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## **Orientalism and images of Eastern Poland**

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### Introduction

Eastern Poland is undoubtedly facing many objective problems. In economic terms it is certainly a less developed part of the country; most of the indicators of economic development in the region are below the national average. The same is true with regards to both social and technical infrastructure development. All of these problems are clearly objective in nature.

A much more ambiguous issue revolves around the origins of these regional inequalities and extends to the broader question of how development plans for the region are interpreted and understood. What seems particularly controversial is the diagnosis of the problems of Eastern Poland as a 'natural' function of the link between economic issues and subjective interpretations of contemporary social and political behavior patterns, not to mention reference visions of the region's past. In this regard, Eastern Poland is usually assigned negative stereotypes pertaining to allegedly innate and clearly detrimental cultural-psychological traits of its populace. These often questionable interpretations, which refer to such notions as specific "mentality", "culture" or "attitude" as allegedly prevailing in the region, are linked to selected indexes of economic growth which are clearly negative. This is done in order to suggest a causal relationship between the later and the former. In this way, images of a 'backward' region, not only in the sense of material prosperity, but also in the sense of mental and cultural achievement, are produced. As it seems, many of these perspectives do not have sufficient empirical or even moral justification and can thus be considered as instances of symbolic violence exerted on that part of Poland by dominant cultural and economic centers of power. It is worthwhile to look closer at the mechanisms that produce this kind of discourse. Revealing their roots, methods of reproduction and modes of use may be instrumental in understanding the broader question of the production of culturally inferior perspectives of regions in general.

It should be noted that this negative discourse of Eastern Poland seems to be part of a broader discursive structure operating at both a national and European level. A negative attitude towards "Easternness", defined in a variety of ways, can be spotted in several dimensions of political discourse in Poland including that of the mainstream Polish national identity discourse. A deep-rooted stereotype of the "East" (defined both as the

Eastern part of Europe as well as the Eastern party of the country) as a backward social world lagging behind European “normalcy” still persists among many Poles. Its effects, among others, emerge in numerous one-sided images of Poland’s Eastern regions and in the countries that are Poland’s Eastern neighbors. The awareness of the role of these often implicit, subconscious stereotypes is growing. Nevertheless, there is still much to be done in the study of this type of discourse. At the same time there is growing support for limiting their widely shared, while often hidden, influence on discursive reproduction of the images of the Eastern Poland, as well as of Eastern Europe as a whole.

The need for awareness of the above mentioned stereotypes seems to be of particular importance for all of those involved in work on development strategies in Eastern Poland, both in public institutions and in non-governmental agencies, which are currently provided with considerable public funds for these purposes. It is important that this money not be spent on projects based on ideas loaded with strong cultural and ideological prejudices. Thus it seems relevant to investigate and illustrate the implicit assumptions behind popular images of Eastern regions. This is because such images are being used to legitimize social and economic development strategies, which can be considered as controversial from the point of view of the region’s inhabitants. Are their best interests really being served?

Questionable assumptions concerning the lower status of the widely understood “East” are also often present in the images of Poland’s eastern neighbors. These countries have, however, become important partners of Poland in recent years. For this reason, but also out of respect for the widely accepted values promoted through European integration and mutual reconciliation, it is important to make Poles even more sensitive to the ways in which they perceive their “Easts”, both their internal East, as well as the external East.

A rising awareness of the implicit assumptions that underlie many of the discourses on the ‘East’ in Poland is also important because of the key role of relations with Lithuania and Ukraine; countries where two cities of crucial importance for Polish national identity are located, namely L’viv and Vilnius. Despite the very complex nature of Poland’s relations with Belarus, the same sensitivity, with respect to how images of the country are produced, is equally critical in the context of the challenges posed by the need for dialogue and cooperation with that country.

