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# Imagining the 'West' in the Context of Global Coloniality: The Case of Post-Soviet Youth Migration to Finland

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## Abstract

The article argues that the post-Soviet youth construct their migratory projects as an effort towards social distinction vis-a-vis post-socialist imaginary. We argue that their migration can be understood as a search for distinctiveness and for what is perceived as a 'better', that is, more western, lifestyle. Analysing their narratives through the prism of imagination, we demonstrate how young Russian-speakers vision the position of the post-socialist condition within the global coloniality of power and claim their belonging to the western project as educated young people with global cultural capitals. The article brings the case of Russian-speakers' migration within debates on global coloniality and offers a contribution to the theorising of post-socialist imaginaries in the context of global coloniality and sociological imagination. The analysis is based on a multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in 2014–2016 in Helsinki, Finland.

## Keywords

Finland, global coloniality, migration, post-colonialism, post-socialism, Russia, youth

## Introduction

Post-colonial critics have called for the deconstruction of 'modernity' as a historical process and for problematising the concept of modernity (Bhambra, 2007, 2014). This deconstruction argues that modernity needs to be understood as a specific *narrative*

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evoking the idea of a particular temporal rupture (from traditional or pre-modern to modern) that resulted in sociocultural, political and economic transformations located in Europe (Bhambra, 2007). Post-colonial deconstruction engages also with the politics of knowledge-production in developing epistemologies of the South (De Sousa Santos, 2014) and southern theories (Connell, 2007). Thus, a specific geographical imaginary of the global North and South is often evoked. This imaginary can be complicated by spaces that are located west of the 'East' and east of the 'West' (Boatcă, 2007; Mayblin et al., 2016), or those who have become 'poor of the North' after the collapse of socialist system (Tlostanova, 2011). In this article, we ask how new post-socialist subjects position themselves in relation to this narrative and imaginaries of the 'West' through migration.

We analyse how post-Soviet youth make sense of their migration to Finland and imagine it as part of the global 'West'. Young Russian-speakers are searching for what in the imaginary space informed by global coloniality (Quijano, 2000), is to them a 'better', that is, more western lifestyle. Thus, in order to understand the migration projects and motivations of the post-Soviet youth born and/or raised after state socialism, we need to draw on the framework of global coloniality.[1]

By global coloniality we refer to the 'model of power relations that came into existence as a consequence of the Western imperial expansion but did not end with the official end of colonialism' (Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2012: 7; see also Quijano, 2000, 2007). The effects of global coloniality continue to live in cultural, labour and intersubjective relations as well as in knowledge production affecting the ways in which people imagine the world and their location in it. The starting point of our analysis is that global coloniality includes not only historical relations between global metropoles and ex-colonies, but marks today's ex-third world, ex-socialist and western subjects alike (Tlostanova, 2012: 133; see also Hall, 1996).

Global coloniality is based on the idea of classifying people in relation to the colonial matrix of power and marginalising non-western subjects under Euro-centred world power (Quijano, 2000). In this framework, Eastern-European and Russian 'Other' have been seen as not quite European and not quite white – Europe's Eastern 'Other' (Boatcă, 2007). Russia – although an empire itself – is included in the position of coloniality vis-a-vis the West. The collapse of the Soviet Union symbolised the winning of the capitalist modernity, through which Russia and former Soviet Union republics have taken the position of the 'poor North' and developed a catching-up logic (Tlostanova, 2011). In this article, we thus analyse how post-Soviet young people see their position in a global capitalist modernity and how it relates to their imaginings of migration.

The analysis is based on ethnographic research of young Russian-speaking migrants' lives in Helsinki conducted in 2014–2016 by the first author. In what follows, the article presents the context and discusses the conceptual framework arguing that coloniality is a useful analytical lens to understand young Russian-speakers' imagination in migration. We then present a multi-sited ethnographic study the article is based on followed by the analysis of young Russian-speakers' imaginaries of Finland as the 'West', the notions of difference between home and the 'West' and self-orientalising conceptions of themselves. We conclude the article by methodological implications for migration research and arguing that global sociology (Bhambra and De Sousa Santos, 2017) should further analyse the effects of coloniality beyond the immediate presence of colonial power.

