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CHRISTIAN GIORDANO,

*Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology at the
University of Fribourg (Switzerland)*

Europe: core, peripheries and postcolonial relations

Abstract

Most concepts of Europe as a unitary community are characterised by a bipolar scheme where the notion of Europe appears together with contrastive representations of an “anti-Europe” (Arab-Muslim culture, Asia, the Orient, Africa, etc.). There is a mirrored reflective relationship by which the former’s basic traits are identified through a presumed diametrical opposition with the latter’s.

However, it is misleading to think of Europe as a united civilisation, or even worse, as a sum of cultural areas. As suggested by a Hungarian historian Jenő Szűcs, a French historian Fernand Braudel and an American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, Europe must be considered as a system of strictly (inter)dependent yet structurally diverse “historical regions”. The rise of the capitalist “world-system” and the emergence of a new international division of labour transformed those regions into core, peripheries and marginal external areas.

The divide between centre and peripheries suggests the existence of power relations, which are postcolonial by nature. The consequence of such postcolonial situation implies a division of European societies into hegemonic and subaltern ones.

Keywords: *Europe, historical regions, centre, peripheries, postcolonial power relations, hegemonic and subaltern societies*

Introduction

From an anthropological point of view, Europe discovers itself by discovering and conquering the rest of the world. Between “Europe” and “anti-Europe”, which from time to time could be the Arab-Muslim culture, Asia, the Orient, or to a much lesser extent Africa etc., there is a mirrored relationship whose upshot is to make the former identify its basic traits through a presumed diametrical difference with the latter. The different intellectual constructions of Europe share a

common denominator: a scheme, usually bipolar, in which at least one term of comparison appears besides Europe and refers mainly to Asia. In other words, the main question for most of the above-mentioned authors is as follows: how come European nations are the only ones that have reached such a high level of civilisation, while the “other” societies are still savage, primitive or barbarian? Again, there is the same contraposition between “Europe” and “anti-Europe”.

In the 19th century, the notion of Europe within this dichotomy was having an increasingly hegemonic connotation. That century, which beyond any strictly mathematical chronology ends after World War I, was characterised by a bold optimism that turned out to be an awful self-deception, as a German political theorist Carl Schmitt fittingly proved. In historical terms, European “élites” had surprisingly underestimated, or even disregarded altogether, the considerable changes that had been going on beyond their continent. Throughout the 19th century, as well as the following one, Europeans obstinately emphasised their superiority, as Eric Wolf has aptly highlighted, by stubbornly disowning the history of “others” [Wolf, 1982: pp. 3–23]. It is no surprise that the term “Europe” was being increasingly used as a synonym of “civilisation” and “progress” [Schmitt, 1974: pp. 272–275]. From a European point of view, the Old Continent is the only one that could establish a “civilising movement” to “break through the darkness that enfolds entire populations”, as Leopold II, king of the Belgians, stated in a solemn speech in 1876. For this typical representative of his times, European colonial expansion in the heart of “anti-Europe” was “a crusade worthy of this century of progress”.

What Europe is not. Some misleading and dangerous ideas

Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, notions of Europe with powerful ideological implications have occasionally been spread; yet, they can hardly endure a historical, sociological and anthropological analysis. The idea of “European civilisation” as a homogeneous and “monolithic” entity was the most popular and politically relevant. However, the term “Occident” (or “*Abendland*”, which means the opposite of “*Morgenland*”, or the Orient) was often used as a synonym of “European civilisation”. More or less explicitly, these concepts call to mind presumed unifying values stemming from a Christian heritage; therefore, “European civilisation” was seen as the centre and bulwark of Christianity. Historically and socio-anthropologically misleading, this concept of Europe was an ideological backbone (albeit not the only one) of blatantly anti-democratic and totalitarian political movements. German Nazism and Italian Fascism regarded themselves as the sole upholders of “European civilisation” and strenuous paladins of “Christianity” particularly against Soviet Bolshevism, which, due to historical mystifications, was stigmatised as “Asian”, hence “alien” to Europe. Other regimes with similar ideological backgrounds, such as authoritarian and dictatorial governments and movements in Central and Eastern European countries, as well as Francoism in Spain and Salazarism in Portugal, resorted to analogous ideas.