Within Poland, relations with the above mentioned eastern neighbors are of even more significant importance for the Eastern regions. Their current relatively peripheral status was largely caused by the fact that, after World War II, they had been cut off from those regional metropolises which played a key role as centers of economic and cultural development. In particular, we can mention Königsberg/Kaliningrad, which was the historical center of former East Prussia, Vilnius/Wilno and Grodna/Grodno, which were crucial for the regions of north-eastern Poland and finally L’viv/Lwów, the former growth hub of the pre-war south-east Poland. At the current time growth of these centers will be also an important factor stimulating development of Eastern Poland.

In order to reinforce this growth effect it is important that the interaction with these centers is as dynamic as possible and on fully equal terms, not only in the administrative, legal and infrastructure sense, but also from a cultural and psychological perspective. In other words, it is important that the impact of these towns (characterized by considerable economic and cultural potential, as well as excellent intellectual traditions) on eastern Polish regions is not constrained by visa and custom restrictions, but also not harmed by unfriendly stereotypes of Poland's eastern neighbors. The above arguments seem to justify a need for a closer look at the determinants of cultural perceptions of the widely understood "East" in Poland as well as for a search for elements of Orientalism in popular images of Eastern Europe and Poland's Eastern neighbors.

### Orientalism

This postcolonial theory, part of an interdisciplinary intellectual school already well established in Western social sciences, seems to be a particularly useful tool in the analysis of the above mentioned biases in the images of the "East" in Polish media and academic discourse. Originally, the theory developed as a critique of Western knowledge and discourse about past and contemporary colonies and, in more general terms, countries and regions peripheral in relation to the West. Both the intellectuals of the third world countries as well as academics from the core of the West have been active in its development. One of their main task has been a reflexive look at the implicit assumptions on which the images of the countries dependent on the West, in the past and in present our day, have been based.

In this text I will be particularly concerned with one concept, that of "orientalism", which is one of the key ideas of post-colonial theory. "Orientalism" in its contemporary meaning has been introduced into post-colonial studies by Edward Said (Said 1978). According to his definition, orientalism is a way of perceiving and imagining "East" in Western literature. Said argues that it typically appears as a culturally backward, often dangerous, unpredictable, incomprehensible and alien civilization. Orient in such a Western prejudiced view requires continuous efforts at its pacification and modernization. Said sees Orientalism as a Western mode of domination, or the exercise of power over the "Orient." One of the typical characteristics of "Orient" identified by Said in Western discourse about the Middle East is the problem of Oriental expression, in other words the inability of the inhabitants of the East to produce images of their region on equal terms with their Western counterparts. As Said notes, Orient is usually described in the West and by Western experts and scholars, while its own representatives are not able talk about themselves freely or to interpret their culture or history. Gayatri Spivak presents a more general argument discussing the above mentioned issues, suggesting that "subaltern can not speak" (Spivak 1988). This happens not necessarily because Orient is expressly forbidden to speak about its problems, but because the views prevailing in the West consider Orient imitative and not original. Oriental point of view usually turns out to be "outdated", thus uninspiring and therefore not worth hearing.

It is also common across Western discourse to suggest the existence of absolute and systematic difference between the "rational" West and the Orient, which is usually perceived as devoid of rationality, deep in its superstitions and myths. Because of its "irrationality", Orient, in the eyes of the West, often becomes dangerous and unpredictable. The threats arising from the Orient are often associated with inclinations towards ethnic and religious conflicts. It is worth noting that even if similar tendencies appear in the West, they are usually treated as exceptions. Ethnic or religious tensions appearing in the East are usually recognized as its inherent, distinctive features. The threats and risks produced by the Orient create the need for its control. To meet the challenge of "civilizing" the East experts in "Oriental affairs" are both educated and called to assist in harnessing the Orient by the rational West. The Western "experts on the East," working in rich universities and other affluent and efficient institutions of the 'center' are faced with poorly paid scientists based in much less wealthy and prestigious oriental universities. As Said has argued, the modern Middle East does not have a single decent library. This observation can be probably related to many other, smaller "Easts" inside Europe itself. Interestingly, Said points out that the Oriental academic elite appears to be largely Westernized. The best-educated of the oriental intellectual elite uses their Western education to swagger over their own "people." At the same time, according to Said, these elites have a subordinate status in relation to their Western counterpart. They appear to be mainly local informants of the theoreticians from the center, unable to significantly affect the image of the Orient in the West. What's more, they are often involved in "civilizing activities" of the Orient which could be seen as an adaptation of the region to the values and interests of the West. Said takes a very critical stance towards these intermediaries between the West and the periphery. He accuses them of co-responsibility for the maintenance of post-colonial dependence of their own countries.

