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THE QUESTION OF RESPONSIBILITY: (DE-)PERIPHERALISING RURAL SPACES IN POST-SOCIALIST ESTONIA

Abstract. Recent studies on socio-spatial polarization and post-socialist spaces increasingly propose the use of postcolonial theory. Following this proposal, the paper attempts to make the decolonial approach fruitful for studying the crucial role that discourses play for rural peripheralisation processes in post-socialist Estonia. It shows that the Estonian discourses on peripheries manifest in a struggle between neoliberalism and interventionism as two competing regional development models that promote either self- or state responsibility for dealing with peripheralisation. Despite their differences, both models build on the same notion of modernity, as the colonial history associated with socialist modernity renders alternative models obsolete.

Key words: rural area, peripheralisation, spatial discourses, postcolonialism, Estonia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to their simultaneous material deprivation and territorial stigmatization, rural areas in post-socialist space are often treated as peripheries per se (Kay *et al.*, 2012). As such a spatial hierarchy does not simply exist, but is actively made, the question arises how, by whom and with what consequences? To better understand the making of peripheries, the research on socio-spatial polarization and post-socialist spaces increasingly proposes the use of postcolonial theory, which opens the scope of analysis to the formation of core-periphery relations on multiple scales (PoSCoPP 2015; Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008). Following this proposal, the paper argues for a decolonial approach as useful heuristic tool to examine the crucial role of discourses in periph-

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eralisation processes. While the research on socio-spatial ascriptions (Bürk *et al.*, 2012; Meyer and Miggelbrink, 2013; Wacquant *et al.*, 2014) already establishes that peripheries are materially and discursively (re-)produced, the paper goes one step further by attempting to show that decolonial studies help to analyze *how* peripheralisation discourses become performative. Based on a critical evaluation of knowledge production mechanisms, they convey that the depiction of peripheries as places lagging behind stems from normative development notions proliferated in hegemonic discourses (Koobak and Marling, 2014). Adopting this Foucauldian understanding of discourses as form of knowledge production, the paper therefore applies decolonial approaches to critically scrutinize the development models that underlie rural (de-)peripheralisation discourses in post-socialist Estonia.

However, due to the long-lasting ‘mutual silence’ (Moore, 2006, p. 17) between postcolonial and post-socialist studies, this endeavor poses several challenges, which the first section tries to meet by developing a common conceptual framework. This is followed by a twofold analysis of the discursive formation (Jäger, 1999) and discursive field (Schwab-Trapp, 2006) that constitute the debates of opinion leaders on places denoted as peripheries in Estonian national print media. It shows that the discourses evolving around rural peripheries manifest in a struggle between neoliberalism and interventionism as competing regional development models. As result of the analysis, the paper concludes that despite their differences, both models build on the same notion of modernity as the colonial history associated with socialist modernity leaves discourse participants with no other option than to embrace capitalism, which is questioned but never fully rejected.

2. OVERCOMING THE MUTUAL SILENCE: DECOLONIAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

By attempting to make post-colonialism fruitful for studying (de)peripheralisation discourses in post-socialist Estonia, the paper follows conceptual debates that aim to intersect postcolonial and post-socialist approaches (Koobak and Marling, 2014; Suchland, 2011; Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008; Tlostanova, 2012). Post-socialist space is used here to denote Central-Eastern European (CEE) countries in the former Soviet sphere of influence. Thereby, it is preferred to the Cold War term Second World that reflects a modernization narrative, which is essentially questioned in postcolonial approaches, and to the term post-communist as to underline that ‘communism was never fully achieved’ (Koobak and Marling, 2014, p. 340).

Hitherto, the specific contextuality of both approaches acted as major obstacle for exploring potential intersections. Postcolonial theory is based on a Three-World modernization paradigm that was turned on its head to scrutinize the global dependencies evolving from it (Annist, 2011). As a result, it was deeply rooted in a standard North-South colonization theorized as embedded in orientalism of a superior colonizer towards an allegedly inferior colonized (Said, 1995). Due to this normative standard-setting, postcolonial theory essentially focused on the Global South. This did not only lead to an exclusion of more marginalized spaces within Europe, but also to a reluctance of post-socialist scholars to draw parallels with their experiences (Moore, 2006; Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008). Moreover, due to their Marxist grounding, postcolonial studies framed Second World socialism as alternative to a Western notion of development as inevitable path towards a capitalist modernity that others will catch up to (Moore, 2006; Tlostanova, 2012). This made postcolonial theory blind for socialist coloniality or, put differently, in ‘Western critical canon it is not possible to be both – a victim of Marxism and colonialism’ (Račevskis, 2002, p. 42).

