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Postcolonialism in International Studies: Two Faces of Theory

Ivan D. Loshkariov 🆔 ✉

MGIMO University, Moscow, Russian Federation

✉ivan1loshkariov@gmail.com

Abstract. Postcolonial theory is gradually entering the research arsenal of international relations, although it is not yet widely represented in modern international political science. The importance of mastering the tools and techniques of this paradigm or a set of relatively close paradigms is associated both with the gradual rejection of the Eurocentric vision of global and regional political history, as well as the identification of spatial and temporal features of theorizing on international issues. In this regard, it is necessary to identify the internal potential of postcolonial theory and those ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations of this theory, which will allow more concrete application of its concepts, interpretations and causalities to international realities. That is why the article attempts to single out the basic types of the postcolonial theory of international relations while revealing their key methodological principles and assessing the originality of the object and purpose of the study. On the basis of the interpretivist principles of the analysis of theories, the author reconstructs the key ontological and epistemological foundations and features of the interpretation of causal relationships in postcolonial way of thinking. The article highlights two main types of postcolonial theory — Postcolonialism of difference and Postcolonialism of interdependence. Despite the similarity in the basic desire to liberate scientific discourse from the techniques and concepts of Eurocentric science, these types of postcolonial thinking differ in the degree of willingness to break ties with the colonial past, in the requirements for the final result of the study, and also in the appreciation of space and social time in theorizing per se. Based on the identified types of postcolonial theory, the author proposes the trajectories of interaction of the theory with other schools of research in international relations, and also identifies geographically limits of these types. Thus, the article demonstrates porousness, analytical potential and adaptiveness of the discussed approaches that makes them more useful for the current IR studies.

Key words: postcolonial theory, Postcolonialism of difference, Postcolonialism of interdependence, international relations, bifocal approach, border thinking

Постколониализм в международных исследованиях: два лика теории

И.Д. Лошкарёв 🆔 ✉

Московский государственный институт международных отношений Министерства иностранных дел Российской Федерации (МГИМО МИД России), Москва, Российская Федерация

✉ivan1loshkariov@gmail.com

Аннотация. Постколониальная теория постепенно входит в исследовательский арсенал международников, хотя пока не представлена достаточно широко в современной международно-политической науке. Важность освоения инструментов и приемов данной теоретической парадигмы или группы родственных

парадигм связана как с постепенным отказом от европоцентричного видения глобальной и региональной политической истории, так и с выявлением пространственных и временных особенностей теоретизирования на международные темы. В этой связи необходимо выявить внутренний потенциал постколониальной теории и те онтологические, эпистемологические и методологические особенности этой теории, которые позволят более конкретно применять к международным реалиям имеющиеся в распоряжении данной парадигмы концепты, их интерпретации и заложенные в них причинно-следственные связи. Именно поэтому автором предложены базовые типы постколониальной теории международных отношений, а также раскрыты их узловые методологические принципы, дана оценка своеобразия объекта и цели исследования. На основании интерпретативистских принципов анализа теорий автор производит реконструкцию ключевых онтологических и эпистемологических оснований, особенностей толкования причинно-следственных связей постколониального «стиля мышления». Выделено два основных типа постколониальной теории — постколониализм различия и постколониализм взаимозависимости. Несмотря на сходство в базовом желании освободить научный дискурс от приемов и концептов европоцентричной науки, эти разновидности выстраивания постколониальной исследовательской программы различаются по степени готовности разорвать связи с колониальным прошлым, по требованиям к конечному результату исследования, а также по оценке пространства и социального времени в теоретизировании как таковом. На основе выявленных типов постколониальной теории автор намечает траектории взаимодействия этой парадигмы с другими школами исследования международных отношений, а также предлагает географически разграничить применение этих типов. Таким образом, продемонстрированы неоднородность, аналитический потенциал и адаптивность представленной парадигмы и возможности для более широкого ее применения в современных международных исследованиях.