Among the numerous followers of Said, one can mention contemporary Indian author Dipesh Chakrabarty. In his book "Provincializing Europe" (Chakrabarty 2000), already a classic of post-colonial studies, Chakrabarty notes that Western social sciences are based on a mechanism of universalization of particularistic historical experiences of the West. As a result, all the other regions of the world turn out to be "backward" in some way or another while their histories appear "deficient". This is because they have not experienced, or have only experienced in a limited scale, the ground-breaking events of social history of the West, such as the French revolution or the Reformation. Their history, in the light of Western theories, always appears as full of "failures" and "shortcomings." The relatively privileged role of religion, which is characteristic for many of them, defines their image as irrational, far from the ideal of modernity promoted by the Western social sciences. That modern dominant ideal is identified by Chakrabarty as capitalism, based on the values of secularized Calvinism.

### Orientalism in Poland?

The classic works of Edward Said and Frantz Fanon (Fanon 1965) were published in Poland over two decades ago. However, the first comprehensive review of post-colonial theory was published in Poland only two years ago (Gandhi 2008). Moreover it was only

a translation of a book published originally in the United States, and to date, there are no larger, book-length studies on postcolonial theory published by Polish authors. Attempts at its assimilation in the Polish context usually have shorter forms, many of them are essays published in popular magazines. One major exception was the book "Imperial knowledge. Russian literature and colonialism" by Ewa Thompson (Thompson 2000). It is, however, only partly related to the Polish experience, as its main topic is the analysis of the discourse in Russian literature in light of postcolonial theory. That book was also first published in the United States and only later translated into Polish. Another relevant book was also published in English. It is a volume edited by Janusz Korek (Korek 2007) and is devoted to post-colonial voices from and on Poland and the Ukraine. An early attempt to look at Polish literature using the lens of postcolonial theory was also made by Claire Cavanagh (Cavanagh 2004). She was one of the first authors to draw attention to the possible interpretation of Poland's history as a country with a historically dual role: both of a colonized subject and a colonizer. She was followed by such literary scholars as Maria Janion (Janion 2006) and Dariusz Skórczewski (Skórczewski 2007). An analysis of the discourse of the former borderlands of far Eastern Poland, the so called "Kresy", was so far most systematically dealt with by Bronisław Bakula (Bakula 2006). Among the other authors that presented their critical perspectives on the Kresy discourse one should mention French historian Daniel Beauvois (Beauvois 1994). He was not referring to post-colonial theory directly, but nevertheless he made an important, albeit seemingly controversial, contribution to the debate on former Polish Eastern borderlands.

An application of postcolonial theory to the contemporary Polish regions seems to be a topic not yet dealt with directly by any author. One could admittedly point to Upper Silesia, where the accusations of "internal colonialism" directed towards Warsaw could be heard since the mid-eighties (Szczepanski 1998). The use of that notion is a reference to Michael Hechter's book "Internal Colonialism - The Celtic Fringe in British National Development" (Hechter 1975). The notion of "internal colonialism" was transferred in the 1980s from academic to media discourse by Upper Silesian intellectuals. Its use did not, however, become an inspiration for any serious intellectual debate on postcolonial theory in the Polish context. Such an attempt has been made recently by Michał Buchowski (Buchowski 2006) who diagnosed internal colonialism in Poland, in particular in regions characterized by a high concentration of former state farms. Their inhabitants, in Buchowski's view, are stigmatized by the liberal discourse of contemporary social science and journalism. In a similar way, "internal" colonialism of the elites toward regions inhabited by lower social classes perceived as culturally alien has been also criticized in Russia by Alexander Etkind (Etkind, 2003). Peripheries, as they are seen in this critical approach, appear as "oriental" irrespective of their actual geographic location (they don't even have to be located east of the center in which the local elite is concentrated). Buchowski defines three basic dimensions of domination in the Polish space that have a post-colonial aspect. They are the urban *versus* rural axis, educated *versus* uneducated axis, and the winners *versus* losers of the transformation axis. Using case studies of texts by Jan Winiecki and Piotr Sztompka (in particular Sztompka 1993), both renowned Polish academics, Buchowski reconstructs orientalist binary oppositions of the liberal academic-expert discourse. His list includes the following fundamental contrasts: Homo Sovieticus *versus* Homo Westernicus, anti-

