by a colonial power. In other words, this happens when the gap between two cultures under question is perceived as huge and when the inferior culture is trying to reach the level of the superior one out of admiration and without external coercion. As a result, the adoption and internalization of a foreign dominant thinking, perspectives, horizons, knowledge production, language and hegemonic colonial discourse are quite vital in this category. For example, the reception of Western psychotherapeutics in Greece has been considered a "colonization of the Greek mind."¹⁹ The main problem is that this category of colonization is not always clearly discernible and cannot be classified as such, a fact that can leave several colonial cases undetected for a long time.

There are many related issues in this context that are equally instrumental in capturing the multiple intricacies of the whole topic. One concerns the timeframe of colonialism, which in the Western context specifically started with the beginning of the early modern period onwards. Are there any forms of colonialism before that era, such as a kind of proto-colonialism? Several scholars distinguish here between pre-modern (e.g., with regard to ancient Greece²⁰ or medieval Western Europe²¹) and modern forms of colonization. More recently, George Demacopoulos has tried to locate Western colonizing practices in the context of the Crusades and especially that of the Latin occupation of the Byzantine Empire in the 13th century, attesting to a pre-modern form of "colonial Christianity." In general, Byzantines were feeling superior to other peoples and the West, yet, after the sacking of Constantinople in 1204, they started revising their traditional superiority. Since then, there is almost no Greek Orthodox text that does not refer to the West either as an alien culture as such or against the Westernized Orthodox. Aside from the theological differences, the cultural differences between East and West also acquired greater significance in this context.²²

18 Steven Shapin, "Citation for Mary Douglas, 1994 Bernal Prize Recipient," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 20 (1995), 259–61, here 260.

19 Charles Stewart, ed., *Colonizing the Greek Mind? The Reception of Western Psychotherapeutics in Greece* (Athens: DERE – The American College of Athens, 2014).

20 Gabriel Zuchtriegel, *Colonization and Subalternity in Classical Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

21 Felipe Fernández-Armesto and James Muldoon, eds., *Internal Colonization in Medieval Europe* (London: Routledge, 2008); Lucy K. Pick, "Edward Said, Orientalism, and the Middle Ages," *Medieval Encounters* 5 (1999), 265–71.

22 George E. Demacopoulos, *Colonizing Christianity: Greek and Latin Religious Identity in the Era of the Fourth Crusade* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

Another important distinction is the one between the usual overseas colonialism, associated with the expansion of Western Europe, and the continental one pertaining to other regions in various guises, including Europe itself. Continental colonialism tends to exploit colonial subjects from within the state. There is also the condition of “reverse colonialism,” namely, when previously colonized cultures start colonizing Western countries in various ways. In the end, colonialism always flows both ways, and there is perhaps no place, country or culture on earth that has remained totally immune to some kind of colonial encounter and experience. In fact, the relations between the colonizers and the colonized are viewed today as being much more complex than previous theories held. This is because the top-down approach to the topic has been relativized, while more emphasis is placed upon the dynamics and the reciprocal interactions between the two and the concomitant transformations. Another interesting case is that of neo-colonialism or neo-Orientalism. This concerns an indigenized colonial thinking, a “double bind,” namely, indigenous people seeking national sovereignty and self-determination while reproducing colonial positions and attitudes themselves.²³ Furthermore, the notion of crypto-colonialism or shadow colonialism is also intriguing. According to Michael Herzfeld, it is “the curious alchemy, whereby certain countries, buffer zones between the colonized lands and those as yet untamed, were compelled to acquire their political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence, this relationship being articulated in the iconic guise of aggressively national culture fashioned to suit foreign models. Such countries were and are living paradoxes: they are nominally independent, but that independence comes at the price of a sometimes humiliating form of effective dependence.”²⁴ All this is relevant and applicable to a certain extent, as we shall see, to the case of Orthodox Christianity.

For example, modern Greece has been considered a prime case of crypto-colonialism. The new independent (since 1830) Greek state remained totally dependent on West European and generally foreign powers that had treated it in an explicit or implicit colonial way. Related examples from the 19th century²⁵ down to the recent deep economic crisis (since 2009)

23 Sotiris Mitralaxis, “Studying Contemporary Greek Neo-Orientalism: The Case of the ‘Underdog Culture’ Narrative,” *Horyzonty Polityki/Horizons of Politics* 8, no. 25 (2017), 125–49.

24 Michael Herzfeld, “The Absent Presence: Discourses of Crypto-Colonialism,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 1001, no. 4 (Fall 2002), 899–926, here 900–01.

25 Rodanthi Tzanelli, “Unclaimed Colonies: Anglo-Greek Identities through the Prism of the Dilessi / Marathon Murders (1870),” *The Journal of Historical Sociology* 15 (2002), 169–91.

abound.²⁶ The new Greek state has been rightly regarded as an imperfect and Athenocentric simulacrum of the West's imaginary construction of ancient Hellenic glories. In fact, it was mainly for this imagined Hellenic antiquity and not so much for its Orthodox Christian heritage that Greece received considerable support from the West for its independence. The modernizing Greek elites, as representatives of the West European others, opted for a collective subjugation of their country to a Western (and later on global) cultural hegemony.²⁷ The modern Greek relationship with the West has been often criticized from various perspectives, including postcolonial ones. More specifically, the Western reception of Greek antiquity was regarded as being a particular one since it obeyed Western criteria and ignored the cultural specifics of Hellenic civilization as a way of viewing the world and living in it. Hence, the West ended up distorting the ancient Greek tradition. By contrast, several modern Greeks – despite the wholesale subjection of the country to Western colonialism – claimed to have rediscovered the genuine meaning of Greek antiquity unfettered by Western influences and to have reassessed it in light of the country's past, present and future.²⁸ It is exactly here we can observe the kind of postcolonial reaction that we shall also observe below regarding the rediscovery of authentic Orthodoxy unpolluted by the West.

Orthodox Christianity and Postcolonial Theory

Launching now onto our main subject, the key question here would be to locate the ways and the areas in which Orthodox Christianity can be analyzed and theorized from a postcolonial perspective. This may initially surprise us, given that the Orthodox majority states and cultures of Eastern and Southeast Europe have never been Western colonies in the strict sense of the word. There were a few notable exceptions, however – for example, the island of Cyprus, which was under British rule (1878–1960) and was even officially a crown

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- 26 Tereza Capelos and Theofanis Exadaktylos, “‘The Good, the Bad and the Ugly’: Stereotypes, Prejudices and Emotions on Greek Media Representation of the EU Financial Crisis,” in *The Politics of Extreme Austerity: Greece in the Eurozone Crisis*, ed. Georgios Karyotis and Roman Gerodimos (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 46–68; George Tzogopoulos, *The Greek Crisis in the Media: Stereotyping in the International Press* (London: Routledge, 2016).
- 27 Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).
- 28 Christos Yannaras, *Wem gehört die griechische Antike?* Erfurter Vorträge zur Kulturgeschichte des Orthodoxen Christentums, 8 (Erfurt: Universität Erfurt, 2009).

colony (since 1925), a fact that also had an impact on the Orthodox Church there. Characteristically enough, independent Cyprus did not get rid of all colonial influences.²⁹ But can this case alone justify a broader consideration of Orthodox Christianity via postcolonial analysis and critique? The answer to this question relates to the broader understanding of colonialism explained above, which involves many facets of colonial dependence and devaluation that are relevant to Orthodox Christianity in many respects. After all, Western Europe/the West and its colonial practices have been a perennial problem and challenge for the Orthodox world at various levels.

