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## Shared Divergence: Comparing Post-Socialist Peripheries and Predicaments

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# **SHARED DIVERGENCE: COMPARING POST-SOCIALIST PERIPHERIES AND PREDICAMENTS**

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**Abstract:** Based on preliminary research, mainly interviews with social scientists, and theoretical propositions I explore the politics of knowledge in peripheral post-socialist states. The states considered here are Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tanzania. Out of the four a focus is set on Tanzania in order to better argue for and show the global nature of some of the shared predicaments of post-socialist states in general and of the post-socialist peripheries of the former second world, the so-called “post-peripheries,” in particular. The overarching argument is that certain post-socialist predicaments have incapacitated an effective politics of knowledge across post-peripheral states and led to a decrease of substantive rationality. The argument is constructed not to hold categorically but rather to outline an ideal-type description of one perspective with which to better understand similarities of post-socialist states within the divergence of the former socialist world as a whole.

**Keywords:** *Post-socialism, post-peripheries, Tanzania, politics of knowledge, statehood*

## **1. Introduction**

In *Twenty Years After Communism* Bernhard and Kubik (2014) analyse the memory regimes of post-socialist countries pertaining to the fall of state socialism. Their analysis goes to show a divergence of post-socialisms. They trace patterns of conditions that guide actors’ strategies in the construction of historical visions employed in struggles for power (Bernhard and Kubik 2014: 262). However, all 17 countries they analyse are European and all of them have to some degree been able to redefine their statehoods and the politics of knowledge that connects memory regimes to interpretations of

present and visions of future. Bernhard and Kubik's analysis therefore does not represent the whole post-socialist story. Not all post-socialist conditions and their patterns have allowed the successful construction and employment of new historical visions. I suggest that we need to similarly recognise conditions of post-socialism that fail to produce new historical interpretations or, when they succeed, fail to connect them to visions of the future and knowledge of the present, i.e., to formulate new politics of knowledge.

National memory, present-day legitimisation and politics, and a country's perceptions of future trajectories and possibilities are tied together through the politics of knowledge. In this paper I attempt to turn our focus towards this intersection when analysing post-socialist countries. I propose that such a focus reveals similarities across former socialist peripheries and their statehoods from Eastern Africa to the Caucasus, from Europe to Central Asia. My cases represent a variety of former socialist peripheries: from a history of direct (Kyrgyzstan, Georgia) to indirect (Albania, Tanzania) dependency on the socialist world and from statebuilding premised to a lesser (Georgia, Albania) and a larger degree (Kyrgyzstan, Tanzania) on socialism.

The ideas presented here are based on a theoretical discussion and on preliminary research in all four countries. The research consisted of interviews with social scientists and sought to approach wider issues of post-socialist politics of knowledge through the keyhole of the production of social scientific knowledge. In order to underline the global reach of post-socialism and its connections to transnational ideas of statehood I focus on Tanzania and compare it to Albania, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan jointly, as they are more commonly taken as parts of the former socialist periphery with legacies of socialism affecting their politics of knowledge today. After presenting my theoretical outlook, I will therefore first discuss the case of Tanzania in greater length and then the cases together.

Theoretically I begin from a problem of research on post-socialism. For example, Outhwaite and Ray (2005) claim that changes in post-communist societies are too "uneven" to provide explicit theoretical implications. Whereas Kandiyoti (2002) notes that in research on post-socialism there is a discrepancy between theoretical perceptions and concrete contexts, I approach this discrepancy not,

like Kandiyoti suggests, as theoretical poverty or, like Outhwaite and Ray suggest, as chaotic reality, but as an actually existing and researchable phenomenon in itself. Drawing from my preliminary research and from theory, I describe this phenomenon broadly as the delegitimisation of substantive rationality and a transition with alternativelessness producing together an incommensurability between the delegitimisation of the socialist past and possible analyses/critiques of the present and visions of future, or, as Sarah Amsler has put it, an “ostensibly expanded space for intellectual experimentation” with difficulty to imagine what it might entail (Amsler 2007: ix).

By the end I hope to have shed light on two mutually reinforcing lines of thought. First, countries of former post-socialist peripheries share a common predicament when it comes to the politics of knowledge. However, in discussing this post-socialist predicament I do not propose that my perspective holds categorically but rather that it can outline an ideal-type description of one perspective with which to better understand similarities of some post-socialist states within the divergence of the former socialist world as a whole. The second line of thought is that any post-socialist country, in this case Tanzania, is possibly subject to that same predicament just like its Eurasian peers. Speaking specifically of African post-socialism Pitcher et al. point out that “the impact of these changes [1989–91] on socialist states in Africa was no less monumental” (Pitcher et al. 2006: 1).

### **1.1 Statehood and Post-Peripheries**

Just as the creation of the states system was part and parcel of the creation of a capitalist world-economy (Wallerstein 1998: 10), today not the disintegration of that system as such, but its devaluation, especially where the politics of knowledge are concerned, is part of the capitalist world-economy; a time of uncertainty and popular antistatism that “has undermined an essential pillar of the modern world-system, the states system” (Wallerstein 1998: 32). Therefore some states are not automatically granted the binary benefits of systemic dependency and state sovereignty, which are still, however, perceived to be the birth right of any state.

For states today the price of recognition is increased demands for dependence and adaptability. Yet, at the same time, as Wallerstein has described (Wallerstein et al. 2013), complexity and competition in the world-economy have intensified whilst fluctuations between markets and power alliances have become manifold and faster, resulting in unpredictability. This tension has excluded actors such as some post-socialist peripheries that lack the capacity to influence them or to maintain themselves the institutions required to adapt to constant change. Furthermore, they themselves would provide unnecessary further unpredictability, a burden for any core actors to incorporate them and be responsible for their adaptability too.

A globally informed theoretical exploration thereby pluralises modernity and proposes that more complex dimensions of a global society and the states within exist beyond the traditional measures of successful statehood of the twentieth century. A way to begin conceptualising this is to theorise an in-betweenness caught in a delegitimisation of substantive rationality and a transition coupled with alternativelessness; a shared predicament of some post-socialist countries across the world. This means that in a world, to paraphrase Amsler (2007), where the state and social movements are considered to be the facilitators of power and resistance, who constitute and reproduce the system, it is also crucial to investigate the limitations and possibilities of the facilitators themselves to engage that system. And furthermore, not simply investigate the results, for shared limitations may produce divergent results, but also the form and process, or lack thereof, of that engagement.

