

ON THE EAST-WEST SLOPE

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Globalization, nationalism, racism and
discourses on Central and Eastern Europe

By Attila Meleg



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Preface

I. The Paradox of Central and Eastern Europe?

The dominant discourse on Central and Eastern Europe in and outside the region confronts us with a paradox. Central to this discourse is the interpretation of the events of 1989 and the subsequent social and political development presenting a hope/chance for a “return to normalcy.” Here normalcy means the “West,” a combination of ideals such as “diversity,” “freedom,” “democracy” and “market economy.” This “Europeanization,” prescribing radical “westernization” and “normalization,” supposedly meant the end of a distinct “Eastern” category in Europe, or at least the rapid evaporation of its unpleasant connotations and a gradual “reintegration” of Europe. But paradoxically, at least in the short run, this “normalization” has led to extremely “abnormal” and partly unexpected disintegrative tendencies around the shifting borders of “Europe.” Federal structures and states collapsed creating geopolitical uncertainties, harsh disputes over minorities and territories evolved, and in some cases ugly and devastating civil and international wars were conducted, hindering the return to “normalcy” and thus the hoped-for disappearance of the East–West divide. It is still with us and only the level of “Easternness” or “Westernness” is debated with regard to different, geographically and politically understood contexts.

The political disintegration, the wars and the “rise” of nationalism have been rarely explained by the emerging new socio-political framework, i.e. global capitalism and the European Union. The arguments tend to fall back instead on essentialized and scaled “Eastern” characteristics of the region. The “abnormal” phenomena have been either understood as the “return of the past,” i.e. the reproduction of the inherited “Eastern” structures and sociopolitical reflexes, or they have been dismissed as the “necessary” but “unpleasant” costs of getting back

to the “normal” path of Western development.¹ Thus on the one hand there has been widespread talk of the reappearance of “Balkan political leprosy,” “murderous” nationalism, the “burden of history,” “tribal collectivism,” “ancient East–West divide” or “old wine in new bottles,” to quote just some of the most frequently used terms suggesting that “East is East”.² On the other hand, as compared to the blood-wine-disease focus, from institutional actors such as the EU and the World Bank to prominent “East Europeanist” intellectuals there is lamentation about the difficulties of transplanting certain “Western” practices or getting beyond certain developmental phases in Central and Eastern Europe. In this genre of “developmental” or “transitional” thought there are ideas of necessary “modernization”, “hybridity”, and it is argued that Central and Eastern Europe has some “unfinished business” and the “ten–fifteen years” of transition are still going “on” within the newly accessing “Eastern” parts of the European Union or beyond.³ Alternatively, in the case of the primeval nationalism, it is claimed that the Central and East European states are still in a “state-building” and “nation-building” phase, whereas most West European states have entered an essentially “post-nationalist” era.⁴

That the above interpretations, narratives or discourses are highly problematic is not a new discovery. Attacks on them have been manifold, and at times devastating.⁵ This book is not a new attempt to refute or to deconstruct this mythology directly. The point of my analysis of East–West discourses is not that the above understanding of political and social development is Eurocentric or teleological, or that categories like Central and Eastern Europe are socially and historically constructed and can serve as a basis for hegemonic discourses.⁶ The question for us is rather how these “East–West slopes” based on the idea of gradually diminishing civilization toward the “East” enable the translations of “liberal humanitarian utopias” onto a global scale and how the related identity structures actually operate and transform themselves into social and political action or individual narratives in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. Even within this broad area, my prime focus is not on the social and political behavior of actors at the extreme positions (the “West,” EU versus poor “Third World” states), but of those who are delegated by the discourse into a mid-way position on the slope, or who imagine themselves in that locus. Geographically and socially this position is not fixed in the discourses be-

ing analyzed, but the institutional and non-institutional actors of the former “Eastern Bloc” are prime examples and therefore provide the main target of my analysis.

II. The concept of this book

This book is organized around three major problems. The first is the issue of historical change in East–West discourses from a modernizationist type to a new/old civilizational one and the relevance of this discursive change in the collapse of state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe. The second is the role and functioning of this new/old discourse of civilizational slope at the end of the 20th century. In particular this entails an attempt to understand why Central and Eastern Europe necessarily turns “ugly” (racist, xenophobic and nationalistic) under a global pattern of Westernization understood in the framework of the civilizational slope. Thirdly the book looks for an interrelationship between discourses and narratives, that is to say the ways in which institutions or individuals attach themselves to cognitive structures such as the East–West slope. My aim is to examine not only how we can imagine ourselves on the slope, but also how these narratives and their interrelationship can be categorized.

1. Changes in discourses

One of the main arguments of this book is that around 1980 there was a major shift in discourses, which is analyzed in chapter 1. The concepts of “Central Europe” and “Europe” emerging in both popular and scholarly analyses of the early 1980s mark the collapse of one discourse and the arrival of a new/old one. The reinvention of these concepts was not some kind of historical accident whereby intellectuals “East” and “West” returned to concepts that had been forgotten for 30 or 40 years. Rather these concepts had been suppressed in a discursive, Foucauldian sense. During that period of 30–40 years there had been a discourse of rival modernities or “cold war” competition, conceptualized largely in terms of quantitative and ideological differences. This discourse appeared as something “real” and did not lend itself to self-reflection. Around the early 1980s, still within a teleological framework, there was a shift to a qualitative-regional schema. The discursive

shift was evident in the “now-classic” texts on the concept of Central Europe and post-totalitarianism. They were all relying on the idea of the collapse of the modernizationist-progress discourse and the (re) vitalization of a new/old conceptual framework. All this facilitated the collapse of state socialism and the reallocation of political power both within socialist countries and in the international community.

The same historical shift is addressed in chapter II, where I follow the development of population discourses on “East” and “West” in both “East” and “West.” I use new archival-documentary material from influential American and Hungarian intellectuals, policy makers and demographers to trace “local” racist discourses of qualitative population development to “global” modernizationist ones (which suppress but in some way still carry certain elements of previous cognitive structures) and to analyze the shift to the new/old qualitative-regional discourses of population changes. It is of some significance that, as compared to the prewar discourses, those of the 1980s and 1990s show a definite interest in incorporating Eastern Europe into an overall non-Western category. Furthermore the tracking of East–West exchanges and the mutual reflection of “local-global” discourses on each other provide a critical insight into the “paradoxical” rise of “Eastern” racism.

The marks of qualitative East–West discourses can also be shown in the spatial imagination of global actors such as multinational corporations, major research and development foundations and international newspapers, discussed in chapter 3. There it turns out that, counter to the idea of a unified world and deterritorialization cherished by the literature on globalization, the globalization processes bring back long suppressed civilizational projects with regard to the region, a return which clearly fits into the idea of discursive change around the 1980s.

2. The role and functioning of East–West discourses in the late 20th century.

In chapters 2 and 3 I attempt to find a way out of the above liberal paradox by analyzing how the idea of gradual Westernization on an East–West slope leads to disintegrative processes in Central and Eastern Europe and these unwelcome processes cannot be explained by their belatedness or their prevailing “Eastern” traits. What is the dynamic (the sociology) of this slope sequenced by geo-cultural categories?

I will examine this not at the extreme points, where the perspectives, behavior and the identity of the West and that of the “least developed” countries have been widely discussed in recent postcolonial and cultural studies, but in the mid-way points of “half Western, half Eastern” countries.

It seems that the main mechanism has already been outlined by Sorin Antohi’s linkage of mimetic competition, the “failures of political identity” and disintegration in Eastern Europe or by concepts such as “nesting Orientalism” pioneered but never fully and systematically elaborated by Bakić-Hayden (Antohi 2000; Bakić-Hayden 1995). According to these ideas, then, the essence of the present dominant discourse of an East–West slope prescribes the gradual Westernization of different areas of the world and a drive to climb higher on the East–West slope. This upward emancipation leads to a mechanism designated in this book as movement on the slope or perspectives on the slope, which invites a grotesque chain of racisms or Orientalisms between different public actors, depending on the position and perspective they adopt on the above slope. In this chain everybody finds more “Eastern” actors or social arrangements that can be scapegoated for the failure to move upward on the slope or toward “liberal-humanitarian” ideals. In some other perspectives on the slope the Orientalism of the actor positioned higher or at the top of the slope is used to legitimize East–West exclusion further down the global civilizational scale. Conversely it is possible to construct a “Western, liberal, Jewish colonizer” who is aiming at the total subordination of the local population. This East–West game makes the internal political fights in Eastern European countries very fierce, while it can also lead to strange international conflicts between the states themselves, destabilizing the region and inviting Western intervention as exemplified by the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

3. Discourses and local narratives.

How do we as individuals relate to this slope? By what kind of narratives and narrative identities can we attach ourselves to this East–West slope if we cross the designated East–West borders? How do we reproduce these patterns by way of our own life histories? These are the questions of the concluding chapter of the book, in which we can fol-

low the individual translations of the East–West slope and of the East–West paradoxes projected on us.