Ключевые слова: постколониальная теория, постколониализм различия, постколониализм взаимозависимости, международные отношения, бифокальный подход, пограничное мышление

Introduction

The publication of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) gave a powerful impetus to revising the role of concepts central to the social sciences. From early modernity, these sciences evolved primarily in the West, and, as it transpired, held a substantial share of prejudices and tacit representations reflecting the development paths of European and North American states, as well as the interests of political forces and businesses originating from these regions (Said, 2006, pp. 314—318). As a result, the academic discourse of the countries of the East/non-West[1] became the space of the constitutive outside, seen as the breeding ground of attributed negative characteristics. Whilst western countries were ascribed features such as rational behaviour, progressive development and a capitalist economy, the East, for this claim to hold, was left with irrationality, social backwardness and a primitive economy. This process was incessant as western countries could flaunt their achievements only if the opposite situation existed somewhere else, no matter how imposed, constructed and divorced from reality it was. Thus, as the West transformed, the means and language used to discuss what is conventionally called the East/non-West, or rather, to describe its backwardness and marginalisation mutated, altered and reassembled (Mitchell, 2000, pp. 7—12). This change was visible in the theories, approaches and even research methods of the contemporary social sciences, including International Relations (IR).

Drawing on the historical experiences of the West, the principal theoretical schools of thought in IR impose comprehensive action plans on the so-called East. Modern versions of

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[1] Here and below, the terms non-West and East are used interchangeably, albeit labelling some regions of the world, such as Latin America and Africa, as the East, is disputable.

realism see large non-Western states, such as China, Russia and, to a lesser extent, India, as posing a threat to the West and reproduce the rhetoric of the late Roman Empire: if impossible to defeat, barbarians have to be contained and occasionally punished. Perhaps, that is where the conceptual distinction between "great powers" and "revisionist/emerging powers" comes from: the former belong exclusively to the West and the latter to the underdeveloped periphery. The modern versions of liberalism and partly of constructivism take a paternalistic stance toward the East, seeking to bring "civilisation" to perceived barbarians by changing political regimes, increasing economic interdependence and introducing shared values. This attitude is visible in theses about the varying sovereignty of states, which may range from formal cosmetic sovereignty to the benchmark sovereignty of the West. Moving up this hierarchy is possible only through internal transformation or "enculturation." Overall, variations in sovereignty predetermine the trajectory of globalisation, which "corrects" and guides non-Western states along a prescribed development route (Hobson, 2012, pp. 257—260).

International studies have long been faced with the problem of geographical imbalance in the production of basic concepts and conceptions. The situation has not changed much since Stanley Hoffmann proclaimed IR theory an American science (Hoffmann, 1977). Despite profuse attempts to challenge the dominant approaches and theories, to rethink the history of international relations and how they were explored in the recent past, the discursive framework of theory has barely changed, ignoring the growing body of logical and factual inconsistencies (Bleiker, 1997).

Thus, contradictions and convergences between the West and the East remain a substantive area of research. The appeal to postcolonial theory is not accidental since,

albeit amorphous by definition, it looks at the essence of geographical construction and the causes of imbalances afflicting IR theory and other social sciences. The basic assumption of postcolonial theory is so-called emancipation, aimed at gradually eliminating cultural hierarchies (Alekseeva, 2019, pp. 544—545). Yet, it is not entirely clear how postcolonial theory might develop or what ontological and epistemological commitments it has implicit in it. Therefore, this article sets out to assess the potential of postcolonial theory.

The analysis uses an interpretivist approach to the study of theories. From this perspective, postcolonial theory, just like any other analytical framework competing with it in international studies, seeks both to form judgements about available facts and to rethink the very process of theorising, to justify preferences for one or more interpretations of causality (Jackson, 2016, p. 10). Depending on these preferences, certain ontological and epistemological features and conditions emerge, allowing theory to evolve and maintain internal integrity within the transparent disciplinary and paradigmatic boundaries of the social sciences.

The Two Logics
of Postcolonial Theory

Recognising latent inequalities in the representation of the East and the West suggests two different logics of reasoning. Firstly, postcolonial theory often adopts a "*bifocal approach*," which deconstructs current power relations and formulates an alternative "Eastern" agenda, an "Eastern" language of reassembling social reality. At the heart of "bifocality" is the rejection of the predominant appeal to European historical experience, as well as of references to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia (Elmuradov, 2021, p. 24; Untalan, 2020, p. 41). Without the regulating experience of the West, theorising finds itself in a state of greater freedom, open to new concepts and approaches: the formation of scientific

schools of thought is deliberately rolled back in order to embrace a broader range of updated theories. I call this type of Postcolonialism "Postcolonialism of difference."