The paradox of post-peripheries' – the peripheries of the former socialist world – politics of knowledge is that their attempts to construct substantive rationality is incommensurate with the statehood that is offered to them by the global community. Whereas the countries from the former core or semi-periphery of the second world with strong state machineries or leaders have used old tropes of tradition, nationalism and religion coupled with new forms of information and communication technology to break through this impasse, the latter states have actively “sponsored the formation and propagation of useful traditions” (Starr 1991, quoted in Bernhard and Kubik 2014: 8). But many post-socialist or post-communist states, particularly those of the former socialist periphery – such as Moldova

or Albania, most African cases, or states of the Soviet south – whose statehood often was largely constructed or even newly created as part of the socialist alternative, have not been able to forcefully reformulate their politics of knowledge.

This trajectory of post-peripheries is premised on the production and legitimisation of knowledge connected to the collapse of the socialist alternative. This is a predicament with which all post-socialist societies have specifically struggled, setting them apart from other societies with similar problems or similar incapacity. Moreover, my preliminary research suggests that the states I call post-peripheries, whose nation- and state-building was predicated upon a dependency on the core of the second world, have struggled in specific ways in terms of dealing with the collapse of the legitimisation of the socialist alternative; as well as with the collapse of their dependent relations in this sense with the core of the second world; and with on-going developments of the wider global states system. This points towards certain similarities and shared conditions for the politics of knowledge in the face of an apparent divergence of the post-socialist experience across the world.

## **2. Post-Socialist Predicament(s)**

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union not only societal agreements founded upon or emulating the Soviet as well as the socialist model were delegitimised, conjointly also social inquiry and social science academia in those regions became delegitimised. This was and continues to be a particularly difficult predicament especially for those countries in which the state, the nation, the social order, and academia and the social sciences were for the most part constructed during the Soviet or socialist eras, where legacies, traditions and memories of institutions predating socialism had been supplanted.

The main goal of modernisation in general in its socialist as well as capitalist versions was to make the uncertain controllable and to produce predictability. Some have called this social engineering. It is centred on a mutually re-enforcing relation between theory and action, or in other words between knowledge and social, political and economic reproduction. The first problem then that was encountered by post-socialist societies was to come to terms with how their past – that all of a sudden lost its legitimacy as a modernising project of this

sort – had been built upon the premise of it being an incommensurable alternative to the capitalist mode of modernity that was now the only other option on offer. Societies that to some extent or another successfully navigated this predicament formed new regimes of memory as Bernhard and Kubik (2014) show. Following this first predicament the second one encountered especially by post-socialist knowledge producers and social science academics was the fact that the only critical perspective within the capitalist mode of modernity was nevertheless a variant or multiple variants of the very Marxism they had abandoned. This is the problem of present-day knowledge, of forms and ways of a state and society to analyse, define and understand itself. The problem causes a disconnect between reinterpretations of the past and politics today. The third predicament is how, when the two previous predicaments should have been tackled by politicians and scholars, at the same time globally the era of sovereign national development as a means to an end began to come to an end and ironically made, so to say, obsolete the struggles that had appeared to be of utmost importance. This last one is the problem of future visions. Where all of the three predicaments have remained in place, they have produced a specifically post-peripheral statehood.

Let me illustrate my point with a minor but specific example, of a more symbolic nature, of this predicament. The Ala-too square in central Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, used to be dominated by a large statue of Lenin to symbolise not only the ideology but also the man who literally signed off the creation of Kyrgyz statehood. In 2003 – only – the statue of Lenin was replaced by a statue named “Freedom,” a female figure holding a torch. Kyrgyzstan had joined the WTO already in 1998 and was for a time considered a promising example of transition towards free markets and democracy in the region. Two revolutions later, in 2011, “Freedom” was replaced by a statue of the hero Manas from the national epic as part of an effort to strengthen nationalist sentiment. But Manas has not brought the people together or legitimised Kyrgyz statehood any more than did “Freedom” (and, of course, there is no going back to Lenin).

Following promising reforms after a 2010-revolution, things are again looking unpredictable. Nate Schenckan of Freedom House summarises the situation by stating that the so-called “island of democracy” in Central Asia “is barely staying afloat.” He continues, “Kyrgyzstan

might not be headed to a dictatorship, but neither is it becoming more democratic” (Schenkkan 2015). It is caught in an in-betweenness that could not be reconciled through religion, nationalism, democracy, or the free markets either. A correct symbolism would be to leave the pedestal on Ala-too square empty.

The example of Ala-too square speaks to how there was and to an extent continues to be, to quote Sarah Amsler again, that “ostensibly expanded space for intellectual experimentation” following the fall of the Soviet Union, but “imagining what this might entail was difficult” and continues to be so in some cases and therefore “the reconstruction of existing boundaries of legitimate knowledge”, and of the politics of knowledge, was and is “experienced as a crisis as much as an opportunity” (Amsler 2007: ix).

Often post-socialist debates about what should be done with the politics of knowledge themselves revolve around a paradoxical dichotomy. On the one hand, social scientific knowledge is seen as not sufficiently national and still too influenced by Soviet Marxism, while on the other hand, national traditions are seen as backwards whereas Western credentials and theories are considered the standard (Amsler 2007). Yet, also the Western standard is not seen as outright applicable or fully sensitive to the particular situation these states find themselves in.

## **2.1 Research on Post-Socialism**

There is a problem in research on post-socialism. For example, Outhwaite and Ray (2005), in their discussion of the implications of post-communism for social theorising, claim that changes in post-communist societies are too “uneven” to provide explicit theoretical implications. They attempt to explain that unevenness in terms politics of knowledge by describing the “post-communist” world as “one in which the play of modernization, modernity and otherness has become both intense and unstable” (Outhwaite and Ray 2005: 103).