intellectualism *versus* intellectualism, aversion to elites *versus* respect for elites, double standards for private and public life *versus* unified standards for any sphere of life, acceptance for meager performance *versus* contempt for meager performance. These schemes are, in his view, imposed as dominating interpretations on the three above mentioned divisions in Polish society. Buchowski also argues that "above all, crusaders of the 'new deal' uncritically accept orientalizing rhetoric, or politics of marginality in describing social relations. Dichotomous logic renders them blind to the fact that their stigmatized subjects, like themselves, are products of a historical process in which all actively participate. People are not hibernating as homo sovieticus or homo orientalis, but while reproducing their daily practices they are reinterpreting them perpetually and contributing to change. The unemployed are not victims of their mental habits, but of a correlation of transformations that was brought upon them as a consequence of globalizing processes. What is striking is the mentor attitude of the missionaries of laissez-faire. They embark on the typical Enlightened project of educating 'the masses'. The mob (lumpenproletariat, homo sovieticus) has to be transformed into 'the people'."(Buchowski 2006: 475).

In another part of the same article Buchowski reconstructs the basic elements of the civilizational project he calls "enlightened despotism": "Individuals have to be disciplined and educated, they must internalize a certain, in this case capitalist, set of values in order to become 'normal.' In the socialist past they dropped out of any reasonable control and 'landed in a moral vacuum.' Demoralized, corrupted and orphaned victims, not of current practices but of the past, have to learn new standards and change their mentality in order to join the progressive part of humanity. If they cannot do it, they remain 'Easterners' and should indict themselves for being alienated. Any failure is ascribed to their 'oriental nature'."(Buchowski 2006: 475).

One can note that the above interpretation concerns a specific type of discourse of the Polish elite, which is referring mainly to the regions of high concentration of state farms in the communist period. It seems, however, that several elements of this world-view can also be found in many discourses on Eastern Poland. In the later case the main weaknesses of the local population are seen not so much as a supposed post-communist mental legacy, but rather as a religious conservatism and moral traditionalism.

#### Orientalism in Central and Eastern Europe: conclusions of previous studies.

It is worth noting that the above mentioned criticism of orientalist discourse in Poland may be seen as part of a much broader body of critical analysis of the images of Central and Eastern Europe, which has been developing in contemporary social sciences. Larry Wolff (Wolff 1994) is often considered to be the most systematic analyst of the historical roots of Western orientalism towards Central and Eastern Europe. He has identified the first depictions of an 'orientalist vision' of the region as emerging already in the Enlightenment period. In the Balkan context orientalist traditions have been reconstructed by Maria Todorova in her seminal "Imagining the Balkans" (Todorova 1997). To date, one can observe a growing number of publications analyzing the

orientalist syndrome in the discourse on Eastern Europe coming from both inside and outside the region (eg Böröcz 2001; Melegh 2006). Merje Kuus (Kuus 2004, 2007) has published a number of interesting papers analyzing the mechanisms of production of discourse on Central and Eastern Europe in contemporary Western Europe and the ways in which such mechanisms are reinforced and assimilated in the Eastern part of the continent. Kuus has singled out binary schemes which are present in the stereotypical images of the region. They appear to be the same basic notions discussed by Buchowski; in Kuus' studies one can see, however, their trans-national nature and scope - ranging from the Eastern part of Western Europe's core to Europe's far Eastern and South-Eastern limits in Russia and the Balkans. In that zone, as it has been pointed out by Kuus, a constant struggle for symbolic status is taking place. Its stakes are labels of different degrees of "Easternness" and "Westernness" assigned to particular locations in the region, usually based on their distance from the Western European core. That hierarchy of regions and countries is based on the above mentioned binary oppositions. The distinction between the "civic" West and the "nationalist" East is a prominent one in Kuus' view. In effect, the Eastern regions are faced with the inevitable choice of following Western patterns as the only remedy to the temptation of nationalism, which is usually assumed to be fully overcome.