Secondly, a postcolonial theory may abandon the logic of counterposing the West versus the East. The notion of difference implies disparate patterns of development, a specific language of description and peculiar interpretations of events. Like the binary of the West and the East, the authenticity attributed to the latter can suppress/distort social realities just as effectively as the permanent marginalisation within Western discourse can (Booth, 1995). It is safe to assume that not only has the West somehow constructed the East, but also the East has taken part in the political and cultural institution of the West. This process was not limited to migration from Asia and Africa; there was also adaptation to the Western standards of scholarship and research, alongside the embracing of political views and indiscriminate premade policy recommendations (Bilgin, 2008, pp. 12—14). This approach draws no clear boundary between the West and the East but depicts a continuum of closely interwoven elements. From a methodological point of view, it is not a rejection of the Western theoretical narrative but a search for common ground between the Western and Eastern approaches, concepts and values, and the ways in which they can enrich each other. I call this version of Postcolonialism "Postcolonialism of interdependence."

These two logics of postcolonial theorising suggest two different visions of social ontology and epistemology, as well as very peculiar attitudes to social time. The first understanding presents the East as an ontologically distinct historical agent, either actual or potential, and a legitimate object of scientific knowledge. Within this logic, decolonisation did not simply launch the liberation of states from political shackles. It also ushered in a new time interval where colonial relations are used to interpret the present. Although these interpretations will differ depending on the peculiarities of metropolitan-colonial relations, what is principal here is the temporal direction of analysis: from the past to the present (Gavristova & Khokholkova, 2020, pp. 39—40). At the same time, this logic of reasoning is prepared to accept the "extension" of available concepts to the historical experience of the East, at least, because it would be impossible otherwise to deconstruct power relations in scientific and political discourse.

In the second case, ontological dualism is superseded by holism: IR are seen as an integrity with multiple demarcations and configurations, both temporary and relatively permanent. International relations, domestic politics and cross-border ties are all part of an intensive horizontal and vertical exchange of capital, ideas and standards. The idea of fixed space and time is alien to this branch of colonial theorising: the multiplicity of temporal relativities and the fragmentation of the space of interactions are assumed as axioms. Hence the meticulous attention to the production of new concepts capable of a more accurate description of this social reality and exempt from reproducing hierarchical relations (Barder, 2015, pp. 130—131).

The Oppressed Postcolonial Agent: Postcolonialism of Difference

If we are to take the division between the East and the West seriously, several important limitations of ontological and epistemological nature will arise. Firstly, the hierarchical arrangement of states indicates that, by definition, the existing narratives about the West are the most difficult to change or eliminate. IR are rooted in the European and North American experience; thus, it is hard to build new, acceptable practices on the direct negation of the current normative framework

(Ivkina, Trusova & Cherniaev, 2019). From an ontological point of view, the postcolonial agent — if such an entity can be constructed after all — will still be limited by the external framework of Western IR (Jabri, 2014, pp. 375—379). In other words, even the deconstruction of current and past Western dominance is doomed to peter out at some point; otherwise, the desired result will be lost.

Secondly, the "bifocal approach" means an uphill struggle against the anti-historicism of IR theories and enriching the discussion on contemporary global and regional relations with the historical experience of the East. In general, the opposite drift towards "historicism" suggests an idiographic focus on details, conditions and trajectories rather than theorising about trends, cause-effect relations and behavioural patterns (Hobson & Lawson, 2008). This version of postcolonial history concentrates on the actors' self-perception and goal-setting, the correlation between the accidental and the inevitable. In terms of research techniques, this means producing a new sequence of facts, introducing emotional and even theatrical-dramatic elements into the narrative of events and working on the "depth" of a theory rather than its scope (Roberts, 2006, pp. 707—708). In effect, the focus on chronology and the sequence of events changes the traditional object of IR theory: interconnections and actors are replaced as such by the very development of IR in a particular geographical area.