On a similar note, Kandiyoti (2002) observes that in research on post-socialism there is a discrepancy between theoretical perceptions and concrete contexts. Both Kandiyoti and Outhwaite and Ray touch upon a problem of post-socialism that is perceived to be there by



researchers: A discrepancy between ideas, or theory, and empirical data is brought up in one form or another, from one angle or another. The assumptions that hold theories together appear to make the theories blind to specific aspects of post-socialist societies, or, the other way around, knowledge of those societies seems not to fit well in theoretical assumptions and undertones. However, that is not the real problem I suggest this discrepancy is not, as Kandiyoti suggests, theoretical poverty, or like Outhwaite and Ray suggest, chaotic reality, but an existing and researchable condition of post-socialism in itself. The real problem is that we are disguising our inability to approach this condition as no-good theory or difficult empirics. Instead of poor theory or bad empirics, there may just be a persistent disconnect between the two in post-peripheries that both researchers and societies have failed to displace. To give a simplified description: theories, perceptions and understandings about societies and states in the world are applied and developed today in a more global and unified direction than ever before, while post-socialist peripheries are stuck on a parallel trajectory that keeps being dragged along but is unable to intersect. When researchers then try to bridge these two trajectories, they end up explaining away or excusing for the discrepancies in an effort to produce findings that would resonate with the global trajectory.

Partly this came about as there was no structural support for a reconstitution of politics of knowledge, a crisis that has not been resolved today and has been transformed into a politics of recursive instrumentalisation of that very disconnect within some post-socialist countries (Korhonen 2012). With this I mean sort of a reactionary, status quo oriented, relation to any transformations in the global society due to an incapacity to connect ideas with action. Concretely this has manifested, as Amsler accounts, in discourses of inferiority of local knowledge, polarized responses of unproblematic attraction and irredentist reaction to post-Marxist models of progress in neoliberal development agendas (Amsler 2007: ix-x).

The situation continues to be one where problems encountered are assumed to be natural elements of “the transition.” This, I argue, is the underlying cause of what I see as a knowledge politics of a recursive never-ending “transition” that fails to resist or support anything. Amsler has termed this as being between “Marx and the Market,” which manifests as a situation in which “epistemological and political

architectures, even of methods that aim to dismantle power relations, are structurally embedded within these very relations” (Amsler 2007: x-xi). What this means, I suggest, is that the post-socialist predicament(s) is reproducing itself with the result that “problems of organized knowledge production ... cannot be adequately understood if we view them only through the narrow national and regional lenses through which we had for so long been accustomed to looking”, but rather, these problems “beg questions about knowledge, power and capital at the global level” (Amsler 2007: x-xi). Indeed, comparisons between post-socialisms globally may reveal aspects hidden from regional analysis, as Pitcher et al. argue is the case for African post-socialisms: “most theorists of postsocialism overlook the persistence of historical memories, the symbolic and discursive continuities, and the institutional ruptures and restorations in those African countries that once embraced socialism” (Pitcher et al. 2006: 2).

In post-peripheries a fragmentation of politics of knowledge is visible in the affiliations, differentiations, distinctions, and overall entrenchment that different institutions of knowledge production seek. This fragmentation is a sign of strategies built upon funding received and rhetoric copied from elsewhere (spatially or temporally) rather than interactive and responsive connections to and support of social movements and state building. As Amsler points out, each of these factors of fragmentation is mediated through academics’ decisions about how to negotiate competing logics such as Marxism, nationalism, capitalism and institutional professionalism. Social scientific practice and fields of knowledge are reproduced by strategically negotiating alliances with “a bankrupt and authoritarian state” and with “unstable and uneven relationships ensuing from dependence on development organizations, or reliance on commercial funding” (Amsler 2007: 94, 107). In a situation in which, as Amsler argues about the post-Soviet periphery, such production of knowledge is nevertheless defined as producing objective representations of social reality, little space is left for legitimate substantive rationality that leads to shared ways of life, I suggest. Substantive rationality, as Weber described, differs from theoretical rationality in that it “directly orders action into patterns”, which it achieves “not on the basis of a purely means-ends calculation of solutions to routine problems but in relation to a past, present, or potential ‘value postulate’” (Kalberg 1980: 1155).

Thereby only substantive rationality “introduces methodical ways of life” (Kalberg 1980: 1145).

Lack of substantive rationality leads to limitations in capacity for an effective politics of knowledge, such as what Richard E. Lee calls imagining possibilities for human action that are effective and legitimate (Lee 2011: 36), i.e. negotiating differences between present knowledge, the horizon of expectations, and memory regimes. With limitations in capacity the processes and mediation provided by politics of knowledge cannot aid in the accumulation of capital (social or economic) or state formation. An indeterminacy of “meaning-formation” pervades social movements and state-building, as Emilian Kavalski claims is the case of post-Soviet statehood in Central Asia (2010).

### **3. Pasts and Presents of Socialist State-Building**

Having described my theoretical angle, and before delving into the case of Tanzania and into comparisons, I will present a few remarks about the four cases, which, while not an exhaustive selection, represent different geographical and political peripheries of the former socialist world – varying in terms of direct or indirect dependence, forms of socialism, and historical timelines – these countries’ present moments that are nevertheless defined by their socialist pasts.

While space does not permit replete historical comparisons, it should be noted that all cases, Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Tanzania share histories of statehood that were shaped by imperial interventions. And all of them, for a period at least, found or were given a solution to their troubled statehood through socialism. Looking at the longer term, before the Russian Revolution of 1917, the four cases do not vary significantly in terms of the development of infrastructure, foreign trade or local political bargaining capacity with imperial actors, with Kyrgyzstan and Albania probably trailing Tanzania and Georgia in terms of the former two measures. Specifically coastal parts of Tanzania were equally if not more connected to international trade around the 19th century than the other three cases. Comparatively, at least before the Soviets properly turned their eye towards Central Asia and the Caucasus, under the German and British empires Tanzania enjoyed a relatively heavy investment in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century for

the development of administration, infrastructure, agriculture and education. Tanzania, for example, had 1200 kilometers of railways on the mainland and tramlines running on the Island of Unguja by 1914, including plans to heavily expand both transportation forms. Higher education in Albania, Kyrgyzstan and Tanzania took off in the early 1960s and has not effectively regained its position, as I will later discuss, since the collapse of communism. Georgia's brief period of independence in 1918–21 also saw the establishment of a university in Tbilisi; this academic tradition however, was forcefully interrupted by Soviet occupation.