## Russian-Speakers in Finland

Since the 1990s until 2015, Russia has been the top country of origin for immigrants and the second most popular destination for immigrants after the USA (UN, 2018). The Russian diaspora is the third largest in the world: over 11 million Russians live outside of Russia all over the world (UN, 2016). Significant Russian minorities live in ex-Soviet Union countries (Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Belarus and Baltic states), but also in the European Union (Germany, Spain, Italy) and in the USA (Pew Research Center, 2016). Russian-speakers constitute the largest group of migrants also in their neighbouring country of Finland, a member state of the European Union since 1995. Finland has a population of merely 5.5 million of which a little over 300,000 are foreign-born (Statistics Finland, 2018). With over 75,000 Russian-speakers living in Finland in 2016, they represent one-quarter of foreign-speakers in Finland (Statistics Finland, 2018).[2]

Russian-speakers occupy an ambivalent position in Finland. On the one hand, Russians experience racialisation, negative stereotyping and labour market discrimination (Kobak, 2013; Krivonos, 2017; Larja et al., 2012), which partly stem from the difficult historical relation between the countries.[3] On the other hand, the histories of the two countries are closely connected – for example, Finland was part of the Russian Empire in 1809–1917 – so Russians have always been part of Finland. Moreover, there are several minority groups with Finnish ethnic origins living in Russia, including Ingrian Finns who were able to apply for a residence permit in Finland within a special programme in 1991–2016. Nowadays, Russians are the largest group among naturalised foreigners in Finland (Statistics Finland, 2016).

Finland as 'Europe' and the 'West' in post-Soviet youth imaginaries should be contextualised within Finland's own historically precarious belonging to the 'West' and whiteness (Keskinen, 2014). Finland's own construction of Europeanness has in many ways been based on distancing from Russia (Puuronen, 2011) and been historically produced at a cost. The racial hierarchies produced by scientific racism in the 19th and 20th centuries assigned Finns a status of non-white and non-European, which led some Finnish scientists to invest in forceful counter-arguments (Näre, 2018; Tervonen, 2014). This effort involved racialisation and subjugation of indigenous Sámi people to prove Finns were Europeans and white. Finland is a latecomer to 'the West' and became identified with Europe after the collapse of the 'Eastern bloc' and was previously seen as a grey zone between Europe and the USSR. Despite the fact that Finland has not been a colonial empire – even though Sámi people have had a subjugated and racialised status – its belonging to the 'West' and symbolic geographies of Europeanness has been produced through 'colonial complicity', that is, the processes through which (post-)colonial practices and imaginaries have become accepted in the Nordic countries (Mulinari et al., 2009: 17). Regardless of Finland's historically peripheral and recent status in the global West, we show how the claims to belonging to Europe and 'the West' have been crucial to young Russian-speakers migrating to Finland. Although Finland was part of the Russian Empire, Finland has become part of 'the West' while post-Soviet countries have become representatives of a failed socialist modernity with Russian-speaking migrants having a racialised status as not-properly-white (Krivonos, 2017).

## Migratory Imaginations in the Context of Global Coloniality

The post-socialist 'East–West migration', that is, migration from post-socialist countries to Western European countries and to the USA and Canada, which followed the collapse of the Soviet regime, challenges the dichotomy in migration theory between voluntary labour migration and forced, refugee mobility (Kopnina, 2005). While the multiple economic crises following the collapse of the Soviet Union forced the people to seek a better future abroad, their migratory trajectories and projects resembled those of labour migrants rather than 'forced migrants' (e.g. King and Mai, 2008; Kopnina, 2005; Näre, 2012).

Migrations from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Former Soviet Union (FSU) have been mainly analysed in the historical context of the collapse of the Soviet Union and/or as labour migrations in the aftermath of the EU enlargement (Cretu, 2016; Datta, 2009; Fox et al., 2012; Kopnina, 2005; Manolova, 2018). This research has mainly constructed CEE and FSU migrants as economic subjects, as labour supply for Western European labour markets (Datta, 2009; Fox et al., 2012; Manolova, 2018).