The call for "historicism" and theorising about a particular object of study within its framework leads to the problem raised by Friedrich Nietzsche. Invoking a concrete historical experience means constructing a specific rationality where unique practices, both recognised and marginalised, emerge. The resultant rationalities are manifold since there is a sufficiency of regions and distinct cultural communities. This pluralism blurs or even eliminates the very possibility of objective and accurate knowledge: true in one frame of reference, the very same thing may be false in another (Jackson, 2016, pp. 134—137). Postcolonial theory does not propose general criteria for evaluating the resulting knowledge. Instead, it offers an analysis of past practices based on juxtaposing the way the immediate participants reproduced and imagined these practices with how this was done by scholars. But the assumption about the miserable and marginalised position of the East, a belief underpinning international political discourse, comes here under serious threat: this claim will not be true in every specific rationality. In other words, removing one epistemological obstacle leads to the emergence of another.

From the perspective of understanding postcolonial IR, it is vital to maintain the pluralism of results (to acknowledge a diversity of cultural experience) and avoid relativism (i.e. reject both the multiplicity of ways to attain the truth and the multiplicity of truths itself). Thus, postcolonial theory seeks to expose the political interests behind the dominant paradigms and knowledge modes, working towards their gradual convergence, mutual recognition and amalgamation. The *division* of knowledge into colonial and postcolonial is to be replaced with the *circulation* of knowledge obtained by various theoretical schools of thought. This will help overcome the seclusion of academic institutions theorising about international affairs and ensure the recognition of postcolonial theory as a means to produce knowledge on how colonial relations have deformed our world (Darby, 2003, pp. 147—154). In other words, the academic mainstream, on the one hand, is blamed for anti-historicism and, on the other, serves as an epistemological "anchor" preventing alternative versions of theory from falling into the category of the "non-scientific."

Despite all the difficulties of their practical implementation, the principles of historicism and the non-linear evolution of IR make it possible to construct a spatial

epistemology where postcolonial agency is ensured through exploring the mutual *positioning* of an established set of actors (Elmuradov, 2021, pp. 29—31).

And this, in turn, pays the way for a new global social ontology. In current theories, the East (non-West) is already marginalised at three levels. Some countries or societies are denied development altogether. Others are faced with utter disregard for the painfulness and coerciveness of their following borrowed and imposed development models. Finally, the possible influence on the current world order of the non-Western states that have succeeded in developing according to Western patterns is viewed as a matter of secondary importance. But, instead of eliminating these levels or causing them to collapse, the "bifocal" approach breaks them down into further sub-levels and realigns them. Social, political and discursive inequalities are desirable since they make differences possible. As long as such differences exist and are reproduced, the marginalised East has agency, which is due to developing in a direction different from that of the West and exists only insomuch as these differences are acknowledged in concrete states (Matin, 2013, pp. 354—355, 366—368). Something of a scientific and cultural "decolonisation" of the East occurs this way, with agency treated as an "option" rather than a hierarchical advantage (Tlostanova, 2020).

Although the desired agency of the East turns out to be heterogeneous and restricted by narratives about the circumstances in which the social, cultural and political life of Eastern states takes place, postcolonial theory, using the "bifocal approach," destroys the passive homogeneity of IR, providing numerous grounds for revising the teleology of democratic transition, economic modernisation and globalisation. At the level of epistemology, however, the resulting knowledge is only possible through an ongoing dialogue with dominant theories.

Yet, quite paradoxically, the recognition of ontological and epistemological limitations makes it possible to theorise in a postcolonial vein. The value of such theorising is not in discovering any general laws of development or clarifying details about whole classes of phenomena. Rather, such theorising generates holistic narratives about specific phenomena and narrow problem areas that often have no counterpart elsewhere (Jackson, 2016, pp. 168—170). Such an approach allows one to determine what factors were decisive in a particular tectonic shift in international situations and what alternative options were available. For the East/non-West, this means not only an internal plurality and multifactoriality but also a preponderance of less explored alternatives since the history of the East is chronologically longer than that of Europe. Naturally, there is also a need for extensive historical research.