The analytical variety of the cases originates from the research process itself. My first case was Kyrgyzstan because it represented both a direct dependence on the socialist alternative as well as a statehood that was the direct result of socialist intervention. Furthermore, it distinguished itself from its Central Asian counterparts, for example, by being a poster child of transition at different times following the collapse of socialism, but nevertheless time and time again failed to fulfil those hopes. Next in line, Georgia added variety through its history of independence not only long ago, but also right before Soviet intervention. And similarly Georgia had distinguished itself among its Caucasian neighbours in terms of hopes for a transitional development, which for the most part has failed to actualise. Thereafter, Tanzania served to globalise my outlook as well as present a case of indirect dependency compared to the two former ones. And lastly, Albania presented a case of indirect dependency coupled with a history of independence before the Soviet intervention that in a sense sealed the circle for this stage of research and these particular comparisons.

Finally, it is meaningful to realise, as background, the intertwined nature and history of state-building and socialism. Sovereignty, or national liberation, and socialism functioned practically as synonyms following the First and Second World War. Socialism had become viable symbolic capital for the international recognition of sovereignty. This situation was often in contradiction with socialist policies domestically and led internationally to the proliferation of “socialisms” based on domestic needs, which partly began to chip away its international clout by the 1970s.

### 3.1 Traditional Understandings of Tanzanian State-Building

Neville Linton (1968) wrote one of the earliest pieces on the success of Tanzanian socialism and state-building seven years after the country's independence and one year after the Arusha Declaration that steered the state towards a socialist path: "It would have been enough of a task to set out to build a modern nation-state as was the goal of most new states of the Afro-Asian world. Nyerere's purpose, however, was to create a new order, a truly socialist community, an African vision of what society ought to be" (Linton 1968: 1). A problem of Linton is that he assumes state-building to be a neutral process onto which socialism is added as if a special flavour or extra challenge. He also assumes that there is a specifically African vision of what society ought to be (perhaps in contrast to an assumed Eurocentric understanding). But societies are bound and shaped by the dynamics of the world that constrict their capacity to understand, exploit and define those dynamics. It is in this capacity that Tanzania shares similarities with some of its post-socialist companions.

A common preface to studies regarding Tanzania and Tanzanian-type socialism is like the one offered by Dean McHenry in his *Limited Choices: The Political Struggle for Socialism in Tanzania*. McHenry compares Tanzania to the proverbial elephant in the story about a group of blind men, who each touched a different part of the creature's body and then described the whole animal accordingly (1994).

McHenry's opening assumption is not far from Kandiyoti's and Outhwaite and Ray's lament. This continues to be the case for many studies on and understandings of post-socialist societies. A similarity, bringing Tanzania together with other post-socialist peripheries. I find this curious. McHenry explains this claim by offering accounts as to why in the case of Tanzania scholars have been "blind." His explanations range from ideological bias to concrete problems in conducting research, i.e., from theoretical poverty to perceived chaotic reality.

I suggest rather that such problems are commonplace in the study of any social phenomena and in that sense we are either all blind and Tanzania is no different or we are actually not blind even when we describe the elephant differently. In either case, what is missing

from post-socialist research are the spaces and opportunities in the politics of knowledge to negotiate, legitimise and assign the problems and discrepancies found in the post-peripheries to be defining the characteristics of those states and societies today. This is an actual condition of Tanzania as a post-socialist country. With this I mean that the very existence of the country and especially ideas about the country; the immanent political critique and the practice of the state in trying to understand itself is contingent, volatile, and unstable. The politics of knowledge is constantly torn apart and pummelled by different participants in the process and its environment, yet post-socialist legacy prevents the volatility and instability from being decisively supplanted by stronger perspectives produced elsewhere. This results in divergent and separate accounts of the characteristics of the state and society of Tanzania, which I argue is in fact a characteristic on its own.

This is not accidental. The ability to control and decide which forms of statehood remain stable in the global markets and the states system is important political and ideological currency. One could perhaps say that in this definitional capacity is where actual power lies; in being able to guide and shape the relations that constitute the system.

### **3.2. Possible Revisions**

Paul Bjerck (2010) noted that “scholars are torn between the impulse to understand the theoretical implications of Tanzania’s experience for socialism and a more pragmatic concern to evaluate the country’s claim to sovereign authority”; he continued that “debates have pitted the diffuse international discourses of modernization, socialist and otherwise, against the specific cultural needs of defining a truly independent African state” (Bjerck 2010: 276). This is another angle from which to observe the same discrepancy caused by post-socialist predicaments. It is a common phenomenon as well as a major problem for peripheral post-socialist states struggling to establish autonomous statehood while lacking the capacities needed to formulate an effective politics of knowledge.

Bjerck’s paper is one of the few I found that resonates with my own interest in interpreting Tanzanian socialism as a historical form of state-building within a larger historically specific context of an

international order of nation-states and politics that is, if anything, constituted by that division and not objectively separate from it. “As such, socialist policies must be first understood within the exercise in sovereign authority and its contestation”, Bjerck asserts (Bjerck 2010: 277). Through this understanding we are better able to gauge the problems that a socialist past sets for states’ politics of knowledge as a whole today.

Descriptive of how this post-socialist predicament with knowledge production came about is the manner in which Joel Samoff (1979) described the causes for failure of the state-building efforts of Tanzania. Samoff explained them through a mismatch between state ideology in Tanzania and its place in the world as a state; he has asserted that in Tanzania especially ideology is used to create cohesion and to deal with conflicts of power. This then, according to Samoff, in terms of the ruling class, causes problems with the ruling class’ dealings with international capital, as it attempts to maintain that ideology in the face of the rest of the country and simultaneously to maintain its monopoly position as the intermediary between the state politics and international capital.