On the other end of the scale, post-socialist theory built on a dominant transition paradigm that proclaims the ‘defeat of communism and final triumph of capitalism’ (Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008, p. 320). Reducing the spatial differences between the post-socialist and Western world to temporal differences, the changes since 1989 were commonly presented as linear catching-up process and labelled as ‘Return to the West’ (Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008, p. 320). Thereby, the transition paradigm neglected the plurality, heterogeneity and asynchrony of post-socialist experiences and simultaneously portrayed differences as deviances from the West (Kay *et al.*, 2012; Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008). This benchmarking of Western norms positioned post-socialist countries as lagging behind, hence ran counter to postcolonial theory that aims to brush normative standard-settings against the grain. Moreover, it resulted in an altered framing of post-socialist space within postcolonial studies: from alternative development model to an area perceived as generally uncritical of the West (Suchland, 2011). This prevented a treatment in postcolonial terms as well.

Despite these difficulties, there are strong arguments for overcoming the mutual silence and applying postcolonial theory to post-socialist space. On one hand, it enables an analysis of socio-spatial developments that considers socialist history without reducing it to simplified legacies of the past. Post-socialist studies can draw on postcolonial theory to account for the historical experiences of territorial occupation and power coercion, the psychology of oppression and resistance or the overarching aim of implementing an own version of modernity (Račevskis, 2002; Tlostanova, 2012). Thereby, postcolonial theory helps to accommodate for the ‘twin dangers’ (Stenning and

Hörschelmann, 2008, p. 323) of essentialism and determinism often encountered in post-socialist approaches. On the other hand, it can be used to understand the dependencies that post-socialist countries or regions face today. While the notion of peripheralisation already deconstructs the emergence of cores and peripheries as result of multi-dimensional and relational processes (Kühn, 2015), postcolonial theory emphasizes the multi-level nature of this relation being actively (re-)produced on the local, regional, national and international scale (PoSCoPP, 2015).

However, when uncritically applying postcolonial frameworks to post-socialist space, it runs the risk of posing yet another example for the universalization of contextualized Western knowledge frames. This is why Tlostanova (2012) and others propose to apply the decolonial option to achieve ‘true intersectionality’ (Koobak and Marling, 2014, p. 336). Their approach shifts the focus from colonialism as historical system to global coloniality as ensemble of (post)colonial practices and legacies in contemporary societies. By intersecting the concept of coloniality that Quijano developed on the basis of European colonialism in Latin America with post-socialist theories, they redefine it as ‘indispensable underside’ (Tlostanova, 2012, p. 132) of capitalist *and* socialist modernity. This allows them to move away from transition-based understandings, which interpret the changes since 1989 as linear path towards market economy and democracy. Instead, the changes are conceptualized as simultaneous process of socialist decolonization and capitalist neo-colonialism affecting the post-socialist and non-socialist world alike (Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008).

As analytical concept, global coloniality describes the persistence of socio-spatial hierarchies that are represented and constituted by discourses ascribing value to certain societies and spaces while denying it for others. In line with the research on socio-spatial ascriptions (Bürk *et al.*, 2012; Meyer and Miggelbrink 2013; Wacquant *et al.*, 2014), it establishes that discourses form an inherent part of polarization processes by influencing individual as well as political decisions and actions. Going beyond that, global coloniality determines that such discourses show consequences in practice by affecting the knowledge formation and subjectivities of colonizers and colonized alike.

The paper argues that a decolonial approach based on the notion of global coloniality helps to analyze *how* peripheralisation discourses in post-socialist space become in a Foucauldian sense performative. On one side, it allows to deconstruct how discourses co-constitute core-periphery relations by presenting normative standards and particular interpretations of reality as universal knowledge (Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008). Accordingly, Koobak and Marling (2014) show that the truth claim depicting peripheries as lagging behind and in need to catch up stems from a discursively hegemonized normative development concept that translates spatial into temporal differences. This

developmentalism is deeply rooted in both, capitalist and socialist modernity (Annist, 2011; Suchland, 2011). On the other side, global coloniality conceptualizes how the truths established in such discourses influence the formation of subjects who relate to the ascribed categories and norms. These can either be rejected or (re-)produced in processes of self-colonization. The concept thus accounts for two central tendencies structuring the discourses on peripheries in post-socialist space. The first is the frequent reference to the former modernization project by either heroizing or radically rejecting the socialist past (Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008). The second is the tendency to (re-)produce normative development notions of the capitalist modernity that are taken as standard for self-evaluation, often resulting in acts of self-peripheralisation (Koobak and Marling, 2014).