Two months of field research have produced forty-five narrative interviews in the United States, Hungary and Russia with people involved in East–West relations. The interviewees included representatives of multinationals or “emerging” “Eastern” business people investing heavily in the United States; academics who were also working on the social and economic problems and processes of the “other” region or who had simply moved across the border and taken long-term teaching assignments on the other side; employees of major international foundations and non-corporate actors engaged in philanthropic activities related to Central and Eastern Europe; political experts and one senior military figure.

The main assumption behind chapter 4 is that, besides providing meaning through temporality, narratives are also our prime means of “weaving” ourselves into East–West discourses. They are critical intermediaries in the materialization and reproduction of the power arrangements concerned. This reproduction by way of narrative identities is interpreted through hermeneutic analyses of the different narratives. The narratives cross each other or meet at the “border.” “Easterners” speak about their activities related to the “West” or Central Europe and “Westerners” about their activities with regard to Eastern or Central Europe. This allows us to interpret not only the techniques used in creating a story for a Hungarian researcher in the East–West context, but also the role of the interviewees’ position on the East–West slope and the possible consequences of “interactions” or the “dialogue” between the different actors.

From the types of the narratives and the reflection of the “Eastern” narratives on the “Western” ones it turns out that paradoxically the discussion between those who still rely on “cold war” patterns (“the children of the cold war” as one of the interviewees put it) have a much greater respect for each other’s culture, than those trapped in the “dialogue of the deaf” between “nomadic,” or “global traveler” versus “nationalist” types. Thus see again that the identity structure resulting from global Westernization creates conflicts contradicting the original assumptions of the proposed gradual “enlightenment” in the region. This seems to be the real paradox of Central and Eastern Europe or any other would-be “Western” region of the world.

NOTES

- 1 For the categorization of “comparative” analyzes of non-Western developments see: Böröcz 2003, chapter 1. For nationalism and this very useful division of arguments see: Rupnik 2000.
- 2 These terms appear in different sorts of texts from newspaper articles to scholarly analysis. Here I will only mention some of the authors who rely on such ideas with regard to Eastern Europe: Judt 1996; Glenny 1992; Tismaneanu 1999, 2001; Gross 1999; Fisher-Galati 1992; Richards 1999. For a critical overview of these terms see also Appadurai 1996; Burgess 1997 and Todorova 1997.
- 3 This modernizationist analytical angle is maintained basically by the whole genre of transition literature and all the major international institutional actors managing the “transition” including the EU, World Bank and EBRD, but it has been reformulated even more eloquently by many intellectuals preoccupied by the translation of the institutionally promoted “global design.” For institutional actors see chapter III of this book, while for intellectuals among others see Chirot 1999, 2001; Kovács, J. M 1999, 1999a; Ash 1999–2000; Ramet 1999.
- 4 See among others: Bideleux and Taylor 1996; Rupnik 2000.
- 5 There are a number of critical attempts for historical, sociological to political analyses. See among others: Tamás 1999a; Burgess 1997; Todorova 1997; Neumann 1999; Böröcz-Kovács 2001; Böröcz 2000.
- 6 See among others: Amin 1989; Said 1978; Böröcz 2000; Böröcz and Kovács, 2001; Böröcz, 2005; Wallerstein 1991, 1997; Appadurai 1996; Neumann 1999; Todorova 1997; Antohi 2000; Wolff 1994; Mignolo 1998, 2000; Spivak 1990.

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CHAPTER 1

Liberal Humanitarian utopia and Eastern and Central Europe

1.1. On the slope. Introductory examples of East–West discourses in the late 1990s

From the early 1980s the geopolitical and geocultural imagination has been recaptured by the idea of a civilizational or East–West slope providing the main cognitive mechanism for reorganizing international and socio-political regimes in the Eastern part of the European continent. In this radical “normalization” and “transition” process almost all political and social actors “East” and “West” identify themselves on a descending scale from “civilization to barbarism,” from “developed to non-developed” status. This discursive structure appears in very different forms and areas of knowledge and is utilized by very different speakers ranging from the European Union to restaurant owners, but in each case the concept of a “sliding scale of merit” with regard to Eastern and Central European countries as members of the former so-called socialist block¹ (Glenny 1992, 236). To further conceptualize this cognitive order of differentiation let us take some introductory examples “East” and “West”:

On July 12, 2000, the Italian daily *La Stampa* published an interview with Giuliano Amato, the prime minister of Italy at the time, who, arguing heavily against putting the EU candidate Eastern and Central Europeans into “*quarantine*,” felt outraged because of the delaying tactic of the European Union with regard to the “Eastern enlargement.” As he put it, when the East European nations expressed their wish to belong to Europe the EU told them: “Yes, you are European, but only of mixed blood.” And this answer showed him that “with this we [Europeans] accept some responsibility for communism” (MTI, Hungarian News Agency, press archive, 07/13/2000).

The same racial descending scale appeared in April 2001 in a narrative interview conducted by me and analyzed in details in the last chapter of this book. In this report a Walloon professor living in St. Petersburg reflected upon the day when she met her Russian husband in Moscow:²

It was a very, very beautiful day. And it was a discovery of Russian for me, of Russia, and I think, like everybody in the beginning, I didn't feel myself a foreigner here * I think for everybody it's the same because... especially because the people look like us * there is no difference. Of course there is un petite Slav, but they are white, they are very different, like, like in Europe, there is black hair, there is blond hair, everything, and * we look not very different. And especially now because the clothes are the same. Ten years ago * it was all of this very Soviétique, and * until now anyhow the people know in one second that you are not, you are not Russian. * Before it was enough to look at the shoes, but you know this because you were living in Hungary. I think it is for you very familiar.

On October 23, 1998 Mr. Orbán, the newly elected Hungarian prime minister was interviewed by *Business Week*, a Budapest-based English language weekly, with regard to the economic damage arising from the financial turmoil of August 1998 in Russia. In this interview he established another type of descending scale with regard to the progress toward a fully-fledged market economy:

The Hungarian market is not an emerging market anymore, it is a converging market. ... The crisis in Russia is deep, and we will have to live with the situation for a long time. But I am quite confident that investors realize the difference between NATO and soon-to-be European Union members—such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland—and Russia. And they will make a clear distinction in the future. Investors will come back—more than who left—and Hungary and Poland will be the stars for them over the next two years (<http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/oct1998/nf81023e.htm>, accessed: July 27, 2001).

In 1996, analyzing the European integration and the “East European”

disintegration process, the director of the Centre of Russian and East European Studies at University of Wales and his co-author came up with the following conclusion concerning the disintegration process in “Eastern Europe” and its post-communist transformation toward “Western” ideals:

An even more important consequence of these East–West divergences is that East European politics is seriously “out of phase” with West European politics, and this constitutes another crucial hindrance to pan-European integration. Fundamentally, the East European states are still in a “state-building” and “nation-building” phase, whereas most West European states have long since completed (or exhausted) their state-building and nation-building projects and have moved essentially post-nationalist era (Bideleux–Taylor 1996, 285).

In October, 2000, in a restaurant called Sydney Bar, a menu gave advice to guests looking for food or drink in downtown Bucharest, Romania. Among items like “Bloody Mariana,” “Bucharest Road Kill,” “Where the Hell Am I” and “Castro’s Revenge” the following hierarchical evaluation could be read with regard to legality in different areas of Europe:

Wallaby toasted

“We’ll-al-be-toasted” is our standard reply to the often asked question “why isn’t there a Sydney Bar in a Western Country?” With our uniquely inoffensive menu destined to battle with those western lawyers (whom we are sure do not sue in lei) we definitely see a conflict of interest. 60,000 lei

In 2001 Péter Nádas, one of the most renowned and finest Hungarian writers of Europe today, published a short article in a liberal Hungarian Weekly on “Training Practices of Freedom.” This article became something of a cult piece among the Hungarian intelligentsia and is worth quoting more extensively due to its dense hierarchical vision of Hungary and Europe put into civilizational terms:

Yet it does not take just ten years—it takes well over two hundred to change a nation’s most singular characteristics ...

While the person was talking I was standing in front of my bookcase in an attempt to compile a list of books s/he should not miss by any chance. I was going to suggest them accessible books to enhance their image of Hungary. It was no easy task since Hungarians excel in quite a number of fields, self-knowledge, however, not being one of them. They had written on the Swedish, the Italians and maybe on Norwegians as well and had come to Budapest to carry on with their peculiar undertaking.

