Theory from the Peripheries
What Can the Anthropology of Postsocialism Offer to European Anthropology?

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Abstract
This article argues for the benefits of a relational approach to understanding centres and peripheries across scales in anthropology, as opposed to an approach based on substantive notions of geographic areas. Based on an extensive literature review, I expose how the salience of the division into Western and Eastern Europe, and, increasingly, into Northern and Southern Europe, obscures the divisions on other scales within and across these divisions. Instead, I argue for thinking relationally about centres and peripheries, highlighting two relevant contributions that the anthropology of postsocialism can make to a European anthropology: one is based on analyses of how places become peripheral, while the other starts from analyses of political-economic changes and their social impacts after the collapse of socialism.

Keywords
Europe, political economy, relational approach, symbolic geography, theory from the peripheries

In this article, I argue that combining two distinct and traditionally separated lines of theorisation – the discursive construction of some regions as peripheral and the political-economic analysis – can be a valuable starting point for elaborating 'theory from the peripheries' in the anthropology of Europe (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2012; Siniscalchi 2015). The premise is that different locales are unevenly caught up in global political-economic processes and that there is value in emphasising convergences and interrelations in these processes. Peripheries are often recursively reinscribed on multiple scales, demonstrating unevenness in the relationships between multiple centres and multiple peripheries. Furthermore, rhetorical boundaries and substantive definitions of regions actually hinder a deep understanding of the processes that generate new and reproduce old peripheries in the continent.

Hence, I am not focusing on peripheries as substantively defined regions (e.g. Southern Europe or Eastern Europe), sets of countries

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(e.g. Greece or Serbia) or sets of micro-regions within a country. Rather, a 'theory from the peripheries' approach situates ethnographies within a dynamic and relational understanding of space in capitalism (Gill and Kasmir 2016). I advocate for a relational approach, by which I mean that space consists of social relations (Massey 1994); since I am mainly concerned with political economy, I take these social relations to be shaped by uneven development (Smith 2008), with associated class relations, power differentials and discourses of difference. Although this approach poses a dichotomy between centres and peripheries, that dichotomy does not include substantively defined spaces, but rather spaces caught up in comparable processes and relations.

I do not strictly follow the approach developed by Immanuel Wallerstein (2004), which views the world-system as divided into core, periphery and semiperiphery based on the international division of labour in which some countries concentrate core-like production processes, while others are relegated to basing their economies on peripheral production processes. The world-system approach is hard to reconcile with ethnographically grounded work that I am discussing. Spatially, the unit of analysis in the world-systems approach is the world-system, and temporally, the unit of analysis is the *longue durée.* Neither of these are easily implemented in anthropological research, where the unit of analysis is often defined on much smaller scales. The insights of world-systems analysis inform my approach to a degree, notably the relational approach to space. But I make a contrast in my approach by opting for the word centre (often in its plural-noun or adjective forms) instead of the word core and leaving aside the concept of semiperiphery.[1] The type of analysis I suggest rests on the idea that centres and peripheries, and relationships between them, are constantly made and unmade through political-economic processes that operate on multiple spatial and temporal scales, and which can be studied ethnographically.

Spaces and peoples are marginalised as a consequence of political-economic processes, as well as due to the way they are treated in intellectual discussions or various (self-)marginalising discourses; indeed, such processes and discourses are often linked. I draw from studies of the discursive and material peripheralisation of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to highlight the contribution of ethnographies of post-socialism in Europe.[2] Crucially, while studies of European post-socialism are often understood to be limited to the region of CEE as a substantively defined region, I point out how they can be used

as a basis for an anthropology of European peripheries. A relational European anthropology that fully incorporates insights from CEE would not need to position itself with regard to dichotomies of East and West, or North and South, but rather locate the places it studies in shifting relations between capitalist centres and peripheries. In the following section, I consider how using insights from scholarship on post-socialism destabilises epistemic boundaries in anthropology, which is necessary for building a relational approach to European peripheries.