Due to its focus on global coloniality, the decolonial option has the potential to truly intersect postcolonial and post-socialist theories and thereby overcome the challenges usually met during this endeavor. As it critically scrutinizes the knowledge production in capitalist and socialist contexts, it seems a promising analytical approach to adopt when researching the performativity of (de-)peripheralisation discourses in post-socialist Estonia.

3. PRODUCING KNOWLEDGE ON PERIPHERIES: A TWOFOLD DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

To base the analysis of discourses evolving around Estonian peripheries on Foucault's (1999) notion of performativity means to recognize that such knowledge does not simply exist, but is actively (re-)produced via socio-spatial discourses embedded in power relations. Discourses exercise power by those who know over those 'who are known in a particular way' (Hall, 1992, p. 295) because they universalize particular interpretations of reality (*truth claims*). But they are also subject to power structures, as it is the access to resources and positions of power that determines who has the right to speak and be heard or whose truth claims are temporarily fixed through hegemony and manifested in categories, symbols and practices (Bourdieu, 1991; Spivak, 1988).

Empirically discourses appear as discursive formation, which is defined as group of statements governed by fixed distribution principles (Jäger, 1999). The discursive formation is scrutinized with the critical discourse analysis approach developed by Jäger (1999) who argues that truth claims are universalized by two primary means: legitimization strategies and the repetition effect. Legitimization strategies draw limits to the discursive content and ways of expression by presenting own truth claims as only liable alternative while simultaneously

delegitimizing others. The knowledge production is stabilized by the repetition effect, which becomes visible through recurrent subjects or strategies (*threads*) and the links connecting them (*nodes*). Consequently, the analysis of the discursive formation focuses on common discursive patterns associated with the term periphery that is treated as an empty signifier capable of absorbing different meanings projected on it (Laclau, 1996). Using the keywords *äärema** and *perifeer** (*roots of periphery in Estonian*)¹ in the time between 2011 and 2015, it builds on 296 opinion articles² retrieved from the online versions of the main Estonian dailies *Postimees* and *Eesti Päevaleht* and the rural weekly *Maaleht*, which were chosen due to their widespread readership and specific discourse positions (Section 3).

These articles also form the basis for the discursive field analysis. With its specific spatiality and temporality, the discursive field sets the conditions for the acceptance or rejection of truth claims (Bourdieu, 1991; Schwab-Trapp, 2006). On one hand, it describes the socio-historic context and institutional framework in which central debates and the resultant actions occur. On the other hand, it is constituted of opinion leaders who steer debates by disseminating different discourse positions or ideological standpoints (Jäger, 1999). These ‘interpreting coalitions’ (Bürk *et al.*, 2012, p. 339) develop widely accepted strategies and nodes that discourse participants have to follow to make their claims successfully heard. To understand who constitutes the interpreting coalition in Estonia, the articles were scrutinized for the occupation fields and institutions the authors are representing, the number of articles they published and the acknowledgement by other authors who refer to them as authorities. On the basis of this analysis, nine opinion leaders were selected for in-depth interviews. Beyond that, interviews with opinion editors of the three newspapers were conducted because they play a pivotal role as gatekeepers who regulate the access to the media debate and set the rules of engagement. Moreover, they seize responsibility for the editorial letters representing the opinion of the newspaper editorials. The interviews focused on their position in the discursive field, the motivation to engage and the discursive strategies employed. The criteria for selecting or rejecting articles were an additional topic of discussion with the opinion editors. As a result of this selection process, the list of interview partners (Tab. 1) displaying their field(s) of occupation and the number of published articles, greatly resembles the structure of the discursive field.

¹ Articles that were not freely available, duplex or referring to the Estonian surname ‘Ääremaa’ were excluded from the analysis.

² The section ‘arvamus’ (*opinion*) in Estonian newspapers resembles a regular column based on opinion-based articles incl. reader’s letters to the editor, editorial letters and opinion pieces provided by external authors.