The compilation of the list required information about what languages they could read.

In answer to my question they casually turned away from their heart-to-heart conversation only to return to it a moment later. “European languages” they said. They probably did not name them to avoid making a show of their brilliance and to avoid later embarrassment owing to their boasting. They laughed instead, as if clearing up the flotsam and jetsam of their modesty.

It is unfair to identify a single person with the country or people of the person’s origin. I, for one, am Hungarian but this has no significance for others. My own self does, however. A person is always more than his people or his country—yet no matter how great a master of words somebody is, that person will still know less than his mother tongue.

As regards them, it was never a worry that I might indecently identify them with their nation. Any master of vivisection observing them will find delicate junctions of individualism and egotism, well worth scrutinizing. And then, in principle, they should be considered French, not German. Furthermore, I could not have identified them with the Germans since in those days the Germans had two peoples, two countries and two German languages simultaneously. One of their two countries always smelled of insufficiently burnt lignite, it was like a rotten egg—while the other was saturated with the scent of detergents and fabric softeners used in compulsive overdoses. As a matter of fact, there was much to be scented and washed away. To avoid the self-destructive obsession of sterilization must have been as tough a task in one country as surviving two successive dictatorships without going insane in the other.

I do not want to talk big but to me, the old Bundesrepublik [Fed-

eral Republic] compares to Goethe. Not, however, to Hölderlin or Kleist or Büchner.

Let me tell you what I am thinking of: I am talking about the country's face, poetry, and history, about the great process of individualization which has been carried through in the past fifty years by the worthiest of Germans in the Bundesrepublik, though they had to cut themselves into pieces and then put themselves together again. ...

I should describe the toilet in the first class car of the fast train connecting the town of Zalaegerszeg with Budapest [in Hungary]. I would thereby be fulfilling a long-time obligation of mine as a human being as well as a citizen of Hungary and, last but not least, as a writer. From the aesthetic point of view this is no easy task. It would of course be all too simple just to get into a train toilet and put down everything I see like a clerk. Then I would be entangled in stylistic problems. Narrative prose would apparently solve the problem with similar ease. This would involve my approaching and describing a rather distinct toilet that does not actually exist in nature, making use of my decades-long experience. Should the latter be the case, I might unwillingly embellish the massive reality of this toilet.

It is thirty-nine years now that I have been traveling along this route. I have been using it on a regular basis for sixteen years. Ever since I can remember I have not given up hope.

It will be better, it will please the eye—the day will come when facilities will be used for their original purpose because my countrymen will learn how to use them. ...

In a democracy, things happen by the people, not to the people. You act. Now I feel obliged to declare bankruptcy. And with this bankruptcy the Head of State has nowhere to appeal to.

Either we discuss this rather simple logistical problem, then we embark upon an agreement, clean up and repair things—or there is no solution (translated by András Barabás, accessed 2003.03.21).

The first thing to be noted in the above examples is that the “authors” do not see themselves actually creating differences, but merely feel that they are bringing something to the surface. Nádas speaks about national and “personal” characteristics which cannot be changed in

a short period of time. The “author” of the “inoffensive” menu also clearly assumes knowledge of a difference between a hellish place like Bucharest and the “West.” It is certain (it is “destined”) that in the “West” lawyers would sue a restaurant with such arrogant pieces as the one above. It is also openly assumed in the text that in Romania the authors of the menu are allowed to do so. Amato, the Italian prime minister, directly refers to the categorization of an institution, namely the European Union, as sending out an implied message of half-Europeanness. The Walloon woman evokes the special, lower value whiteness of Eastern and Central Europeans as a civilizational level with which the interviewer—put into the same category—should be familiar. The then prime minister Orbán is “quite confident that investors realize the difference,” that is to say the fact is so obvious that one only has to refer to it. The problem is simply one of clarification. The same lack of control appears in the idea of “these East–West divergences” and the complaint about the lack of “hygiene” in Hungary in spite of the freedom and democracy that have been achieved. That is to say, all our authors draw upon packaged, ready-made “facts of differences” as available references.

This reliance on externally and historically given differences, in addition to the used or evoked and partially overlapping, partially contradictory geocultural categories, always assumes some kind of axis with two end points: “East” and “West,” “white” and “not white,” “cleanliness” and “dirt,” “emerging” and ready or “fully developed,” “nationalist” and “post-nationalist” aspects which unite all the texts above. That is to say spaces, countries, people and regions are put on some kind of a ruler along which they can be moved or along which they are moving. The *reduction* or *localization* of differences, the definition of the *coordinates* and the *distances* all form part of some kind of a metonymic *mapping* exercise, both in the geographical and in a cultural sense (Antohti 2002, 20). Categories are not only set up, but are also put into a *hierarchical* order, that is to say the scale possesses some superior and inferior points, or at least the differences are positioned above and below a certain line.

More concretely the mapping exercises based on “given” differences aim at establishing “in-between,” transitional categories, gray zones which are problematic, insecure and vague. The menu item, “Where the Hell am I?” might refer to being nowhere, but possibly also to be-

ing on a borderline, where localization is problematic. Mixed blood means half one type, half not that type (Böröcz and Kovács 2001, 35). “Un petite Slav” or “Sovietique” means whiteness, but of a different, lower quality. A “converging” market is an in-between category among fully developed and emerging markets. And “Eastern Europe” is still in a “state-building” and “nation-building” phase” or it is just “quarantine,” a place where people are temporarily put for the purpose of observing them in their movement to “hygienically safe” places. Writing not about freedom but the “trainings of freedom” the Hungarian writer Nádas builds his whole narrative upon a metaphor of being on the road, on train or being in transition between “East” and “West” in a geographic and cultural sense. The key issue is locating and establishing borders between larger categories, and this *border mechanism* guides the actors and the speakers in their texts.

The constructed textual borders cannot be put into any kind of a fixed geographical pattern outside the “West.” In the words of the title of a book written by an emigrant Hungarian sociologist, in these texts “There is West, but not East” (Ankerl 2000). In our examples Hungary can be placed in the category of “purely” Eastern European and “real Western” or between the emerging markets and the developed ones etc. The point seems to be not an emerging fixed geographic or regional pattern, but rather the use of racist and other types of negative markers, like “emerging,” “still nation-building,” “Slav” (Neumann 1999, 206–207). These markers and the attempted localizations are then the focus of the fight over categories.

The fight adds a tone of hysteria, embarrassment or fear to the texts. There are two interrelated regulatory practices within these textual worlds. First we are in a “twilight” zone, in an era of fear and danger. Ghosts or lingering memories of major catastrophes characterize this location as an object of the texts. Second the border constructed is a point at which, or the scale where, countries and people become disconnected. This point of ambiguity, together with some value hierarchies, suggests possible and at the same time unfinalized (conditional and contextualized) exclusion, or in the revealing phrase of Böröcz “contingent closure” (Böröcz 2003a, 128, 230–254).

Such exclusion mechanisms mean that those dissatisfied with the location along the non-privileged side of the border try to cross it by way of certain verbal maneuvers. The then Hungarian prime minister,

Orbán wants to change the classification of the Hungarian economy as an “emerging market” and to take it out of a class related to crisis. He actually invents a new title in order to distinguish Hungary from Russia and to push Hungary closer to the “most developed” areas. Nádas, who is most embarrassed by the Hungarian “reality” on the train and especially the uncivilized behavior of fellow Hungarians, makes a demonstrative announcement that they should use the toilet in a proper manner and thereby start the cleaning process which will move them further up the ladder of civilization.

The speakers on the other side of the “floating” border are also tantalized by this “contingent closure” and would like to see an upward movement as soon as possible. The Walloon lady distances herself from her husband who is not “proper white,” but says that much has changed in the previous ten years: clothes, for instance, are now the same everywhere. Amato is afraid of accepting some responsibility for communism and that is why he wants to move some countries out of the danger zone, the era of in-between. Via their inbuilt teleology the scholarly discussions on nationalism also wish to move the East European countries out of the “nation-building” phase and push them into the “post-nationalist” phase. However, it is important to note that looking down the slope might involve vested interests in keeping the “inferiors,” “down,” as evidenced by the Sydney Bar menu in Bucharest. Moving Romania out of the backward category would mean that then the open despicability of the place might be challenged.

The above examples can be interpreted either as a proper or as a distorted representation of reality. In either case they deserve careful analysis since it seems that most of the political and social changes in Eastern and Central Europe have been institutionalized in accordance with this cognitive pattern. The most obvious example of this is the “Eastern enlargement” of the European Union, a process which, according to Böröcz, is not only imagined in this slope manner, but is actually managed accordingly if the published EU reports legitimizing decisions on starting the accession negotiations with the countries concerned are analyzed retrospectively (Böröcz 2001). To show the legitimacy of this argument and the links to our examples it is enough to quote the Copenhagen criteria announced in 1993.

