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Mental Maps of Eastern Europe: States, Mentalities, Modernisation

Mihai Varga

Abstract

Eastern Europe has been the object of orientalising discourses portraying it as a region defined by problematic statehood, underdevelopment, and nationalist-religious warmongering. These discourses have produced 19th-century mental maps of Europe contrasting a perceived 'core' European area ending with the Frankish Empire's eastern border and coinciding with later Enlightenment influence and an indistinct 'Orient' or 'East', bypassed by "modernising" processes. This contribution focuses on (post-)Cold War discourses in social science and shows how these discourses re-produce 19th-century layers of orientalising map-making and keep East-West differences alive by tracing deficient, fragile or repressive state institutions back to alleged Eastern European 'mentalities'.

INTRODUCTION

Mental maps give meaning to spatial relations as they systematize places to form broader categories, associating geographical borders with cultural, political, and economic differences. When arranging these categories in allegedly natural hierarchies and oppositions (East versus West, Orient versus Occident), produced by accident rather than domination, they tend to reflect and re-produce imperial divisions and justify "ethnocentric" perceptions of superior "culture" or "civilisation" (Coronil, 1996, p. 78; Wolff, 1994). Particular geographical features – such as seas or rivers, mountain ranges - become the very edge of "civilisation", as with the Mediterranean separating Occident from Orient (Said, 2003). Such mapping identifies features that simultaneously contrast entire areas with 'the West' and turn them internally indistinct in falling behind "modern civilisation". As this article exemplifies with Eastern Europe, the region's diversity calls for a mix of such features to make it internally indistinct and externally distinct from the 'West', resembling how colonial categories reduced the perceived diversity of Western hemisphere populations (Mignolo, 2001, p. 434).

Institute for East-European Studies, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany

Correspondence: Mihai Varga, Institute for East-European Studies, Freie Universität Berlin, Garystr. 44, 14195 Berlin, Germany. Email: Mihai.varga@fu-berlin.de

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This contribution argues that Eastern Europe emerges out of several intersecting mental mapping exercises adding further layers of difference to the distinction between a 'core' European area and an indistinct 'Orient' or 'East'. Such mental mapping emerges during the late Enlightenment and the 19th century (Bideleux, 2015; Lemberg, 1985; Neumann, 1999; Okey, 1992; Schenk, 2012; Wolff, 1994), but re-surfaces ever since through new layers of difference, adding further claims about allegedly distinct non-Western mentalities. At times they portray Eastern Europeans as "paternalists" with little personal initiative and over-dependent on their state, and at times as cynical and cunning profiteers, undermining state structures. Adding to the complexity, as they approach our times, these discourses become collectively-reflected identity markers. That is, elites and, later on, the publics in Eastern Europe pick them up as mobilising notions relating them positively or negatively to an idealised notion of the West.

What matters for the present analysis is less the debate of whether the mental mapping of Eastern Europe represents a variation of orientalism (Bakić-Hayden, 1995) or a (subaltern) sub-category of Europeanness (Todorova, 2009). Instead, the article highlights the discursive (re)production of East-West differences in social science by (re-)combining or transforming earlier arguments on Eastern European alterity. As discourses, mental mapping exercises are anything but "closed systems, [instead] draw[ing] on elements in other discourses, binding them into [their] own network of meanings" (Hall, 2019, p. 156). Edward Said used the idea of a "library" or – borrowing from Michel Foucault - "archive of information commonly […] shared" and held together by a "family of ideas, […] explain[ing] [the Orientals'] behaviour, mentality, genealogy" (Said, 2003, p. 41). This article uses the archive concept to point out the layers of mental mapping that constitute Eastern Europe as an object for social science. As a diachronic and dynamic take on mental mapping, it argues that the mental mapping of Eastern Europe rarely sees any of its constitutive layers disappear, while new layers emerge by re-framing older ones. The dynamism and longevity of Western discourses thus result from these discourses' successful reproduction, "borrowing from and folding within themselves earlier discourses".[1]

Absent or problematic statehood has operated as a particularly effective tool for constructing East-West difference and for connecting the discursive archive's elements. Academic discourse has stylized the development of states and, in particular, nation-states as a defining aspect of modernity (Malešević, 2019; Moore, 1993 [1966]; Tilly & Blockmans, 1994; Weber, 1992 [1919]; Wimmer, 2018; Wimmer & Min, 2006). The mental mapping of Eastern Europe narrates the region's history as either lacking statehood because of organisational deficiencies and lacking secularisation; or because of legacies distinct from the West's, as Eastern Europe allegedly features a particular, problematic relationship between its inhabitants and state institutions. It fosters corruption, underdevelopment, authoritarianism or warmongering, or all these factors. From the perspective of highly prestigious sociological literature, from Max Weber to Barrington Moore and Charles Tilly, Eastern European states have undermined their modernization by tolerating the estate-owning aristocracy's power (Moore, 1993 [1966]). They have had a relatively brief existence, failing to secure the "means of coercion" (Tilly & Blockmans, 1994) that some of their Western European counterparts acquired; and succumbing to Ottoman, Tsarist, Habsburg and Prussian expansion (Tilly, 1990). Yet small states slowly re-surfaced out of these empires throughout the 19th in the Balkans and early 20th century elsewhere. Thus, Tilly's account helps little with understanding how and why these states could re-emerge as independent polities in the 19th and early 20th centuries while largely lacking the "means of coercion" that supposedly characterise the West.