Deconstructing Western Constructions of the Orthodox Other

One of the main areas where postcolonial theory applies to our case concerns the deconstruction of the numerous, pervasive and influential Western essentializations of the Orthodox East, both historically and at present as well, which were in fact a mirage of Western consciousness. This is perhaps a classical domain in postcolonial studies, considering that “(Western) Europe/the West” has been the dominant point of reference and criticism for non-Western cultures, including Orthodox ones. In our case, this is mainly due to the multi-dimensional Western “expansion” to the East, especially since the early modern period, which had far-reaching consequences in numerous areas. Due to the manifold Western superiority and the concomitant power of defining the other, Orthodox Christianity was often presented in a particular light and not least in a derogatory and negative one, a fact that led to related lingering representations of it both in academic and public discourse.³⁰ Western social theory has also often considered Orthodox Christianity from Western presuppositions and led to the establishment of various related images.³¹ This often happened in close connection with the Western negative evaluation of Eastern and Southeast Europe as a whole (e.g., its lacking modernization), where Orthodoxy has always been considered an important factor shaping its history and present reality. This centuries-old situation has given rise to a massive dependence of the Orthodox East on Western developments and strong

29 Vassos Argyrou, “Independent Cyprus? Postcoloniality and the Spectre of Europe,” *The Cyprus Review* 22 (2010), 39–47.

30 Larry Wolff, *The Enlightenment and the Orthodox World: Western Perspectives on the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe* (Athens: Institute for Neohellenic Research, 2001).

31 Peter McMylor and Maria Vorozhishcheva, “Sociology and Eastern Orthodoxy,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, ed. Ken Perry (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 462–79, especially 475–78; Chris Hann, *Eastern Christianity and Western Social Theory*, Erfurter Vorträge zur Kulturgeschichte des Orthodoxen Christentums, 10 (Erfurt: Universität Erfurt, 2011).

pro-Western tendencies, a fact that also triggered massive reactions that fall under the broader spectrum of Orthodox anti-Westernism, old and new alike.³² Postcolonial analysis of these East-West relations not only yields important insights in capturing their entanglements. It is also relevant *mutatis mutandis* for understanding the particularities of Orthodox identity building across history and may help deconstruct the Western discourse about the Orthodox East.

To be more specific, there have been numerous representations of Orthodox Christianity articulated from a Western perspective: exotic, archaic, mystical, irrational, incapable of development, resistant to reform, conservative, other- and outwardly, nationalistic, patriarchal, anti-modern, violent, world-negating and world-indifferent, and many more. For example, Orthodox ritual practices and spirituality were often viewed as uncanny and bizarre by modern Western people. It seemed a rather strange and remote religiosity that did not fit into the growing rationalization of Western Christianity, especially in the post-Reformation era. In turn, this putative construction of the Western imagination also had an impact on the Orthodox self-description of alterity (“We of the East” – ἡ καθ’ ἑμᾶς Ἀνατολή), which also reinforced even more the centuries-old separation line between Orthodox and Latin Christianity. Truth be told, most of these Western characterizations of the Orthodox East belong mostly to a rather distant past, given that there has been some significant rapport between Orthodox and Western Christianity in recent decades.³³ The dominance of Western modernity as the sole way to modernization has also been seriously called into question,³⁴ and this applies to Orthodox Christian cultures in Eastern and Southeast Europe³⁵ where various indigenous alter-

32 Vasilios N. Makrides and Dirk Uffelman, “Studying Eastern Orthodox Anti-Westernism: The Need for a Comparative Research Agenda,” in *Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Europe*, ed. Jonathan Sutton and Wil van den Bercken, (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 87–120; Thomas Bremer, “Der ‘Westen’ als Feindbild im theologisch-philosophischen Diskurs der Orthodoxie,” in *Europäische Geschichte Online* (EGO), edited by the Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte (IEG), Mainz, 19-03-2012, <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/bremert-2012-de>.

33 Donald Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy through Western Eyes* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); Robert Letham, *Through Western Eyes: Eastern Orthodoxy. A Reformed Perspective* (Tain UK: Mentor, 2010).

34 Shmuel Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000), 1–29; Walter Dignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

35 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Orthodox Christianity, Rationalization, Modernization: A Reassessment,” in *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age: Tradition Meets the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Victor Roudometoff, Alexander Agadjanian and Jerry Pankhurst (Walnut Creek CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 179–209.

native roads to modernity have been proposed.³⁶ Nevertheless, the numerous older constructions of the Orthodox East by the West can be deconstructed and analysed from a postcolonial perspective, which attests to the utility of this research paradigm.³⁷

An area where such Western perceptions still linger on, however, is Western politics and mass perceptions, which are dictated to a large degree by the Western mass media and their sweeping influence in global terms. Especially in post-communist times and in the context of new military and other conflicts, Orthodox Christianity was portrayed in an extremely negative way and colours. This was especially the case with the consecutive wars in former Yugoslavia (1991–2001), when many stereotypes and less flattering characterizations circulated about the Orthodox Serbs and Orthodox Europe at large.³⁸ In this context, Orthodox Christianity was portrayed as one of the main driving forces behind alleged Serb nationalism, aggressiveness and backwardness.³⁹ “Orientalist” and “Balkanist” discourses thrived during that period and led to many misconceptions about Orthodox Christianity, which was starting to emerge again and play a more crucial public role after suffering from long-standing discrimination and persecution by communist regimes. In turn, such Western discourses were often criticized and deconstructed⁴⁰, either by Orthodox⁴¹ or even Western actors⁴², a fact that shows the wider potential and

36 Roumen Daskalov, “Ideas about, and Reactions to Modernization in the Balkans,” *East European Quarterly* 31 (1997), 141–80.

37 Irena Zeltner Pavlović, “Imagining Orthodoxy: Eine postkoloniale Beobachtungsperspektive der Repräsentation des religiösen Anderen,” in *Ostkirchen und Reformation 2017. Vol. 1: Dialog und Hermeneutik*, ed. Irena Zeltner Pavlović and Martin Illert (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2018), 217–28; eadem, “Postkoloniale und postsozialistische Studien: repräsentierte Orthodoxie,” in *Postkoloniale Theologien 2: Perspektiven aus dem deutschsprachigen Raum*, ed. Andreas Nehring and Simon Wiesgickl (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2018), 226–41.

38 Elizabeth Prodromou, “Paradigms, Power, and Identity: Rediscovering Orthodoxy and Regionalizing Europe,” *European Journal of Political Research* 30 (1996), 125–54.

39 Srdjan Vrcan, “A Christian Confession Possessed by Nationalistic Paroxysm: The Case of Serbian Orthodoxy,” *Religion* 25 (1995), 357–70.

40 Stevan K. Pavlovitz, “Who is ‘Balkanizing’ Whom? The Misunderstandings between the Debris of Yugoslavia and an Unprepared West,” *Daedalus* 123, no. 2 (1994), 203–23.

41 Bogoljub Šijaković, *A Critique of Balkanistic Discourse: Contribution to the Phenomenology of Balkan “Otherness”* (Toronto: Serbian Literary Company, 2004).

42 Klaus Roth, “Von Europa Schwärmen? ‘Europa’ und die Europäische Union in den Vorstellungen der Menschen in Südosteuropa,” in *Prowestliche und antiwestliche Diskurse in den Balkanländern/Südosteuropa*, ed. Gabriella Schubert and Holm Sundhaussen (Munich: Sagner 2008), 165–79; Valeska Bopp, Katharina Lampe and Andrea Schneiker, eds., *Balkanbilder in Ost und West. Mythen und Stereotypen auf der Spur: Anregungen zur Didaktik interkultureller Studienseminare* (Berlin: MitOst-Editionen, 2007).

appeal of the postcolonial paradigm. This also concerns other Western stereotypes about Orthodoxy in other contexts, such as those about its alleged “exotic” character, which are again in need of critical appraisal.⁴³

We are talking, however, about a new phase of Western constructions with far-reaching consequences that cannot be always effectively stopped. This is because after the fall of communism, the West as a whole acquired a new legitimacy, self-assurance and prominence that became visible in numerous instances. It is not accidental that, in the notorious geopolitical theory of Samuel P. Huntington about the “clash of civilizations” after the end of the Cold War, the model of the West vs. the rest of the world acquired new significance. In this frame, Orthodox Christianity was not portrayed in positive colours and was – among other factors – held responsible for the overall cultural lag of Eastern and Southeast Europe. This once more triggered sharp critiques of Huntington’s ideas as representing a new form of colonialism in the context of the propagated “new world order.” The same can be said for other Western theories (e.g., Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man*, 1992), which prophesied the worldwide victory of liberal democracy and the free market economy and once more prompted postcolonial critiques.