The Continuum of Postcolonial Interdependence

It is quite possible to construct and explore identities without denying and fundamentally opposing the Other. Colonialism not only produced a classification of inequalities in the world, but also geographically distributed the resulting inequalities. This classification gave rise to ideas about the ways and means of knowing the social world, exploiting the contradictions between local experiences and the "global" Eurocentric rules. If the colonial experience is built on distinctions and the denial of the "development" and self-sufficiency of Eastern culture and political life, postcolonial theory should avoid distinctions and denials in every possible way. Arguments about the lack, absence or even non-existence of certain characteristics in non-Western societies are categorically rejected (Mbembe, 2001, pp. 5—7). Hence, the need to overcome traditional epistemology, disciplinary boundaries and the distance between the cognised and the cogniser. Walter Mignolo

calls this approach "border thinking," emphasising the principal focus of the researcher on the formation of interdisciplinary spaces, the application of hermeneutics (rather than more rigorous positivist methodological approaches) and building a research logic from facts, rather than relying on proof by contradiction (i.e. denying the Western historical experience) (Mignolo, 2012, pp. 9—18). "Border thinking" implies that we do not have all the facts about the East available to us, and there are many hidden circumstances and causal mechanisms yet to be revealed. Whilst the marginalisation of the East is evident in discourse and pervasive global institutions, epistemological inequalities produce less obvious forms of colonial legacy and its reproduction.

"Border thinking" questions both the validity of the opposition between the East and the West and the generally accepted division of history into pre-modern, modern and post-modern. There is a hint at "phased development" and the belief that all corners of the world have passed or will pass through the same consecutive stages. Yet, in reality, instead of the "obligatory" stages of development and what Fernand Braudel called *la longue durée*, historical relations are characterised by hybridity, a mixture of opposites and situationality: schematic stages and cycles prove to be analytical constructs suppressing the temporal diversity of events and processes. Therefore, instead of modernity and postmodernity, it is proposed to distinguish yet another period of history — transmodernity,[2] a period characterised by uncertainty, instability and a combination of incongruities (Pavlov, 2021, pp. 176—198). An alternative option is the idea of multiple modernities, i.e. the abandonment of the substantive unity of the Western political and economic project (Dirlik, 2003). In essence, the differences between the concepts of transmodernity and multiple modernities are stylistic, not semantic.

Similarly, social space in Postcolonialism of interdependence is translocal rather than sharply divided into the local and the global. As Paul Gilroy writes, space is global in scope but not content. Postcolonial theory sees no point in dividing the world into the sovereign territories of states; thus, a global scope does not bind unconnected units together but points to the limitations imposed on social and political activity by nature (biosphere) (Gilroy, 2004, pp. 80—84). Likewise, the local does not exist either, since it cannot be contrasted in transmodernity with any particular spatial hierarchy.

The concepts of transmodernity and translocality have not been unequivocally accepted by all postcolonial theorists. Yet, these concepts accurately capture the essence of two main theses of postcolonial studies. Firstly, Europe did not walk a single path to arrive at modernity and colonialism. Therefore, the ways of marginalising the so-called East/non-West and the languages to describe it are not homogenous and cannot be reduced to a common denominator (Hall & Hobson, 2010). Secondly, some states in the East/non-West did tread the thorny path of imitating and borrowing both imagined and actual achievements of the West; other Eastern states and other polities disappeared or were defeated in the struggle against the Western colonisers, i.e. were replaced by European modernity. All these countries share, to an extent, the responsibility for global inequalities and the marginalisation of the East (Zarakol, 2011, pp. 38—45, 54—56).

The multiplicity of implicit Eurocentric and regulatory forms compels one to reconsider the object of international studies. The intertwining of different processes and influences implies a holistic social ontology where everything is part of a single complex reality. States, social groups and businesses are not isolated or cohesive actors. They reflect a

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[2] The term was coined by the Argentinian philosopher Enrique Dussel.

collective experience; they are reproduced and incorporated into everyday life through institutional practices. In many ways, they are still a result of some characteristics being attributed to groups from without, as well as of the assimilation (rejection or acceptance) of the ascribed features (Vieira, 2018, pp. 145—151). Postcolonialism of interdependence sees as the object of study the *reaction* of collective communities of the West and non-West to transmodernity and translocality, to a multiplicity of spatial and temporal multidirectional influences.