This re-emergence requires another perspective on "civilisational" characteristics to uphold the East's distinctiveness, one that incorporates the modernizing processes associated with nationalism. This perspective – emerging from the works of Ernest Gellner, Miroslav Hroch, and Hans Kohn – emphasised how nationalism (and implicitly modernisation) was "late" in the region. This, in turn, explained nationalism's virulence and salience throughout the region. Nationalism was "late" because local elites lacked their states (Gellner, 1991; Hroch, 1993; Wimmer, 2018). Taken further, this thesis upholds that Eastern Europe even develops its brand of nationalism (Kohn & Calhoun, 2017 [1944]), one inherently aggressive and unwelcoming vis-a-vis the liberal democratic state structures allegedly emerging throughout the West. This perspective idealises the West and reinstates the importance of the (absent) statehood dimension for explaining Eastern European distinctiveness. Here again, the

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eyes of mental mappers turn to the past to explain the region's unique nationalism, failing statehood (from "tyranny", despotism, authoritarianism, to "corruption") and economic underdevelopment: The alleged absence or shallowness of 'secularising' movements, from Renaissance and Reformation to Enlightenment, turning local societies into one indistinct realm of 'Eastness'.[2]

The remainder of this essay explores the discoursive "archive" (Hall, 2019; Said, 2003), backing the mental mapping of Eastern Europe. It follows several mental mapping instances constructing Eastern European distinctiveness. I discuss these in the chronological order of the historical periods they focus on. While I focus on sources reconstituting the discursive archive of Eastern Europe during the Cold War, there is, however, a structural similarity between the arguments about Eastern alterity, going back to how Enlightenment thinkers thought broadly about the non-Western world, a thought pattern returning in modified forms. For instance, Marxist and Weberian categories for analysing non-Western societies –such as oriental despotism (Marx) or patrimonialism (Weber) – resemble Enlightenment-era modes of subsistence, from hunting and pasturage to agriculture and commerce, each characterised by specific ideas and institutions (Hall, 2019, pp. 177–179; Said, 2003, pp. 153–156). In turn, Cold War and post-Cold War theories use Weber's patrimonialism to claim a 'fit' between communism and societies in Eastern Europe or Asia and later on between patrimonialism and post-communism's failed democratisation. Patrimonialism is only one of two tropes; the other is about the Easterner's penchant for ethnoreligious fervour. These two tropes cut across layers of discourse to constitute two contrasting images of Eastern Europeans: patrimonialism represents Easterners as *detached* from and ignorant of the public good while over-depending on authorities. In contrast, the second trope portrays Easterners as 'ethnic nationalists', *over-involved* in their ethnoreligious groups, unreflecting preys of nationalist and religious passion, and largely incapable of self-government.

The next parts discuss the discursive archive layers involved in the mental mapping of Eastern Europe. The first part discusses claims of patrimonialism in the eastern Mediterranean region after the (Western) Roman Empire's demise and the east-west economic differentiation following the Black Death. Parts 2 and 3 focus on discourses about the 19th-century rise of nation-states and 20th century Soviet Bloc constitution to show how amoral familism and ethnoreligious fervour operate as psychologising – yet contradictory - elements of mental mapping, turning Eastern Europe internally homogenous. Note that I capitalize Eastern/Western when referring to lands orientalised as "Eastern" (or idealised as "Western"), and write "east(ern)"/"west(ern)" when using the geographic meaning ("east of the Elbe").

EASTERN EUROPE, EASTERN CHURCH, AND THE LANDS EAST OF THE ELBE

Eastern Europe is often mentally mapped onto the contours of the Eastern Church's expansion, in a discourse explaining developmental differences between Western and Eastern Europe by identifying the legacies of "Eastern Christianity" or Orthodoxy and, for South-Eastern Europe, Orthodoxy and Islam (for overviews and criticism, see Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Bideleux, 2015; Todorova, 2009). It was Enlightenment thinkers that depicted Eastern Christianity's political homeland, the Byzantine Empire, as a "theocratic antithesis of Enlightenment" (Wolff, 1994). While they thought less in East-West binaries and more in categories of a civilised South (reflecting the legacy of classical Greek and Roman antiquity) versus barbaric "North" (also including Polish and Russian lands), they were aware of the association between Russian lands and Eastern Church (Lemberg, 1985; Schenk, 2012). The North-South 'civilisational' axis turned into an East-West axis over the 19th century's first half. From then on, Byzantium and Eastern Christianity would stand in for Western observers from Max Weber to Samuel Huntington for failed secularisation and modernisation due to the overlap between political and religious power. Weber would shape future generations of social scientists – including Cold War cultural explanations for communist domination over Eastern countries (see part 3) - by associating Constantinople's fusion of political and religious power in the figure of the Byzantine emperor (caesaro-papism) with patrimonialism. In opposition to rational-bureaucratic rule,

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patrimonial political systems made the entire societal realm the ruler's private domain (Curtis, 2009, p. 270). They failed to foster the conditions for modernisation by precluding the separation of state powers and, therefore, also religious freedom, popular education and capitalism (Weber, 1978a, pp. 239–240).[3]

Constantinople indeed acted as the cultural-religious centre of a loose realm of Eastern - “Orthodox” - Christianity, reaching from Serbian and Bulgarian kingdoms to the Kievan Rus', and encouraged Christianity among the emerging principalities east of the Frankish (Carolingian) empire. Byzantine monks Cyril and Methodius spread Christianity as far as Moravia (the east of present-day Czechia), establishing Church Slavonic and the Glagolitic alphabet, which later developed into Cyrillic. Most lands covered by Cyril and Methodius during their journeys had already known Christianity and were under the jurisdiction of Roman (often German) bishops. Yet Rome recognized the jurisdiction of Methodius (made an Archbishop by the Pope) over Moravia, Pannonia, and the Serbian lands, prompting the first opposition between a geographical west of Frankish kings and an east seeking to escape their rule. The 1054 “East-West Schism” between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy further strengthened the opportunity for rulers east of the Frankish Empire to seek legitimacy from Constantinople as an alternative to the Carolingian Empire and the Frankish states to follow it.