It is good that in social sciences and history we have moved ahead from the theoretically straightforward class formational underpinnings of Samoff’s type from the 1970s. Yet, perhaps unfortunately, there has been an urge also to forget much of this type of analysis on state-building and development instead of rereading it and incorporating it as sources in new research. While Samoff’s analysis might not satisfy us today theoretically, the perceptions underlying it offer valuable information as to how the politics of knowledge were perceived and reproduced. In this sense I believe that Samoff, especially in his description of the situation as it was, may not be too far off in terms of pointing out a part of the history of the dynamics of global knowledge production now constraining post-socialist politics of knowledge following the collapse of socialist legitimacy. Therefore, the second tier that can be and should be read in Samoff’s analysis is not how accurately it might have described reality, but how insightfully it resonated with and created perceptions of reality, i.e., Samoff is at once trying to describe the real situation but also creating and reflecting something ideational, something that affected and perhaps restricted

the development of the politics of knowledge in the years following his analysis.

Samoff's description of the failure of socialist state-building through problematically promising national liberation on all fronts – economic, social and political – is a useful description for understanding how a politics of knowledge borrowed from elsewhere but motivated by sovereignty and national liberation was not sufficient for socialist peripheries to secure that liberation, but did produce a specific strategy to, so to say, forge ahead nevertheless, and today continues to produce specific challenges for memory regimes, knowledge of the present, and visions of the future, and especially for all of them successfully coming together to form a substantive rationality.

### **3.3 Tanzanian Statehood**

Peter J. Steinberger (2004: 28) argued, “individual states essentially are attempts to implement the idea of the state” which, itself, is internal to “the idea or set of ideas that constitutes the essence of a particular state.” From this argument Steinberger drew the conclusions that (1) “the state has itself for subject matter” and (2) attempts to examine the nature of the state will always “be a profoundly political endeavor” or, in other words, “a matter of a particular state ... seeking to understand itself, to discover, and to achieve in practice, its own coherence”; “an intelligible structure seeks to make sense of itself, to make implicit claims, to correct its own inconsistencies, to evaluate the degree to which discrete propositions comport with the overall system and to revise those that do not” (Steinberger 2004: 28–30). Such inquiry, Steinberger further argued, “will have the character of an immanent political critique” (Steinberger 2004: 30). Identifying incapacities to conduct this evaluation or immanent critique is another way to observe and understand the post-peripheries’ struggle with post-socialist predicaments.

Part of what makes Tanzania interesting in this context is that it was actively and knowingly constructing a national unity and a working national state while visibly promoting international socialism. Today, though, Tanzania has undergone “structural adjustment” policies of similar and, according to some accounts, greater magnitude than its African counterparts (due to its inability to bargain well for the



conditions) (Aminzade 2013). Tanzania has nevertheless avoided the fate of those counterparts for whom “the idea of state” as an authoritative institutional apparatus separated but strongly engaged in controlling and regulating social processes “has often appeared to match uncomfortably with underlying societal forces and dynamics within the African context” (Doornbos 2006: 48–72). This is another difference between post-socialist states and other states struggling with defining their statehood.

This difference can partly be explained through differences between socialism and ideas that constitute(d) a developmental state. This is present, for example, in the ways in which in Tanzania socialism was also used in an essentially negative way to mean the absence of certain features: “of exploitation, corruption and class divisions in society” (Coulson 1979: 2). Partly due to this difference socialism as a national liberation came to emphasise moral and ideational aspects, socialism as a way of life, which was a strong undercurrent in the writings of Tanzania’s socialist leader Julius Nyerere too. This ethos took place in a developmental and post-colonial state dependent on foreign aid and imports. In this regard, it diverges from socialism in the core regions of the USSR and its western satellites, but shares similarities with the Soviet south and other socialist peripheries that had a dependent relation with the core regions of the Second World.

Another aspect of Tanzanian socialism was the constant undertone of freedom of choice and free will of the people in implementing socialism. This, I suggest, is also a result of the complex relation between socialism and ideas of a developmental state. Similar rhetoric was offered to the newly created Soviet Central Asian republics. This rhetoric has been at the core of constructing Tanzanian nationalism, a relatively successful endeavour which many have applauded for the relative lack of ethnic conflict found in this post-colonial country of over one hundred ethnicities and spoken languages. This peacefulness was demonstrated once again during the tension-filled presidential elections in the fall of 2015.

Susan Geiger (1996) pointed out the paradox that while Tanzanian nation-building has been relatively successful, the narratives of that story remain largely unchallenged and unchanged. They have not been

re-interpreted to be employed in power struggles in a similar fashion as in the cases described by Bernhard and Kubik (2014).

Geiger then argued, with a focus on female Tanganyikan nationalists, that around the time of mobilisation these actors “did not ‘learn nationalism’ (so to speak) from Nyerere or when they joined the party” (Geiger 1996: 468). Rather, Nyerere and the party “provided women with a context within which to advance specific interests: namely, freedom from colonialism and gender equity” (Geiger 1996: 469). Geiger rightly pointed out, following Benedict Anderson, that nationalism in this fashion aligns with large cultural systems and not with self-consciously held political ideologies like socialism. Hereby I note that it was not socialism as such that drove the national movement. Yet, at the same time, it is not inconsequential today that it was socialism and not something else. Cultural systems influenced by socialism did not change overnight and a glue-on capitalist mentality did not displace certain ethos and ideas that had been shaped by socialism. Even more so, nothing automatically repaired the politics of knowledge.

Tellingly, by the 1980s the development debate over Tanzania shifted from critical examinations of the success of Nyerere’s policies to whether the country is already and/or should be socialist or capitalist. This shift overshadowed analyses of state-building and substantive rationality as independent processes of transformation that could be understood through a socialist mode or a capitalist mode but are not equivalent to either.

Duncan Holtom noted the drastic shift in Tanzania’s position during the 1980s: “A former World Bank favorite, it [Tanzania] became one of the few cases in Sub-Saharan Africa where the IMF and World Bank brought their full coercive power to bear in a protracted struggle,” Holtom continued, that “after six years of bitter struggle, Nyerere’s Tanzania, leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, and standard bearer of African Socialism, had given into the demands of international capitalism (McHenry 1994)” (Holtom 2005: 1).