Since a researcher cannot take into account all reactions to all external influences, and the number of possible social units is inordinate, Postcolonialism of interdependence is faced with the acute problem of the intellectuals (or the issue of sampling and reflexivity). In essence, the question is to what extent the actors and external influences selected by a researcher are the results of scientific inquiry and to what of personal or political preferences. External conditions affect both the object of study and the researcher; therefore, it is unclear whether affiliation with a marginalised social group means more productive scholarly work. Patrick Jackson believes that this problem is cancelled, firstly, by articulating the researcher's social and political affiliation and, secondly, by maximising the scope of possible alternative reactions (Jackson, 2016, pp. 185—204).

The problem of the intellectuals indicates that postcolonial theory (at least, Postcolonialism of interdependence) recognises not only the historical and discursive marginalisation of the non-West/East but also the existence of some hidden forms and structures of the relationship between the West and the non-West (transfactuality). Despite the widespread popularity of quantitative methods (Degterev, 2019), the approach described above means, epistemologically, a principled focus on qualitative methods, as well as on interpreting and explaining facts rather than merely reporting them. In Postcolonialism of interdependence, the findings will never escape subjectivity, which is seen as an advantage contributing to the awareness of existing problems and contradictions. Moreover, postcolonial theory has a unique opportunity to rely on the argument that standards of scholarship and objective knowledge are the product of colonialism and the marginalisation of the non-West, i.e. they need to be rethought and deconstructed. Postcolonialism of interdependence gravitates in many ways towards reflexivist scholarship, which has been making its way into international studies since the late 1980s (Hamati-Ataya, 2013).

The Two Faces of Theory

One of the early postcolonial theorists, Homi K. Bhabha stressed that turning the whole world into a research project will inevitably lead to heightened and not always justified tensions and divisions, to "schizoid fragmentation." Yet, such a project may yield something new to the social and political sciences (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 216—217). Since postcolonial theory strives to overcome the limitations of the dominant schools of thought, dividing lines within the theory itself are inescapable.

In reality, these variations within postcolonial theory are neither clear nor pronounced since the theory continues to evolve. Moreover, it is extremely sensitive to the geographical position of the study object and the researcher and thus reflects various historical and social experiences, being extremely resistant to generalisations about them. Clear distinctions within the theory give grounds for a pragmatic discussion on its convergence with other paradigms, leading to a dialogue on ontological and epistemological problems and the prospects of applying postcolonial analytical optics.

The main features of Postcolonialism of difference and Postcolonialism of interdependence are due to variations of an ontological nature (Table 1). Postcolonialism of difference presupposes a dual social ontology where the West is clearly distinguished from the East and is not subject to any palpable influence from the latter. In this context, the main task of research is "opening up" the East and destroying the artificial Eurocentric homogeneity of IR and related sciences. Hence the concern for the future and the development trajectory the East will choose. Postcolonialism of interdependence, on the contrary, no longer sees any homogeneity in the world and refuses to identify IR with intergovernmental relations. Despite fragmentation and heterogeneity, phenomena and processes are still closely linked and interdependent (ontological holism). Therefore, the study of the East is not so much a rectification of centuries-old injustices as an attempt to understand the role and place of specific units in the complex interweaving of social and political interrelations. This means a commitment to the present and abandoning efforts to forecast and predict.

Both strands of postcolonial theory refrain from exploring international political reality as a whole but look at its smaller fragments. Moreover, Postcolonialism implies a logical inversion in IR theory: former peripheries are brought into focus; former heroes are desacralised; silent communities get the chance to narrate their story (Gavristova & Khokholkova, 2020, pp. 86—87). In practice, this can translate into very different research objectives. In other words, Postcolonialism of differences aims to study development and, ultimately, tries to answer the question "Who is to blame?" and identify the East's development trajectories predetermined by the past. Postcolonialism of interdependence, however, is not looking for ways to shift historical responsibility, concentrating on alternatives and trying to answer the question "What is to be done?"