In 1993, at the Copenhagen European Council, the Member States took a decisive step towards the current enlargement, agreeing that “the associated countries in central and eastern Europe that so desire shall become members of the European Union.” Thus, enlargement was no longer a question of “if” but “when.” Here too, the European Council provided a clear response:

“Accession will take place as soon as an applicant is able to assume the obligations of membership by satisfying the economic and political conditions required.”

At the same time, the Member States designed the membership criteria, which are often referred to as the Copenhagen Criteria. As stated in Copenhagen, membership requires that the candidate country has achieved:

stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;

the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union;

the ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

has created :

the conditions for its integration through the adjustment of its administrative structures, so that European Community legislation transposed into national legislations implemented effectively through appropriate administrative and judicial structures (<http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/intro/criteria.htm> 23 March, 2002).

It can clearly be seen that the EU enlargement process is not imagined as a negotiation between the assigned political body of the EU and certain nation states, with a deadline to be met, but as a timeless *process* (the question being when) of achieving certain capacities like the “stability of institutions guaranteeing” humanitarian liberal ideals such as the “rule of law,” “human rights” etc., or the “existence” of a “functioning market economy” or the “capacity to cope with” certain “pressures within the Union.” Even at first glance it can be seen that the criteria are vague and imply processes with no real end. Any country in

the world can be found to be lacking some of the required conditions (for instance the guarantee of human rights) and therefore the process becomes merely a question of “translating” these ideals into a multidimensional slope and measuring countries accordingly. This inevitably leads to hierarchies not only between EU countries and the applicants, but also between the applicants themselves, as we have seen. Furthermore the selection method is entirely at the discretion of the issuer of criteria. The socio-political implications of these “redundant,” “over-determined” and in many respects “substantive” translation methods have been eloquently analyzed by Böröcz with regard to the behavior of the EU in this slope situation as follows:

This has far-reaching implications for the nature of the statehood of the European Union as well as the politics of state-making and remaking in Europe today. Within the EU, “eastern enlargement” is widely seen and commonly portrayed as a mission civilisatrice. In the words of a British commentator: “if redrawing the map of Europe is effectively about extending the territorial coverage of the rules of law and norms of civil society, this is equivalent to the projection through much of central and eastern Europe of the code Napoleon, this time without the blood-shed and with legitimacy.” The questions this leaves the observer with, then, are the same as raised by the inclusion of what used to be the German Democratic Republic in the legal and administrative structures of the Federal Republic of Germany a few years ago: Is it possible to establish the rule of law through substantive and overdetermined means? Furthermore, even if it is possible, what are the implications of that for the legitimacy of the process and the structures created thereby (Böröcz 2001)?

Good questions. The writing of this book has been very much inspired by such paradoxes particularly concerning interpretations of the above cognitive patterns as they relate to Eastern and Central Europe and asking how they fit into the structures revealed by studies on colonial-postcolonial patterns or East–West dichotomies. First I will argue that Karl Mannheim’s concept of liberal humanitarian utopia is a relevant notion. Then, with regard to Eastern and Central Europe, I will try to summarize and partially reinterpret some of the key findings of literature on coloniality and East–West discourses on the basis

of the previously discussed patterns and utilizing the concept of liberal humanitarian utopia.

1.2. Liberal utopia versus Orientalism and coloniality

1.2.1. East–West discourse as liberal humanitarian utopia

All the textual mechanisms in the above texts add up to an overarching cognitive pattern establishing a civilizational slope. As a structure of mentality this civilizational slope is strikingly similar to the “*liberal humanitarian utopia*” introduced by Karl Mannheim. The addition of some postcolonial insights to this originally Eurocentric concept clarifies elements of the cognitive structure mentioned above and its social function.

In his classical piece “Ideology and Utopia” Mannheim sought to find a way out of the history of political ideas and “partial ideologies” to describe wider, “total” cognitive systems and to link them to a particular social structure. He calls these wider cognitive structures “total ideologies,” among which there are patterns “incongruous with the state of reality within which they occur.” This incongruence is to be understood not as containing “transcendental,” “mythical” or “metaphysical” elements, since all ideologies carry such parts, but elements which, “when they pass into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time” (Mannheim 1936, 173). These revolutionary models are the utopias.

On the basis of “historical time-sense” Mannheim identifies four utopias, one of which is the “liberal humanitarian utopia” linked to the period between the Enlightenment and the 1920s when Mannheim wrote his classic piece. Mannheim characterizes the former type of utopia in the following manner:

The utopia of liberal humanitarianism, too, arose out of the conflict with the existing order. In its characteristic form, it also establishes a “correct” rational conception to be set off against evil reality. This counter-conception is not used, however, as a blueprint in accordance with which at any given point in time the world is to be reconstructed. Rather it serves merely as a “measuring rod” by means of which the course of concrete events may be theoretically evaluated. The utopia of the liberal-humanitarian mentality is the “idea.” This,

however, is not the static platonic idea of the Greek tradition, which was a concrete archetype, a primal mode of things; but here the idea is rather conceived of as a formal goal projected into the indefinite future whose function is to act as a mere regulative device in mundane affairs (Mannheim 1936, 197).

The “belief that reality moves continually towards an ever closer approximation to the rational” almost perfectly describes the dominant discourse on Eastern and Central Europe illustrated by the above examples, including that of EU accession.

First, it suggests the idea of an ongoing transition (progress or evolution as pointed out by Mannheim) to an ideal social form postponed into the indefinite or localized out of the reach of the “locals.” Second, it also contains the idea of “perfection” and “civilization,” which is a movement upwards on the slope and in the qualitative level of social behavior (see also Elias 1994). Third, it focuses on the idea of scaling and measurement and the associated linear conceptions of difference or change. Fourth, it introduces the idea that such concepts are not correct or incorrect descriptions of some kind of reality, but texts and concepts which actually change the existing “order of things” and make “reality” or, in Mannheim’s words, regulate “mundane affairs.” And last, due to the above traits it also reflects a highly normative mode of thinking, which, being at the same time extremely flexible, tends toward expansion or the incorporation of new objects into its discursive machinery.

Mannheim’s concept nonetheless lacks the idea of qualitative borders on the slope and the racist or functionally racist constructions of these points. It seems then that Mannheim maintained a Eurocentric perspective. His main focus was the understanding of European developments as having universal validity, and he made Weberian references to “Oriental” experiences merely for the sake of static comparisons. Thus it is very important to consider how examples of East–West discourses and their interpretation as a liberal utopia fit into studies on postcolonial and colonial cognitive patterns, preoccupied as they are with qualitative-racist borders and exclusions. Here I will argue that Mannheim’s idea of liberal utopia and the methodology behind it can be reinterpreted in such a way that it incorporates “coloniality” and the related findings of this literature. Actually it seems that the idea of

a civilizational slope can provide a solution for the debates on the link between discourses on Eastern and Central Europe and colonial and postcolonial ones.

1.2.2. Concepts of knowledge production

Several major concepts and related methodological approaches have dominated the studies on knowledge production with regard to the non-Western world in the last two decades. These include ideas of discourse, the imaginary, ideology, identity formation and narrative. The idea of a civilizational slope interpreted as a liberal utopia can be harmonized with the concept of discourse and narrative, and especially of the imaginary, but it does not fit into the concept of ideology and identity formation. But let us examine the concepts one by one.

Most systematically elaborated by Michel Foucault, the idea of *discourse* is certainly a key element. Foucault's idea of the concept and his concrete examples made a great impact on Said's analysis of Orientalism and, through Said's work, on the whole genre of postcolonial and colonial cultural studies. In fact the later studies can be understood as translations of Foucault's ideas into a field positing Europe against non-Europe that was ignored by the founder himself (Stoler 1995, 59–60). As Said argues:

He [Foucault] seems unaware of the extent to which the ideas of discourse and discipline are assertively European and how, along with the use of discipline to employ masses of detail (and of human beings), discipline was used also to administer, study, reconstruct—and then subsequently to occupy, rule, and exploit—almost the whole of the non-European world...The parallel between Foucault's carceral system and Orientalism is striking (Said 1978a, 117–118).

Discourse analysis as understood by Foucault refers to the understanding of rules and regularities in the creation/dispersal of objects, subjects, styles, concepts and strategic fields, and thereby reveal why certain "statements" and not others are made, and how these statements are related to each other. As Foucault put it:

Whenever one can describe between a number of statements such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of state-

ments, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlation, positions, and functionings, transformations) we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation (Michel Foucault 1972, 38).

