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Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe

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This book explores how the countries of Eastern Europe, which were formerly part of the Soviet bloc have, since the end of communist rule, developed a new ideology of their place in the world. Drawing on post-colonial theory and on identity discourses in the writings of local intelligentsia figures, the book shows how people in these countries no longer think of themselves as part of the "east", and how they have invented new stereotypes of the countries to the east of them, such as Ukraine and Belarus, to which they see themselves as superior. The book demonstrates how there are a whole range of ideologies of "eastness", how these have changed over time, and how such ideologies impact, in a practical way, relations with countries further east.

ABSTRACTS

CHAPTER 1 : Central and Eastern Europe and the Idea of the East

The introductory chapter of the book presents the main goals and assumptions. The author discusses definitions of key notions introduced in the book such "orientalism" and "ideologies of eastness". The chapter presents the main arguments of the book, which includes a thesis related to the unavoidable character of negative stereotypes of Eastern Europe in the context of contemporary hierarchies of power and status within the continent. The author argues that dominant visions of Eastern Europe may be seen as highly ambivalent and symbolic inequalities between this part of the continent and its core are largely naturalized.

CHAPTER 2: Central and Eastern Europe in a Center-Periphery Perspective

The chapter introduces a view of Central and Eastern Europe as peripheries. It is based on the perspective of Immanuel Wallenstein's world system theory. This model is related to Stein Rokkan's typology of political cleavages. It is argued, in particular, that specific types of center-periphery cleavages can be identified as being characteristic of particular zones of Central and Eastern Europe. The main focus of the chapter is on the so-called anti-communist cleavage and the cleavage based on different attitudes towards Western domination. The role of the so-called ideology of anti-communism is discussed towards the end of the chapter.

CHAPTER 3 : The Dependence Doxa: Western Hegemony and its Naturalization in Central and Eastern Europe

The chapter introduces the notion of “dependence doxa”, which refers to the naturalization and resultant relative invisibility of the dependence of Central and Eastern Europe from the Western core. It is argued that the economic dimension of Western hegemony remains the key, but least contested, element of dependence within the region. On other hand, it is the cultural and partly political dimensions which are most vividly debated. This results in what is called a “cultural reductionism” of the critical discourses related to problems of Central Europe. These dominant culturalist images of the region may be linked to mechanisms of symbolic violence.

CHAPTER 4: The Intelligentsia Doxa: The Hegemony of the Intelligentsia and Its Naturalization

The chapter introduces the notion of the “intelligentsia doxa”, which refers to the naturalization and resultant relative invisibility of the privileged role of the intelligentsia, in particular in the countries of Central Europe. The special status of the intelligentsia is theorized in terms of the dominant role of cultural capital. It is argued that cultural capital in Central Europe and political capital in Eastern Europe may be seen as compensatory capitals in peripheral regions. The chapter discusses the role of the intelligentsia from the point of view of its position in the so called field of power.

CHAPTER 5 : Post-colonial Theory in Central European Context

The chapter discusses Central European uses of post-colonial theory with special reference to Poland. Such uses are seen as recontextualizations of an imported academic discourse into a new context, which is marked by a specific configuration of political oppositions and ideological biases. Consequently, two key parallel reinterpretations of post-colonial theory are discussed: the euro-skeptical conservative recontextualization and the euro-enthusiastic liberal recontextualization. Finally, a view of post-colonial theory is presented as a new language of expression of the concerns of Central-European intellectuals.

CHAPTER 6 : The Kresy (Old Borderlands) Discourse and its Critics

The chapter discusses the heritage and contemporary uses of the so-called “Kresy” discourse, which is a traditional Polish way of referring to the eastern borderlands, especially during the period of the First Rzeczpospolita and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Along with that discussion, contemporary discourses critical of the Kresy myth are also analyzed and some of the questionable assumptions of those discourses are revealed. The historical Kresy debate is deconstructed as another instance of the contemporary key debate between liberal and conservative camps in the Polish political field.

CHAPTER 7 : The New Borderlands Discourse

The author argues that the old discourse of “Kresy” discussed in the previous chapter can be seen as a conservative ideology of eastness and as a traditional Polish orientalist discourse. A new liberal discourse of borderlands is analyzed and interpreted, in this chapter, as an implicit new ideology of eastness. The chapter deconstructs the idealistic assumptions of the borderlands discourse and points to its normative character and practical implications. In the conclusion, it is suggested that the new borderlands discourse may be seen as playing an important role in naturalization of the privileged role of the intelligentsia.

CHAPTER 8 : Constructing New Identities for Eastern Poland

The chapter presents contemporary Eastern Poland as a case study of the reproduction of old ideologies of eastness and the application of their new forms. It begins with a short overview of the history of Eastern Poland’s marginalization, in particular in economic terms. The author links this geo-economic context to the reproduction of orientalist images of the region. The chapter concludes with an overview of internal images of the region, with a focus on new discourses of regional identity within the three metropolitan areas of Eastern Poland: Białystok, Lublin and Rzeszów.

CHAPTER 9: Belarussian, Lithuanian and Ukrainian reactions to Polish discourses on the East

The chapter presents an analysis of the relationships between Polish ideologies of Eastness, in particular those referring to the region between Poland and Russia, and discourses of countries which share a common historical heritage with Poland: Belarus, Lithuania and the Ukraine. The discussion centers on which elements of the Polish narratives in these countries are most strongly rejected by them, and which more or less resonate with discourses of local intellectuals. A short overview of the uses of post-colonial theory in the region is also presented.

CHAPTER 10 : Conclusions: Critical theory in the Central European Context

This last chapter summarizes the main arguments of the book and, at the same time, relates them to some of the key debates of contemporary Western critical theory. It argues, in particular, that the case of Central and Eastern Europe does a good job of exposing the ambiguous status and implications of the uses of contemporary Western critical theory in peripheral settings. Idealism of critical approaches may unintentionally reinforce and naturalize such relatively invisible hierarchies, such as the dependence of the region on the Western core and the hegemony of the intelligentsia over other social groups.

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