A prime target of Western political and other critical voices is still Russia, however, which, in the era of Vladimir Putin (since 2000), has once again become anew a major opponent of Western political and other designs and strengthened its traditional anti-Westernism in many forms. Not least, the war against Ukraine in 2022 attests to this. The role of the Russian Orthodox Church in post-communist times is anything but negligible since it has systematically promoted “traditional” values against Western ones (e.g., liberalism, secularism, individualism), supported the policies of the Kremlin and attempted to craft broader anti-Western alliances and fronts.⁴⁴ This close connection between state and church policies has been often criticized by Western actors.⁴⁵ As the Swedish ex-Foreign Minister Carl Bildt once tweeted on 24 March 2014, the “force of Putin’s new anti-Western and anti-decadent

43 John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to its History, Doctrine and Spiritual Culture* (Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell 2008), 1.

44 Christopher Selbach, “The Orthodox Church in Post-Communist Russia and her Perception of the West: A Search for a Self in the Face of an Other,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 10 (2002), 131–73; Alexander Agadjanian, “Tradition, Morality and Community: Elaborating Orthodox Identity in Putin’s Russia,” *Religion, State & Society* 45 (2017), 39–60.

45 Zoe Knox, “Russian Orthodoxy, Russian Nationalism, and Patriarch Aleksii II,” *Nationalities Papers* 33 (2005): 533–45; Gaziza Shakhanova and Petr Kratochvíl, “The Patriotic Turn in Russia: Political Convergence of the Russian Orthodox Church and the State?” *Politics and Religion*, (2020), 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000620>.

line” builds “on deeply conservative orthodox ideas.”⁴⁶ Such utterances, either official or private, abounded in recent decades and led to counter-reactions by Orthodox and other actors, reinforcing their anti-Western predispositions. Not least, they prompted postcolonial deconstructions of related Western discourses. In general, it should not be denied that Orthodox Christianity and its cultures may exhibit such characteristics in one way or another for socio-historical and other reasons. But the way such characteristics are portrayed in Western discourses and media is in most cases fragmentary, misleading, oversimplifying and generalizing, a fact that underlines and justifies again the necessity of subjecting them to postcolonial analysis.

Provincializing the West European/Western Discourse

Another area in which postcolonial perspectives may prove especially useful for the study of Orthodox Christianity concerns the long established and dominant Western Eurocentric view about non-Europeans and their cultures and the concomitant divide between the West and the rest of the world.⁴⁷ After all, this was a cardinal aspect of the West European overseas expansion, which imposed its own colonial perspectives, even forcibly, on other peoples and cultures across the globe. This concerned, for example, historical consciousness, which was then articulated on the basis of related Western Christian presuppositions and ignored non-Western historical traditions. The same applied to the study of non-Christian religions, which were conceptualized anew through Western Christian criteria, premises and intellectual tools. Against this long-established colonial tradition, postcolonial theory attempted not only to call into question this expansion of Eurocentrism but to also deconstruct the coherence of the Western view of history and narrative about the world. This has happened through various means, such as through the development of comparative philology. The “West” was regarded in this context as a hybrid and heterogeneous product,⁴⁸ while (Western) Europe was also considered as a province from the point of view of global history.⁴⁹

The above also becomes quite relevant when applied *mutatis mutandis* to Eastern and Southeast Europe and their Orthodox cultures, which have been marginalized in the wake of the Western colonial discourse. For instance,

46 <https://twitter.com/carlbildt/status/448069450437513216>.

47 Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” in *Formations of Modernity*, ed. Bram Gieben and Stuart Hall (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 275–320.

48 Christopher GoGwilt, *The Invention of the West: Joseph Conrad and the Double-Mapping of Europe and Empire* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press 1995).

49 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

West Europeans have constructed their own view of Europe, which mostly excluded the East and Southeast (especially the Balkans) parts of the continent. The Europeaness of the latter was often called into question, a fact that still lingers on in various forms. There are still courses, study programmes and books in Western languages talking about Europe in an inclusive way, although they refer solely to its Western parts and virtually ignore its Eastern and Southeast areas.⁵⁰ “West European history” then easily turns into an all-encompassing “European history” and claims for itself alone the whole of the continent. Even a country like Greece, where, in fact, the term “Europe” arose in antiquity in the first place, was not considered a fully European one in Western eyes. This became evident when Greece officially joined the European Economic Community back in 1981, as the first Orthodox majority country to do so. The Orthodox Christian tradition of the country was also regarded as a hindrance to its Europeanization.⁵¹ The same holds true for other Orthodox majority countries that exhibit both anti-Western and anti-European sentiments.⁵² Here one can spot a clear difference along confessional lines with the Roman Catholic or Protestant countries of East Central Europe, which, as already mentioned, have been treated more positively by the West due to their greater religious affinity to Western Christianity. It is also no accident that for a long time Europeanization was almost coterminous with modernization and Westernization. We are talking here about established and still widespread stereotypes, categorizations and discourses of Western provenance, which post-colonial theory has only partially deconstructed so far.

There are also further issues in this category in terms of subjecting Western historiography and its consequences regarding the Orthodox world to postcolonial critique, which may deconstruct the discourse about the alleged overall European coherence from an exclusive West European perspective. To mention one telling example, this concerns especially the way “Byzantium” was constructed and treated by Western Europe in highly negative and inimical terms,

50 Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Orbis Books 2002); Hans Joas and Klaus Wiegandt, eds., *The Cultural Values of Europe*, trans. by Alex Skinner (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

51 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Griechenland zwischen Ost und West, zwischen Antiozkizidentalismus und Verwestlichung,” in *Prowestliche und antiwestliche Diskurse in den Balkanländern/Südosteuropa*, ed. Gabriella Schubert and Holm Sundhaussen (Munich: Sagner, 2008), 115–36; idem, “Orthodox Anti-Westernism Today: A Hindrance to European Integration?” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9 (2009), 209–24.

52 Alena Alshanskaya, *Der Europa-Diskurs der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche (1996–2011)* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016); Julia Anna Lis, *Antiwestliche Diskurse in der serbischen und griechischen Orthodoxie: Zur Konstruktion des “Westens” bei Nikolaj Velimirović, Justin Popović, Christos Yannaras und John S. Romanides* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019).

given the long-standing animosities between East and West and the definitive schism between the two churches in 1054.⁵³ It is well known that “Byzantium” – not as a geographical indication but as a normative neologism – was coined by the German humanist Hieronymus Wolf (1516–1580), who thereby intended to deprive the Hellenized “Eastern Roman Empire” of any continuity with ancient Rome. By contrast, the latter was in fact the sole true and legitimate heir to the Roman Empire in a Christian frame, given that the Western Roman Empire had ceased to exist after 476 AD and continuity with it was claimed there by other peoples (e.g., Franks, Germans). As a result, the later invention of “Byzantium” should not occasion any surprise, given that it was the outcome of the hard-fought claim to Roman heritage in the Latin West and of the concomitant denial of any such continuity in the Greek East. All this went hand in hand with the negative depictions of Byzantium in Western historiography for many centuries, which only came to be critically reassessed since the early 20th century. Despite all this, terms like “Byzantinism”⁵⁴ are still widespread, especially in journalistic but sometimes also in academic circles in a negative sense. The same holds true for other expressions (e.g., “Byzantine intrigues”) in general usage, thus pointing to the lingering of related remnants of Western misconceptions and misrepresentations.⁵⁵ All of this is not unrelated to the role ascribed to Byzantium in the historical formation of Europe, which has been downplayed in recent decades on different occasions, even in the context of the European Union (cf. the 1990 book *Europe: The History of its Peoples* by Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, which had been commissioned by European authorities).⁵⁶ After all, Byzantium was an Orthodox Christian Empire, and this fact has been regarded for a long time as a hindrance by the Roman Catholic and Protestant West to its being part of Europe. Characteristically enough, one can observe here a “colonization of the Orthodox mind,” given that the Western