Table 1. List of interview partners

Specification	Name	Gender	Main field(s) of occupation	Articles
Opinion editors	Kauri	M	Media and journalism	13
	Paavo	M	Media and journalism	9
	Anu	F	Media and journalism	3
Opinion leaders	Alar	M	Media and journalism; Politics and public service	3
	Eerik	M	Media and journalism	3
	Hendrik	M	Research and academia	12
	Ivar	M	Research and academia; journalism	7
	Joel	M	Research and academia; consultancy	3
	Kristjan	M	Politics and public service	2
	Maarika	F	Art and culture; politics and public service	2
	Lauri	M	Art and culture; research and academia	2
	Meelis	M	Consultancy	3

Source: author's elaboration based on in-depth interviews, names have been changed.

Applying a decolonial framework, the paper explores the knowledge production on peripheries in Estonia with the help of a twofold analysis that focuses on the discursive formation and discursive field. The analysis is based on twelve in-depth interviews with representatives of the interpreting coalition and 296 online opinion articles. However, within the limits of this paper, the illustration of the analysis will rest solely upon the interview transcripts³ and the 62 opinion articles or editorial letters that the interviewees seize responsibility for.

4. STRUCTURAL AND DISCURSIVE INEQUALITIES: THE DISCURSIVE FIELD

The knowledge production takes place against the backdrop of a rapid neoliberalization and polarization since Estonia regained its independence in 1991. As other CEE countries following the premises of the Washington consensus,

³ Interviews were held and transcribed in Estonian and subsequently translated by the author into English.

Estonian politics have ever since promoted market liberalism free from state intervention (PoSCoPP, 2015; Lauristin and Vihalemm, 2009). In a process of de- and recolonization, the institutional and social structures of the socialist regime were devaluated and substituted by a capitalist system embraced in its radically neoliberal form. On one hand, this resulted in a restructuration process that replaced the former system of state and collective farms with large-scale farming, causing widespread unemployment and a downward spiral of rural impoverishment and outward-migration (Nugin, 2014). On the other hand, it led to the institutionalization of a competitiveness-based regional policy focusing on consumption-oriented place promotion and post-productivist entrepreneurialism while simultaneously dismissing policies based on egalitarian norms (Bristow, 2005; Nugin, 2014; Peck, 2010). Whereas these political changes also offered new opportunities for a diversification of rural income opportunities, they could not ensure equally distributed living standards. Instead, the polarization continues to increase in form of a (sub-)urbanization while at the same time peripheralisation in small towns and on the countryside deepens (PoSCoPP, 2015; Leetmaa *et al.*, 2013).

These urban-rural inequalities are mirrored in the discursive power structures. Although the freedom of press is particularly high in Estonia, indicating a rather non-discriminatory access to the public arena, the print media discourses on peripheries are dominated by an intellectual, urban and male elite. Figure 1 indicates that the interpreting coalition consists mainly of journalists, academics, politicians and artists (86.3%). Less often, the articles are authored by consultants, entrepreneurs, interest group advocates or readers (13.7%). Hence, the majority represents newspaper publishers, state bodies, research and cultural institutions as well as consultancies or for-profit organizations located in the capital Tallinn and the second city Tartu. Only a minority of readers, rural interest representatives and municipality leaders is located in peripheral areas. Moreover, there is a noteworthy gender gap as only about 11% of the contributions are written by female authors, a trend that is common for Estonian opinion columns in general (Eurotopics, 2015).⁴ The authors were appropriated due to the ascribed institutional affiliation in the articles. However, there is a common overlap of positions fulfilled by the interpreting coalition as most of them do not only participate in the (de-)peripheralisation discourse but are also actively engaged in the politics and economics evolving around it.

Confronted with this discursive hegemony, the opinion editors explained it with their selection criteria, the asymmetry of article suppliers and the editing process. Unanimously, they declared good quality writing or an ‘intelligent per-

⁴ Gender roles and the question of gender equality in Estonia certainly need a deeper analysis that cannot be provided within the scope of this paper. For an initial reading, see: Anspal and Rõõm, 2010; Kaskla 2003.

son's mode of expression' (Anu) as the main criterion for article selection, which 'for the upper elite is much easier' to meet (Kauri). All agreed that the selection process is also influenced by the pool of authors offering articles where 'women have been more hesitant' (Anu). The underrepresentation of female authors is ascribed to their choice of topics that tends to 'mirror the society' and concentrate on 'family issues' instead of 'delving into politics' (Paavo). Finally, the newspapers' editing process and target groups are said to influence the constitution of the interpreting coalition. Even though all headquarters are located in Tallinn, the newspapers' regional foci and discourse positions are different. While *Maaleht*'s mission is to 'preserve rural life' (Anu), *Eesti Päevaleht* defines itself as 'pretty Tallinn-centered' (Paavo). Accordingly, the former established an editorial network covering the country, whereas the latter has no permanent correspondents outside of Tallinn. *Postimees* takes the middle ground between them as it commands a considerable regional network, but does not set its focus explicitly on rural issues.