Some scholars have analysed post-socialism and post-Soviet space, as well as migration from post-socialist countries to Western Europe, from a post- or decolonial lens aiming to capture intertwined relations of the spatially positioned world (Baker, 2018; Buchowski, 2006; Mayblin et al., 2016; Samaluk, 2015, 2016; Silova et al., 2017; Stenning, 2005; Suchland, 2011). Chari and Verdery's (2009) invitation to 'think between the posts' – that is, post-socialism and post-colonialism – has provided scholars with the framework to give up the vision of post-colonialism and post-socialism as analytics used for separate parts of the world. They argue that post-colonialism and post-socialism should be seen as historical processes within global reach. Social scientists should, therefore, analyse the effects of the collapse of state socialism beyond places that were under state socialism, as well as the consequences of colonialism and decolonisation beyond the spaces that have been empires or have been colonised. This argument resonates with the broader post-colonial and decolonial critique that has challenged the perception of the world divided into spaces 'with' or 'without' colonial histories and has argued, instead, that spatialised hierarchies of modernity established as a result of colonial conquest have been global (Bhambra, 2007; Hall, 1996; Mignolo, 2000; Mills, 1997). Thus, Nordic and post-socialist countries have been no exception to these processes (Baker, 2018; Keskinen et al., 2009; Tlostanova, 2012). Post-colonial and decolonial arguments draw attention to the emergence of modernity in the broader histories of colonialism and empire, which have produced *global* racialised hierarchies, imaginaries and division of the world. The starting point of this perspective is that although political colonialism has been formally eliminated, the relationship between the 'West' and others continue to be the relations of coloniality (Quijano, 2000; see also Hall, 1996). The project of modernity is inseparable from coloniality: hence, modernity/coloniality (Mignolo, 2000). Global coloniality continues to exist long after historical colonialism itself and lives in geo-historical contexts beyond the immediate presence of a colonial empire, affecting both post-colonial and post-socialist subjects (Tlostanova, 2011).

In line with this logic, existing research has shown that the East/West dichotomy and teleological idea of progress are at the centre of migration from post-socialist countries (Andreouli and Howarth, 2019; Samaluk, 2015, 2016). Barbara Samaluk (2016) has defined the CEE workers' relationship to the West through the framework of symbolic violence and discourses of self-colonisation. According to Samaluk (2016), the strategies of those wishing to migrate were guided by the neo-colonial symbolic power that constructed 'the West' as a place where one can acquire more superior and transnationally recognised cultural capital. The choices of CEE professionals to move to the West were informed by what Samaluk (2015) has referred to as 'self-colonial imagination'. In addition, Andreouli and Howarth (2019) have shown the ways young Romanian nationals in Britain reproduced the orientalist schema of West vs. East, and saw their own belonging to Europe as precarious and not fully westernised.

Madina Tlostanova (2012, 2017), writing on Russia, has described the post-socialist as a complex position in the configuration of global coloniality, referring to it as a void. On the one hand, Russia has constituted itself as an empire in relation to its own subaltern Others (Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2012). Colonial relations initiated in Tsarist Russia were further reproduced by the Soviet 'civilisational' and 'modernising' mission in relations to its colonies. These relations continue to inform contemporary mobilities to Russia (Abashin, 2014). Russian identity in contemporary Russia acquires a racial character as white, with colour-based references and racialisation of people from the Caucasian region and Central Asia as 'black' (Sotkasiira, 2016). On the other hand, Russia has been considered as the not-quite-western and not-quite-capitalist empire of modernity – 'a Janus-faced racialised empire' considered as the Other to the West, to use Tlostanova's (2015: 47) terms. In addition, after the collapse of the state socialist system, post-socialist subjects were further required to join the only possible neo-liberal capitalist modernity. The collapse of the Soviet system produced the 'end of history' effect, with the vision that a socialist subject will vanish and be educated into how to become fully modern in a neo-liberal way (Buchowski, 2006; Samaluk, 2016; Tlostanova, 2017). Russia has thus become seen as the 'poor of the North', having its own South and East – yet, refusing to be compared to the 'poor South' (Tlostanova, 2011). Post-socialist space can then take different positions in relation to colonialism being both a former colony and a coloniser in relation to its external and internal others (Mayblin et al., 2016). This position offers a contribution to the discussion of global sociology that aims to deconstruct the dominance of Euro-centric epistemological North (Bhambra and De Sousa Santos, 2017).

We argue that young Russian-speakers' migrations to Finland are no exception to the global pervasiveness of coloniality as they imagine Finland primarily as part of 'the West' and a space where more 'modern' lifestyles can be achieved. We focus on *imagination* as a driving force of migration and argue that imagining is not an individual but a collective act (Appadurai, 1990). What seem to be individual imaginings are in fact located within wider cultural and historical frameworks. In our analysis, we demonstrate how young people produce the notions of 'the West' as more progressive and superior, and understand their migratory projects to Finland as a distinction vis-a-vis non-modern post-socialist life.

## A Multi-Sited Ethnography of Young Russian-Speakers' Lives in Helsinki, Finland

The analysis is based on a multi-sited ethnographic study of young Russian-speaking migrants' lives and employment in the Helsinki capital region conducted in 2014–2016 by Daria. Initially, the study aimed to analyse the ways young Russian-speaking migrants navigate labour migrant insecurity in Finland and make their ways towards employment after migration. The fieldwork traced multiple sites, through which young migrants search for work such as job fairs, NGOs, career counselling, CV, language and integration courses. Thus, following the sites through which young migrants search for work as a strategy to gain access to the field moved the research towards a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995), which allowed Daria to meet young Russian-speakers with different backgrounds, migration histories and statuses, as well as language skills. In addition, one of the strategies was to access the daily lives of young migrants through informal meetings and gatherings of young Russian-speakers in Helsinki. Daria's Russian background, similar age and native language skills facilitated access to the field and establishment of rapport.