Next, I specifically consider the discursive and material construction of the peripheral position of CEE that challenges a substantive definition of Europe and points out centres and peripheries within it. I move on to discuss insights from studies of post-socialist political and economic processes that could be useful for a broader study of European peripheries. For simplicity's sake, in this first part of the article, the meanings of the terms 'CEE' and 'post-socialist space' largely overlap, and this space is treated as peripheral. In the fifth section, I consider the possibility of developing 'theory from the peripheries' as a way to approach European margins in a comparative perspective, and problematise the understanding of CEE as peripheral *tout court* by drawing attention to the recursive and nested reinscription of peripherality on multiple scales. I conclude with a discussion of how a focus on peripheries is crucial for grappling with the unevenness of Europe, which is an empirical condition that confronts European anthropology.

Peripheries Made and Unmade

The anthropology of post-socialism can be useful for a project of the anthropology of European peripheries if the processes it describes are understood relationally: as taking place in shifting geographies of capitalism where centres and peripheries are constantly made and unmade. In my understanding, the post-socialist region is, minimally, defined by the legacy of socialism, which is often vanishing, being rapidly transformed, and in some cases mutating (see F. Martínez in this issue). Post-socialism, in that sense, is not just a temporal designation – something that comes after socialism. Rather, it is in many ways a relation to that legacy, often in the form of a need for it to be overcome by embracing neoliberal capitalism (Chelcea and Druță 2016; Martínez 2018).

The embrace of capitalism has made CEE invaluable for studying rapidly unfolding political-economic processes such as deindustrialisation, privatisation, income inequality and poverty; ethnonationalism and xenophobia; and migration, among others. These processes now unfold in, or otherwise affect, other parts of Europe, which used to be considered more central. European anthropology – anthropology of and in Europe – would benefit from fully incorporating insights from the anthropology of post-socialism. An extension of post-socialist literature proposed in this article does not, I argue, require anthropology to ignore the specificities of locales characterised by different histories in order to fit them into an overarching and predetermined model of history. As Francisco Martínez (2019b: 137) writes, one of the ways in which European anthropology can be approached is 'as an abstraction that connects, a *conceptor,* whereby the emphasis is put on the capacities and possibilities opened up via this abstract location'. The relationality entailed in such an understanding suggests new ways in which scholarship on post-socialism can bridge the divide to build a truly transnational European anthropology and proceed with an epistemic boundary un-work (Gieryn 1983).

My proposal for a 'theory from the peripheries' approach builds on scholarship on post-socialist Europe, which has, to a large degree, focused on various forms of peripherality in which objects of study are seen to be situated. Although often overlooked outside the region, anthropological studies that focus on CEE are of value to understand other places in Europe. Dominic Boyer and Cymene Howe (2015: 16–17) conceptualise anthropological theory as 'the process of striving to wrest away from a case study the cluster of insights that are worth mobilising'. In that sense, Dace Dzenovska and Larisa Kurtović (2018) have recently proposed that Eastern Europe appears as a goldmine for understanding the current shifts in the Western political landscape.

This article furthers that idea by paying closer attention to what anthropological scholarship on post-socialist Europe has to say about the political economy of peripheral places. Peripheries can be places of intellectual opportunities that should be tapped into in order to enrich dominant anthropological traditions (see Martínez 2019a). Analyses of the way certain political-economic processes – various economic crises, growing inequalities, the effect of dispossession on already marginalised populations – have unfolded in CEE in the past several decades offer valuable insights because these processes have unfolded rapidly in the region, designating it as a vanguard for processes that have since affected places that used to be understood as

centres. The insights gained from the study of this region need to be more fully incorporated into European and global anthropology.

Why Europe and European Peripheries?