Another stigma often attributed to the region is the above mentioned post-communist legacy - making the residents of Central and Eastern Europe homo-sovieticus. Hence the continuing need to purify the region of the remnants of communism; performing exorcisms through boiling down and adopting Western cultural patterns. Such mechanisms in the region can be seen as an element of constant symbolic pressure; a situation in which European credentials of the inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe are tested day after day. A key element of this scheme, as emphasized by Kuus, is not only an assumption of Western superiority from the perspective of development of civilization, but also a moral superiority of the West. Thus Eastern regions are facing a battle not only for their material and economic status, but also for their moral standing. This aspect of the symbolic violence of the West has been also emphasized by Buchowski, who points to the crucial role of the notion of the "moral vacuum" used in reference to the Poland's internal peripheries. József Böröcz (Böröcz 2006) has pointed out similar mechanisms which are manifested in the so-called "discourse of competences", which have the effect of depreciating the Eastern European periphery. His classic example is the concept of "civilizational competences", a lack of which is often arbitrarily assigned to communities heavily dependent on the European core. Unjustified use of that term, appearing in both academic and expert discourse, can be viewed as a tool of symbolic legitimization of the political and economic dominance of the West. Böröcz has also pointed out that Central and Eastern Europe is often stigmatized as a region characterized by an exceptional intensity of informal social networks, often of a clannish or even corrupt character. Such a vision of informality as an inherent characteristic of the East is, in Böröcz's view, one-sided as it assumes that informal social relations play no significant role in the organization of Western societies (Böröcz 2000). Böröcz argues that that asymmetry of images of East and West is part of a mechanism of the West to impose an idealized vision of itself on others while reducing the importance of its own shortcomings, which are presented as exceptions from an otherwise superior social organization.

In this context one can also mention the current renaissance of historical sociology. Of particular interest is its return to historical reflection on the sources of backwardness of Poland, its regions and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. However, this may be regarded as an ambivalent tendency due to the strengthening of interpretations that imply strong historical determinism. In particular, visions of the insurmountable character of 'centuries-old- backwardness' of the region may be questionable. Such ways of interpreting the history of countries in Central and Eastern Europe has been, in particular, criticized by Boleslaw Domanski (Domanski 2004). Merje Kuss notes that while the discourse she analyzes is highly ideological, it is often related to the tangible interest of actors from core countries, such as corporations and state agencies (Kuus 2004). Tomasz Grzegorz Grosse points, at the same time, how adoption of self-orientalizing stereotypes and acceptance of self inferiority by several Central and Eastern European actors, in particular government agencies, has lead to an inability to define and implement their own development goals and strategies (Grosse 2009).

### The case of the Eastern Poland

Good examples of how the above mentioned orientalist tropes work in contemporary discourse in Poland can be found in the expert opinions and other government documents concerning the region of Eastern Poland. A vivid illustration can be provided by an analysis for the Polish Ministry of Regional Development authored by Grzegorz Gorzelak. Gorzelak writes about Eastern Poland in the following way: "backwardness of this region is durable and therefore very difficult to overcome in the short term. This is because it is an example of what is called after Braudel (1999) – an instance of 'long duration', both in terms of material as well as social and institutional structures" (Gorzelak 2009). Pointing out the historical roots of the low levels of economic development in this part of the country is, of course, a statement of a universally recognized fact. More controversial, however, is what Gorzelak does at the same time, namely linking the "backwardness" question to the cultural dimension. In the following paragraphs of the same text one can see even a more clearly a tendency to arbitrarily, as it seems, link the economic problems of the region to the cultural traditions and political attitudes assigned to its inhabitants. The author suggests in particular that "low values of economic development indicators are accompanied by adverse social characteristics. Conservative attitudes dominate in the region (see the results of the referendum on EU accession and the results of the last parliamentary and presidential elections), capacities for self-organization are low, although recent experiences with the use of pre-accession funds point to an improvement in this respect (especially in the provinces of Podkarpackie and wi tokrzyskie). The level of knowledge of development mechanisms is low. Traditional values prevail, the level of tolerance for attitudes and behaviors different from those locally accepted is low (while as Florida argues, tolerance is one of the most important factors of social development)" (Gorzelak 2009).