The fieldwork also included semi-structured interviews by Daria. A total of 54 young Russian-speakers in Helsinki were interviewed, aged 20 to 32 years, 20 of whom were male and 34 female, from Russia, Estonia, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia – the majority coming from Russia and Estonia, which represent the two largest migrant groups in Finland. Research participants from Russia came from the dominant majority backgrounds. All but one were born outside Finland. All the interviews were conducted in Russian, recorded and transcribed, lasted on average 80 minutes and were semi-structured around young people's biographies before and after migration to Finland. During 2014–2018, Daria kept in touch with key research participants through informal meet-ups and social media. All the research participants were informed about the aims of the research and gave verbal permission to use interview and observation data on conditions of anonymity.[4] The research participants were given Daria's contact information and had the right to withdraw from the research at any stage. In order to protect the anonymity of our research participants, we use pseudonyms when quoting them.

Both interviews and participant observations are used for analysis in this article. The interview transcripts and ethnographic field notes were analysed inductively using thematic analysis, which meant reading and organising data around key themes. In practice, this meant reading interview transcripts and field notes, highlighting key themes and recording patterns within the whole dataset. Although the theoretical framework of coloniality did not inform this research from the start, the construction of young people's destinations as 'the West' and distinctions vis-a-vis their imagined lives at home were identified as one of the key themes during analysis.

## Imagining 'the West'

Although imagination has received relatively little attention in sociology (Benson, 2012), recent studies have shown the role that imagination plays in social life and particularly in migration (Adams, 2009; Benson, 2012; Koikkalainen and Kyle, 2016; Smith, 2006).

Research has emphasised the role of imagination in the decision to migrate, creating a desire to be in a particular place (Koikkalainen and Kyle, 2016; Manolova, 2018).

The imaginings of post-Soviet youths' destination are revealed in the interviews. It is *Zapad* ('the West') or *zagranitsa* (abroad) that young people mention persistently as an essentialised construct (see also Manolova, 2018 and Yurchak, 2006 on late Soviet imaginings of the West). When the first author asked her research participants what motivated them to move to Finland, a typical answer was often: 'I have always dreamed to live in the West.'

As Alisa put it: 'The USA was somewhere far away, while Finland was close by.' Similarly, Inna explained: 'I always dreamed of America, I wanted to live and study in America because you hear about it all the time. I wanted to travel, to live among foreigners, learn about other cultures.' Yet, Inna did not manage to get a visa to go to the USA and moved to Finland as an au pair. Finland as a destination was picked up almost by chance as it was a Finnish family that the au pair agency found for her.

Young Russian-speakers did not envision migrating to Finland for some attraction the country might hold, but because it was perceived as part of the global 'West' and more accessible due to geographical proximity. These are the imaginings of their future life in the 'West' as opposed to their hometowns that motivated their migration. By positioning their destination as the 'West', young Russian-speakers express a vision of their potential futures at home as different from what they had imagined as life in the 'West'.

In the interview excerpt below, Anna presents a rich narrative of her motivations to move to Finland. Anna was born and raised in a regional capital in the north-west of Russia. Although economic reasons emerged during the conversation, it was her imagining of the 'West' and a vision of herself abroad that she talked about extensively:

> Why did I move? Because I did not want this standard life: you graduate, you get married, live in a *khruschevka* [Soviet concrete-panel apartment block], you work in a bank with papers, and then go to your parents' *dacha* [countryside house]. I did not want this, it was boring, it was so predictable and so uninteresting. Would my life end when I graduated from the university? *Khruschevka*, an apartment loan, *dacha* instead of Italy (laughing)? I did not want this, I had so much life energy.

Anna not only imagined her life abroad but also her life had she stayed in her hometown. She explained her migration project as a claim to a different way of living from the one she retrospectively imagined at home after graduation. According to Anna's vision, the future awaiting her at home would be lived through the symbols of the Soviet past and the post-Soviet present, such as *khruschevka* – a concrete-panelled apartment block developed in the Soviet Union in the 1960s as a project of mass housing, and *dacha* – a countryside house where families cultivate vegetables. Notably, it is the Soviet past that continues to define the present: the architecture comes to symbolise a stagnated and boring lifestyle of the past generations.