The broader approach to centres and peripheries that I am advocating does not need to be limited to Europe, but there are reasons why focusing on Europe in this way is important. Europe and its accompanying notions – such as Europeanisation, Europeanness, European values and so on – are salient ideas both within and outside of the continent (Borneman and Fowler 1997). However, using the term Europe and the terms derived from it glosses over the structured differences within the continent. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has pointed out, 'a certain version of "Europe", reified and celebrated in the phenomenal world of everyday relationships of power as the scene of the birth of the modern, continues to dominate discourse of history. Analysis does not make it go away' (2000: 28).

This is so despite many analyses that have been offered, taking their cue from one of the meanings of *Orientalism* in Edward Said's (1978) influential work and inspired by the transposition of Said's ideas to study processes similar to 'orientalisation' in other contexts. These analyses considered such geographical categories as Eastern Europe or the Balkans, historicising their construction and proliferation in academic texts, political treatises and popular imagination. Closely examined, the discourse about Europe appears fractured. Although Europe is often compared to the rest of the world, it is hardly clear what Europe means. Conventionally, in physical geography, Europe is straightforwardly understood as the landmass separated from the rest of Eurasia by several large bodies of water and mountain chains. However, symbolically, the concept of Europe is more fluid and often conflated with the West, which means that it often ends up being extended to include the United States, Japan or other places of advanced capitalism.

This hegemonic discourse has produced its Others, including those in places that belong to the European continent. Eastern Europe or the Balkans have frequently been left out of this designation, and the character of Central and Southern Europe has been questioned. The dominant dichotomy has been the one between Western and Eastern Europe, but it has not been limited to these geographical macro-regions; the dichotomy has been reinscribed on ever smaller scales to

involve geographical bodies, individual countries, or regions within countries, revealing the openings for nested inscriptions of Otherness that symbolic geography provides (Bakić-Hayden 1995). Furthermore, this perception has been not only externally imposed but also appropriated and perpetuated within these spaces. The Balkans could thus be imagined as the inverse of civilised Europe (Todorova 2009), in the same way that certain parts of any country or social group could be understood as the internal Other (Bakić-Hayden 1995; Buchowski 2006). Such constructions were developed by the people who live in these places – as a strategy of distinction or self-exoticisation – as well as the external actors.

The examination of the discursive construction of various European Others has brought to light some similarities between postcolonial societies and peripheral societies in Europe (see Cervinkova 2012; Chari and Verdery 2009; Owczarzak 2009). Notwithstanding the differences in the contexts and the contents of orientalising narratives in various places, there seems to be a profound similarity in the way narratives of differentiation work, which pertains to the difference in political and economic power that these narratives reveal. Orientalist narratives reveal the *longue durée* relationship of domination between imperial metropoles and colonial territories. Although orientalisation is based on unequal economic relations, those relations cannot fully determine the content of orientalist narratives. Rather, orientalist ideas have a reality that is to a certain extent independent from material relations (e.g. Todorova 2009). Furthermore, orientalisation is never a one-sided process. It also entails a dialectical construction of ideas about the West both by those who are depicted in orientalist ideas and by those who are involved in the production of knowledge in the West (Obad 2014). Both occidentalist and orientalist representations are dependent on politics in the societies that produce such interpretations, including power hierarchies of race, gender, religion and so on. More broadly, they reveal how power differentials across space and between people are enshrined in and reinforced by representations.

The normative idea of Europe is entangled with other understandings that pit Europe against other normative and affective projects (Klumbytė 2011). Yet Europe and Europeanness are ideas that often get singled out as very powerful designations that strongly animate many large-scale political projects in the European Union and the countries that strive to join it (Mikuš 2018). This should not obscure the fact that the construction of Europe proceeds materially. For

example, large infrastructural projects connect centres and peripheries in ways that facilitate the extraction of resources by centres, allowing powerful local actors to vie for the importance of their locales in transnational contexts by meeting the needs of the centre (Firat 2016).

The integration of peripheries often proceeds by accepting the conditions set by centres. Yet the notion of Europe is also open for appropriation by counter-hegemonic projects. Studying the normative idea of Europe and its material consequences can benefit from the insights gained from studying orientalising discourses that designated CEE as a peripheral space. These insights have long challenged a definition of Europe as monolithic, pointing instead to the differentiation of centres and peripheries within the continent (Kuus 2004). In the following section, I review insights gained from studying some of the political and economic changes in CEE after the collapse of socialism, which can be useful for a broader study of European peripheries.