Suffice to say that Byzantium was anything but “culturally backward” by the time and today's standards. The 6th century Code of Justinian, a large codification of all legal norms existing at that time in the Eastern Roman Empire (contained in more than 2000 volumes), forms the basis for Civil Law in Western Europe. Without Constantinople, the Roman legal culture would not have survived the fall of Rome in 476. Nor was the Byzantine Empire a “theology, a polity denuded of historical and political dimensions”, as imagined by Enlightenment thinkers and later on sociologists such as Max Weber, Karl Marx, and many more (Murvar, 1971; Spuler, 1963). It had an efficient, professional bureaucracy, tax collection system and army, and protected property rights by law. It had secular (private) primary and secondary urban education, and distinguished between public and private goods, and human and divine law (Kaplan, 2016; Krallis, 2013, p. 237).[4] But the perception would stay that Byzantium and by extension Orthodoxy engender a different – passive or *detached* - relationship to economics (irrelevant) and politics (subordinate) than Western Christianity and impedes the separation of state powers, the rule of law and resistance to tyranny. This perception of non-Western institutions undermining through their historical involution (or centuries-long stagnation) political and economic freedoms represents a key orientalising theme, the “theme of Europe [having to] teach the Orient the meaning of liberty” (Said, 2003, p. 172), a perception that would characterise subsequent depictions of Eastern Europe.

But ever since the Enlightenment, Eastern Europe also included those lands – in Poland-Lithuania, Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia, and Livonia – that had become part of Western, Catholic and Protestant, Christianity. The common denominator for “Eastness” was “backwardness” and “barbarism”, and lack of “personal autonomy” (Longworth, 1992) irrespective of confessional and religious belonging, due to the “closeness” to Asia, Constantinople, and the distinct economic development of regions east of the Elbe (for an overview, see Bakić-Hayden, 1995). The arguments about the economic East-West differences represent a different layer of mental mapping, one that - notwithstanding the eastward expansion of Western Christianity – downplays the importance of the previous layer (Western Christianity) to affirm the importance of economic factors instead. It avoids the previous argument's cultural determinism, highlighting instead the east-west political-*economic* differentiation caused by serfdom re-emerging in Eastern Europe (meaning the lands east of the Elbe river and an imaginary line prolonging the Elbe southwards) while declining throughout Western Europe.

The argument about the origins of serfdom in Eastern Europe initially surfaced in the 19th century, with Friedrich Engels' analysis of the “second serfdom”, meaning a second wave of imposing serfdom upon peasants, after the first, pan-European wave ended in the 13th century. Engels was primarily interested in explaining differences within the newly unified German territory, such as between the peasants-dominated Catholic South and the Protestant North-East. But the argument developed into one over East-West differentiation, claiming that introducing serfdom east of the Elbe followed a growing Western European population and increasing purchasing power. The aristocracy in Eastern Europe responded to Western demand by increasing grain production, for which

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it needed labour, found by enslaving peasants (Brenner, 1977; Hagen, 2002; Makkai, 1975; Wallerstein, 2011 [1974]). The ensuing land-holding aristocracy strength and weakness of urban social forces sealed Eastern Europe's modernisation prospects, as the strong aristocracy favoured later authoritarianism and undermined democracy throughout the region (Moore, 1993 [1966]).

The argument takes a spectacular turn during the Cold War, when institutional economists connected serfdom to contrasting responses to the 14th century Black Death (pest). The West responded to the pest-induced human life loss by (eventually) introducing property and contractual rights (including waged labour), the quintessential capitalist institutions, spurring economic development for the centuries to come (North & Thomas, 1973).[5] In contrast, the pest prompted Eastern landowners to force peasants into working their lands – including by (re-)introducing serfdom. The competition between aristocrats over peasant-labourers and the granting of ever more rights to stabilize local populations explain the futility of serfdom in England, and, by extension (high collusion between aristocrats) its successful return to Eastern Europe (North & Thomas, 1973, p. 79). This is a deeply functionalist argument, assuming that "serfdom" had an economic rationale grounded in the failure of 'Eastern Europeans' to unleash capitalism through property or contractual rights[6]; and that property rights, waged labour and the abolishment of serfdom would have made Eastern capitalism resemble Western capitalism. However, rather than turn serfs into urban proletarians as in England, property rights and serfdom abolition east of the Elbe in the 19th century generally brought peasants pauperization and poverty, having little land and hardly the means to work and market production (Baronov, 2000; Boatcă, 2014, p. 381; Coulson, 2014; Mitrany, 1951).

Furthermore, the factors highlighted by North and Thomas were also present east of the Elbe (Domar, 2017), and the introduction of serfdom is a process too vast and complex to be reducible to a reaction to the pest. It spans one-and-half centuries before and after the pest, takes place far later in Russia and Orthodox and Muslim South-Eastern Europe than in Poland, and requires far more explanations than simply considering it a reaction to the pest-induced demographic collapse (Blum, 1957; Kamiński, 1975). Over these centuries, the region experiences the expansion of Teutonic, Mongol, Ottoman, and Swedish forces, and rising rivalries between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Tsarist Russia; these trigger military and political re-organisation strengthening the lesser nobility at the expense of urban centres from Prussia, through the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, to Russia (Bideleux & Jeffries, 2007; Blum, 1957).

The late 19th century also brought attempts to combine the political-economic perspective linking neo-serfdom's contours to East-West differentiation with a Weberian focus on cultural traits and Social-Darwinist racism. These pointed to the *inborn* "backwardness" of the German and the Habsburg empires' eastern possessions. They included not only references to the differences between Western and Eastern Christianity (which would leave out much of Central Europe), but more generally, the alleged absence of cultural and political movements such as the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment.[7] Such accounts translated into justifications for denying Eastern Europeans political rights and statehood. Max Weber fiercely defended on cultural and racist grounds denying political rights to Poles due to their Catholicism and belonging to a "Slav race", with alleged inter-generational inbreeding affecting the intellectual capacities of the Polish population (Abraham, 1991; Boatcă, 2013; Zimmerman, 2006). Thus, Weber followed into the footsteps of Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire and Montesquieu, vocal critics of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and – Voltaire – an admirer of absolutists such as Catherine the Great (Wolff, 1994, 2004). These observers produced the basis for othering Eastern Europe even where Western-Christian, by defining Western Europe as having a unique "reasoning" capacity due to Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment that leaves little room for an Eastern Europe "plunged in chaos and darkness" (as Larry Wolff paraphrased Voltaire; Wolff, 1994, p. 197). Intellectual and political elites in Eastern Europe either internalised these accounts (Murphy, 2018) or opposed them by pointing out that the East starts further to their south or east, in the Balkans or in Russia (Schenk, 2012; Todorova, 2009).