#### **4. Towards a Politics of Knowledge in Post-Peripheries**

Part of the paradox of the tradeoff (of structural adjustment and transition) for Tanzania and other post-socialist countries is its temporality: democratisation movements following the end of the Cold War may have led to “more democratically constituted societies, but global interdependence may mean that those collectivities have very little to indeed decide and determine” (Wagner 2012: x), while at the same time globalising knowledge continues to set increasingly high requirements for participation in politics of knowledge (Kennedy 2014).

For example, recently Tanzania attempted to introduce a new voter registration system ahead of the presidential elections in 2015. This elegant biometric system records individuals’ facial and eye features and finger prints and holds promise for the increased efficiency of democracy and thereby state control and administration techniques as was likely envisioned by the system’s western developers. However, the potentiality of a system based on a continuous supply of electricity and internet access collides with problems of local governance and resources, not to mention eye problems and diseases of much of the elderly population – which seem not to have been considered by the system’s developers as a significant variable – and jam the system as it is unable to read the eye features of those individuals. Similar problems were encountered in Kyrgyzstan that also introduced a new biometric voter registration system ahead of its parliamentary elections in 2015. The promise of democratic state consolidation failed due to technical and governance capacities with the opposite result of what was likely intended. “the uncertainty around the biometrics issue will reduce trust in the outcome of the elections” (Schenkkan 2015). And although such sophisticated systems in conditions like Tanzania or Kyrgyzstan also hold the promise of abuse by the ruling elite, in securing votes or voters, even that type of state consolidation seems to have been ill-served by these technologies due to their poor compatibility with local governance and political organisation, be it real or simply perceived by the public.

While any lower income country may face similar issues with new technology, these are specific aggregate level problems for post-socialist states, which commanded a tradition of their own in techniques

and technologies of population and state control. It is not simply a question of failing to apply the technology, but the technology's function and idea, either in promoting democracy or even in allowing for more abuse, is eschewed by the system. Specifically such problems surface with attempts to align the existing post-socialist state and social structures, local knowledgeabilities, and forms of reproducing privilege with new systems being introduced. In more abstract terms, this problem arises from how "the recognition of knowledge reflects not just its intrinsic value but also the power and privilege organizing the systems in which that recognition functions" (Kennedy 2014: xiii). In post-peripheries forms of power and privilege seem to be kept in place but in check also. The same attitude is extended to the knowledge reflected through them. This interconnection, identified by Kennedy, thereby has its specific problems and characteristics in post-peripheries.

Part of the problem is that we find – unsurprisingly considering the quality, intensity and length of social transformations (in most cases the building of a state and a society from almost scratch) undertaken by peripheral socialist countries – significant resilience in post-peripheries of the form of politics of knowledge, networks and state control from a socialism-that-was.

In the case of the voter registration system this post-socialist condition, that limits the possible configurations that a new control or governance method can take with local knowledgeability, is present for example in a bureaucracy based on specific and unaligned organisational goals (rather than other distributive administrative methods or simple coordination); in the locality's tight connection to bureaucratic power resonating with the ruling party's or simply the political machine's structure; in importance of public and known bureaucratic steps to be followed (in contrast to a special programme set up for a specific function); in compliance with or even admiration of citizens of the bureaucratic models, i.e., seeing it as completely normal to queue for three days to simply register; and in a high value placed on rigidly official processes. All of the above are used as coping mechanisms and survival strategies, at least in post-peripheral academia, according to my interviewees. While at the same time a connection to "value postulates" or a "methodical way of life," as Kalberg (1980) described substantive rationality, is missing. This relates to how the above-

mentioned coping mechanisms are also associated with a perceived loss of shared value; “universities used to be serious places,” as one interviewee put it.

In another instance, at a conference in Tanzania a younger charismatic scholar spoke widely of the need for a new “grand vision,” touching upon the problems of the politics of knowledge and its failure to produce long-term social and political mobilisation and cohesion (Tanzania is very peaceful and perhaps one could say unified, but it is not cohesive or concerted). He explained that this vision should not be yet another piece of paper, but a feeling and a goal shared by all citizens of the country, much like substantive rationality. This, however, immediately aroused strong reactions from the audience. The critique was based on the impossibility of sharing a vision as long as the economy does not work and people are poor as well as on the impossibility of jointly agreeing what such a vision would entail. This is one example of the post-socialist predicament. It is a reversal of the original role of socialism, at least its original intention in Tanzania. The socialist vision was abandoned in favour of an opposite logic of structural adjustment that believed in transforming the economy in order to then residually change the society too and provide cohesion through mutually beneficial competition. It has not done so. It has made a small group of people wealthy. Yet Tanzania has been able to avoid many of the tendencies of strife and failure of government that are present in other post-colonial contexts. And, most importantly, this did not happen under the umbrella of strict authoritarian rule but through at least a perceived emphasis on social equality and societal legitimacy, things that apparently can peacefully coexist with high levels of corruption. My interviewees in Albania, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan – from different sides of the particular national divisions – employed similar arguments of social equality in explaining their problems with successfully reform or re-invigoration of societal knowledge production, i.e., to change something, while at the same time use strong rhetoric against those perceiving and interpreting the past, present or future of the country in a different way than they did.

In another example of the ethos of social equality, coupled with an incapacity to produce it, Ronald Aminzade (2013) pointed out how Tanzanian nationalism operates with exclusionary processes in a relatively inclusionary nation-state. He argued that exclusionary

practices were justified exactly by the need to prevent exploitation, address the consequences of prior colonialism and foster cultural pride (Aminzade 2013: 4). Similarly, the politics of knowledge in Albania, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan are based on exclusionary arguments that prevent a shared substantive rationality but try to promote social equality and the rights of all to hold on to achieved gains. The painstakingly slow reform of an exclusionary and thereby fragmented system of knowledge production and legitimacy is justified by the benefits, inclusion and social equality it creates for the individual fragments of the field, while at the same time all parties recognise a dire need for reform. In Kyrgyzstan this had led to a proliferation of academic institutes divided roughly based on religion and ethnicity. In Georgia the divide is more strongly constituted by the ideas drawn from Western, national, or past imaginaries. In Albania this whole process of allowing academia and education to open up has been avoided and delayed based on the same arguments, and the negotiation and recognition of emerging divisions by each other is now underway. In Tanzania reform is kept at bay and fragmentation promoted based most often on social hierarchies that could be upset; even if in many cases, if not in the minds of people but in socio-economic reality, they already have been upset.