Thus in a discourse there is some kind of an order of knowledge, which creates and absorbs “statements” or systems of statements. These orders by way of the web of objects or styles are the grids and acts of power. Such “disciplining” discourses are also truly historical as they come into existence at a certain point in time and then disappear. It is important to note that these changes are linked to social and political relations and institutional arrangements but are not explained by them (Foucault 1972 1974, 1991a; 1999; Neumann 1999; Said 1978a; Goldberg 1990; Racevskis 1983, 90; Kiss 1996; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Wolff 1994).

It seems that the East–West slope interpreted as liberal utopia implies some kind of a discourse since it focuses on rules for statements. Thus, as with a discourse, we are tracing the transformation of certain rules into social reality by creating certain critical ideas out of the confrontation between rational ideals and “evil reality” and the measurement of the distance between them. This confrontation is not reduced to certain areas of knowledge (history writing, public attitudes etc.) and thus, as do discourses, it crosses all boundaries of forms and spheres of knowledge. It also lacks the idea of “author” and maintains the linkage between cognitive and social structure, which is so important for Foucault’s analysis. Thus Mannheim’s liberal utopia and the East–West slope revealed above can be reinterpreted as a discourse and can therefore be fitted into the relevant findings in cultural studies which apply this concept.

A structuralist version of a “post-structuralist” (or, as claimed by Foucault, non-structuralist) discourse analysis, namely the idea of asymmetric counter-concepts, provides additional insights into the working of the East–West slope and harmonizes well with the interpretation as a liberal utopia (Koselleck 1985, 159–196). “Asymmetrical” or universalist binary counter-concepts as self-designations deprive the “other” of some kind of essential trait, such as being a member of some kind of “universal” community. As Koselleck put it:

This kind of self-definition provokes counterconcepts, which discriminate against those who have been defined as the “other”. ... Thus there are a great number of concepts recorded which function to deny the reciprocity of mutual recognition. From the concept of the one party follows the definition of the alien other, which definition can appear to the latter as a linguistic deprivation, in actually verging on the theft. This involves asymmetrically opposed concepts (Koselleck 1985, 160–161).

The methodological status of these concepts is once again not that of a description of reality or a self-reflection, an identity. The concepts shape our social reality or more precisely they are meant to intervene in our reality on behalf of a political action. In Koselleck’s words again: “Concepts employable in a particularly antithetical manner have a marked tendency to reshape the various relations and distinctions among groups, to some degree violating those concerned, and in proportion to this violation rendering them capable of political action” (Koselleck 1985, 162).

Ideas such as cleanliness, whiteness, Europeanness or being post-nationalist, which reveal the East–West slope in our examples are such asymmetrical totalizing concepts, which in themselves hinder positive identification through lack of a relevant trait. In addition, the slope, by depending on asymmetrical concepts like those above becomes the translation or representation of the political character of these binary oppositions. Thus the semantic structuralist idea of asymmetrical counter-concepts comes in handy for our analysis.

In analysis of the East–West slope interpreted as a liberal utopia, as an alternative approach to discourse analysis the concept of the *imaginary* is also helpful. Like Mannheim’s concept of “total ideology” the imaginary is understood as the sum of ways in which a culture perceives and conceives the world or areas within it (Glissant quoted by Mignolo 1998, 2000 23; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Goldsworthy 1998, 1999; Csizmadia 2001). The imaginary is also a socio-historical concept which describes how different cultures cognitively structure the world (e.g. by continents, commercial routes or by setting up the categories like 1st world, 2nd world or 3rd world or mental maps, for instance in tourist guide books, Böröcz 1996, 44–51). Furthermore these structures are not pure images, or “true” or “false” representa-

tions but “world views” inherently linked to some social systems like the “modern/colonial world system” or the capitalist world system. It is to be noted that as a hegemonic *Weltanschauung* originating from the Enlightenment and linked to the hierarchical and unequal modern world system Wallerstein’s analysis of a singular, universal civilization fits also into the idea of the “imaginary” or that of utopias (Wallerstein 1991, 215–230; Böröcz 2003 91–92; Wolff 1994, 8–9; Mignolo 2000, 23–24).³

In all the above methodological attempts, including that of liberal utopia, there is the clear shadow of the concept of ideology in its Marxist interpretation. Both Foucault and Mannheim rejected that concept and invented their diverging methods of analysis as an alternative to the idea of ideology understood as something that has its own development and in particular as forms of knowledge linked to particular social groups (Foucault 1972, Mannheim 1936). But it seems that regardless of the dominance of “non-ideological” concepts such as discourse or the imaginary the concept of ideology is resurfacing in the analysis of East–West dichotomy or coloniality. In one of the most critical books on relevant “Western” cognitive structures Amin bluntly argues that “Eurocentrism” is not a paradigm, not ethnocentrism, not a theory, but the “ideological framework of capitalism” (Amin 1989).

Behind the choice between ideology and discourse the crucial issue seems to be the problem of domination or hegemony of certain patterns and resistance to them. Most of those who accept the implications of discourse see no real way out of the imposed hegemonic patterns, while those who opt for ideology are able to conceptualize methods of breaking up the hegemonic mode of thought. As Rätzhel puts it:

To say that a certain way of thinking is linked to a certain way of living and acting is not the same as to say that economic structures determine the way in which people think. ... When Marx suggests that the “ruling ideas are always the ideas of the rulers” this is not to imply that other ideas do not exist, that there are no practices of resistance and no competing ideas (Rätzhel 1997, 62).

Wallerstein and Amin are even more explicit (Wallerstein 1997; Amin 1989). They openly declare that the capitalist social formation or mod-

ern world system in its European form is not eternal and therefore the relevant cognitive patterns of Eurocentrism are not eternal either. It is a particular formation, both historically and philosophically, and this is the starting point for rejecting the liberal-humanitarian type of utopian universalism which serves the purposes of domination and exclusion:

And if we are to do that we have to recognize that something special was indeed done by Europe in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries that did transform the world, but in a direction whose negative consequences are upon us today. We must cease trying to deprive Europe of its specificity on the deluded premise that we are thereby depriving it of an illegitimate credit. Quite the contrary. We must fully acknowledge the particularity of Europe's reconstruction of the world because only then will it be possible to transcend it, and to arrive hopefully at a more inclusively universalist vision of human possibility, one that avoids none of the difficult and imbricated problems of pursuing the true and the good in tandem (Wallerstein 1997, 106–107).

Overall Mannheim's concept of "total ideology" and that of the imaginary seem, even in this later question of historicity and hegemony (the beginning and end of "Eurocentrism" and its dominance), to offer a convenient solution, which maintains the "totalitarianism" of such cognitive patterns, but neither pushes it too far in world history nor simply waits for the unpredictable collapse of the discourse.

Beyond the conceptual framework of discourse, the imaginary or ideology, another alternative methodological approach for understanding the hegemony of the above Eurocentric cognitive patterns is to say that they are linked to the formation of *collective identities* that are "functionally" somehow unavoidable or necessary (Said 1978, 7; Neumann 1999, 3–4, 207–243). The need for designating community boundaries leads to the search for "others." The location of this *alter ego* group can be changed, but for historical and semantic reasons these "others" tend to be fixed spatially and especially in the content of differences.

This effort of looking at the formation of collective identities is probably the most systematic attempt to break away from the discursive and "totalized" cognitive patterns and generally goes hand in hand with the

idea of stereotypes and ethnocentric explanations (Todorova 1997, see footnote 1 above). First, the notion of identity assumes some kind of *self-identification* since it refers to ideas about ourselves (Neumann 1999, 209). Even if patterns are not coming from us, as an escape from uncertainty, there is the option of dressing up in clothes offered to us (Neumann 1999, 207–42; Baumann 1996). Thus there are collective actors who, by setting up “boundary markers,” clarify the borders of the community.⁴

Second, this approach assumes that there is some kind of structural stability in such identities extending across very long periods of time. The best example of this ahistoricity is Neumann’s analysis. Although he sees important historical changes in the process of collective identity formation and historically links, for instance, the “European” and Russian identities, he nonetheless fixes certain relationships such as that with the “Turkish other” in which there is a continuity between medieval perceptions and, say, those of the 18th century.

In addition, the time of reconquest and empire was seen by many as a reincarnation of the old religious war—a continuation of the Crusades. What is interesting to note, however, is the increased use of the Greek term “barbarian” to describe “the Turk,” as opposed to the strictly religious notion of the “infidel” or “non-believer.” This change in terms would seem to fit with the growing secularization of the state system that had begun at Westphalia and is yet another reminder that the phenomenon of the Easterner as Europe’s other predates the coming of Christendom and Islam. In other words, civilization, defined by criteria such as “humanity,” “law,” and “social mores,” seemed to supplant religion in Europe’s external differentiation from non-European communities. What took hold was a set of “intercultural relations” between Europe and “the Turk,” relations that drew a sharp distinction between civilization and barbarism (Neumann 1999, 52).