53 Johann P. Arnason, “Approaching Byzantium: Identity, Predicament and Afterlife,” *Thesis Eleven* 62 (2000), 39–69.

54 Dimitar G. Angelov, “Byzantinism: The Imaginary and Real Heritage of Byzantium in Southeastern Europe,” in *New Approaches to Balkan Studies*, ed. Dimitris Keridis, E. Elias-Bursac and N. Yatromanolakis (Dulles VA: Potomac Books, 2003), 3–23.

55 Milica Bakić-Hayden, “What’s so Byzantine about the Balkans?” in *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, ed. Dušan I. Bjelić and Obrad Savić (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 61–78.

56 Paschalis M. Kitromilides, “Europe and the Dilemmas of Greek Conscience,” *Greece and Europe in the Modern Period: Aspects of a Troubled Relationship*, ed. Philip Carabott (London: Centre for Hellenic Studies, 1995), 1–15.

negative evaluation of Byzantium was also shared by many Western-educated Orthodox and other intellectuals in Eastern and Southeast Europe.⁵⁷

Last but not least, similar problems appeared with the Western reception of ancient Greece and its heritage, which has been exclusively claimed by West Europeans from the beginning of the early modern period onwards. But this process presented West Europeans as the sole legitimate heirs to and worthy continuators of this rich tradition, whereas modern Greeks were mostly left out. The history of ancient Greece was thus conceived and written in most cases through Western lenses, while the results of that Western reading subsequently acquired a canonistic and strong normative significance.⁵⁸ In addition, modern Greeks (including their Christian Orthodoxy) were often negatively portrayed by the West as being unworthy of creatively continuing the ancient Greek heritage and its immense legacy. It is obvious, then, that Greece, both ancient and modern, had diachronically become an attractive focus of Western imagination, wishes and related projections.⁵⁹ The Western currents of Humanism, Philhellenism, Romanticism and Neoclassicism attest to this. The questions of whom ancient Greece belongs to and how modern Greece should be approached are therefore central to our topic and reveal once more the many consequences of the Western dominant perspectives on the East that are in need of systematic deconstruction through postcolonial analysis.

Orthodox Christian Subalternity and Indigenism

Among the typical postcolonial terminology used, “subalternity” occupies a central place.⁶⁰ Initially coined by the Italian Marxist philosopher and politician Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), it denoted the condition of lower social classes, which were not in a position to decide their social status independently.

57 Rōxanē D. Argyropoulou, *Les intellectuels grecs à la recherche de Byzance (1860–1912)* (Athens: Institute for Neohellenic Research, 2001); Dimitris Stamatopoulos, *Byzantium After the Nation: The Problem of Continuity in Balkan Historiographies* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022).

58 Joachim Jacob and Johannes Süßmann, eds., *Das 18. Jahrhundert: Lexikon zur Antikerezeption in Aufklärung und Klassizismus* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2019).

59 Wolfgang Hautumm, ed., *Hellas: Die Wiederentdeckung des klassischen Griechenland* (Cologne: DuMont, 1983); Wolfgang Löhneysen, “Ideal und Wirklichkeit: Deutsche Reisende in Griechenland 1800–1840,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 38 (1986), 133–66; Christopher Meid, *Griechenland-Imaginationen: Reiseberichte im 20. Jahrhundert von Gerhart Hauptmann bis Wolfgang Koeppen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).

60 Ranajit Guha, ed., *A Subaltern Studies Reader 1986–1995* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories, Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

In the postcolonial context, the term generally refers to minority, marginalized and oppressed social groups and colonized peoples that try to live up to expectations foisted upon them by a prevailing colonial power. The context of the Indian subcontinent was a prime case, for which this concept was initially used.⁶¹

The question is whether and how this concept can be applied to the Orthodox Christian case, which does not exhibit the above characteristics. Yet, Orthodox subalternity should not be understood as submissiveness, subjugation, exploitation, domination and oppression, as in the classical postcolonial context. Rather, it relates more to notions of alterity, inferiority, dependence, subordination, unimportance, backwardness, deficiency, failure, marginalization, lack of recognition and exclusion. These characteristics were generated mostly from the Western side in its evaluation of the Orthodox East and were subsequently internalized by the latter so that they became dominant in related discourses. Western Europe thus became a model to be imitated in the East, which felt it was by definition inferior and lagging behind. Although various traces of this condition can already be observed in the late Middle Ages, the East-West gap became gradually bigger and bigger from the early modern period onwards. This was due to the radical and pioneering development of Western Europe in many crucial domains (e.g., science and technology), which made the differences to the East immense and almost unbridgeable. This far-reaching change gave rise to various and widespread discourses in the West about the notorious backwardness of Eastern and Southeast Europe, which has persisted through centuries and partially exists even until today.⁶² The “Asiatic burden” and the non-Europeanness of Russia from a Western perspective constituted a usual topos that survives in various forms right up to the present.⁶³ The same pertains to the inferior and outlandish status of the Balkans vis-à-vis the West, which gave rise to the aforementioned Western ideology of “Balkanism,” including Greece.⁶⁴ The latter did not only relate to the Orthodox Christian cultures in the region, but also to Islam, especially in the

61 Gayatri C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson (Urbana IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

62 Daniel Chirot, *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Chris Hann, “Backwardness Revisited: Time, Space, and Civilization in Rural Eastern Europe,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57 (2015), 881–911.

63 Christian Sigrüst, *Das Rußlandbild des Marquis de Custine: Von der Zivilisationskritik zur Rußlandfeindlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990); Bruno S. Sergi, *Misinterpreting Modern Russia: Western Views of Putin and His Presidency* (New York: Continuum, 2009).

64 Sotirios Mitralixis-Georgakakos, *Can the Underdogs Speak? Contemporary Greece's “Subaltern” Political Theories through the Lens of Critical Geopolitics and Post-Secularism* (PhD Diss., University of Peloponnese, 2018).

form of the Ottoman Empire, which was viewed negatively and scornfully by West Europeans.⁶⁵ This sense of inferiority was shared by many élites in these areas (political, economic, intellectual etc.), who tried to emulate the Western prototype as far as possible and transform their states and cultures accordingly. Yet this often created deep gaps within the respective societies and triggered strong anti-Western reactions, which were also mostly supported by the Orthodox Church and related circles.⁶⁶

This process can be also described by the notion of “self-colonization”⁶⁷ or “self-orientalization,”⁶⁸ namely, a self-imposed colonial status that always puts a culture on an inferior and dependent status, which obstructs its free and autonomous development. This concerns cultures that have succumbed to the cultural power of the West without having been conquered and turned into colonies. Hence, by feeling inferior to the West on numerous levels, many Orthodox Christians often exhibited a defensive and fortress mentality. The question is here how the Orthodox can overcome this self-imposed colonization. In fact, the growing impact of Western theological influences upon the Orthodox world has led to counter-reactions and a strengthening of an Orthodox “indigenism” that was supposed to fight off such adulterating external elements. In addition, this process was coupled with the search for a genuine and authentic Orthodoxy beyond the Western alienating and colonizing elements. The main motto was: Orthodox Christianity is (or should ideally be) what Western Christianity is not. Although not limited to the theological domain, the West was here pre-eminently perceived as the religious and cultural other. These multifaceted reactions across the East-West binary for rediscovering a true Orthodox self-identification unfettered by Western influences can be thus conceptualized as an Orthodox postcolonial search and movement.