It is not the desire to migrate in order to have a 'normal life' elsewhere, as often described in relation to post-socialist migration (King and Mai, 2008; Kopnina, 2005; Manolova, 2018). Quite on the contrary, for Anna it is a desire to escape a 'standard' and 'energyless' life – precisely the one she considers to be 'normal';[5] a life, which would

'end after graduation'. It is significant that Anna refers to her 'life energy' with energy being a symbol of the future and potential, which she distinguishes against a place that can only offer a post-Soviet lifestyle imagined through somewhat unexciting weekends in *dacha*. The reference to traveling in Italy as contrasted with *dacha* suggests a desire for a class and lifestyle distinction (Bourdieu, 1979). Although what Anna perceived as a 'normal life' with a white-collar job, an apartment loan and weekends in *dacha* could be imagined as achievable in her hometown, it is a picture of a life frozen in the past, out of the course of time that she depicted.

The desire for distinctiveness at the core of Anna's migratory project is further depicted by the references to her parents:

> My parents also kept telling me 'Go live abroad, the world is open for you, do not limit yourself to one place.' Nothing kept me in [hometown], I thought my boyfriend would go with me, he is a programmer with fluent English, I finished university, I had fluent English too.

Anna's references to her parents and their encouragement to explore the 'open world' refer to Anna's belonging to the first post-Soviet generation, for whom travelling abroad became easier, as opposed to the generation of her parents. Representations of abroad or Europe resonate with representations of cosmopolitan lifestyles and the global (see also Andreouli and Howarth, 2019). Through their cultural capitals such as language skills and higher education interviewees bridge themselves with the imagined futures in 'the West'.

It is against the backdrop of a dull *khruschevka* and her parents' lives as images of the past that Anna referred to a 'beautiful private house':

> I always wanted to try to live abroad, because we watch western movies, the lives of youth from the West and America are so different from our life, absolutely different life. It is so beautiful in the cinema, I wanted to try it, how they live in beautiful private houses, so cool, so clean.

Globally circulating mass-mediated images have made it possible for many people, like Anna, to imagine a life abroad. Idealised images of a life abroad through movies as a life in a 'beautiful private house' is opposed to a dull life in a *khruschevka*. Against the backdrop of a Soviet state-built concrete-panelled building, a 'beautiful private house' materialises a middle-class lifestyle in Western Europe. Anna did not describe the life that she had *experienced* before migration – it is the life that Anna *imagined* through binary opposition between *khruschevka* and a 'beautiful private house'.

Similarly to Anna, Olga reflected on her cultural capital being wasted in her hometown:

> Something was eating away at me in my hometown; what am I doing here with my English skills? I wanted something else. Then, the company in which I worked, its manager was American, it affected me too. Then the company was closing, so I thought it was a good chance to try my luck.

Olga's self-questioning of 'what am I doing here?' suggests a feeling of being out of place with her skills and cultural capitals. Her hometown was imagined by Olga as a place with little potential for self-realisation. Migration is then tied to a feeling of

self-transformation and self-realisation in a new geographical place. The difference between 'the West' and their hometowns, which came as an unquestionable being for the interviewees, can refer to the construction of geographical space through the meanings of time (Chakrabarty, 2000). The future, which Anna imagined for her life, could not be found in the space 'locked up' in the past – with the symbols of (post-)Soviet life. What is common in Olga's and Anna's narrations is the construction of locality through the meanings of time: 'here', their hometowns, was seen through the prism of the images that belong to the past. By situating home in Russia temporally in the past in contrast with 'the West' that represents the future, the interviewees evoked an allochronic representation of their homes. This representation resonates with what anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1983) famously criticised anthropologists for doing in their representations of the Other. Yet, in this case, it is the Russian-speaking youth themselves who are applying an othering gaze on their own homes rather than outsiders. We will return to this practice of self-orientalising in the next section.

When the first author asked Oleg about his impressions of moving to Finland, he distinguished himself from supposedly non-modern subjects left behind in the past:

> I was not that impressed. Before Finland, I visited many countries as a child, such as the USA. I was in Germany, then in Hungary. So all these things, Europe was not alien to me, I am not a person from Siberia who had never seen things before, that the goods are on the counter and not behind the counter, under a lock. Finland? Well yeah a normal European country.