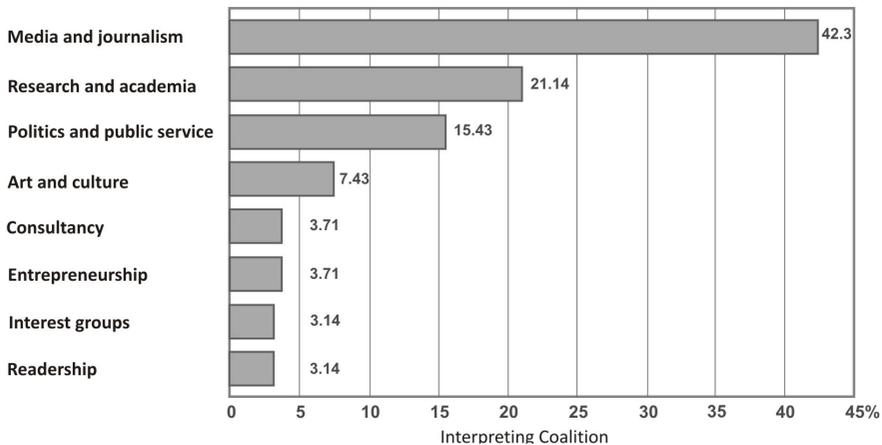


Fig. 1. Discursive field: interpreting coalition

Source: author's elaboration based on calculations of institutional affiliation in opinion columns of *Postimees*, *Eesti Päevaleht* and *Maaleht*, 2011–2015 (n = 296)

Together, all publications cover a broad market of Estonian-speaking media, as they are among the newspapers with the widest circulation and most frequently visited websites (Balčytienė and Harro-Loit, 2009; IfM, 2015). Due to the continuous expansion of internet access, the online versions have become ever more important. They are characterized by a broad readership, high degree of interactivity and considerable overlap with the printed versions (Balčytienė and Harro-Loit, 2009). For all opinion leaders, this broad coverage constitutes the main reason to engage in the debate: 'If one already starts talking, then after all in the big-

gest newspapers, to most likely reach the decision-makers or make people think' (Maarika). The newspapers are seen as national arena for 'different kind of truths' (Alar) and means to strategically influence the decisions of 'policy designers', because 'newspapers they read, opinions they read, but reports they never read' (Hendrik). But the focus on market leaders also has its limits. As the three newspapers belong to the main competing media groups Eesti Meedia and Ekspress Grupp, several interviewees were 'asked to just make a decision' (Eerik) for either one or the other. Finally, the question 'where the target group [is]' (Meelis) also seems important for the opinion leaders who take the different newspaper foci into account when supplying articles.

Distributed to a wide audience, the discourses on peripheries in Estonia are dominated by an urban, male and intellectual elite that has the potential and will to influence the practices and materialities of peripheralisation. Despite the dominance of actors from the center, rural politicians, interest representatives and inhabitants also participate in the debate. Hence, the subaltern can speak (Spivak, 1988), but to a much lesser extent.

5. RURAL AND RESPONSIBLE? THE DISCURSIVE FORMATION

This interpreting coalition actively (re-)produces a discursive formation in which peripheries are linked to two central subjects: rurality and responsibility. As shown in great detail elsewhere (Plüschke-Altöf, 2016), while the multi-level nature of peripheralisation 'in a globalizing world' (Joel) that raises the question of Estonia being 'a European periphery' (Maarika) is acknowledged in the debate, a prominent discursive node links the peripheral to the rural. Thereby, the specific discursive threads associated with peripheries are projected on rural areas in general, portraying them as economically lagging behind, geographically remote, socially problematic, politically dependent and institutionally thin (Plüschke-Altöf, 2016). However, by drawing on a rural idyll that displays the countryside as cradle of the nation, home to Estonian folk culture and untouched nature, opinion leaders also employ this discursive node of the rural to the peripheral in counter-discourses that revert negative images (Plüschke-Altöf, 2016). The second discursive node, which is elaborated in the current section, evolves around the question who assumes responsibility for the causes of and dealing with rural peripheralisation. Oscillating between the poles self- and state-responsibility, this question points to the conflicting notions of development underlying peripheralisation discourses in Estonia. As the paper conveys, the media discourses thus go beyond different interpretations of rurality by manifesting a struggle over the suitable regional development model that is deeply enwrapped in both, post-socialist de- and capitalist recolonization.