Thus there are patterns that “supplant” each other and maintain some kind of “functional” link in history, even at the cost of assuming that the “Turks” are the same.

Third, authors following this line generally assume that not only

does the “we” group exist, but so does the other group. Therefore, instead of looking at how a discursive order creates us we have to analyze a *dialogical* process, in which identities are formed by interactions of different groups and agents. Easterners have a definite impact on us: not only do we constitute them but we are constituted by them as well. With this approach the “other” receives a definite role as opposed to the passive role it is portrayed as having by discursive and hegemonic patterns. As Neumann puts it: “Since it is a pervasive theme of this literature that the formation of the self is inextricably intertwined with the formation of its other and that the failure to regard the others in their own right must necessarily have repercussions for the formation of the self” (Neumann 1999, 35).

The particular use of the “East” is the essence of this dialogical approach. Instead of just saying that there is a need for an abstract “Other,” the dialogical approach describes the content of the imagination by reflecting the two actors’ ideas onto each other. The argument is that: “Without the other, Bakhtin insisted, the subject actually cannot know either itself or the world, because meaning is created in discourse, where consciousnesses meet” (Neumann 1999, 13).

On the basis of our examples such an approach would mean that the civilizational slope and positions along it are somehow negotiated; independent subjects meet in a “discourse.” Our examples do not allow us to answer this question directly, but the very idea of slope and asymmetry excludes the possibility of some kind of a discussion between more or less equal partners. Instead, a whole array of studies suggesting the hegemonic status and universalizing character of these patterns demonstrates that those on the lower part of the slope, in Böröcz’s words, those “on the sideline,” have no chance to formulate an autonomous perspective. Wallerstein puts it succinctly:

The problem is structural. In an historical social system that is built on hierarchy and inequality, which is the case of the capitalist world-economy, universalism as description or ideal or goal can only in the long run be universalism as ideology, fitting well the classical formulation of Marx, that the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class. But if this were all that universalism was, we would not be discussing it today. Universalism is a “gift” of the powerful to the weak which

confronts the latter with a double bind: to refuse the gift is to lose; to accept the gift is to lose (Wallerstein 1991, 217).

In a sharp analysis of the relationship between the European Union and its applicants including Hungary, Böröcz not only demonstrates the working and institutionalization of the civilizational slope, but also directly addresses the problem of communication between the two actors (Böröcz 2000, 2001). He finds that during the submission of the application for membership the two partners do not even address each other as equals and one of the partners actually does not exist as a communicative actor. In his analysis, relying also on Bakhtin's ideas, Böröcz puts it thus:

Hence, the addressivity of the two documents is completely asymmetrical. The Hungarian side treats the European Union as a subject by speaking directly and unambiguously to it. The European Union, in contrast, treats the Hungarian side as either an object or a locative adverb, but never as a subject" (Böröcz 2000, 861).

These are "dialogues" with only one subject ("dialogue with itself") and therefore we have to reject the idea of some kind of a dialogical identity formation with regard to the civilizational East–West slope.

As a last alternative approach, the idea of an overarching "grand," "global" or collective narrative is also applied in the analysis of East–West dichotomies or discourses.⁵ Böröcz relies on the concept of modernization narrative with an unfolding story of those appearing in the top position. Mignolo use the term "global design" as opposed to "local histories" meaning a story "celebrating" the "occidental achievement of universal value" exemplified by Weber's much quoted introduction to "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (Mignolo 2000, 3–4). On a national or regional level Neumann also points out the role of narratively "constructed" identities and the need for "as if stories." According to him the self (the political self) cannot be completely erased by the discursive formations and context-dependent, contingent identity formations. Interestingly he argues that narratives are the frameworks in which we combine different discursive elements:

I would like to suggest that the making of selves is a narrative process of identification whereby a number of identities that have been

negotiated in specific contexts are strung together into one overarching story (Neumann 1999, 218–19).

On this basis, the East–West discourse as a liberal, humanitarian utopia can be easily interpreted as a narrative. In fact it is nothing but an ongoing narrative of transition, putting differences into temporal order by way of translation using a “measuring rod.” This essential story building technique, which is also the method of universalization and expansion, is most clearly summed up by Böröcz in his analysis of the main ways in which teleological modernization operates in terms of “comparison” (Böröcz 2003, 28–100).

1.2.3. East–West slope and coloniality

As we have seen above, in terms of methodology the East–West slope revealed in our examples and interpreted as a liberal utopia fits well into the methodological mainstream of the literature on East–West discourses. The only approach incompatible with this idea is that of understanding such relationships in terms of a dialogue of collective identities, which has never really gained ground in this field of study. But what about the content of the relevant cognitive patterns? Can we explain coloniality on the basis of a civilizational slope? To what extent can the East–West civilizational slope, also found in historical studies on Eastern and Central Europe, be linked to colonial or postcolonial patterns? In general it seems that coloniality has relevance, but it needs careful analysis especially in the light of the heated arguments about this issue (among others Wolff 1994; Todorova 1997; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Goldsworthy 1998). But first let me clarify what I mean by coloniality.

In my understanding coloniality is not essentially some form of physical territorial occupation and direct exploitation. By coloniality I mean a system of power understood as a complex form of domination, including the hierarchical classification of the populations of the planet, the reformulation of local concepts of space and time, the export of sexual energies into the “East,” the “imperial gaze” and most importantly the *colonization of consciousness*. This latter point can be summed up as “an energy and a machinery to transform differences into values” and as the consequent “subalternization” of knowledge and societies (See among others Mignolo 1998, 2000; Said 1978; Erlmann 1999; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Williams-Chrisman 1994).

Darcy Riberio provides a very a good summary of the colonization of the mind:

In the same way that Europe carried a variety of techniques and interventions to the people included in its network of domination...it also introduced to them its equipment or concepts, precepts, and idiosyncrasy that referred at the same time to Europe itself and to the colonial people. Even the brighter social strata of non-European people got used to seeing themselves and their communities as an *infrahumanity* whose destiny was to occupy a subaltern position because of the sheer fact that theirs was inferior to the European population (quoted by Mignolo, 2000, 13).

The East–West slope interpreted as a liberal utopia can easily lead to the colonization of the mind and the subalternization of non-western societies and cultures. The universalizing concepts of “Europeanization” are asymmetrical enough to silence all those somehow denied membership of that “universally valid” community. As our examples show, on such a “sliding scale of merit” no one should want to be out of “Europe” and the social and value patterns it represents or, more precisely, is aligned with. This asymmetry alone and the emerging asymmetrical binary oppositions are powerful enough to deny a “real existence” to those who are in a midway or bottom position on such a scale.

To see the importance of asymmetry as an essential element of “colonial” or “Orientalist” patterns it is enough to glance at 20th century Hungarian or Central European social history, which has struggled with concepts such as “pretended capitalism,” “non-real bourgeoisie” or “distorted,” “uneven development” (Melegh 1994).⁶ We can even read accounts of the “unreality” of local social arrangements. As in the following quote from one of the best-known and certainly one of the most influential Hungarian social and political thinkers, István Bibó. He has been much praised for establishing the major traits of “European social development” during the international debate on the concept of Central Europe (among others Keane 1988). The “distress of East European small states” in comparison with the “West” is an integral aspect of his analysis:

This means that nations living in this region lacked what was naturally, clearly, precisely and concretely present in both the everyday

life and community consciousness of nations in Western Europe: A reality in their own national and state framework, a capital city, a harmony between economy and politics, a unified societal elite etc. In Western and Northern Europe the political rise or decline of one's country, the growth or diminution of its role as a great power, and gaining or losing of colonial empires could have been mere episodes, distant adventures, beautiful or sad memories; in the long run, however, countries could survive these without fundamental trauma, because they had something that could not be taken away or questioned. In Eastern Europe by contrast, a national framework was something that had to be created, repaired, fought for, and constantly protected, not only against the power factors existing in the dynastic state, but also from the indifference exhibited by a certain portion of the country's own inhabitants, as well as from the wavering state of national consciousness (Bibó 1991, 38–39).