Here are some examples. The well-known and widely disseminated theory of the Russian theologian Georges V. Florovsky (1893–1979) about the “Babylonian captivity” of Russian Orthodox theology in early modern times through various

65 Ash Çırakman, “From Tyranny to Despotism: The Enlightenment’s Unenlightened Image of the Turks,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 33 (2001), 49–68.

66 Gabriella Schubert and Holm Sundhaussen, eds., *Prowestliche und antiwestliche Diskurse in den Balkanländern/Südosteuropa* (Munich: Sagner, 2008).

67 Alexander Kiossev, “The Self-Colonising Cultures,” in *Cultural Aspects of the Modernisation Process*, ed. Dimitri Ginev, Francis Sejersted and Kostadinka Simeonova (Oslo: TMV Senteret, 1995), 73–81.

68 Plamen K. Georgiev, *Self-Orientalization in South East Europe* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2012).

“pseudomorphoses” under Western influence is a case in point.⁶⁹ The same applies to the views of the Orthodox theologian and philosopher Christos Yannaras (b. 1935) on the distortion of the genuine Orthodox perspectives and criteria since late Byzantium due to growing Latin (Scholastic) influences.⁷⁰ The same also holds true for various Orthodox rigorist/fundamentalist circles in Orthodox majority countries or in Western settings who dream of restoring the “traditional Orthodoxy” that became lost in the context of modern pluralization, individualization, secularization and liberalization, not least in the wake of the Western intellectual colonization of the Orthodox East.⁷¹ Another similar case concerns the attempt to create a purely genuine and traditional Orthodox theological education, given that Orthodox Theological Schools have been modelled to a large extent according to Western prototypes (Roman Catholic or Protestant Faculties of Theology). The reason for this lies in the fact that Orthodox theology is considered to be charismatic and experiential, whereas Latin theology is regarded as intellectualistic, rationalized and worldly in many respects.⁷² All these reactions, no matter their differences, are in fact postcolonial in nature. They are in favour of an Orthodox indigenism as a nostalgia and a search for a forgotten, neglected, lost or ignored authentic, pre-colonial Orthodox voice. The main question is of course whether there is indeed such a religious and cultural purity at all. This notwithstanding, the postcolonial character of these reactions is unmistakable.

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- 69 Georgij V. Florovskij, *Puti russkogo bogoslovija* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1937; with several later editions); English edition: *Ways of Russian Theology*, part I, trans. by R. L. Nichols, The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, vol. 5 (Belmont MA: Nordland Publishing, 1979); part II, trans. by R. L. Nichols, The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, vol. 6 (Vaduz: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987); see also Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 159–200.
- 70 Christos Yannaras, *Ἄρθοδοξία καὶ Δύση στὴ νεώτερη Ἑλλάδα* [Orthodoxy and the West in Modern Greece] (Athens: Domos, 1992); see also the shortened English edition, *Orthodoxy and the West: Hellenic Self-Identity in the Modern Age*, trans. Peter Chamberas and Norman Russell (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007); see also Brandon Gallaher, “Orthodoxy and the West – The Problem of Orthodox Self-Criticism in Christos Yannaras,” in *Polis, Ontology, Ecclesial Event: Engaging with Christos Yannaras’ Thought*, ed. Sotiris Mitralaxis (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2018), 206–25.
- 71 George E. Demacopoulos, “‘Traditional Orthodoxy’ as a Postcolonial Movement,” *Journal of Religion* 97 (2017), 475–99.
- 72 George Metallinos, “Das Problem der deutschen Einflüsse auf die griechische akademische Theologie in der Gründungsphase der Athener Universität,” *Orthodoxes Forum* 3 (1989), 83–91; Athanasios Vletsis, “Charismatische oder akademische Theologie? Das Ringen der orthodoxen Theologie um ihren Platz an einer staatlichen Universität am Beispiel der griechisch-orthodoxen Kirche,” *Una Sancta* 66 (2011), 123–32.

Furthermore, many Orthodox actors are also annoyed by the fact that Orthodox ideas and suggestions remain rather marginal in current international debates on modern issues of broader significance (e.g., human rights⁷³), that in the past were largely dominated by Western perspectives in a normative manner. Can the Orthodox, despite their residual subalternity, speak for themselves and become vocal within the global discursive field? Historically speaking, it is not amiss to argue that, for a long time, the Orthodox remained anonymous and mute; their voice was hardly heard and even less taken into account. Even today, despite some improvements, there is still a notable absence of Orthodox perspectives on various issues that do not seem to play a significant role internationally or to be taken into account by prominent (often Western-led) forums and respective actors. Suffice it to say that the Orthodox Churches have only lately begun to systematically expose their official views on social issues.⁷⁴ This marginalized status of the Orthodox discourse usually strengthens the traditional Orthodox defensive mechanisms against Western dominance, which again bear postcolonial characteristics, even if subdued in most cases. Interestingly enough, it is possible that some Orthodox may find the postcolonial critique of the West a “stroke of luck” for their own anti-Western purposes and may use it accordingly, even if they distort its original motives and intention. The point here, however, is that Orthodox anti-Westernism as such and the formation of Orthodox identities may be subjected to postcolonial analysis and deconstruction too, as we shall see later on.

Orthodox Christian Internal Colonization

Another area that can be examined from a postcolonial perspective pertains to cases when a previously “colonized” Orthodox culture has tried to apply its own colonial policies to other peoples within newly acquired territories and to homogenize these peripheries culturally and religiously according to a dominant centre and prototype. This concerns colonial policies within one and the same country or culture (as a second conquest) with the purpose of rendering it uniform. In this case, we observe a colonialism “from within.” As already mentioned, the distinction between the colonizers and the colonized is not an absolute one, given that the latter may act like the former under specific circumstances, yet in a different direction.

73 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Orthodox Christianity and Modern Human Rights: Theorising their Nexus and Addressing Orthodox Specificities,” in *Global Eastern Orthodoxy: Politics, Religion, and Human Rights*, ed. Giuseppe Giordan and Siniša Zrinščak (Cham, CH: Springer, 2020), 13–39.

74 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Why Does the Orthodox Church Lack Systematic Social Teaching?” *Skepsis: A Journal for Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Research* 23 (2013), 281–312.

The case of Orthodox Russia is paradigmatic for this category, not least because of its particular geographical position both in Europe and in Asia.⁷⁵ On the one hand, Russia was exposed to an extensive “Western colonization,” decided from above by its own leaders (e.g., through the Petrine reforms), on its way to modernization. After all, as already mentioned above, Western Europe had always looked down upon it as an Asian and not fully European country. On the other hand, due to its immense gradual territorial expansion (Caucasus, Central Asia, Siberia, Alaska), Russia undertook a similar colonial role as a *force civilisatrice* of its own “Orient” in many ways.⁷⁶ This concerns Russia’s internal colonization, a colonization “from within,” which is also often subsumed under the category of continental colonization. Thus, Russia became both the subject and object of colonization as well as its corollaries (e.g., Orientalism).⁷⁷ In another interesting case, Ukraine was also treated by Russia in a “colonial” way, both historically and at present. This explains the heated conflicts between Russia, the West and Ukraine and the concomitant war in 2022, which are basically about the latter’s decolonization. Ironically enough, this may lead in the future to another colonization of Ukraine, namely, by the West. In the ecclesiastical realm, this decolonization was instigated by the declaration of autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2019, which was supported by the political leadership of the country and the West. This autocephaly was initiated and effected by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, a fact that subsequently led to a schism between Moscow and Constantinople.⁷⁸