5.1. Two Development Models: The Question of Responsibility

The struggle over ‘what kind of regional and local development and for whom’ (Pike *et al.*, 2007: 1253) unfolds between two alternatives: neoliberalism and interventionism (Tab. 2). Both regional development models promise to deliver general well-being, but through different means. Whereas the former propagates market-liberalism and state retrenchment, the latter casts doubts on the premise that the free market is capable of balancing socio-spatial inequalities and therefore advertises market-regulation and a welfare-state system (Gyuris, 2014).

As explained in great detail elsewhere (Bristow, 2005; Peck, 2010), the neoliberal model focuses on fostering economic growth on the national level and in growth poles, which in a trickle-down process should eventually reach less prosperous regions. Development is thereby reduced to an issue of growth building on two principles: austerity and competitiveness, which constitute prominent discursive threads among Estonian proponents of a neoliberal development paradigm. Especially in the debates on the ongoing amalgamation reform, state-responsibility for dealing with peripheralisation is often reduced to a matter of public austerity. On this basis it is argued for a further centralization, which is more ‘needs-based and effective’ (Meelis) or ‘reasonable’ (Maarika) than the ‘overly expensive’ (Hendrik), ‘disproportionate’ dispersed settlement that causes Maarika to ask ‘who pays for that’? This reference to cost-effectiveness and efficiency also sets the basis for delegitimizing decentralized settlements based on an alternative redistributive paradigm. It is accompanied by an emphasis on competitiveness shifting the responsibility to individual regions and thereby separating winners from losers (Bristow, 2005). This discursive thread is used to denote success stories. Via narratives of active coping and self-initiative it is shown how municipalities ‘can manage’ (Kristjan) through ‘success-oriented leadership’ (Kauri) or by employing resources such as the ‘local workforce’ and the ‘natural and historic-cultural environment’, which have until now been ‘underutilized’ (Hendrik). Simultaneously, attempts to shift the responsibility back to the state are delegitimized by presenting them as unjustified: ‘we can’t blame Estonian politics’ for that (Lauri).

These truth claims are legitimized with the help of statistical data and rankings that do not only objectify the success of some municipalities, but also render an image of the rest offering ‘nothing good’ (Kristjan). The resultant urban-rural hierarchy is seen as without alternative or, as Alar puts it, ‘some good things are inevitably farther living on the countryside than in the city. This is just the way it is’. By projecting the responsibility for development on the regions themselves while discursively neutralizing the structural factors for socio-spatial inequality, the neoliberal model links rural peripheralisation with non-success or self-induced development deficits and incapacities, hence universalizes a lag discourse.

This knowledge production is opposed in a counter-discourse based on an interventionist development model positioning itself as alternative to neoliberalism, which has ‘enslaved us ideologically’ (Ivar). It questions the notion of development as economic growth and expands it to include also the ‘inequality issue’ (Joel) and the ‘preservation of heritage culture, nature and language’ (Lauri). By opposing austerity and competitiveness to the principles of solidarity and redistribution, the proponents shift the responsibility back to the state. In order to force the state to intervene, the first discursive thread shows the limits of self-responsibility by pointing out that the lack of peripheral capacity stems from ‘global and Eurozone dependencies’ (Joel), Tallinn’s ‘huge competitive advantage’ (Eerik) and from ‘not developing these regions’, which ‘is also a political decision’ (Joel). These narratives of dependency and neglect are supplemented by a discursive strategy that presents state intervention as question of life and death for the state and the nation, or, as only option. On one hand, a doom scenario of national extinction is created, as the countryside is ‘depopulated’ (Ivar) while the cities prove to be ‘the cemeteries of the population’ (Hendrik). As the ‘vis vitalis of Estonian people’ derives from a ‘contact with the land’, further urbanization means ‘the end for Estonia’ (Ivar). On the other hand, rural peripheralisation is linked to the whole ‘security topic’ (Mee-lis). Empty villages are thus ‘a very bad thing for national security’ (Lauri) as they play a crucial role in the defense of and supply for cities in times of crisis. Aware that the neoliberal responsabilization of peripheries for their underdevelopment affects ‘national definitions of deservingness’ (Kay *et al.*, 2012, p. 61), the urban-rural hierarchy is moreover reversed in a discursive thread portraying cities as hostile surroundings full of ‘crime, drug addiction, all kinds of crap’ (Eerik) that regularly ‘run empty’ (Ivar) as ‘people flee like from a horrible accident’ (Hendrik) to the countryside full of ‘wild nature’ and people preserving ‘Estonian culture’ or ‘heritage’ (Lauri).