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THE ETHNO-RELIGIOUS MARKERS OF "EASTNESS"

Arguments about the strength of Catholic and Orthodox religious sentiment among Eastern Europeans are omnipresent. They follow a simplified reception of Weber, claiming that Western modernisation leads back to secularisation and Protestantism, which fostered an economistic mentality favouring capitalism (Lipset, 1959). The distinction between a secular West and a religious East often surfaces as the main line of East-West differentiation, with another one being the allegedly pathological form of nationalism prevalent in Eastern Europe (for reviews and criticism, see Berglund & Porter-Szűcs, 2010; Bruce, 1999). Another interpretation of East-West differences – and a further layer of mental mapping - connects the strength of religious affiliation and mobilisation in Eastern Europe less to lacking modernisation and more to the region's fragile states. Strong religious affiliation and organisation represent the main vehicle of national mobilisation under conditions of weak or absent states (Berglund & Porter-Szűcs, 2010; Bruce, 1999). Indeed, Constantinople's declining influence, culminating with its fall in the 15th century, spells a period of increasing pressure on states leading to their gradual decline and disappearance. Most eastern lands (east of the Holy Roman Empire, the political formation to rise from the Carolingian aristocracy) lost statehood following the Ottoman empire's expansion. But, the 15th century also brought an abrupt halt to the eastern expansion of the German Teutonic Order: The battle of Grunwald (1410) even brought together an army of diverse eastern extraction to defeat the Order, facilitating the rise of the largest eastern state formation (after Russia), the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. At its expansion peak, it reached from the Baltic to the Black Sea and was powerful enough to lift, in 1683, the Ottoman siege of Vienna. This perspective of an Eastern European resistance to "German" (and "Austrian") eastward expansion was an important trope in notions of Polish- or Russian-led pan-Slavism, or of Polish regional leadership, the "Jagiellonian idea" (Dabrowski, 2013). On the other side, it also informed perceptions of Eastern Europe during the late German Empire, the Third Reich, and the German tradition of *Ostforschung*, and served to legitimate German eastward expansion (Gebhart, 2019).

Yet statehood surprisingly re-emerges throughout the region, notwithstanding the grim assessments of Eastern European decline given the region's distance from the *abendländischer Sonderweg* (Max Weber), the West's unique path to modernisation. Most eastern states re-emerge as nation-states with titular nations in the 19th century, along with a few new ones in the early 20th century. Next to religion (or confession), language - the other national identity marker in the area - also gains importance throughout the 19th century. Churches played an important part, at least initially, in the "vernacular" survival of Eastern European languages, by maintaining or establishing language schools.[8] Like the rest of Europe, Eastern Europe was also undergoing a process of "vernacular" mobilisation and establishment of nation-states (Anderson, 1983; Smith, 2011).

In fact, ethno-religious mobilisation in the area is not simply a bottom-up reaction to absent statehood. It also results from the control attempts of the moment's powers, seeking to influence the religious affiliation of local populations and, in particular, to push back Eastern Christianity, bereft of its once powerful centre of Constantinople. This attempt took the main form of creating local versions of Catholicism and incentivising the Orthodox clergy to join it (Himka, 1999; Himka, Flynn, & Niessen, 1993; Leustean, 2018; Plokhy, 2015; Wilson, 2015 [2002]). The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth tried it out first, creating the Ruthenian Uniate Church, which would later develop into the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the largest among Eastern Europe's Uniate Churches. The other prominent example is the Habsburg empire's support for the Greek Catholic Church in Transylvania, aimed at pushing down the numbers of Orthodox (Romanians). Whatever the intentions of the Polish-Lithuanian and Habsburg elites were, these churches became important, if not the main carriers of national identity among Ukrainians and Romanians (Himka et al., 1993). They turned these populations against elites by giving them quasi-political organisations. Churches functioned in a similar way in 19th-century "partitioned" Poland and among Serbs and Bulgarians.

In the re-emergence of states throughout the area, some see signs of institutional continuity – mainly fostered by churches - that "relaunch" states (Malešević, 2019). Others saw signs of "national" continuity extending beyond institutions to include historical memories of ethno-religious communities mobilised by 19th-century intelligentsias:

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"in Eastern Europe, the nation was seeking for its own state" (Smith, 1986, pp. 239–240; 2011). A far more widespread interpretation was to treat the ethno-religious mobilisations in Eastern Europe as a pathology, a type of "nationalism" closer to the blood-and-soil notion of German, "Herderian" nationalism than the supposedly more benign, "civic" nationalism of Western European nations such as France and England. While first formulations of this opposition go back to Friedrich Meinecke's distinction between cultural and political nations (1907), the strongest formulations go back to the Cold War era and Hans Kohn's work (1944, 1946, 1949).

Continuing the 19th century use of Enlightenment as an alterity marker of East-West difference, Western nationalism appears in Kohn's influential account as a product of the Enlightenment. In contrast, Eastern nationalism is a product of Central and Eastern Europe's cultural backwardness and political immaturity, as nationalism preceded state-building, and subsequent state-building followed the intentions of nationalists (Kohn & Calhoun, 2017 [1944]). More recent perspectives echo Kohn's arguments, making grim warnings about the capacity of eastern states to harbour "civic" nationalism (Brubaker, 1996; Hockenos, 2013 [1993]). While Brubaker and others, including Jack Snyder, George Schöpflin, and Ken Jowitt, blamed communism more than lacking modernisation for the weakness of civic nationalism in the region (for critical reviews, see Bideleux, 2015; Shulman, 2002), they re-produce the 19th century arguments about Eastern Christianity legacies or of absent Renaissance and Enlightenment, replacing these factors with communism (although leaving social-Darwinist racism out). They also produce the image of the 'over-involved', fanatical Eastern Europe inhabitants, contradicting the 'over-detached' image involved in patrimonialism; both images agree, however, on seeing Eastern Europe's state-citizen relationship as deeply problematic – and different from the West's.