#### **4.1 Incapacities and Fragmentations**

Returning to the three predicaments that post-socialist knowledge producers encountered, a multitude of strategies were employed to deal with them leading to the aforementioned fragmentation of institutions of social knowledge. Very little if any exchange of ideas or communication exists between the fragmented camps, though in most cases all are relatively well connected to some official circles of the state or political apparatus. In Albania we can talk of delay and the intentional ignorance of fragmentation, in Kyrgyzstan of a religious and ethnic strategy, and in Georgia of an over-appreciation of the West leading to reactionary responses and a fragmentation based on inflation of that appreciation, while in Tanzania the strategy has been a mixture of delay and fragmentation based on supposed academic autonomy and societal hierarchies. All of these strategies have been the result of a failed response to post-socialist predicaments. Furthermore,

the effects of such fragmentation reproduce the incapacity to respond to the very predicaments.

In Georgia, for example, I encountered dichotomy, inflation and displacement. While the western or Anglo-Saxon mode of academic knowledge is widely appropriated and over-appreciated – with groups of elder Soviet trained academics holding on to their positions at least until retirement – at least two cleavages emerge from it. The first is a practical one. This Anglo-Saxon academia is still purely an imported good. Scholars who were trained or spent time as visitors in the West bring it to the country. As we know, too much quantity-focused imports of one good lead to inflation, like the tulip mania in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Holland. What one then finds is that academic arguments, over concepts, definitions or theories often happen in somewhat of a profane manner, in which the truthfulness and rightfulness of an argument is displaced out of Georgia and an autonomous Georgian field of knowledge production. Rather, validity is sought in reference to the knowledge of and connections to Anglo-Saxon academia elsewhere, namely the USA and Europe. This undermines the usefulness of such debates for a functional politics of knowledge and reproduces incapacity. The second cleavage I encountered in Georgia is a re-appearance and re-interpretation of Marxism, especially by young scholars, through Georgia's brief stint as an independent social democracy in the 1920s. While potentially promising and interesting, these scholars hit a wall since at present this perspective gives them little or no reference to the dominant Anglo-Saxon field of knowledge that serves to reward, organise and orient social inquiry, sort of like trying to sell orchids when everyone is crazy over tulips even though they are both flowers. At worst then this might create a new connection with them and the remaining elderly, Soviet trained and minded, academics.

The result in all cases, while perceivably fostering the rights of all groups, is however increased competition, lack of coherence, and diminishing returns that characterise social science knowledge production. A competition, in which the participants agree on the game, but attempt to win by arguing about and by reinterpreting the rules. This is peculiarly post-peripheral. In most other places, either the game would be changed, one group would impose a set of

non-negotiable rules and players would leave to start a new game, or perhaps many different games would be played from the get-go.

In general, then, what is shared across all post-socialist countries is that a legitimated, coherent, restricted and controlled field of knowledge production organising the politics of knowledge suddenly became instable, and even more so, the perceived organisational logic unifying it globally was presented as the cause of that destabilisation and unpredictability. This condition, lacking a specific disruption or “revolution” that would directly and automatically install a new politics of knowledge, caused specific post-socialist problems of the politics of knowledge for societies to tackle. However, countries whose statehood and sovereignty was predicated on a dependency to that logic externally, the post-socialist peripheries, now share an increased incapacity to do so. They cannot turn inwards to reorganise their politics of knowledge like most other post-socialist countries have done by means of distancing, renegotiation or reinvention (as many successor parties have done), or by the exploitation and critique or even by celebration and nostalgia (as neo-communists or new nationalistic movements have done); effectively employing “politics of memory ... as an integral part of the establishment of new collective identities and new principles of political legitimacy” (Bernhard and Kubik 2014: 3).

Tellingly, the political systems of post-peripheries have remained largely untouched, in a sense even stable. Even two revolutions followed by heavy reforms in Kyrgyzstan have failed to do much more than scratch the surface of the overarching political system. No drastic new interpretations of these countries’ statehoods have buoyed new political parties or movements to the same extent as has happened in most core or semi-peripheral post-socialist countries. The divergence of post-socialist peripheries is shared while the divergence of the rest of the post-socialist countries is a “true” separation from their individual trajectories. “True” in terms of the capacities and conditions governing those trajectories. To point to Bernhard and Kubik again, “the assessment of the fallen system ... something that is neither uniform in or across countries – is a prerequisite ... for fashioning governance in a new system” (Bernhard and Kubik 2014: 3). What is uniform in the case of post-peripheries – ideal-typically, not categorically – is an incapacity of the assessment of the fallen system



in the first place. A shared divergence. In the extreme, as long as the state itself, which borrowed its existence from the socialist core, exists then the post-peripheral systems cannot even fall so that they could be assessed and relegitimised to a meaningful extent.

#### **4.2 Shared Divergence**

Because of the collapse of the socialist alternative these post-peripheries are no longer perceivable as the hypothetical proto-forms of a more advanced core and in that have lost the legitimation for imagining and defining the future of their statehood. The discrepancies found in the politics of knowledge in these countries create an in-betweenness characteristic of the post-periphery in the grip of increasingly demanding, political and globalising knowledge. It is a politics of knowledge neither definable simply through the means of a sovereign state, national independence, nor divorceable from existing recognition and acknowledgement, nor even one achieved merely through distinction.