Thus, low levels of economic development in Eastern Poland appear, in Gorzelak's view, to be quite clearly related not only to processes of long duration or the region's economic and geopolitical location on the map of Europe, but also to the supposedly

ingrained attitudes of its inhabitants. These attitudes are interpreted on the basis of electoral behavior and are assessed as "conservative" and "traditional". In other words they are seen as being far from the cultural patterns described by modern social sciences, in particular lifestyle patterns of middle and upper class inhabitants of the modern global metropolis.

In another interesting article published in a recent volume on modernization of Poland and edited by Witold Morawski (Morawski 2010) Grzegorz Gorzelak and Bohdan Jałowicki present an even more extensive and clear example of a similar view of Eastern Poland. They write: "Previous studies have shown that Polish regional elites, at least in the Western provinces, have internalized to a considerable extent the post-modern paradigm of development. They are characterized by more rational attitudes, which are open and susceptible to change. In Eastern Poland, views characteristic of the former communist-period elites are still present – [people are] conservative and closed to new development trends and the outside world. Poland's Eastern regions are characterized by a relative economic backwardness and low growth dynamics. No wonder that in such a socio-economic context old well-established attitudes and patterns of behavior prevail. The communist period's outlook considered industry and agriculture as the main factors of growth, while the officially preached egalitarianism was used to strengthen claimant attitudes. Family and friends were an important element of social structure, and the criterion of informal connections was a major factor in supporting career development. Such an world view, as has been illustrated by previous research, has survived not only within a considerable part of Polish society, but also among its elites, particularly in Eastern Poland. Therefore, these are not only the indicators of economic development and political attitudes, which were expressed during the subsequent elections and referendums, but also the outlooks of the elite, which prove that Poland, even in this respect, is quite clearly divided into two parts." (Gorzelak and Jałowicki 2010: 521).

Similar elements can be found in some of the theses presented by Antoni Kuklinski in his research proposal on Eastern Poland. He mentions, for example, "different mindsets of the societies of Eastern Poland". What's more, he defines "underdevelopment as a mindset of the social psychology of the regional and local communities documented by passive and non-innovative approaches" (Kuklinski 2010).

Such a way of perceiving the sphere of economic development as conditioned by particular cultural and psychological characteristics of the region's inhabitants (defined as "mental" traits incompatible with the ideals of modernity) seems to be a hypothesis difficult to prove. At the same time, it can be seen as a form of subconscious acquiescence to the classical mechanism of orientalization of regions located east of the location of observers in the wide zone of Central and Eastern Europe's "eastern slope". One can note that anyone located in this part of the continent may become an object of similar mechanisms of discursive violence. The entire zone starting at the Elbe and ending in Vladivostok is, in fact, all potentially "Eastern" and thus may have potentially negative symbolic associations. Any actor, individual or institutional, entangled in its social structures, while orientalizing their eastern neighbors, may at the same time become a an object of orientalization by their relatively more western neighbors. In

particular, it may appear that in their eyes the 'other' will pass as less modern, constrained by a conservative outlook resulting either from the context of religious traditionalism or entanglement in the (post-) communist past. Their economic status, if not matched by the highest Western upper class standards, may appear as a result of specifically having a not fully "open" and "innovative" mindset.