'The Dull Compulsion of Economic Relations'

The introduction to the recent special issue of the journal *History and Anthropology* on austerity and temporality in Southern Europe framed the issues discussed within a broad literature on temporality, affect, trauma and political crisis (Knight and Stewart 2016). The authors did not cite any of the works on European post-socialism that thematised the issues of crisis, temporality, the breakdown of social provision, and resistance. In terms of regional focus, Daniel Knight and Charles Stewart's project attempted to reorient the study of the Mediterranean focused on shared values and institutions to a new 'Mediterranean' that was 'unified by shared problems, emergencies, and exigencies' due to imposed austerity measures and humanitarian crises such as the refugee crisis (ibid.: 2). The omission of contributions from the scholars of post-socialism from major anthropological debates has been noted in the past (Buchowski 2004; Kürti and Skalník 2009; Thelen 2011). Greece, which Knight and Stewart study, has also been omitted from anthropological debates (Herzfeld 2002). Thus, it is curious why they did not reach for literature extending the area of concern. Is there anything that makes the phenomena they focus on distinctly Mediterranean or South European? What are the parallels that could be drawn with other countries, deindustrialised regions and urban areas? What, other than regional divisions of the world into areas that can be studied by social sciences, compels us to separate

the Mediterranean from, say, CEE? Instead of using these ossified geographical categories, I propose situating our ethnographies within a dynamic and relational understanding of space characterised by shifting relationships between capitalist centres and peripheries.

The anthropology of post-socialism has focused on many processes and phenomena that involve political and economic differentiation: sovereign and private debt, dispossession, the feminisation of poverty, the commodification of care, the embrace of xenophobia and nationalism, and migration, among others.[3] An anthropology of European peripheries could make use of the anthropological knowledge about these phenomena in post-socialism. Similar processes are ongoing in other peripheral places in Europe that are not characterised by a legacy of socialism, and understanding them would greatly benefit from a comparison with post-socialist places.

In the early years of post-socialist studies, anthropologists were arguing against the narrative of transition, pejoratively referred to as 'transitology' (e.g. Burawoy and Verdery 1999a). Instead of a teleology of modernisation with capitalist market societies as the end goal of societal development, anthropologists emphasised the continuities and differences in the way socialist countries had been connected to capitalist countries and part of the global economy. Former socialist states had experimented with various market instruments and they had been open to capital from non-socialist countries (e.g. Bockman 2011). Asymmetrical relationships with capitalist countries at the time of structural crisis of global capitalism had put socialist countries at a disadvantage after the fall of socialism (Burawoy and Verdery 1999a; Verdery 1996). As the entitlements from the socialist period disappeared (Burawoy and Verdery 1999b; Hann 2002; Humphrey 2002), people were forced to engage in various forms of marketised economic activity, including credit. The insecurity of this financialisation from below was particularly pronounced in countries whose currencies were seen as less valuable and reliable than foreign currencies (Pine 2002a; Rogers 2005). Indexing credit in foreign currencies and inflation exposed borrowers to increased risk of servicing their debt (Halawa 2015). This process has been especially salient with the commodification of necessities, such as housing (Zavisca 2012).

Bundling aspiration, economic constraints and moral considerations, various forms of credit became a specific technology often used as a way to cope with uncertainty by changing its temporality. Profound insecurity in the early days of post-socialism was reflected in the ethnographies that paid attention to how many people in these societies

were 'surviving' as the existing forms of material provision were rapidly changing (Bridger and Pine 1998; Burawoy and Verdery 1999b; Hann 2002; Humphrey 2002; Mandel and Humphrey 2002). A differentiation in life chances exacerbated existing forms of social inequality (Kaneff and Pine 2011; Kideckel 2008; Matza 2018; O'Neill 2017). Many 'ordinary' people felt stuck (Jansen 2015; Simić 2014) while others – politicians, the new rich – were seen moving at their expense (Kojanić 2017; Patico 2005). As economic precarity spread, patterns of relating and expectations from the state were being transformed (Dunn 2004; Morris 2016; Potkonjak and Škokić 2013; Rajković 2018).