Hans Kohn was writing at a time when Eastern European states had, again, lost de facto independence, after two tumultuous decades between the two world wars. Kohn drew a straight line between the nationalist ardour of the 19th century and the rise of authoritarianism and fascism in the 1930s in the area he called the "East". Thus, not only does "ethnic nationalism" stand for an entire region but one is left wondering whether other political currents were also present. By that time (the 1920s and the 1930s), societies in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, most of them monarchies, saw internal debates over socio-economic "modernisation", catching up with Western Europe, and, after World War I, avoiding Bolshevik revolutions. Since when belonging to empires, most of these countries were non-industrialised peripheries (except for Czech and Slovenian lands), there was an acutely perceived "need" among elites to establish "national industries" and strengthen local capitalists. This position was opposed by "conservatives" and agrarian or rural "populists" believing that national survival needs to build on the rural and agrarian majorities of these countries, that most often formed the titular nations of the new states (Trencsényi et al., 2018).

This political cleavage pitting pro-industry "cosmopolitans" and "liberals" against "conservatives" and "populists" resembles the political conflicts of the day present also in other parts of Europe (Italy, Germany, Scandinavia). Yet the question of national survival in the face of strengthening authoritarianism in Germany and the Soviet Union gave it a particular virulence. It culminated with excesses against Jewish populations, seen as cosmopolitanism's educated urban carriers. These conflicts strengthened authoritarian tendencies in monarchies and military establishments promising to solve them. They ended democratic experiments throughout much of the region before WW2, except for Czechoslovakia (Janos, 2001). In fact, the authoritarianism engulfing most societies in the region between the world wars seems more related to the virulence of internal socio-economic conflicts over "modernisation" than simply the victory of nationalist mobilisers. Furthermore, Eastern European nationalist mobilisers, by the time they had become proponents of fascism or military dictatorship, had also embraced the same racist theories as Nazis and fascists in Western Europe, most notably Chamberlain's, and bitterly opposed the legacy of local Enlightenment exponents (Turda, 2008).

The eastern states of the "vernacular revolution" disappeared or suffered massive changes to their borders before, during, and immediately after WW2, to an extent unprecedented in Western Europe (except for Germany). Equally unprecedented, the war operations and exterminations following the battles between Axis (Germany and its allies), south-eastern states resisting the Axis, and Soviet Union forces extended over a territory covering

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Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Yugoslavia, Greece, and most of European Russia. Tymothy Snyder refers to much of this area as the "bloodlands" (Snyder, 2011), an area largely coinciding with earlier notions of Eastern Europe and united by the destruction brought by Soviet and German expansion.

The "bloodlands" also partly coincided with the borders of the Pale of Settlement, the historical world area with the highest density of Jewish population before World War II. Over the centuries, Jewish populations emigrated eastward to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Ottoman-ruled south-east Europe, following their persecution in Western Europe from roughly 1290 on (Bartal, 2011; Diamond, 1993; Pipes, 1975). As the Tsarist Empire occupied Poland's east, it created the Pale of Settlement, an area allowing the settlement of Jews and including western and southern parts of Ukraine, present-day Belarus and Moldova, and (unofficially) the Polish Kingdom's Vistula Region (Arad, 2008). While also discriminated in the Pale, which they were not allowed to leave and where the range of their occupations was greatly limited and they often fell victim to pogroms, Jews in the Pale also created their most famous and potent political organisations, the socialist Bund party and the Zionist movement (Rogger, 1986). As Germany and its allies occupied the Pale's former territories, these lands became the most dramatic sites of the Holocaust, with much of the Yiddish-language Jewish population exterminated during the German occupation (1941–1944).[9]

For some commentators, Eastern Europe became the (logical) birthplace of anti-Semitism, given the anti-Semitic pogroms in the Pale and elsewhere, pogroms to have preceded German World War II expansion and the advent of local fascist variants, pointing out the violence of these mobilisations as a characteristic feature across the region's history (Haffner, 2013 [1978]; Hockenos, 2013 [1993]; Kaplan, 1993; Wistrich, 1992).[10] The implication is that the West differs on this account, as even the intensification of anti-Semitism in Western Europe surrounding the Dreyfuss Affair at the end of the 19th century was worlds apart – and more "civilised" – than the anti-Jewish pogroms carried out in the Tsarist Empire. And, that by extension, this difference might be due to Orthodoxy being, in the words of Richard Pipes, "traditionally the most antisemitic of all the branches of Christianity" (Pipes, 1975, p. 4; Rogger, 1986). Yet it needs to be remembered that the large Jewish populations in the Pale of Settlement (actually in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) came into existence through migration from west to east. Crude theories about the "Eastern Europeans'" "willingness" to help Nazi Germany in carrying out the destruction of the Jewish population, or about the higher anti-Semitic propensity because of Orthodoxy (Landsman, 1994; Pipes, 1975) overlook two factors. First, before Nazi influence, Eastern European anti-Semitism most often combined violence with calls for the conversion of Jews, while expulsion and genocide became markers of the region's anti-Semitism mostly as the influence of Nazi Germany over it strengthened and peaked during 1939–1945 (Bergen, 1994). Second, as noted by Hagen (1996), such analyses conflate anti-Semitism with anti-modernity and – one can add – with religiosity. In other words, they imply that anti-Semitism (due to the religious fervour it allegedly builds on) has little to do with the secular West.