Systematic missionary activities were the primary way to engage in Russia’s internal colonization. These were also supported and coordinated not only

75 Dmitry Shlapentokh, ed., *Russia between East and West: Scholarly Debates on Eurasianism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

76 Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzarini, eds., *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917*, (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1997); Kaplana Sahni, *Crucifying the Orient: Russian Orientalism and the Colonization of Caucasus and Central Asia* (Oslo: White Orchid Press, 1997); Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002); Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia’s Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

77 Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia’s Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

78 Alexander Ponomariov, “Ukrainian Church Autocephaly: The Redrawing of the Religious Borders and Political Identities in the Conflict between Ukraine and Russia,” *Russian Analytical Digest* 231 (25 January 2019), 2–9.

by the Russian Church but also the state since they served the objectives of homogenizing a steadily expanding Russia. After all, the intrinsic connection between missions and colonization has already been evident historically in the Western overseas expansion. Hence, “missions in Russia were part of a non-certified colonization process directed by the state and, as such, were subservient to government interests.”⁷⁹ On the one hand, the historical model of Orthodox missions prescribed a different agenda. This was evident in the Byzantine missionary legacy of Cyril and Methodius, the “Apostles of the Slavs,” who respected the local languages, customs and traditions of the Christianized peoples and contributed to their literary development (e.g., through the creation of the first Slavic alphabet).⁸⁰ This was a model of missionary inculturation (including indigenization and vernacularization) that exhibited features of pluralism, openness and tolerance. On the other hand, Russian missions in modern times were strongly affected by state-imposed processes of Russification (*Obrushenie*) of the newly acquired territories, which obeyed various strategies of convergence, centralization and homogenization. Yet such Russification policies were not very coherent and thus remained generally unsuccessful. Aside from this, there were significant variations within the Russian Orthodox missionary endeavours, such as the differences between the culturally highly indigenous missions (in the Aleutian Islands and Alaska) and the culturally non-indigenous missions (mainly in Siberia but initially also in China).⁸¹ Moreover, this Russian colonization did not always meet with indigenous reactions. In a characteristic case, the Dena’ina people in Alaska preferred to defend their own Russian Orthodox identity, which was the result of a previous Russian colonization, than to accept the new Protestant missionaries

79 Michael Khodarkovsky, “The Conversion of Non-Christians in Early Modern Russia,” in *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, ed. Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 115–43, here 142.

80 Vasilios N. Makrides, “The ‘Individuality of Local Cultures’: Perceptions, Policies and Attitudes in the Context of Orthodox Christian Missions,” in *Individualisierung durch christliche Mission?* ed. Martin Fuchs, Antje Linkenbach and Wolfgang Reinhard (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag 2015), 152–69.

81 Sotirios A. Mousalimas, *The Transition from Shamanism to Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1995); David N. Collins, “Culture, Christianity and the Northern Peoples of Canada and Siberia,” *Religion, State & Society* 25 (1997): 381–92; Michael J. Oleksa, “The Orthodox Church and Orthodox Christian Mission from an Alaskan Perspective,” *International Review of Mission* 90 (2001), 280–88; Eric Widmer, *The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Peking during the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

and their concomitant colonial practices who became active there after Russia sold Alaska to the USA in 1867.⁸²

Historically, Russia did often exhibit an “Orientalist attitude” towards others, especially towards the Ottoman Empire, with which it had numerous war engagements and from which it had profited territorially over a long period of time.⁸³ It is also worth mentioning that these centuries-old Russian contacts with Asia, the Far East and the Orient led to the establishment of a specific robust tradition of Oriental Studies in the country. These have been established as an academic discipline since 1804 in Kazan, a historical centre of Russian Islam but also later in Moscow and St. Petersburg, a tradition that was continued in the Soviet Union.⁸⁴ The question arises here as to the parallels between the Russian and Western Oriental Studies, given that we can find a colonial background in both and that the Western ones have been so much criticized in recent decades in the wake of the aforementioned works by Edward Said. In general, Russian “Orientalology” (*Vostokovedenie*), as it is called, is different from Western Oriental Studies, which have been directly or indirectly condemned for supporting colonialism, imperialism and Orientalism. On the contrary, Russian Orientalologists at the turn of the 20th century (e.g., Sergei F. Oldenburg, 1863–1934, in St. Petersburg) had already touched upon multiple interconnections between power, dominance and knowledge regarding their research subject – interestingly enough, long before Said.⁸⁵ These are interesting cases showing the multiple ways through which Eastern Europe is historically connected with modern postcolonial studies.

Intra-Orthodox Colonization Processes

An additional area worthy of examination concerns various processes of intra-Orthodox colonization. It is well known that the Orthodox world exhibits some extensive internal variation, given the existence of many local autocephalous Orthodox Churches and concomitant cultures. Pluriformity in unity and not centralized uniformity has been the traditional motto in Orthodox Christianity. This can be attested in numerous cases, and reference was made above to a related tradition in Orthodox missions. Yet, the question of intra-Orthodox

82 Andrei A. Znamenski, *Shamanism and Christianity: Native Encounters with Russian Orthodox Missions in Siberia and Alaska, 1820–1917* (Westport CT: Praeger, 1999), 94–137.

83 Viktor Taki, “Orientalism on the Margins: The Ottoman Empire under Russian Eyes,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12 (2011), 321–51.

84 Michael Kemper and Stephan Conermann, eds., *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

85 Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

colonization arises when a specific Orthodox culture becomes strong, central, influential and dominant, so that it can dictate the development of another, less powerful Orthodox culture. Historically, there have been numerous cases like this, which have led to intra-Orthodox tension and conflicts and can be examined and analyzed through postcolonial lenses.

A most prominent case relates to Byzantine Orthodoxy and its influence upon the Rus' (Old Russia) and the formation of Russian Orthodoxy as a whole. It concerns processes that exhibit various facets of a colonization, even in pre-modern terms. It is well known that Russian Orthodoxy remained dependent on the Byzantine Church for centuries and on many levels, including jurisdictionally. Thus, the multiple influences from Byzantine Orthodox spirituality as well as the artistic and literary traditions are unmistakable.⁸⁶ There are some long-standing debates about the literary condition of the Rus' and whether the formative influence of Byzantium on it has been exaggerated in related colonial discourse. The so-called "intellectual silence" and lack of the development of a high culture in the Rus' have given rise to various discussions, including the question whether it was actually the Orthodox Church and not the Mongols that stifled the development of East Slavic intellectual thought.⁸⁷ Such an interpretation has been variously criticized as reflecting later colonial critiques of Orthodox Christianity as being a force that inhibited reform, development and modernization.⁸⁸

Be that as it may, we know for sure that the Russians wanted to get rid of this broader "colonial dependence" in religious and political terms as they gradually grew stronger and Byzantium declined. This process was accelerated after the fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. This independence plan of a "Russification of Orthodoxy" included the realms of theology, art and ritual practice, in which Russian Orthodoxy managed to develop its own local traditions that differed from the Byzantine ("Greek") ones. This happened even before the official declaration of the autocephaly of the Russian Church (1589/93). As Tsar Ivan IV (1530–1584) is reported to have said once to the

86 Gerhard Podskalsky, *Christentum und theologische Literatur in der Kiever Rus' (998–1237)* (Munich: Beck, 1982).

87 Francis J. Thomson, "The Nature of the Reception of Christian Byzantine Culture in Russia in the Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries and Its Implications for Russian Culture," *Slavica Gandensia* 5 (1978), 107–39.