Socialist legacies in welfare were dismantled or significantly restructured (Jovanović 2019; Mikuš 2018). New forms of provision increasingly relied on women's unpaid labour and strategies that made use of strong kinship ties and women's social networks (Pine 2002b). The withdrawal of the state from many forms of care (Haney 2002) for its citizens was palpable, and those gaps were filled by commodified care. In cases when state-provided care was inaccessible and commodified care outside of one's purchasing power, care was increasingly accessed via personal connections (Brković 2017; Ledeneva 2006), which were shot through with affectively charged expectations from social relations (Hromadžić 2016).

With the exacerbation of existing social inequalities and diminishing life opportunities, many people started rejecting liberal democracy and embracing illiberalism in the form of xenophobic and nationalist politics (Kalb and Halmai 2011). Ethnic, national or racial differences were reinscribed (Makovicky 2013) and nation states and the European Union were 'rebordered' (Follis 2012). The deterioration of economic and political circumstances has contributed to the push that many feel to migrate in search of better opportunities (Follis 2012; Kaneff and Pine 2011; Keough 2016), contributing to the movement of people due to conflict. These movements of people play on the existing differences – both material and discursive – between places, but in the process also contribute to their remaking.

The greatest contribution that the anthropology of post-socialism can offer to the anthropology of European peripheries is in the meticulous ethnographic attention paid to spaces and peoples that get marginalised as a consequence of political-economic processes and marginalising discourses. In the following section I sketch out an argument for a theory from the peripheries approach that connects insights gained from studying discursive and material peripheralisation of CEE.

Theory from the Peripheries in the Early Twenty-First Century?

In the previous two sections I have painted a picture with a very broad brush to highlight some important contributions of the anthropology of CEE to European anthropology in general, and the anthropology of European peripheries specifically. The interrogation of the construction of symbolic geographies should include both the discursive construction of Otherness and the material differences on which such designations are built and which they help reproduce (Ballinger 2017). Connecting these two strands of theorisation can be useful when thinking about the relationality of places within Europe. The unevenness of the European continent cannot be reduced to a dichotomous depiction of the West and the East, or post-socialist and non-post-socialist spaces. There is unevenness within the spaces designated by these macro-level categories. Although I have treated the post-socialist space, or CEE, as unified in order to show the relevance of insights gained from its study, it itself is an uneven space. There are significant differences hidden by the blanket category of the post-socialist space: for example, the so-called 'Baltic states' are not 'Western Balkans', Poland is not Bulgaria, Budapest is not Miskolc, capital cities are not rural margins, and so on.

In other words, there is significant unevenness on each of these scales: regional, national, urban-rural and so on. The processes that I have sketched out (re)produced differences between centres and peripheries. While large swaths of CEE were peripheral within Europe after the collapse of socialism, that may no longer be the case. The processes of differentiation are taking place within CEE itself. Similarly, they are taking place within Western and Northern Europe, spaces that are commonly understood as central on a macro-scale, at least for the time being. My discussion of debt in post-socialism can be compared with sovereign debt in Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, or private debt in Spain and other countries. Dispossession and unemployment due to austerity in these countries, as well as the long-standing policies of deindustrialisation in former industrial powerhouses, such as Northern England, have brought about the feminisation of poverty and the development of solidarity networks that could be fruitfully compared with those developed in post-socialism. The lack of political engagement and the rise of technocracy are evident throughout the European Union, as is the embrace of xenophobia and nationalism in Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The anthropology of post-socialism[4] can be one of the foundations for the anthropology of European peripheries that studies geographies of capitalism characterised by constantly shifting centres and peripheries. Such a relational approach implies the possibility for studying the recursive and nested reinscription of peripherality on multiple scales. Regional horizons should be understood as a product of relations and processes, rather than as a substantively defined space. My emphasis on the relations between centres and peripheries is thus more important than the programmatic call to focus on European peripheries as such. The approach that focuses on relationships between centres and peripheries would allow one to go beyond the cartographic designation of Europe and consider various places around the world as European external peripheries (e.g. parts of North and West Africa or Central and Southeast Asia or India) or beyond the symbolic geography of Europe to consider other peripheral places related to other centres (e.g. the American Midwest or Southeast Asia or Latin America). Of course, when taking these places as peripheral, one would need to pay attention to how they have historically been constructed differently from Others within Europe, under different conditions of knowledge production.