In such a context, one can question the justification for constructing visions of development in Eastern Poland that are heavily reliant on paradigms of innovation and "knowledge-based economies." Orientalist visions of regions considered to be "eastern" are often used in expert analysis to suggest the need for cultural reconstruction in the direction of forms, ideals and behavior patterns derived from the West, which are seen as more advanced and modern. The afore-mentioned analysis provides a good example of such trends, and seems to raise some doubts with respect to the cultural sphere. This is specifically why discourses of "information societies" or "knowledge economies" in that sphere may appear to have the highest ideological charge.

As Bob Jessop (Jessop 2008) and Norman Fairclough (Fairclough 2006) have argued, such fashionable discourses are based on the premise of an "information society" as an existing universal reality. The idea is that the spectacular development of the most advanced global economic centers is based on conscious acceptance of the ideals and slogans heralded by the discourse under discussion. This discourse appears however, as shown by the Bob Jessop's studies, to be highly ideological ex-post interpretations, produced rather arbitrarily by the institutions of the core countries involved in the process of symbolic legitimization of their economic and political position. In other words, these interpretations don't have to be considered as true or false, but seem to be at least one-sided and often, though not necessarily consciously, self-interested. They usually don't take into account the cultural context of the regions to which they refer to. In effect they may appear deceptively as ready-made recipes for achieving economic success through cultural reform. Moreover, by relying on references to the realities of the most developed countries, they don't provide language adequate for defining development targets and ways of achieving them in regions with a lower levels of development. This problem has been well demonstrated by one of the main authorities in the field of critical discourse analysis, Norman Fairclough, (Fairclough 2006) in his analysis of strategic documents of the Romanian government. Fairclough has convincingly shown how the Romanian government, in its official documents on development strategy, is repeating slogans and other formulations directly copied from documents of the European Union. The latter in turn, as it is argued by Fairclough, the so-called Lisbon Declaration included, have appeared largely under pressures of globalization exerted by the strongest economic actors in the world. Un-reflexive transfer of these controversial assumptions to the context of the Romanian periphery may be considered, as it is argued by Fairclough, a result of the symbolic violence exerted by the main actors of globalization and may lead the Romanian government to the adoption of goals and government policies of questionable appropriateness to local socio-economic problems. Fairclough's analysis of the case of these strategic documents of the Romanians government is worthy of deeper scrutiny in the context of the analysis of development programs for Eastern Poland.

## The question of the heritage of the 19th century partitions of Poland

One can also take a look at discourses on Eastern Poland which reference to the historical heritage of the region. Among the most interesting are those which try to explain its “character” or “personality” by relying on stereotypical interpretations of the role of the 19 century partitions of Poland by Austria, Prussia and Russia. What is striking in this context is that most of these interpretations draw the former Russian sector of Poland and its heritage in an unambiguously black color, while the Austrian and Prussia heritage are usually represented in bright colors as a solid foundation for current development.

This happens despite the existence of contradictory evidence. Thus, as has been argued by Janusz Hryniewicz (Hryniewicz 2001) the Prussian occupation of the region of Wielkopolska (Greater Poland), which became the most marginal part of Prussia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, probably delayed the economic development of that region as compared to its hypothetical economic trajectory as a part of Poland. One can also note that it was the only sector of occupied Poland in which no institutions of higher education were established while, at the same time, being subject to a brutal policy of Germanization. This took place within the framework of the so called *Kulturkampf* campaign. The historical facts regarding the construction of a relatively well developed infrastructure, including communication and urban installations, inherited from Prussian rule may not obscure the fact that, with the exception of Upper Silesia, which had been lost by Poland much earlier, the Prussian sector received no significant investment in industry and remained, largely, an agricultural part of Prussia.