88 William Veder, "Old Russia's 'Intellectual Silence' Reconsidered," in *Medieval Russian Culture*, vol. 2, ed. Michael S. Flier and Daniel Rowland (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 20–64; Simon Franklin, "Po povodu 'intellektual'nogo molchaniia' Drevnei Rusi," *Russia mediaevalis* 10 (2001), 262–70; Donald G. Ostrowski, *Europe, Byzantium and the "Intellectual Silence" of Rus' Culture* (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2018); David Prestel, "Kievan Rus' Theology: Yes, No, and It Depends," *Russian History* 46 (2019), 177–92.

Roman Catholic legate Antonio Possevino (1533–1611): “We do not believe in the Greeks, but in Christ. We accepted the Christian faith at the very beginning of Christianity when Andrew, brother of Peter apostle, entered these regions on his journey to Rome.”⁸⁹ The dissociation from the “Greek” version of Orthodoxy grew even stronger at times, although there were more productive encounters and interactions between these two Orthodox traditions. In fact, the schism of the Old Believers (1666/67) was a reaction of this kind to the reconnection of Russian Orthodoxy with the Greek ritual tradition, attempted by Patriarch of Moscow Nikon (1652–1658).⁹⁰ The involvement of other factors (e.g., nationalist, Panslavist) in these mutual relations later rendered the situation even more complex,⁹¹ a fact reflecting the broader state of affairs that seriously affects pan-Orthodoxy unity today. The Moscow Patriarchate tries to develop its own policies independently of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which it criticizes for following a colonial centralizing agenda by trying to dictate the future pace of the Orthodox world on its own. Nevertheless, as a powerful religious institution, the Moscow Patriarchate applies “colonial policies” explicitly or implicitly upon other, less influential Orthodox Churches and cultures (especially Slavic ones) that remain within its immediate range of influence or even tries to expand its jurisdictional presence in new areas (e.g., Western Europe)⁹² and canonical territories (most recently, in 2020/21, in Africa at the expense of the Patriarchate of Alexandria).⁹³

It becomes evident once more that colonizing mentalities and policies can be located everywhere in various overt and covert forms, and the Orthodox world is not free of such antagonisms. There are further examples of such intra-Orthodox tensions due to colonial practices. This pertains, for instance, to the Hellenization of various Orthodox peoples under Ottoman rule in the Balkans, both in religious and non-religious domains. This was mostly a free process without coercion at that time because of the widespread great fondness for the

89 Daniel H. Shubin, *A History of Russian Christianity*, vol. 1: *From the Earliest Years through Tsar Ivan IV* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2004), 9.

90 Paul Meyendorff, *Russia, Ritual, and Reform: The Liturgical Reforms of Nikon in the 17th Century* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1991).

91 Lora Gerd, *Russian Policy in the Orthodox East: The Patriarchate of Constantinople (1878–1914)* (Warsaw/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

92 Sebastian Rimestad, *Orthodox Christian Identity in Western Europe: Contesting Religious Authority* (London: Routledge, 2021).

93 Efi Efthimiou, “The Moscow Patriarchate received 102 priests of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, as announced at the Holy Synod of the Church of Russia, which met today,” *Orthodox Times*, 19 December 2021; <https://orthodoxtimes.com/moscow-adopted-102-clergymen-of-the-patriarchate-of-alexandria-forms-exarchate-of-africa-upd/>.

Greek language and culture.⁹⁴ By contrast, the emerging nationalisms among the Balkan peoples in the 19th century put an emphasis on local cultures and languages and by consequence put an end to this Hellenization process, which was then regarded by them not only as a burden but as a serious threat for the respective national awakening and identity.⁹⁵ Earlier state-supported Hellenization processes (e.g., in the Danubian Principalities under Phanariot rule) were also retrospectively criticized as colonial policies that obstructed the rise of the Romanian national identity. The entire issue has to do with the broader normativity that Greek Orthodoxy has traditionally enjoyed vis-à-vis other Orthodox cultures. This went unquestioned in many cases in the past, yet in other instances and especially in the context of modern ecclesiastical nationalisms, there was a strong reaction to such broader Greek influence. An analogous situation may be observed in another context, which has already been mentioned, namely, in the relations between Russia and Ukraine and the concomitant tensions. Russia was able to exert strong influence upon Ukraine (“Little Russia”) in numerous areas, including the ecclesiastical one, and keeps raising objections to Ukrainian attempts at more independence. From a Ukrainian perspective, however, this relationship exhibited clear colonial characteristics that were not beneficial to the development of Ukrainian national specificities and ecclesiastical independence.⁹⁶

Deconstructing Eastern Orthodox Discourses

Finally, postcolonial studies can be quite useful and fruitful in another direction, namely, in the deconstruction of various Eastern Orthodox discourses that have been articulated both historically and at present. Here the numerous interconnections between postcolonial and postmodern perspectives become quite obvious once again. In actual fact, it is not only Western discourses about non-Western peoples that interest us in the present context but also the Orthodox ones, which basically fall under the following two categories.

94 Vasilios N. Makrides, “The Enlightenment in the Greek Orthodox East: Appropriation, Dilemmas, Ambiguities,” in *Enlightenment and Religion in the Orthodox World*, ed. Paschalis M. Kitromilides (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2016), 17–47.

95 Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy: Studies in the Culture and Political Thought of Southeastern Europe*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot: Variorum, 2003); idem, *An Orthodox Commonwealth: Symbolic Legacies and Cultural Encounters in Southeastern Europe* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006).

96 Stephen Velychenko, “The Issue of Russian Colonialism in Ukrainian Thought: Dependency, Identity and Development,” *Ab Imperio* 1 (2002), 323–367; Vitaly Chernetsky, “Postcolonialism, Russia and Ukraine,” *Ubandus Review: The Slavic Review of Columbia University* 7 (2003), 32–62.

First, there are also Orthodox discourses about the West that are based on stereotypes, false caricatures, artificial binaries, schematic depictions, negative nuances and a lack of thorough knowledge of the Western tradition.⁹⁷ Thus, there are various misrepresentations of the East-West differences by the Orthodox, which end up in the construction of related ideologies about the West that may be subsumed under the category “Latinism.” Here it is not about the West as a geographical location, but as a form of civilization that was historically shaped by Latin Christianity and against which the Orthodox usually tended to identify themselves. Evidently, it is not only the Latin West that constructs the Orthodox East, but also vice versa. The ideas of Christos Yannaras about the “barbarian West” with regard to Latin Christianity offer a good example of how the West is constructed by an Orthodox intellectual and how the concomitant Orthodox superiority is subsequently fabricated.⁹⁸ The Orthodox receptions of Augustine⁹⁹ and Scholastic theology (especially that of Thomas Aquinas)¹⁰⁰ are also prime examples of how Orthodox actors have evaluated and constructed the West throughout history. The same applies to post-communist Russian Orthodox constructions of the decadent West.¹⁰¹ No doubt, the relations between these two were historically asymmetrical, given that the West was, from a certain point in history, stronger and dominant and could influence the East in more decisive ways. Yet the Orthodox reactions to this wholesale Western influx should not be ignored or underrated, given that they are dictated by a similar logic in their attempt to fight off Western colonial influences. Furthermore, the Orthodox case is not unique as it belongs to the broader reactions of non-Western cultures in global terms to Western colonial expansion and formative influences. These anti-Western cases have been subsumed under the term “Occidentalism,” which indicates not only various forms of infatuation with the West and resulting anti-Western attitudes,

97 George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds.), *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

98 Vasilios N. Makrides, “The Barbarian West: A Form of Orthodox Christian Anti-Western Critique,” in *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness: Values, Self-Reflection, Dialogue*, ed. Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 141–58.

99 George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, eds., *Orthodox Readings of Augustine* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008).