This poses the question of whether there is a need for an overarching framework that would allow thinking about these differences in a theoretically rigorous way. Two potential moves that could increase the salience of insights gained from the study of post-socialism have recently been proposed. One considers a geographical extension to places that could be described as post-socialist but are outside of Europe and the former Soviet Union (Rogers 2010); the other suggests a theoretical and empirical convergence of post-socialist studies with postcolonial studies (Chari and Verdery 2009). Both of these are valuable contributions, but I think another extension is possible if European peripheries are thought of in terms of what Jean and John Comaroff (2012) have called 'theory from the South' reimagined as 'theory from the peripheries'. The Comaroffs dismantle the idea of modernisation, according to which the Global South is catching up with the developed Global North. Instead, the Comaroffs point to many contemporary developments that take place in the South, which subsequently get emulated in the North. In this vision:

> while Euro-America and its antipodes are caught up in the same all-embracing world-historical processes, old margins are becoming new frontiers, places where mobile, globally-competitive capital finds minimally regulated zones in which to vest its operations; where industrial manufacture opens up ever more cost-efficient sites for itself; where highly

> flexible, informal economies – of the kind now expanding everywhere – have long thrived; where those performing outsourced services for the North develop cutting edge info-tech empires of their own, both legitimate and illicit; where new idioms of work, time, and value take root, thus to alter planetary practices . . . In many respects, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America seem to be running ahead of the Euromodern world, harbingers of its history-in-the-making. (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012: 121)

The Comaroffs are positing Europe (or Euro-America) as a monolith characterised by modernity derived from the Enlightenment, which confronts the rest of the world characterised by alternative modernities. That is precisely the idea that should be dismantled by paying attention to Europe's internal peripheries. However, their larger point still stands: the spaces of advanced capitalism are now emulating many of the developments from the spaces of peripheral capitalism. In this process, European internal peripheries in many respects stand side by side with numerous places in Africa, South Asia and Latin America.

Since the fall of socialism, the largest part of CEE has embraced capitalism, often rushing to erase any remnants of its socialist past, with varying degrees of success (Martínez 2018). This allowed a host of political-economic processes to unfold rapidly and remake the region, creating new centres and peripheries within it. In the same period, many places in other parts of Europe that used to be central have become peripheral. Shifting patterns of capital accumulation have transformed the uneven character of Europe. For example, in recent years, one could hear more about the peripherality of Southern Europe than CEE. Furthermore, capital accumulation has redefined winners and losers within these regions. New forms of inequality have proliferated across the continent. Understanding some central places within CEE now barely requires reaching for scholarship on post-socialism, except as historical background. At the same time, groundbreaking analyses of post-socialism can help us understand what is unfolding beyond CEE. In that sense, substantive notions of geographic areas (e.g. CEE and Western Europe) seem to be limiting. What is called for instead is a relational approach for studying centres and peripheries across scales. The anthropology of post-socialism can offer a starting point for developing theory from the peripheries within European anthropology.