These truth claims are legitimized through objectification, hence by ‘finding some statistics’ (Eerik) and referring to ‘what we know from science’ (Joel). Beyond that, opinion leaders refer to authorities such as the former president Meri and the poet Tammsaare, who are seen as rural patrons, or the businessman and former mayor of Tallinn Jüri Mõis who figures as ‘radically liberal’ (Hendrik) anti-hero in the debate, as he invoked everyone to ‘come to live in Tallinn’ (Alar). Simultaneously, the neoliberal development model is delegitimized by relativizing its polarizing side-effects as ‘not normal’ (Joel) and questioning its premises: ‘the invisible hand is bullshit’ (Ivar). In some cases it is also rejected as undesirable ‘market fetishism’ (Ivar). By romanticizing the local with the help of a rural idyll and establishing the fight against rural peripheralisation as ‘state interest’ (Eerik), the interventionist model seeks to de-individualize the responsibility for peripheralisation, which Massey (2004, p. 14) critically scrutinizes as form of ‘blaming all local discontents on external [or] global forces’.

Table 2. Discursive formation: the question of responsibility

Knowledge Production	Neoliberal Self-Responsibility	Interventionist State Responsibility
Repetition effect	Reduction of development: Economic growth Public austerity: Efficiency and cost-effectiveness Regional competitiveness: Active coping and self-initiative	Extension of development: Equality and sustainability Inability to be capable: Neglect and dependency Image reversal: Rural idyll and urban stereotyping
Legitimization strategy	Objectification: Reference to statistics Presentation as only option: Inevitability	Objectification: Reference to statistics, science, authorities Presentation as only option: Question of life and death
Delegitimization strategy	Relativization of alternative: Questioning affordability and state responsibility	Relativization and rejection of alternative: Questioning inevitability and desirability

Source: author's elaboration based on in-depth interviews and opinion articles published in *Postimees*, *Eesti Päevaleht* and *Maaleht* (2011–2015).

5.2. One Concept of Modernity: Devaluation of a Socialist Alternative

Despite the noticeable differences, both competing regional development models rely on spatial disparity discourses that are central to capitalist modernity, either dating back to its neoclassical or Keynesian form (Gyuris, 2014). Alternatives building on socialist modernity⁵ that propose leftist ideas based on the notion of uneven development or spatial justice are missing altogether. In decolonial terms, this striking absence in Estonian (de-)peripheralisation discourses demonstrates a simultaneous capitalist re- and socialist decolonization.

It manifests in the discursive inconsistency of many opinion leaders, whose argumentations oscillate between both development models. On one hand, the majority of them lament a capitalist neocolonialism in form of a discourse hegemony where the notion of development is 'deeply rooted' in a 'neoliberal understanding' that is proliferated by a political elite consisting of 'city boys, businessmen and radical liberals' who have no 'political will' to change the faith of peripheries (Hendrik, Joel). In their opinion, this hegemony leaves the peripheries 'without spokesmen' (Joel) and leads to a 'very one-sided media representation' (Hendrik) rendering ru-

⁵ For more information on leftist regional development debates based on Marxist, Socialist and Non-Capitalist ideas, see: Gyuris (2014), chapters 5 and 8.

ral areas as ‘unhappy’, ‘dirty and ugly’ places where ‘only the last two alcoholics are still left’ (Alar). Thus, most interviewees declare it as their mission to offer an alternative ‘positive periphery’ (Lauri), critically scrutinize ‘negative myths’ (Alar) or depict examples of ‘country life advantages’ (Anu). On the other hand, a considerable fraction sees the current polarization as ‘inevitable’ (Meelis) and therefore tends to fall back into neoliberal discursive patterns. Meelis for instance describes how he is torn between the importance of (neoliberal) ‘economic efficiency’ and (interventionist) ‘social support’: ‘I’ve been thinking about that crazily much’. As ‘capitalism has gone nowhere’ (Hendrik) and ‘the market is very important’ (Eerik), the political aim of many opinion leaders is thus to ‘move somewhat in the direction of a welfare-state’ (Kristjan) rather than to radically change the system.