100 Marcus Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

101 Alfons Brüning, “Morality and Patriotism: Continuity and Change in Russian Orthodox Occidentalism since the Soviet Era,” in *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness: Values, Self-Reflection, Dialogue*, ed. Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014) 29–46.

but also the non-Western ideological perceptions and constructions of the Western other.¹⁰²

Second, characteristically enough, there are not only Orthodox constructions of the West, but also those of the East that can be analyzed and deconstructed through postcolonial analysis. Such constructions of the East may take different forms and articulations. It may concern invented, simplistic and non-sophisticated views about the Orthodox East, coupled with claims for uniqueness, absoluteness and exclusivity. Such constructions are typical in the realm of Orthodox rigorists/fundamentalists, who narrow the variety and reduce the richness of Orthodox identities across time.¹⁰³ It may also concern various complex, highly reflected and systematically theorized constructions of the East with the aim to locate its particular “essence” in ideal terms beyond space and time. The latter case relates to various Orthodox intellectuals, either with a philosophical background or not, who look for and reflect upon a true and genuine Orthodoxy that satisfies them personally and intellectually, even if such an Orthodoxy is never to be found historically.¹⁰⁴ In both cases, however, we are dealing with ideologizations (“Orthodoxism”) that can be analyzed through postcolonial lenses. In most cases, the usual trigger of such ideologies is again the West and its perceived opposition to the Orthodox East across history. In this context, one may also encounter various subtle forms of colonial dependence, such as an Orthodox neo-colonialism or neo-Orientalism. In actual fact, some Orthodox reactions to Western colonial influences may, in their argumentation, inadvertently themselves reproduce *mutatis mutandis* analogous patterns of colonial thought and practice.

102 James G. Carrier, ed., *Occidentalism: Images of the West* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

103 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Orthodox Christian Rigorism: Attempting to Delineate a Multifaceted Phenomenon,” *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 2, no. 2 (2016), 216–52; idem, “The Notion of ‘Orthodoxy’ as the Sole True Faith: A Specific Cause of Orthodox Christian Rigorism/Fundamentalism,” in *Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Davor Džalto and George E. Demacopoulos (Lanham: Lexington Books / Fortress Academic, 2022), 31–50.

104 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Religion, Kirche und Orthodoxie: Aspekte orthodox-christlicher Religionskritik,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 15 (2007), 53–82; idem, “Église contre religion et critique de la religion dans la théologie orthodoxe grecque moderne,” *Contacts: Revue française de l'orthodoxie* 69, nos. 259–60 (2017), 356–401.

Concluding Remarks

The short presentation above of various categories of cases relating Orthodox Christianity to postcolonial studies has hopefully shown that this new research paradigm can offer fresh and fruitful insights in analyzing the construction of Orthodox identities, the Orthodox self-understandings and Western perceptions about the Orthodox, both in history and at present.¹⁰⁵ No doubt, the specific topics and cases mentioned above are not new and have already drawn scholarly attention from diverse angles so far. Yet postcolonial analysis promises to offer novel perspectives that enable a better grasping of various processes and developmental trajectories within Orthodox Christianity and particularly numerous legacies of colonial agency. The heuristic potential of this new paradigm is also attested by the growing number of scholars who decide to use it in examining Orthodox Christianity without of course absolutizing it.

What has become evident from the foregoing presentation is the importance of the East-West connection in our context, not only in Europe,¹⁰⁶ but also beyond it. It is exactly this connection that renders this topic so apt for a postcolonial analysis. At the same time, such an investigation invites a reconsideration of the absolute lines of separation that have often been postulated between East and West and have polarized their mutual relations over centuries. In fact, a postcolonial analysis may well show that the categories “East” and “West” involve a great deal of construction and fabrication, especially if they are to be considered from a broader and especially global perspective. What is “Western” about the West and what is “Eastern” about the East? – these are questions that need to be seriously considered in this context of today’s global entanglements, especially because of the far-reaching implications of such concerns. Truth be told, this is not a completely original issue; it has been discussed earlier many times and in various contexts.¹⁰⁷ Yet, postcolonial perspectives may offer new and inventive directions to the related research as they put emphasis on previously neglected aspects of the topic.

105 George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Orthodox Naming of the Other: A Postcolonial Approach,” in *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, 1–22.

106 Alexander Maxwell, ed., *The East-West Discourse: Symbolic Geography and its Consequences* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011).

107 Fairy von Lilienfeld, “Ost’ und ‘West’ als Kategorien im ökumenischen Sprachgebrauch in Bezug auf ihre Behandlung in der russischen Geschichtsphilosophie des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts,” in *The Religious World of Russian Culture: Russia and Orthodoxy*: vol. II. *Essays in Honor of Georges Florovsky*, ed. Andrew Blane (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 315–48.

To be more specific, this relates to the issue of religious and cultural purity and authenticity, which is of great concern for the Orthodox in their relationship to the West, as we have already seen. There is, however, a danger lurking that this quest for Orthodox purity may be transformed into a sterile East-West polarity. Can there be an ideal condition of religious purity at all without any external influences, a condition for which the Orthodox display such an intense and pervasive longing? Referring to a seminal postcolonial thinker, Homi K. Bhabha's categories of hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry/irony/mockery, dislocation, and interstitial space (third space)¹⁰⁸ are quite useful here and may offer ways to consider such issues in a more nuanced and differentiated way. For him, all identities are basically hybrid, hence religious and cultural purity is a myth and never a tangible reality. This also concerns the construction of Orthodox identities across history, which have been often viewed as having been alienated by external Western influences. But does it concern an alienation here, pollution and the "pseudomorphosis" of genuine Orthodoxy or perhaps unavoidable inter-confessional contacts and consequently inter-confessional permeability that affects both the East and the West?¹⁰⁹ In all probability, the existence of hybrid Orthodox identities cannot be excluded in numerous cases, especially if we consider how many Orthodox critics of the West have lived and were educated and intellectually formed in the West while partly adopting Western perspectives and using them for their own sake. Ironically, in other words, the Orthodox critics of the West are in many cases themselves "products of the West," employ its intellectual categories and tools and in fact end up by being "cultural and religious hybrids." Their shrill anti-Western polemic renders them, even inadvertently, often ever more dependent on the West and blinds them by drawing their identity from the Western other.¹¹⁰

Such a standpoint reveals the sheer relativity entailed in the absolute demarcation lines drawn between East and West that lead to the construction of related ideologies, which are widely disseminated and still enjoy popular support in various contexts. Nevertheless, the experience of the global

108 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

109 Dorothea Wendebourg, "Pseudomorphosis: Ein theologisches Urteil als Axiom der kirchen- und theologiegeschichtlichen Forschung," in *The Christian East: Its Institutions and its Thought: A Critical Reflection*, ed. Robert F. Taft, SJ (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1996), 565–89; see also its English translation in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 42 (1997), 321–42.

110 Brandon Gallaher, "Waiting for the Barbarians': Identity and Polemicism in the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky," *Modern Theology* 27 (2011), 659–91, especially 679–83.

condition and postcolonial analysis allow us to discuss the multiple effects of the colonial dispositive from another angle. The growth of an Orthodox migration and settlement in the West, especially from early 20th century until today,¹¹¹ and the concomitant rise of a new “Orthodox cosmopolitanism”¹¹² render the above East-West distinction in absolute terms very questionable. If nothing else, postcolonial studies are able to offer an alternative stance on such matters and call into question the proclaimed certainty and validity of such ideologies. They can contribute to self-critical attitudes in both Eastern and Western Christianity and to the deconstruction of their negative projections and ideological products respectively.

111 Antoine Arjakovsky, *The Way: Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration in Paris and their Journal 1925–1940* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013); Maria Hämmerli and Jean-François Mayer (eds.), *Orthodox Identities in Western Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

112 Vasilios N. Makrides, “Le nouveau document social de l’Église orthodoxe: Son orientation, son élaboration, son contexte et son importance,” *Istina* 65 (2020), 387–413, especially 395–410.