Conclusion

We should not aim to define European peripheries in substantive, strictly demarcated terms, but rather as regions caught up in the

process of uneven development, which is a systemic characteristic of capitalism operating in space and time (Smith 2008). Brutal deindustrialisation, privatisation, income inequality and poverty; ethnonationalism and xenophobia; migration – these and many other processes find their full expression in peripheral places. This, however, does not necessarily mean that they affect all peripheral places in the same way. Capital accumulation operates according to mechanisms of differentiation and equalisation, which work in conjunction with state power to provide a dynamic that orders places in complex and often unpredictable ways (Gill and Kasmir 2016). In other words, it is not any of these particular processes themselves that make a place peripheral, but rather the underlying mechanisms according to which capital accumulation unfolds in social and geographical space. That dynamic can occasionally transform central places into peripheries over time.

European peripheries herald the future of European centres, but not in the sense that transitological and modernisation narratives can simply be inverted to say that 'the Global North appears to be "evolving" southward' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012: 121). It is true that 'so many citizens of the West – of both labouring and middle classes – are having to face the insecurities and instabilities, even the forced mobility and disposability, long characteristic of life in the non-West' (ibid.: 122). However, this does not necessarily mean that all current capitalist centres are on a path of peripheralisation. Actually existing capitalism is not limited to mechanisms of capital accumulation, but crucially involves established power relations (Kalb 2013). In other words, capitalist centres have non-economic tools at their disposal for extending their hold on the central position.

A 'theory from the peripheries' approach faces these challenges head on. It takes into account the discursive construction of peripheries and the material conditions of peripheralisation. Paying attention to peripheries means paying attention to power relations and the production of knowledge in relation to places and to processes that produce, and unmake, peripheries (Wolf 1982). Anthropologists have offered nuanced interpretations of the process of knowledge production under asymmetrical power relations, which is never simply a matter of imposition of knowledge from more central places (Tsing 1993). A 'peripheral vision' is necessary to grasp these relations and processes (Nash 2001), yet it is not enough to locate oneself on the periphery; one has to look back at the centre and the way that the peripheral position itself is produced, too (Shore and Trnka 2015). Therefore, European anthropology would benefit from directly

studying unevenness on different scales by focusing on its own peripheries. Studying that unevenness ultimately entails the deconstruction of the boundary-work mechanisms that create centres and peripheries.

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Notes

1. The area on which I focus most of my discussion – Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) – is often referred to as semiperiphery (e.g. Blagojević 2009). Within this approach, designating places – most often countries – as belonging to the core, periphery or semiperiphery grants a degree of finality that I strive to avoid.
2. I use the notion of CEE as a more general designation of the region, not limited to the temporal container of post-socialism, with all its internal differences and multiple axes of centrality and peripherality. If a substantive definition is necessary for a preliminary discussion, I understand CEE to refer to the following countries: Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia. As with any substantive territorial designation, this one is subject to reinterpretation; one could also count Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia as belonging to this group, or go even further to include Central Asia under the notion of Eurasia. In order to avoid the 'territorial trap' (Müller 2019) that studies of post-socialism can fall into, throughout the article I shift the focus away from substantively defined territorial designations to processes and relations.
3. Although I offer an extensive literature review, I do not intend it to be exhaustive. The point of this section is not to highlight exemplary work in the anthropology of post-socialism; rather, it is to highlight the analyses of peripherality in this scholarship that I see as having potential to be productively engaged when

studying peripherality outside of CEE. Other scholars, depending on their position and research interests, are welcome to make connections other than the ones I have made, for example by focusing on other important contributions of post-socialist studies such as the study of rural transformations.

4. Admittedly, I am ambivalent towards the category of post-socialism because it implies unity and obscures differences within spaces designated. As many scholars have pointed out, it may not be as useful as it used to be in the 1990s (e.g. Müller 2019). However, post-socialism as a label – an epistemic oasis, as Norbert Petrovici (2015) puts it – is, for better or worse, legible to a wider field of scholars due to various institutional and epistemic traditions within anthropology. These non-specialists are the desired audience of this article as they can implement some of my suggestions to develop a relational and comparative approach, if they find the argument persuasive.

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