Michael Kennedy has described the requirements that globalising knowledge sets upon the politics of knowledge today: “Knowledge can’t flow so easily as other virtual expressions because it must be sifted, reassembled, and assessed. And that means that its nodes of accumulation and transformation matter even in a world of information flows. This mattering does not always work in traditionally knowledgeable ways. As reputations globalize, the distinction of knowledge nodes seems to depend more and more on forms of acknowledgement relatively divorced from knowledge as such” (Kennedy 2014: xi),

The socialist project in its 20<sup>th</sup>-century incarnation was founded on seeking such acknowledgement for an alternative form of knowledge divorced from its competing dominant manifestation. But what becomes of a project, like the so-called Second World, founded on such a search for divergence that then collapses and completely loses its legitimation? When thrown back into the world, which it attempted to undermine or diverge from, specific challenges are apparent. Especially when that dominant form of knowledge is itself undergoing drastic changes related to the function and legitimation of knowledge in which, in Michael Kennedy’s terms, “distinction is dissolved into

recognition.” What does globalising knowledge then entail for the post-socialist condition? The politics of knowledge in post-peripheries is fraught with moral and political ambiguities because of how its connection to one of the main critical perspectives of societal introspection and of resistance towards capitalist forms of knowledge production and social organisation, Marxism, has been undermined; because societal agreements founded upon or emulating the Soviet as well as the socialist model were delegitimised and conjointly social inquiry and social science academia in those regions became delegitimised; because while the previous two problems should have been tackled by politicians and scholars, at the same time globally the era of sovereign national development began to come to an end, and ironically made, so to say, obsolete the struggles that appeared to be of the utmost importance creating “places that used to be serious.”

What then overall characterises the politics of knowledge ? Albert Bergesen (2000) has argued that hegemonic domination in the world-system has always been accompanied by a specific cultural framework and that as cultural frameworks actively change so do social theories. For Bergesen postmodernism is the cultural framework of the contemporary world-system, one that represents heightened intercapitalist rivalry. Bergesen sees this as the appearance of multiple competing voices. This would appear to hold true in cases discussed in Bernhard and Kubik’s research (2014) that show how divergent solutions can produce new and adaptable politics of knowledge. But it appears that in the cases discussed here it rather creates limits and the incapacity to participate in that competition in the first place. Access to institutions of knowledge of the core, focusing on the politics of knowledge, which facilitate cultural frameworks, is becoming increasingly more controlled. Thereby a discrepancy between horizons of political future, realities of present experience and memories of then past is maintained in some cases.

It appears then that the case of post-socialist peripheries in the social sciences is somewhat peculiar. Theories and narratives of modern and post-modern, socialism and post-socialism as well as colonial, imperial, neoliberal and capitalist all carry their incoherent and often mutually exclusive weight in studies of and in the regions. However, rarely do these traditions originate from the regions’ positions in global society. Rather, Western and even semi-peripheral narratives

and models dominate and begin from viewpoints used to define and characterise their own position and predicaments. Sarah Amsler (2007) wrote that sociologists of knowledge and science, who in the past have mobilised en masse to analyse lesser upheavals, have remained curiously silent about the fate of ideas in (some) post-Soviet societies.

Don Kalb (2002) perhaps outlined some reasons for this. In terms of statehood he spoke of three overwhelming properties: the erosion of coherence and cohesion everywhere except in the core, the increased disparity between the core and the periphery and a reception of territories in a highly uneven bundle of capital, goods, information and people (Kalb 2002: 317). The result is that national hierarchies are replaced by “imaginary global ones.” Kalb drew a drastic distinction between the promises and realities of civil society in the post-socialist sphere and the detachment of the economic, political and social structures from the realities of the post-socialist countries. Whereas Neil Brenner (2011) put it something like this: aspects of social space under modern capitalism must be understood as presuppositions, arenas and outcomes of dynamic processes of continual social contestation and transformation; a process with variegated and uneven effects. Brenner underlined that this process is a highly conflict-laden ongoing dialectic that continually produces, reconfigures and transforms the political-economic space at all geographic scales. These descriptions sound clearly problematic for a reactionary politics of knowledge attempting to avoid contestation and yet attempting to prevent a much-needed reform and coherent transformation. It cannot be an easy task to participate in this process in general, while at the same it must be said of the post-peripheries that it cannot be an easy task to stay away from or remain somewhat indifferent to it either.

## 5. Conclusions

Certain post-socialist predicaments have incapacitated an effective politics of knowledge across post-peripheral states and led to a decrease of substantive rationality, particularly visible in the problems of social science and social thought in the post-peripheries. This incapacity and absence – though it cannot be as easily approached through classificatory, taxonomic types of analyses – should be treated

as a phenomenon equal to the politics of knowledge in other post-socialist countries or elsewhere.

Socialism was a global regime closely connected to social thought and state-building, to theory and action, and the repercussions of its fall are equally global and equally connected to the relation of theory and action in a society. And just as socialism was defined as the alternative to Western capitalism, so too the predicaments of post-socialism are affected by the dominant political and economic organisation of the world even after the fall of the Second World. Socialism did not simply leave a vacuum that could be easily filled with any politics of knowledge, be it legitimised by the free markets, nationalism or populism.

Rather, I argue, there is a persistent configuration in post-peripheries' politics of knowledge. Their attempts to construct legitimate substantive rationality that leads to a shared way of life is incommensurate with the statehood that is offered to them by the global community.

Bernhard and Kubik's argument of "the assessment of the fallen system" as "a prerequisite ... for fashioning governance in a new system" (Bernhard and Kubik 2014: 3) reveals how a failure to assess or dysfunctionally assess prevents a new system from emerging and, as is the case of post-peripheries, works to keep the old system in place. The assessment of a fallen system is also not the same as fixing a non-working system, creating a new one where there was none or doing so when the old system was more thoroughly displaced, not just delegitimised. At the same time, the existence of sovereign states is a prerequisite for the current states system, which then again endows these states with rights to their statehood. As long as the state itself, which was given its existence via the socialist core, exists, the post-peripheral systems themselves do not need to fall, even when the socialist alternative is long gone. And they are safeguarded from the necessity of reassessment and relegitimation to a meaningful extent. This gives post-socialism its endurance and significance even 25 years after the collapse of socialism.

Thereby post-peripheral forms of power and privilege seem to be kept in place but also in check and the same attitude is extended to the

knowledge reflected through them. Forms of politics of knowledge, networks and state control from the socialism-that-was are significantly resilient in post-peripheries. In their core the political systems of post-peripheries, despite apparent revolts or renewed constitutions, have remained largely untouched and, in a sense, stable.

At least from the perspective of the politics of knowledge it would appear then that social research on post-socialist states, especially post-peripheries, cannot directly and completely uncritically compare them with other developmental or post-colonial cases. Although this too is true only ideal-typically, the conclusion is nevertheless important at least for research design.

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Juho Korhonen: **COMPARING POST-SOCIALIST PERIPHERIES**

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