On the other hand, the current dominant images of the Russian sector are devoid of any mention of elements of historical heritage which could have had a positive connotation. In particular, it is rarely mentioned that at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries the region was the most rapidly growing part of the Polish territories and one of the main economic hubs of the Russian Empire, a country which was experiencing an unprecedented economic boom during that period (Kochanowicz 2006). At the same time it is worth mentioning that the urban centers of the Russian partition were not only leading among Polish towns in terms of economic growth but also in terms of social, cultural and intellectual dynamism. These elements of the social and economic landscape of the Polish lands under occupation, particularly in its last period from 1905-1914 when the Russian sector was a clear leader in terms of economic and social development, are now completely overshadowed by the memory of the negative elements of oppressive Russian policies. These policies included political repression against Poles participating in resistance efforts. This included confiscations of property or exile, restrictions on development of Polish culture and education, high levels of corruption, relatively delayed democratization of the political system and polarized economic development accompanied by very restricted infrastructure development outside of the major metropolitan centers. Thus, the former Russian zone is currently depicted as a realm of autocracy, a region of extreme economic and cultural backwardness and a land completely cut off from the mainstream of Western civilization. Such images of the region seems to correspond well with the one-sided images of

Russia that are still dominant in Polish media discourse (Zarycki 2004). What is, in particular, often omitted by the most Polish discourse is the fact that in the first years of the 20th century, up to the Bolshevik revolution, Russia had been fully integrated into mainstream economic and social development in Europe. The same could be said of its cultural life. While retaining its specificity, pre-communist Russia was strongly linked to the main centers of European civilization. One can suspect that the current negative stereotypes of historic Russia, and the black images of the former Russian partition, are based on the country's current position in the international arena. Despite the collapse of communism, Russia has not, in fact, decided yet on a clear rejection of its Soviet heritage. A considerable part of the Russian elite and general population manifest a distrust towards Western culture and democratic values while the country remains, despite an accumulation of substantial financial resources from the sale of mineral resources, a weak economy.

These factors determine the low symbolic status of Russia in the international arena, and it seems to be one of the key, probably subconscious, factors determining the perception of Russia's legacy in Poland. Equally ambiguous legacies of Prussian and Austrian occupations of the Polish lands seem to be highly valued and their stereotypical images have become purified of their negative elements. This effect seems to also be associated with the current economic and symbolic status of the two countries in question. In particular Germany, which in contrast to Russia enjoys a relatively high international prestige, is recognized as a global leader of economic and social development. This translates into a reappraisal of the legacy of Prussian Poland and strengthens the above mentioned mechanisms of orientalizing of the Eastern Polish regions, especially those under Russian rule during the 19th century. In my most recent book I present a more detailed comparison of the contemporary stereotypes of former partitions zones, including the mechanisms of orientalizing present in their discourses (Zarycki 2009).

Such a one-sided, orientalizing perception of Eastern Poland not only results in silencing the positive elements of the historical heritage of the partition period, but also leads to overlooking its contemporary strengths, especially in the socio-cultural sphere. A spectacular example of this trend is the marginalization of the fact that most parts of Eastern Poland clearly and systematically achieve higher than average scores in standardized high school tests (Leszyński 2003). Higher level of educational attainment in this part of the country do not fit the above described orientalist image of a "mentally" and culturally backward region. This is probably one of the reasons why no clear academic explanation of this phenomenon has been offered yet. One can mention that among the hypotheses proposed so far is a possible connection to a supposedly greater tolerance for cribbing and other forms of dishonesty. The hypothesis itself seems to be orientalist in nature, and relates to the above mentioned perception of Russian heritage in Poland. Nevertheless, empirical testing demonstrates this to be false (Herbst 2009).

### Conclusion:

This text presents only basic proposals on possible applications of post-colonial theory, in particular the phenomenon of orientalism, to the analysis of discourses on Eastern

Poland. Further study of the above mentioned issues should allow us to gain a better knowledge of the scope and dissemination of the orientalist, one-sided patterns of perception of the region, both outside its realm and among its inhabitants. At the same time, further research may provide a more detailed insight into the nature of the above presented discourses, their specific forms and variants as well as mechanisms for their reproduction and function. Such studies should help to increase self-knowledge and self-awareness of the inhabitants of the region, in particular that of their elites. These elites may also be able to work out a discourse better adopted to diagnosing the region's problems and assets and determining its development objectives in a relatively more autonomous way.

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