AMORAL FAMILISTS AND ETHNIC NATIONALISTS

The pacts between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and later on between the Soviet Union and the UK and the US, brought a renewed "extinction" of eastern states, turning them either into German satellites during the war, or into Soviet republics or Soviet satellites following German defeat. The region became again internally indistinct – and therefore manifest. After the Allied victory over Germany, many states were directly incorporated into the Soviet Union: the Baltic States and partly the territories of present-day Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova. Others were occupied by Soviet troops and turned into Soviet "satellite" states: Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Eastern Germany, and Czechoslovakia. Only a few could stay largely independent (while communist: Albania and Yugoslavia), even though the Allies recognized these countries' communist governments. Eastern Europe's fall under Soviet influence was recognized in the 1945 Yalta accords, in which the secret deal between Winston Churchill and Josef Stalin recognized most of Eastern Europe (except for Yugoslavia and Greece) as falling entirely within the

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Soviet “sphere of influence” (Crampton, 1997). Eastern Europe became the first world region associated with communism, the land behind the “Iron Curtain”. As in the centuries of imperial rule, the region again seemed defined by lacking independent statehood, as captured in the “Soviet Bloc”-designation.

For many Western observers and Eastern European emigres such as Richard Pipes, Andrew Janos, and Hans Kohn, it appeared “natural” that communist rule strengthened over a region that seemed to have few of the attributes they associated with modernisation: statehood and democratic traditions, industrialization and strong bourgeoisie, Western Christianity. Conservative social scientists in the US articulated throughout the 1950s a theoretical position claiming that capitalism and democracy overlapped in Western societies due to the political culture of these countries (especially the Anglo-Saxon ones – see Lipset, 1959). Pipes – a Harvard professor, eminent historian of Russia and US National Security Council official during the Reagan administration - used Max Weber's patrimonialism concept for stressing Russia's distance from the West and historical predilection for totalitarianism (Pipes, 1974). Pipes contributed to a larger argument, taking off with Edward Banfield's 1958 (1967) study of Southern Italy and culminating with Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*. These authors cast off countries in Southern and Eastern Europe, and Central and East Asia (including China) as basically inimical to Western “modernisation” (Banfield, 1967; Huntington, 1996; Jowitt, 1974; Lipset, 1959; Pipes, 1955). They either claimed that “non-modern” or “traditional” (peasant) populations are too “tribal” to foster democracy or that they ignore the public good as they focus entirely on fulfilling their and their families' private consumption needs – Banfield's thesis of “amoral familism” (Schneider, 2012). This kind of society would offer little to resist communism and would even (as outlined by Kenneth Jowitt) provide a “political culture” supportive of communism and detrimental to alternative political projects (Jowitt, 1974, 1992b). Both Jewitt and Pipes later on transferred their conclusions from communist to Muslim countries in the 2000s (Tanenhaus, 2003).[11]

Communism had indeed grouped countries in Europe and Asia under a single political-economic label. Common political-economic characteristics such as single-party rule and plan economy strengthened the perception that communist countries somehow belong together. Furthermore, the countries belonging to the Soviet Bloc were politically and economically interdependent. They underwent similar experiences, such as rapid industrialisation and – except in Poland and Slovenia - forced agricultural collectivisation (Fitzpatrick, 1996; Kligman & Verdery, 2011; Viola, 1999). Keeping in mind the predominantly rural character of Eastern Europe up until World War Two, the importance of collectivisation cannot be emphasised strongly enough. It proved a form of forced industrial investment (Allen, 2003; Millar, 1974), as resources extracted from villages went to developing industries and urban centres that resembled each other from central Europe to the Pacific. This derailing of investment from the countryside to the cities is communism's hidden ‘developmental formula’, ‘hidden’ because communists hardly made it explicit. Communist countries also resembled each other in how they treated opponents or simply “unwanted elements”. They pursued brutal and repeated “purges”, intimidation and eradication campaigns aimed at real or imagined political enemies, from remnants of interwar fascist regimes to members of anti-communist parties, ethnic minorities, religious organisations and believers, or even professional groups (Getty & Getty, 1987; McCutcheon, 1991).

On the other hand, communism meant unprecedented social mobility, high investment in human capital, and a level of welfare and social security previously unseen (Lane, 2005; Segert, 2015). As Michael Cernea, a World Bank social scientist recruited from the Soviet Bloc, pointed out, collectivisation promoted the economic emancipation of women by offering them employment and income (Cernea, 1978). Women however faced a double burden, combining employment with household work (Ashwin & Lytkina, 2004; Fidelis, 2010; Lennon, 1971; Moskoff, 1982). Communist regimes boasted with extending social rights, by offering jobs, free education and healthcare, and subsidising housing and food. Yet from the 1970s on, Communist regimes found it increasingly difficult to provide their populations these goods, which partly explains their increasing unpopularity and eventual collapse (Berend & Berend, 2009).[12]

Despite the communists' difficulty to cater for their citizens' needs, it was often argued – both during and after the Cold War – that communism left a “paternalist” psychological imprint on its subjects, meaning that

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post-communist citizens are over-reliant on state help and lack personal "autonomy" (Kornai, 1996; Król, 1994; Longworth, 1992; Simon, 1993; Verdery, 1996). In other words, communism too – next to the alleged imprint of patrimonialism, economic backwardness, ethno-nationalist fervour due to and late statehood - is a formative layer of "Eastern Europeanness". Proponents of this argument – producing the image of Eastern Europeans as both over-dependent on states and detached from the public sphere - differ in how they understand this imprint. Next to those arguing that "paternalism" makes Eastern Europeans risk-adverse and show little personal initiative, others build on arguments of the "amoral familism"-type to claim that Eastern Europeans distrust and undermine state institutions by relying on informal practices and networks (Jowitt, 1974, 1992a; Ledeneva, 2013; Mishler & Rose, 2001).[13] The "Weberian" implication of both arguments, highly popular also after communism's demise, was that there are cultural prerequisites of political and economic modernisation.[14] Both variants of the argument involve significant psychologising to claim that the state-citizen relationship in Eastern Europe is pathological, with citizen behaviour ranging from over-reliant to deeply distrustful vis-à-vis states. And both accounts further agree in (re-) creating an image of local populations – as they re-produce the patrimonialist perspective - as detached from public matters and, therefore, potentially undermining the functioning of 'modern' institutions.