Oleg moved to Finland with his mother when he was a child. The question seemed somewhat redundant to Oleg, since, as he put it, only a person who comes from outside Europe would be impressed by Finland. Instead, he distinguished himself from the 'people from Siberia' – referring to supposedly non-modern people living in a remote part of the world – as opposed to Europe and the USA. Siberia was used by Oleg as an image of Russia's own subaltern Other, a place imagined as locked up in the past, where goods in the grocery stores are still supposedly sold from behind the counter and kept under a lock – another symbol of the Soviet Union. There is nothing to be impressed by in Finland if one is from Europe, according to Oleg. Oleg distances himself from those remaining in the past 'in Siberia', for whom Europe is an alien place. Oleg's narrative demonstrates the hierarchies and nuances within the self-orientalising discourse: it is possible to distinguish subalterns within the Orient.

The interviewees' imagination of life in 'the West' was narrated in terms of difference from the reality that they described through the powerful symbols of (post-)socialist life. It is significant that rather than referring to the images of contemporary post-Soviet countries as nation-states, these are the symbols of Soviet and post-Soviet life as chronology and space that young Russian-speaking migrants tried to distinguish themselves from. Moreover, these are not their memories, as the research participants were either small children during the last years of the Soviet Union and had few, or more often, no memories of it at all. Yet, contemporary time at home was perceived as continuation of the past, narrated through the meanings of time frozen in the Soviet life. It is the feeling of being 'locked up' in the past that they described in their interviews by referring to the notions of difference between home and 'the West'.

Although similar constructions of 'the West' as epitomising European values of modernity could be found in other non-EU migrants' narratives, we argue that young Russian-speakers' narratives show how the logics of coloniality with essentialised constructions of 'cosmopolitan Europe' reach beyond the North–South divide, or colonised–colonisers power relations. The images they depicted, reproduce the spatial-temporal narrative, where the locality is described in terms of time and spatialised hierarchies of civilisation (Boatcă, 2007; Chakrabarty, 2000). As argued by Fabian (1983: 12–13) with the emergence of evolutionary scientific thinking it becomes possible to describe relationships between parts of the world as temporal relations. While young Russian-speakers might not position their home countries as the direct Other of the West like the 'primitive' Other in Fabian's theorisation, they positioned their homes as not sufficiently westernised and lacking the futures which have supposedly already been achieved in 'the West'. This logic is no exception to the general logic of modernity, which is based on the idea of classifying humankind in relation to the colonial matrix of power (Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2012). Their imaginings are then placed within this logic of coloniality, where 'the West' represents the future and potentiality, while post-socialism – the past and lack of value.

Pilkington et al. (2002) in their study of Russian youth's perception of 'the West' at the end of the 1990s have also pointed to young people's notions of 'the West' as an essentialised construct that refers to Europe and the USA. Young people they interviewed referred to *zagranitsa* (abroad) and *Zapad* (West) as synonyms and imbued them high symbolic value such as quality of life, freedom and material wealth. We suggest that after 20 years young people who moved to Finland still produce the meanings of 'the West' through the notions of difference from their homes yet who see themselves as potential peers to 'western' young adults. In these narratives, the interviewees are engaging in processes of distinction vis-a-vis failed post-socialist subjects who never managed to move beyond the socialist past (see also Buchowski, 2006). Their migratory projects can then be analysed as efforts towards social distinction (Bourdieu, 1979) and subject-formation vis-a-vis non-modern post-socialist life.

## Self-Orientalising Discourses

In this section we examine how young Russian-speakers reproduce a self-orientalising gaze on themselves and their fellow-nationals, and distance themselves from a racialised subject-position of Russianness. We argue that some educated young Russian-speakers produced Russianness through the lack of value.

Consider the following extract from Daria's field diary (November 2015):

When I met Andrey and Zhanna in a shopping centre in Helsinki, I asked them whether it mattered in their lives in Finland that they were from Russia. Zhanna quickly replied: 'When I hear Russian language, I burn from shame.' She then gave an example of what she meant:

Once I was queuing in [the clothes store] ZARA, and there was a woman in front of me in a queue in a fitting room. When a shop assistant told her first in Finnish that she can proceed to a free cabin, the woman did not react. The shop assistant then said the same in English, but again the woman did not react. I then accidentally asked her: 'Do you speak Russian?' 'Yeah, yeah! Thanks god you told me! Why could not this stupid assistant tell me that in Russian?' – the woman swore at the shop assistant. I thought: 'Oh Gosh!'

Andrey picked up from Zhanna's story:

> It is when you start behaving not like a European, but like a Russian. It is when everybody swims calmly in the pool, and I dive-bomb and make splashes all around (*laughing*). It is like when you need to clean a table after yourself in a cafe, and you leave all the trash on the table and leave. I think it is about the lack of culture (*beskultur'e*).