This passage, emerging out of an extremely sophisticated idea of a civilizational slope, clearly shows the process of subalternization, the “silencing” of the local society and its local history. Bibó not only defends the undisturbed moral and social superiority of the “Western nations,” regardless of the “beautiful or sad memories” of the colonial period, but also actually denies the inner and outer “reality” of local nationhood. In the normative “Western mirror” it does not exist, it is fabricated, imbalanced. Hungarian local history suffers under the heavy weight of the universally valid “West,” whose dominance constrains the imagination at the lower points of the slope. By attaching normative statements such as “harmony” or “unified” to the upper points of the slope, Bibó's text provides a perfect example of how differences can be transformed into values by the machinery of the liberal utopia in a process that is coloniality itself. In other words this is a pattern, greatly supported by the “Western” imaginary of social development. Thus there can be no doubt that coloniality as a system of power internalizing the hierarchical visions of social development is relevant to an examination of East–West discourses on Eastern and Central Europe as practiced in and outside the region.⁷ However, the problem is a little more complicated and in this regard it is necessary to take a closer look at the arguments for and against the use of colonial and postcolonial patterns in the case of Eastern and Central Europe since the 18th century.

1.2.4. East–West slope, racism and Orientalism: the case of Central and Eastern Europe

Since the mid eighties there has been a growing interest in the question of discourses on Eastern and Central Europe (Wolff 1994, Todorova 1997, Goldsworthy 1998, 1999; Neumann 1999; Böröcz 1996, 2000, 2001, 2003; Böröcz and Kovács, 2001; Antohi 2000; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Kideckel 1996; Dancsi 2001; Mester 2001; Melegh 1994, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2003, 2004). Regarding one aspect of the problem there is complete consensus. All the authors argue that Eastern, Central and South Eastern Europe represent a separate category in the Eurocentric imaginary of the world and all agree that the non-Western part of Europe is understood as a transitional category between the “real” “East” and “West.” This is most eloquently put by Wolff in his book on “inventing Eastern Europe,” in which, perfectly describing the ideas of the slope, he argues that there is a continuous scale which links “East” and “West”: “Eastern Europe [in the 18th century] was located not as the antidote of civilization, not down in the depths of barbarism, but rather on the developmental scale that measured the distance between civilization and barbarism” (Wolff 1994, 13).

In his analysis of the discursive process of inventing Eastern Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, Wolff implicitly argues that there was no real difference between Orientalist, cognitive colonial techniques and those used in the case of Eastern and Central Europe. There were mapping processes, there was the idea of the “possessing” Eastern and Central Europe, sexual exploitation and even racial categorization. Although Eastern and Central Europe exists higher up on the developmental scale, Wolff does not demonstrate any essential differences in the forms of Western cognitive rule with regard to Eastern and Central Europe in the 18th century (as compared to the Middle East analyzed by Edward Said). Historically only differences in the scale of the slope have been operational with many implications for the lives of people living at the bottom end of the civilizational slope.

The same link to Orientalism is found in the 1990s in the case of the Balkans by Bakić-Hayden, who, with important implications for the sociology of the East–West slope, introduced the idea of “*nesting Orientalism*”:

The gradation of “Orients” that I call “nesting Orientalisms” is a pattern of reproduction of the original dichotomy upon which Orientalism is premised. In this pattern, Asia is more “East” or “other” than Eastern Europe; within Eastern Europe itself this gradation is reproduced with the Balkans perceived as most “eastern”; within the Balkans there are similarly constructed hierarchies. I argue that the terms of definition of such a dichotomous model eventually establish conditions for its own contradiction (Bakić-Hayden 1995, 918).

As noted above, Böröcz found the same “civilizational slope” discourse in the 1990s in the communication between the European Union and Hungary. But in comparison with the above implicit statements, Böröcz goes one step further and openly declares the validity of colonial processes with regard to Eastern and Central Europe:

A fascinating feature of the official exchange between Hungary and the EU is the “Western” side’s reversion to the colonial topos of discovery. Just as colonial discovery involved, according to Anne McClintock, a “journey to a far-flung region, asking the local inhabitants if they know of a nearby river, lake or waterfall, paying them to take one there, then “discovering” the site, so, too the European Union “obtains” information as new knowledge and expresses it as a “discovery.” ...The issuance of a questionnaire to the native governments of the central and east European states, requesting information about the political, economic, sociolegal, and cultural landscape in their countries, and the presentation of this information as a discovery by denying subjectivity to the natives, bears striking resemblance to this ethos of colonial discovery (Böröcz 2000, 870).

In his latest piece Böröcz describes the European Union as a reformulated empire replacing previous individual West European empires, which in the “Eastern enlargement” process introduces straightforward imperialistic arrangements (Böröcz and Kovács 2001).

The same type of framework is offered by Goldsworthy in writing on the “imperialism of imagination” in the “textual” or “imaginative” colonization of the Balkans, mainly during the 19th century. She also argues for cognitive colonization or, more precisely, she also works

with a colonial narrative framework. In her view the process begins rather early, with the formative period is the 19th and early 20th centuries, but it continues into the period of “media imperialism”:

The process of literary colonisation, in its stages and its consequences, is not unlike real colonisation. It begins with travel writers, explorers and adventurers undertaking reconnaissance missions into an unknown area. They are gradually followed by novelists, playwrights and poets who, in their quest for new plots and settings, rely just as frequently on research through atlases and timetables as on direct experience. By this stage the capacity of the new land to feed the ever-hungry mother country—and to make nabobs of those with the wits and ruthlessness to exploit it—is well established. Once “mapped,” new territories are further appropriated by the writers of popular fiction, who delineate the final shape of the imaginary map and secure their stakes as surely as European colonists secured newly surveyed parcels of land in America, Australia or New Zealand. Their need to visit or know the area they describe is, at this stage, relatively remote and the “authenticity” they aim to achieve is one which fulfills the desires and fantasies of the reader. At this point they and their collaborators in the film industry can begin the full commercial exploitation of the appropriated territory (Goldsworthy 1998, 2–3).

In her polemical and powerful book Todorova also relies on the idea of the slope. For her the major images of the Balkans portray a region located low on a civilizational scale. However, in contrast with the authors cited earlier she disagrees on the use of Orientalism and colonialism, describing the transitory character of the Balkans and at the same time rejecting the idea of a continuous scale between the categories of “civilization and barbarity” and its discursive implications: “It is my thesis that while Orientalism is dealing with a difference between (imputed) types, balkanism treats the differences within one type” (Todorova 1997, 19).

In one sense Todorova is supported by Neumann, who, covering the history of different “Eastern others,” but especially that of Turkish and Russian ones, also talks about a “marginal” European type clearly separable from non-European ones: “If ‘the Turk’ really became what

we may call a marginal or liminal other in the guise of ‘the sick man of Europe,’ we have in the case of Russia a European other that, I will argue, has been marginal all along” (Neumann 1999, 63).

Such “liminal” cases are those where the “self and the other overlap” and this capacity to recognize each other as such is tied to “certain external bodily similarities” (cf. Anne Norton, Neumann 1999, 8–9). Thus these “others” are border line cases but in certain physical characteristics they are the same. The descending scale is not continuous, but divided by race.

Kideckel offers an interesting “third way” with regard to Eastern and Central Europe by inventing the special term “*categorical Orientalism*” which refers to a temporal Orientalism, that is to say a new Orientalism after a subalternization process. Here the possibility of climbing on a liberal scale is clearly sustained:

In Categorical Orientalism subjects retain their voice, though those voices that devalue their own lives or at least those aspects of them organized by the state, have the greatest credence. Furthermore, the devaluation of Eastern Life is not because “they” are totally different, but rather because “they” have fallen into difference over time ... The categorical Orientalist holds out the possibility of redemption for the fallen through capitalism, democracy, civil society, privatization and the like (Kideckel 1996, 30).

Thus alongside the agreement on some kind of “in-between” status of Eastern and Central Europe and the existence of East–West slopes that are historically extremely resilient there are important differences of opinion with regard to the validity of colonial or Orientalist discourses. What conceptual and methodological issues underlie these disputes?

To begin with it seems that different lines of argument are not due to differences between the historical periods and regions under analysis. Although Wolff writes about the invention of “Eastern Europe” in the eighteenth century, Todorova and Goldsworthy are preoccupied with the late nineteenth and the twentieth century history of Balkanology, while Böröcz, Bakić-Hayden and Kideckel write about the 1990s.

Neumann covers almost all areas and all periods. He actually quotes texts by Gibbon or Herder as scrutinized by Wolff or Todorova. Thus the difference in opinions is not due to different periods or sources, unless we say that the texts quoted reflect different discourses, a plurality which would not go against the grain of discourse analysis. It seems instead that different methodologies and different judgements explain the diverging opinions.