The latest mental mapping discourse on Eastern Europe concerns the "transition" away from communism and towards market economy and democracy, a period culminating with the European Union's "Eastern Expansion" from 2004 on. This discourse recuperated the image of Eastern Europeans as "ethnic nationalists", in need of "Europeanisation" should they want to join the Western-European world of welfare, high living standards, and liberal democracy. Transition turned into another discursive layer of "Eastness". On the one hand it brought political pluralism, free speech, entrepreneurial freedom, and foreign investments (especially in the so-called "Visegrad countries"), making some question the usefulness of the Eastern Europe designation and stressing the differences between post-communist countries, rather than between Eastern and Western countries (for a review, see King, 2000). On the other, it also brought steeply deteriorating living standards and outmigration (Boeri & Terrell, 2002). Eastern Europe again experienced wars and political violence, from the Yugoslav secession and post-Soviet (civil) wars in the 1990s to the Russia-Ukraine conflicts of 2014 and 2022. Ethnic nationalism seemed on the rise, with commentators claiming that Eastern Europeans were "free to hate" (Hockenos, 2013 [1993]; Jowitt, 1992b; Suny, 1989), after communism had "put a lid on nationalism", and its demise had left the "genie of nationalism out of a tightly capped bottle", as Maria Todorova ironically noted (Todorova, 1992, p. 145). The mental mapping of Eastern Europe was, in the 1990s, about conjuring the danger of local populations showing their 'true' – ethnic nationalist – predilection, as orientalising discourses had already posited that the region's history and tradition offered little to resist the nationalist onslaught.

Transition indeed brought a trend of political polarisation, but the enduring trend was not simply one of a "return" to nationalism. In many countries, local publics fiercely debated how to confront communism's legacies and who is to blame for the immiserating transition. Parts of the political spectrum demanded "lustration", meaning that former communist top politicians, high functionaries, and secret service officers lose access to all public offices. Others, including liberal dissidents, such as Adam Michnik in Poland, successfully opposed this demand, fearing communist mobilisation and resistance to market and democratizing reforms. Not only was there no resistance, but parties of former communists were as effective as the liberals in pursuing market and European integration reforms (Grzymala-Busse, 2002; Tavits & Letki, 2009). Yet lustration proponents became suspicious of former communists embracing liberal reforms. These lustration proponents came to power in 2005–2010 in Poland and Hungary, with a fiercely nationalist, anti-communist, anti-liberal, and EU-critical discourse. "Lustration" or "transitional justice" debates – and more generally conflicts over how to deal with the communist or Soviet legacy – engulfed most Eastern European societies, translating into an eerie resemblance of their political debates. The issue of statehood was again at the centre, as nationalist fears of losing statehood to an alliance of communists, liberals, and "EU bureaucrats", loomed large (Blokker, 2019; Bluhm & Varga, 2020; Varga, 2020).[15]

As in reflections over previous periods, post-communism too invited a discourse highlighting the similarities across Eastern Europe, and the indistinctiveness of the region given the need to "teach" the region the European

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Union's "community values and norms". In turn, post-communist countries were expected to "prove their willingness and ability to internalize [these norms]" (Schimmelfennig, 2000, pp. 110–111). The literature and EU authorities dealing with the EU's Eastern Enlargement process referred to this process as "Europeanisation" (Borneman & Fowler, 1997). Thus they highlighted the post-communist countries' distinctiveness from an EU equated with "Europe"; they had not used this concept before, for instance during the Southern Enlargement (for a critique, see Boatcă, 2010). After two decades of post-communism, Poland and Hungary's return to authoritarianism and embrace of nationalism appeared symptomatic of the entire region's failure to "internalise" such norms. Explanations for this return to authoritarianism now featured the tragic figure of the naïve and surprised "Western liberals" in need of work "explaining [them] Eastern Europe" and why the region turned authoritarian again. The answer was that the reformers tried "imitating" a model that was foreign to the region: a "Western", "liberal" model (Krastev & Holmes, 2018, p. 119). In particular, the post-communist countries' treatment of minorities, from ethnic to sexual, became a marker of Eastern distinctiveness. As Eszter Kováts writes, "[s]ubscribing to LGBT rights became a marker of being [West-]European" (Kováts, 2021, p. 83; Slootmaeckers, 2020).

Problematic is not only the conflation of West, emancipation, and "liberalism", but the lumping of countries into an indistinct entity and the dismissal of much of post-communist transition as "imitation". The political success of "right-wing populism" mainly characterises Poland and Hungary, and does so only from 2005 in Poland and 2010 in Hungary on. Forces similar to Poland and Hungary's "right-wing populists" have not kept power elsewhere. The success of such forces in Poland and Hungary thus has more to do with the political struggle between an increasingly weak left and their right-wing competition than with characteristics of the entire region (Tavits & Letki, 2009; Varga, 2020).

But to many in Western Europe, authoritarianism's post-communist return serves as evidence that talks about Eastern Europe's demise - growing increasingly indistinct from Western Europe after 1989 - were premature. Eastern Europe seemed to reconstitute itself. "Right-wing populists" in Poland and Hungary conjured up a confrontation with the European Union about the allegedly distinctive values they stand for, which leading EU politicians readily accepted. Yet more fruitful and less orientalising than the binary East-West 'values clash' would be to recognise the diverse political outcomes across Eastern Europe - despite the recent – communist and post-communist - collective experiences setting Eastern and Western Europeans apart (Segert, 2015).