Shame is a powerful social emotion of judgement, which Zhanna experienced when meeting other people speaking Russian. Russianness was experienced as opposition to Europeanness for Zhanna and Oleg. The feeling of shame came from the fact that Zhanna could be seen in similar terms as the Russian-speaking woman in the clothes store who lacked manners and did not speak foreign languages. Both Andrey and Zhanna defined Russianness through the 'lack of culture'. Russianness was marked by visibility in public spaces as inability to behave. By highlighting the fact that being Russian is being unable to behave properly, that is, as a 'European', they drew attention away from themselves as competent and well-mannered people. Andrey's immediate description of different practices that distinguish Russianness resemble Du Boisian (2007 [1903]: 8) 'double consciousness'; that is, 'a sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others'. Their post-migratory lives are then marked by dis-identification with Russianness and emotional politics of embodying the lacking Other.

Russianness was discussed by some of the research participants like Egor through the meanings of savagery as opposed to civilisation represented by Finland:

> When I moved, I thought that only nerds live here. I was an *enfant terrible* at school in Russia, I thought that only robots live in Finland. My mother prepared me, she told me: 'Do not smoke at school, do not do that, do not do this!' I came here like a savage. I thought only nerds and robots live here. When my mother moved to Finland before me, she was showing off to everybody that she lives in such a civilised country. (Interview with Egor)

The construction of 'savagery' as characteristic to the colonised and 'civilisation' as characteristic to the coloniser have been theorised by post-colonial scholars (Said, 1978). Egor reproduced this division by referring to a binary opposition of savagery and civilisation and by imagining Finland as civilisation. These examples show how young migrants reproduced self-orientalising discourses, and how their post-migratory lives are constituted through the continuous efforts towards distinction.

However, some differences in young people's positioning of themselves in relation to 'the West' can be found too depending on their country of origin. When the first author met Inna – a young woman from Estonia, Inna started talking about differences between women coming from Russia and Estonia:

Inna:    Do you notice any differences between Russian and Estonian women in Finland?

Daria:    I don't know, what do you think?

Inna:    I think Russian girls are like more old-fashioned, they have different style. We Estonian girls like make-up, we like fake eyelashes more. In one word, I think we are more European. (Field diary, December 2015)

Here Inna makes distinctions vis-a-vis other Russian-speaking women. Europeanness works as a form of embodied symbolic capital, which Estonian women possess in contrast to women from Russia. Estonia is also an EU member state since 2004, which facilitates mobility of Estonian citizens to Finland unlike Russian citizens who need to get visas and residence permits. European citizenship may thus strengthen the feeling of belonging to Europe.

The notion of Europeanness as an embodied symbolic capital can be traced in other interviews too. Similar to Inna's example above, Alina – coming from Russia – drew distinctions around everyday looks of women from Russia, Estonia and Finland:

> I can easily recognise a Russian woman in the crowd, they have their own distinctive style, not always good, unfortunately. Finnish women do not look like that. I don't always like how Finnish women look either, but they look more European. Estonian women are the golden middle. (Interview with Alina)

These examples demonstrate the embodied value of Europeanness and looking European as opposed to 'Russian looks' (Gurova, 2015). It is significant how young people drew distinctions among Russian-speakers, which shows heterogeneity of the group. These distinctions were often made around the value and meaning of 'Europeanness'.

When Daria attended one of the gatherings of young Russian-speakers in a bar and introduced herself to a young man named Ilya as coming from Russia too, Ilya replied:

> But you don't look Russian, it is so good that you don't look Russian and behave like a Russian, I really appreciate that, because I hate Russians that do not know how to behave. Look *(picking up his phone and showing pictures of himself)*, I don't look Russian either, I have curly hair, nobody would guess that I am Russian. (Field diary, August 2014)

Ilya's reaction suggests his strategies of passing as a non-Russian and mimicking – supposedly – a westerner. Ilya considers his own 'non-Russian looking' appearance as symbolic capital. During the same evening, when Daria was introduced to another young man, Igor, who taught Russian tourists in Spain how to sail, a group of young Russian-speakers had a short discussion on Igor's profession and the fact that he works with wealthy people. Igor said: 'Russians are stupid, you need to put a lot of effort to teach them.' Ilya commented as well: 'Because rich Russians living abroad behave in horrible ways.' Ilya's comment on 'rich Russians' behaviour abroad alludes to discourses of *nouveaux riches* as people who have not yet learnt how to behave in a new capitalist reality. These are the meanings of Russianness as the lack of manners that both Ilya and Igor distance from.

As the ethnographic data demonstrate, young Russian-speakers invested themselves in processes of distinction regarding the meaning of Russianness as what Andrey referred to as 'lack of culture' in their post-migratory lives. These examples suggest young Russian-speakers' aspirations for distinctiveness and constant generation of self-value as proper western subjects vis-a-vis orientalised and 'uncivilised' subjects.