Table 1

Two Main Types of Postcolonial Theory in IR

Criteria	Postcolonialism of difference	Postcolonialism of interdependence
Ontological foundations	Dualism: The East and the West are separate social realities shaped by relations of marginalisation	Holism: The East and West construct each other in the course of international communication. This is an ongoing process
Epistemological foundations	Phenomenalism: The knowledge of the East is marginalised but fully accessible	Transfactuality: The knowledge of the East is marginalised and not available in its entirety
Methodological principles	– Historicism; – inter-paradigm dialogue; – multi-level agency/actorness; – non-linear development	– "Border thinking"; – the conditionality of agency/ actorness; – non-linear time and space
Epistemological and methodological problems	The problem of relativism: the relativity of the basic assumptions of post-colonial theory	The problem of the intellectuals: the relativity of the findings of postcolonial theory
Attitude to social time	Postmodernity as a response to the mistakes of the past	Transmodernity as a state of "fluid" transition
Research goal	Analysis of a situation as it progresses	Analysis of external conditions and responses to them
End product	Analytical narrative	Identification of possible alternative responses from actors/social units

Source: compiled by the author.

Postcolonial theories have not yet received much attention in Russian international political science, to a degree due to Russia's/the USSR's peculiar position in the world (its nuclear arsenal, the status of a UN founding member, etc.). Yet, like many other East/non-West states, Russia needs a painstaking analysis of its role and prospects in contemporary IR, its international identity and the identities of its neighbouring states. Many episodes in the history of Moscow / St. Petersburg's relations with the world have been covered up and papered over, and they need to be interpreted and included in the general discussion on the avenues and long-term goals of Russia's foreign policy. From this point of view, postcolonial theories allow not only a debate about the facts and their interpretations, but also a discussion of whether modern Russia is part of the West or a stable element of the non-West, a discursive "constitutive outside" or an ontologically detached social unit with its own trajectory of development. This has implications for understanding the development prospects of the entire post-Soviet space. Roughly speaking, Moldova's or Kazakhstan's multifaceted policy can be seen as an attempt to destroy a particular social reality constructed by Russia or as a natural process of the emergence of new levels of interaction, some of them taking the post-Soviet countries beyond their usual geographical and temporal frameworks. Whilst there is comparative unanimity in Western political analysis as regards these alternatives, Russian IR experts committed to a postcolonial logic may offer counterarguments or even formulate alternative assessments of the current situation. Postcolonialism of difference would seem to be better suited to the task.

Conclusion

The analysed varieties of postcolonial theory have some practical implications. Postcolonialism of difference has ontological and epistemological foundations very similar to those of constructivism and could benefit the latter. A synthesis between this strand of Postcolonialism and constructivism may be used in investigating the patterns and features of the development of macropolitical identity and exploring the density and extent of social time (temporality) in specific geographical areas. In contrast, Postcolonialism of interdependence is closer to the other critical theories — feminist, racialist and post-Marxist ones. Reflexivity inherent in these schools of thought allows a more detailed assessment of the state of structures regulating and reproducing hierarchical relations, be they economic, political or cultural.

From a geographical perspective, Postcolonialism of difference is probably more suitable for the study of the regions and countries that seem ambivalent and not clearly distinct from the West. Analysis of non-Western countries, juxtaposed with the ontological Other, can provide valuable insights into the root causes of their international successes and failures, the peculiarities of their foreign policy identities and military-political thought. This holds for the post-Soviet space, some North African and Latin American countries.

Postcolonialism of interdependence is more productive when applied to regions and states that have passed through a colonial period and are now looking for their own development path, which might not be free from borrowings. This subtle and nuanced variant of postcolonial theory can keep researchers from an unnecessary apologia for the pre-colonial past and all sorts of distortions in research (radical versions of Afrocentrism, Islamocentrism, etc.).

Overall, the potentiality of postcolonial theory in international studies is not limited to coalescing with related paradigms. The blending of the ontological and epistemological foundations of the

two varieties may well yield a new version of Postcolonialism that could, for example, combine ontological dualism and transfactuality. Probably, we are now on the threshold of a new generation of postcolonial theory waiting to be explored.

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About the author: *Loshkariov Ivan Dmitrievich* — PhD (Political Science), Associate Professor, the Department of Political Theory, MGIMO University; Research Fellow, Institute of International Studies, MGIMO University; ORCID: 0000-0002-7507-1669; e-mail: ivan1loshkariov@gmail.com