CONCLUSION

As a "variation on the orientalist theme" (Bakić-Hayden, 1995), Eastern Europe is arguably a special case of mental mapping, where the geographical term "east" overlaps with political and confessional formations – East Roman Empire and Eastern Christianity. For Enlightenment thinkers and 19th-century social science, these formations embodied the "theocratical antithesis" to modernity, and their regional reach – in what was later mentally mapped as Eastern Europe - created indelible associations of geography and political-economic development. Later discourses built on these associations, creating a layered and homogenising perspective on the region that ultimately distinguishes it through claims about its inhabitants and their alleged mentalities. The recourse to mentality explains how discursive layers claiming East-West differences endure over centuries, namely by re-producing the argument that ultimately, the East-West difference is about how inhabitants act or fail to act as citizen subjects of their political communities, their states. Communism deserves particular emphasis since it emerges as the ultimate formative experience of "Eastness" and its mentality. It incorporates the previous layers of orientalising mapmaking – the alleged distance from Western "rationalism", economic backwardness, the legacy of ethno-religious intolerance. It fuses these layers into one indistinct Eastern European realm of (post-)totalitarianism and its mental impact on inhabitants, turning the region's people into paternalists and cynical amoral familists, or ethnic nationalists. Eastern Europe and communism thus overlap - despite the latter's demise - by merging into the mutant form of "post-communism".

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Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

ORCID

Mihai Varga https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0278-7145

ENDNOTES

[1] As Gupta et al. mention in a commentary to Stuart Hall's essay "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power" (Gupta et al., 2007, p. 85); see also (Hall, 2019, p. 156).

[2] For representative statements in this regard, see Longworth's popular history of Eastern Europe (1992, p. 259), reproducing most of the century-old arguments of German historiography and social science.

[3] Note the opposition in Weber (1978b, p. 829), between the major impact of the Western Church on "rationalisation" and the meagre influence of the Eastern Church (and Islam): "unique relationship between sacred and secular law in which Canon law became indeed one of the guides for secular law on the road to rationality. The relatively decisive factor was the unique organization of the Catholic Church as a rational institution (Anstalt)." P. 830-1: "After the end of the early Byzantine period, the situation of the Eastern churches began to resemble that of Islam as a result of the absence of both an infallible agency for the exposition of doctrine and of conciliar legislation […] neither the late Byzantine nor the Russian and other caesaro-papistic rulers have ever claimed to be able to create new sacred law. There were, therefore, no organs at all for this purpose. not even law schools of the Islamic sort. As a result, therefore, Eastern Canon law, thus confined to its original sphere, remained entirely stable but also without any influence on economic life."

[4] It is only with the fall of Constantinople that the Ottoman Sultan appoints the Orthodox patriarch as the leader of Christian subjects (Krallis, 2013, p. 242).

[5] Suffice to say at this point that this perspective highlights the concentration of coercive means in Eastern Europe, and contradicts the account of Tilly and others (Tilly, 1990) who had identified such coercive concentration primarily in Western Europe (Spain and France).

[6] It contrasts with empirical accounts that question the accuracy of the thesis. Here is a quote from Katherine Verdery summarising the arguments of an Eastern European scholar: "The 'new' feudal master of bound labour, far from being directly or indirectly implicated in production for distant markets, is merely a local dignitary who wants a bigger castle, better fortified against external attack, more in keeping with castles encountered in an occasional journey to Vienna or Budapest" (Verdery & Prodan, 1990).

[7] These conceptions characterising, for instance, Max Weber, ignored or downplayed the wide circulation of Enlightenment ideas in the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania or throughout the Habsburg Empire (Hitchins, 1964; Murphy, 2018).

[8] Most often, aristocrats, even when of local extraction, had abandoned the use of these vernaculars in favour of French, German or, in the case of South-Eastern Europeans under Ottoman Rule - Greek. "Vernaculus", meaning "native" in Latin, denotes a "local" language spoken by the lower classes; it is to be distinguished from an upper-class *lingua franca*, mostly used by those who could afford an education.

[9] This was not the only massive change in the ethnic composition of Eastern Europe brought by World War Two. Massive patterns of migration occurred, with millions of Germans, Poles, and Hungarians forced to leave lands they had inhabited for centuries (Snyder, 2011).

[10] Even for the highly acclaimed German historian Sebastian Haffner, Hitler's anti-Semitism was of "Eastern" origin, not mentioning the numerous anti-Semitic publications circulating in Europe by the turn of the century, most importantly, H. S. Chamberlain's and his circle in Bayreuth and Vienna. Similarly, Germany's conservative historian Ernst Nolte saw the Holocaust as partly inspired by and answer to earlier communist mass crimes, reflecting "Asian" violence against the bourgeoisie (1986); in the ensuing *Historikerstreit* (historians' controversy) over Nolte's statements, a hefty exchange of

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arguments sparked by Jürgen Habermas' criticism of Nolte, little attention went to the implicit opposition between the West as absolved of mass murders – and standing according to Habermas for "freedom, responsibility, and self-determination" (Habermas, 1988, p. 50) - and the "Asian deeds" (mass murders) in the Ottoman Empire and the Soviet Union; mass murders could – if at all – only be seen in a comparative dimension that sees totalitarianism and mass violence as non-Western.

[11] While Jowitt does not use Banfield's concepts, his approach is very similar, referencing the alleged tribal-like social structures of peasant societies.

[12] The other big explanation for the demise of communism involves Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms, opening up the political space to mobilisation and inviting the activism of numerous nationalist movements throughout the Soviet Union and tolerating political upheaval in the Soviet satellite states (Kotkin, 2009). The Soviet Union brutally cracked down on protests in satellite countries in 1953 (Eastern Germany), 1956 (Hungary), and 1968 (Czechoslovakia), and threatened in 1981 to intervene in Poland should the Solidarność trade union not be outlawed (Poland). But it refrained from such actions in 1989, concentrating instead on events in Soviet republics (independence movements in the Baltic and the Caucasus republics).

[13] For criticism, see Cook et al. (2005), Gibson (2001), Yurchak (2013).

[14] See, for instance, such seminal works as Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* (1993) or Ronald Ingleheart's (1990) *Culture Shift* (Jackman & Miller, 1996).

[15] Others, in the Balkan and the Baltic regions, have seen in "Western integration", that is accession to the EU and NATO, the only credible guarantee for their fragile statehoods (Abdelal, 2018).

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