These examples are not to suggest that all young Russian-speaking migrants uncritically reproduced these notions. Laying claims to Europeanness and identifications with 'the West' go hand in hand with exclusionary constructions on who can belong to Finland

and Europe. In fact, their claims to belonging to 'the West' and living 'cosmopolitan' lifestyles are based on exclusion of non-white Others, who some see as compromising the idea of 'real', that is, white Europe and Finland (Krivonos, 2017). What remains clear, however, are their efforts to identify with 'the West' in a pursuit of certain lifestyles, which supposedly cannot be achieved in their home countries.

## Conclusions

In this article, we have analysed how young Russian-speaking migrants imagine their futures through the discourse of difference between 'the West' and their home countries. These imaginings became possible through their self-value as educated young people with the knowledge of foreign languages as well as being part of the generation born after the collapse of the Soviet system and their vision of themselves as potential peers to 'western' young adults. Migration to Finland imagined as 'the West' held self-transformative potential for them.

Rather than structuring their imagination through the images of Finland and home countries as units of nation-states, young Russian-speakers imagined their future lives in the global 'West' vis-a-vis their home countries narrated through the powerful symbols of the past. Their imaginings of 'the West' are positioned within a temporal-chronological narrative with 'the West' representing the future and progress, and post-socialism – the past and lack of value. Their futures at home are imagined through the meanings of the Soviet past and post-Soviet present. We argue that the narratives of young Russian-speaking migrants about 'the West' in relation to ideas of progress and future, while at the same time distancing themselves from (post-)socialist subjects, should be placed in the framework of global coloniality (Quijano, 2000; Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2012). Young migrants' self-orientalising narratives and their struggles to disassociate themselves from failed socialist modernity highlight the position of a post-socialist subject in relation to modernity, global coloniality, self-orientalisation and the discourses of essentialised 'West'. The struggles of post-Soviet young migrants in Finland to be recognised as modern and western through migration draw attention to the ways the logic of coloniality has reached the spaces beyond the immediate presence of colonial power, and has produced the effects within global reach (Quijano, 2000; see also Hall, 1996).

Following Tlostanova (2012), we argue that imagination and self-positioning of young Russian-speaking migrants born in capitalist Russia and independent post-Soviet countries disturb the distinctions between lifestyle migration and labour migration, West and East or North and South. Their aspirations and post-migratory lives do not occupy North vs. South, the coloniser vs. the colonised subject positions, yet they do position themselves in relation to the global 'West'. Our analysis suggests that re-thinking of modernity and engagement with 'global futures' of sociology (Bhambra and De Sousa Santos, 2017) should include not only North and South subject positions but also analyse the effects of coloniality beyond the immediate presence of colonial power.

These imaginings of 'the West' and distinctions vis-a-vis 'non-modern' life could inform a wider theoretical understanding of migration. 'East–West' migration has been often theorised in the context of labour migration and accession states (Datta, 2009; Fox et al., 2012; Samaluk, 2015), while lifestyle migration as a quest for a better way of life

has been explored from the perspective of privileged 'West–West' migration (e.g. Benson, 2012). Motivations for migration of young people interviewed for this study show that the aim of their migration was to find 'better' lifestyles and *live in the West*, rather than to work or study in Finland. Yet, the perspectives of young educated Russian-speaking migrants or Central and East European migrants are seldom theorised under the rubric of 'lifestyle migration' since they are classified as non-western subjects. We need to reflect on the ways global coloniality can be epistemologically reproduced in migration research through classifying people from certain geographical locations. There is a need for new research on the geographical mobility of young people born after state socialism, which recognises their aspirations in the context of 'lifestyle' and imaginings of the futures through the prism of coloniality.

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## Notes

1. We use the term Russian-speaking and post-Soviet youth interchangeably to refer to young people from post-Soviet countries (including Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Estonia) whose first or second language is Russian.
2. Finnish statistics do not allow registration by ethnic or racial background, which is why mother tongue is the best identification for 'ethnic origin'.
3. Finland was part of the Russian empire from 1809 until it received independence in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917. The countries fought against each other during the Second World War in which Finland lost Karelia, a border region around Viborg, to the Soviet Union.
4. The University ethical board does not require ethics assessment and written consent for adults. Although we refer to our research participants as young people, all of them are adults aged 20 to 32 years.
5. Compare with different historically, geopolitically and class-wise situated notions of 'normal life' (Dzenovska, 2014; Fehérváry, 2002; Manolova, 2018; Yurchak, 2006).

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