A reason for this perceived lack of options lies in the colonial history associated with socialist modernity, which prevents it from being seen as liable alternate to capitalist development models. For Stenning and Hörschelmann (2008, p. 316) post-socialism ‘opens grand questions about alternatives to capitalism’. Hendrik concurs that ‘there is absolutely no sign of leftist politics here. This is a heritage of the former socialist society. Actually there was a big dissociation from socialism and a turn towards the other extreme’. Consequently, socialist modernity appears only in form of a reference to the past. As in former studies (Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008), also in Estonia a certain ‘nostalgia’ is common among those socialized in the ‘Soviet time’ (Kauri, Meelis). Especially ‘country people’ remember ‘strong collective farms’ as places of secure employment, vivid cultural life, feeling of belonging and solid infrastructure that was ‘all lost’ during transformation (Anu, Kristjan, Meelis). However, in the discourses evolving around Estonian rural peripheries, this past is invoked solely in the form of ‘Soviet colonialism’ (Annus, 2012, p. 21). References are thus used to show things ‘in a bad light’ (Alar). On one hand, the socialist past is employed as negative contrast to show that ‘not everything is so bad today’ (Eerik). On the other hand, current regional policy is criticized by comparing it to Stalinist centralization attempts: Back then, it was a ‘foreign power’ who ‘destroyed’ rural life, now it is an ‘economic power’ that we depend on (Ivar).

While the latter can be interpreted as strong ‘political rhetoric’ (Kauri) or even ‘demagogical argument’ (Paavo) against neoliberal development, the post-socialist renouncement of the past (Jõesalu and Kõresaar, 2013) also devaluates the idea of non-capitalist options altogether that are dismissed as ‘too socialist’ (Lauristin and Vihalemm, 2009, p. 20). This results in an ‘act of self-colonization’ (Koobak and Marling, 2014, p. 339) accompanied by the attempt to distance oneself ‘as far as possible from Russia’ (Maarika), hence by ‘wanting to be just like the West’ (Joel). Consequently it seems ‘obvious’ (Alar) and ‘a matter of course’ (Meelis) that Estonia is constantly compared to Northern or Western European countries while at the same time for most opinion leaders the actual development is ‘quite similar to Eastern Europe’ (Maarika). Socialist decolonization therefore leaves the

interpreting coalition with no other option than to embrace capitalist modernity and Western hegemony, which perpetuates a lag discourse towards peripheries including Estonia itself. As a result, the capitalist notion of development is questioned with the help of interventionist discourses, but never fully rejected.

6. (DE-)PERIPHERALISING RURAL SPACES IN POST-SOCIALIST ESTONIA: CONCLUSION

Based on recent conceptual debates that aim to apply postcolonial theory to post-socialist space, the paper argues that postcolonial approaches serve as useful analytical tools to explore the crucial role of discourses in peripheralisation processes. To overcome the mutual silence that hitherto prevented an intersection of the post-socialist and postcolonial, a decolonial framework following the Foucauldian notion of discourses as means of knowledge production is proposed. On this basis, a two-fold analysis of (de-)peripheralisation discourses in Estonian print media is conducted, which focuses on the discursive formation and discursive field. The analysis conveys that Estonian discourses are constructed by an urban, male and intellectual elite who associates peripheries with rurality and responsibility. By connecting the rural with the peripheral, rural areas are constituted as peripheries per se. The alleged development deficits are then linked to the question of responsibility for the causes of and dealing with peripheralisation. Oscillating between the poles self- and state-responsibility, this question points to the competing neoliberal and interventionist development models underlying Estonian discourses on rural peripheries.

By propagating public austerity and regional competitiveness via narratives of active coping and self-initiative, the neoliberal model favors self-responsibility. Peripherality is thereby rendered as self-induced non-success. This image is opposed within the interventionist model that advocates solidarity and redistribution. To shift the responsibility back to the state, its proponents show the limits of self-responsibility within narratives of dependency and neglect and present state intervention as question of life and death for the Estonian nation. Beyond that, negative peripheral images are reversed by romanticizing the rural. Both models are legitimized by referring to statistics, science or authorities and presenting the truth claim as only option while simultaneously the alternative is delegitimized.

Despite these differences, both development concepts essentially rely on capitalist spatial disparity discourses. Due to the concurrent socialist de- and capitalist neo-colonization, the discourse participants are left with no other option than to embrace capitalist modernity. This might be questioned in interventionist discourses but never fully rejected as a regional development model building on socialist modernity cannot form a viable alternative in a post-socialist and post-colonial context.

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