As a starting point Todorova says that, in contrast with Said's Orientalism which stresses the fluidity of the borders of the Orient, the edges of the Balkans are clear. Here Goldsworthy disagrees, stating that there has been much ambiguity in the definition of the Balkans, especially around the inclusion of certain countries like Hungary (Goldsworthy 1998, 2–7). According to Wolff the discourses on Eastern Europe were vague with regard to its borders in the 18th century and Eastern Europe historically had no clear borders in the period of its invention. In the eighteenth century geographers and scholars constantly redrew its eastern, northern and southern borders (Wolff 1994: chapter 4). Thus, as we will also see in chapter 3 of this book regarding the maps of global actors, the almighty power of redrawing maps and setting new borders has always been practiced with regard to Eastern and Central Europe, and cartographic categories such as Eastern Europe or the Balkans have always lacked clear borders, especially as one moves away from the "West." In this respect I will argue throughout this book that the fluidity of borders is one of the most important traits of East–West slopes.

In Todorova's work gender issues are also raised. While Orientalism is a discourse in which the represented area is characterized by "female penetrability" and introduces an element of "lust," in the case of the Balkans this gendered vision is either not relevant, or in the discourse the represented area acquires male traits: "Unlike the standard orientalist discourse, which resorts to the metaphors of its objects of study as female, the balkanist discourse is singularly male" (Todorova 1997, 15).

This point is valid, but it does not address the portrayal of these regions as sexually "abnormal" in the "Western mirror." For instance in the *New York Times* in the mid 1990s the legal and cultural protection of female employees in Poland and Hungary is portrayed as incomplete and sexual abuse is shown to be widespread (Melegh 1999). Furthermore Wolff points out that elements of "lust" prevail and the

region is “possessed” sexually by people like Casanova, who buy young female slaves for the sake of complete sexual and social control (Wolff 1994, chapter II). Thus although there is sexual ambiguity in the discourse, the basic elements are not missing and cultural differences are formulated through gendered lenses. The important point seems to be the setting up of civilizational differences by way of the coordinates of sexuality.

With regard to the relationship between Orientalism and discourses on Eastern and Central Europe Todorova has also argued that while Orientalism treats the Ottoman Empire as being at the same level socially (one ruling class versus another ruling class), the “East end of Europe” is imagined as a kind of lower class without any ruling classes:

Whereas the treatment of Islam was based on an unambiguous attitude toward religious otherness (ranging from crusading rejection to enlightened agnostic acceptance), there was an ambiguous attitude toward the Ottoman polity that invited a very distinct class attitude of solidarity with the Muslim Ottoman rulers. This was in stark contrast to the poor and unpolished, but Christian, upstarts, who have been described in a discourse almost identical to the one used to depict the Western lower classes, a virtual parallel between the East End of London and the East End of Europe (Todorova 1997, 18).

This claim, while raising a highly interesting point in the “othering” processes, is not without problems. Although it is true that Eastern and Central Europe and the Balkans are portrayed as lower classes, this pattern is not universal. Eastern and Central Europe has also been invented with regard to their ruling classes. In the previously quoted work of István Bibó, even the elites have been inferiorized as part of their societies.

Yet it is not clear whether or not Orientalism is applicable in the case of Eastern and Central Europe. It seems that the question can only be answered by focusing on the racism found supporting the discourses of Orientalism and colonial, postcolonial patterns (among others Said 1978, Goldberg 1990). In our introductory examples racist language and racist scaling appear in the discourse of the East–West slope. Am-

ato spoke about “mixed blood.” There were references to “quarantine” and “whiteness.” The same could be seen in the narrative of the Walloon woman on her Russian husband. Thus we have to ask to what extent they are inherent or functional in the East–West discourses on Eastern and Central Europe interpreted as a liberal utopia.

Todorova and Neumann have pointed out that Balkanism or the “use of the Russian other” has suggested negative treatment within one type based on the issue of color and body. Todorova declares: “On the other hand, despite the presence of the theme of racial ambiguity, and despite the important internal hierarchies, in the final analysis the Balkans are still treated as positioned on this side of the fundamental opposition: white versus colored, Indo-European versus the rest” (Todorova 1997, 19).

Historically, this argument may be correct and certainly in the heyday of imperialist racism the peoples of Eastern and Central Europe and the Balkans were not unambiguously presented as being racially non-white. Nevertheless, it must be noted that in the late 19th century the founders of scientific racism such as Gobineau saw Eastern and Central Europeans as being racially inferior to “civilized people” on a racist scale, just like our Walloon lady with regard to her Russian husband:⁸ “The Russians, Poles and Serbians... even though they are far nearer to us than the negroes, are only civilized on the surface; the higher classes alone participate in our ideas, owing to the continuous admixture of English, French and German blood” (Gobineu quoted by Burgess 1997, 51).

However, the flexibility of racist codes and discourses has also been raised in other ways. Many of the authors found that in the inferiorization of Eastern and Central Europe on a civilizational slope there is a “functional” racism or cultural racism in operation (Burgess 1997, 195–198). In concrete terms this implies the working out of cultural essentialist categories which refer to characteristics of members of a designated group. They function as “old wine” in new bottles, which then becomes the element of blood or genes so important to racist discourses.⁹ In the words of Tony Judd, an influential “British” liberal intellectual, there are “ancient” differences between “long time” European countries and lands “in the process of becoming” (Judd 1996, viii, ix, 60).

Even Todorova, an opponent of applying patterns of Orientalism and racism to Eastern and Central Europe, sees “politically correct” exclusion at work in “Balkanism.” At the end of her book, paradoxically and interestingly, she argues that Balkanism in the 1990s can function as a comfortable *substitute* for a much criticized “racist” Orientalism and Eurocentrism:

By being geographically inextricable from Europe, yet culturally constructed as “the other” within, the Balkans have been able to absorb conveniently a number of externalized political, ideological, and cultural frustrations stemming from tensions and contradictions inherent to the regions and societies outside the Balkans. Balkanism became, in time, a convenient substitute for the emotional discharge that orientalism provided, exempting the West from charges of racism, colonialism, eurocentrism, and Christian intolerance against Islam. After all, the Balkans are in Europe, they are white; they are predominantly Christian, and therefore the externalization of frustrations on them can circumvent the usual racial or religious bias allegations. As in the case of the Orient, the Balkans have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the “European” and the “West” has been constructed. With the reemergence of East and orientalism as independent semantic values, the Balkans are left in Europe’s thrall, anticivilization, alter ego, the dark side within (Todorova 1997, 188).

Thus it seems that Eastern Europe might appear as being functionally on the side of the colonial or racial Other. We must therefore be prepared to accept that weighing and measuring countries, societies and people according to a liberal utopia of descending civilizational scale allows the appearance of Othering structures functionally related to Orientalist or racist discursive statements and structures. Furthermore, such structures can easily be vitalized in the fight for fixing borders on the slippery civilizational scale, especially by those who see this as a last resort to achieve a higher position in the imaginary of the world. This positioning game of would-be “Western” “Easterners” in the “East” will be analyzed in detail later in the context of East–West population discourses, European integration and individual narratives.

But before we look at the different perspectives of actors located at a lower point of the slope, we should look at the substantial changes in the East–West discourses of the late 1970s in order to see the variations within the discourses of liberal humanitarian utopia.

1.3. From modernization discourses to qualitative/civilizational discourses

1.3.1. The discourse of rival modernities

On the basis of the above general arguments about the discourses of liberal humanitarian utopia we should not assume that there has been no change within the discourses on Eastern and Central Europe. In the late 1970s there was certainly a general shift within the discourses leading to discursive statements such as those analyzed above. It can be asserted that the idea of an East–West civilizational slope was reborn after 30 years of discourses of rivaling modernities or modernizationist quantitative/ideological slopes. This change replaced one type of teleological, Eurocentric discourse about the world and within Eastern and Central Europe with another not seen for at least three decades.

Almost until its collapse the “Eastern” block was seen as something very “real” and “concrete,” whose geographical boundaries were very clear. This “reality” was embedded in a discourse of modernization and progress. Within this discourse everything was understood in terms of ideologies and a related quantitative “competition” between different systems. Socialism versus capitalism, “backwardness” versus “superiority,” “progress” (toward socialism or a modern economic system, for instance) “modernization,” “industrialization” and “catching up” were the key concepts formulated in the framework of global competition of blocks and the incorporated nation states. There were “real” regions in Europe, real collective actors and real walls between them. The link between the sense of “reality” and the categories mentioned above cannot be shown better than by the title of a recent conference paper by Daniel Chirot, the author of the influential book *The origins of backwardness in Eastern Europe* (Chirot 1989, 1991). Focusing on the spread of a “modern, liberal, Western, democratic, individualistic, capitalist way of life” this recent “nostalgic” and with regard to the new “postmodern” anthropological approaches overtly critical paper bears the title “Returning to Reality: Culture, Modernization and Various