The most relevant intellectual expression of “European civilisation” as the centre and bulwark of the “Christian Occident” was the “Europe” Congress held in Rome in 1932, organised by the “Fondazione Alessandro Volta” and patronised by Italy’s Prime Minister and Chief of Cabinet Benito Mussolini. The congress proceedings reveal that this interpretation of Europe coincides with the

idea of “Christian Occident”, from which Russia (as an “Asian” society), however, must be ruled out, as Alfred Weber and others emblematically underscored in their contributions [Atti dei convegni, 1933: pp. 46–81, 146–152].

Europe as a “united civilisation” embodied in the “Christian Occident” is not a bygone idea since it can still be traced in several political subjects of European Islamophobic far-right parties, such as France’s National Front and populist fringes in Germany, Austria, Italy, Hungary, etc. These active and no longer marginal movements resort to similar concepts to assert their violent hostility towards immigration, especially from Islamic and/or non-European countries.

Still, the notion of Europe’s “Judeo-Christian origins” and “Judeo-Christian identity” is not an ideological leitmotif used solely by the radical right, since heated debates about defining the Old Continent in the failed European Constitution project not only brought these spectres to the fore again but actually strengthened them and made them nearly acceptable.

The “united civilisation”, or “Christian Occident”, and Judeo-Christian vision of Europe are dangerous ideas since they suggest the pursuit of cultural, denominational and maybe even ethnic homogeneity based upon the “exclusion strategy” and a racial purity myth, which caused lots of Europe’s tragedies in the past century.

This vision of Europe is misleading since it is far from being the continent’s past, as well as present social structure. Considering only the denominational aspect, a far more differentiated, less compact and congruent setting is due to the centuries-old presence in Europe of significant non-Christian communities such as the Muslim one, as well as momentous events like the Great Schism (1054), the Protestant Reformation (the 16th century) and subsequent nefarious wars of religion.

Europe: a system of “historical regions”

A German philosopher Ernst Bloch advises against turning Europe as a highly differentiated social entity into a mere sum of “cultural areas”, because this would turn “history... into a circus [with] three or more [separate] rings” [Bloch, 1985: p. 127]. Europe must be regarded as a system of strictly (inter)dependent yet structurally diverse “*historical regions*” revealing differences and gaps.

A Hungarian historian Jenő Szücs stresses that from the early Middle Ages onwards Europe began to differentiate socioeconomically, giving rise to the two different poles: “*Europa occidentalis*” and “*Europa orientalis*”. A second economic, socio-structural and cultural division, which includes all societies involved in the Great Schism, occurred between the 11th and 14th centuries.

Szücs’ arguments are relevant to social sciences because they reveal how processes dating back to the remote past have created economic, socio-structural and cultural differences in Europe that still hold true. Concerning this subject, it is useful to add Immanuel Wallerstein’s analysis of Europe incorporated in the “*world-system*” yet divided into “core”, “semi-peripheries” and “peripheries”. However, in this paper I will not consider the notion of semi-periphery since it appears to be non-essential and misleading as well.

It is currently taken for granted that a new system for organising and managing economy rose and spread from the Old Continent between 1450 and 1640.

Max Weber labelled this new system rational capitalism [Weber, 1978: pp. 207–236]. According to Wallerstein [Wallerstein, 1974: pp. 347–357], as well as to a French historian Fernand Braudel [Braudel, 1979: pp. 246–265], amongst others, expansionist movements are inherent in this new model of economic and social behaviour. Capitalist economy's worldwide expansion implies a new setup of relationships between economic partners: societies, states, regions, cities, towns, etc. These new relationships based on a stronger (inter)dependence also imply a new international division of labour that will permeate social structures and cultural models of all societies involved in the process of capitalist “world-system” formation. Actually, economic factors from then on became much more significant not only in defining roles and positions but also in determining inequalities and identities.

However, the international division of labour within the “world-system” is also based on a systematic separation of core, peripheries and external zones. Europe at first and then the whole world were divided into a definite number of regions. Some of them underwent a historical acceleration, quickly modernising most of their socioeconomic structure, while others had to experience centuries-old socioeconomic stagnation and even growing impoverishment. The “world-system”, along with its intrinsic (inter)dependence relationships, has had a tremendous impact on Europe's socioeconomic and cultural setup. In fact, it not only heightened pre-existing divisions but also created new “*historical regions*” such as Mediterranean Europe extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Adriatic Sea. Therefore, from the 15th century on, Europe became more diversified in all aspects due to the differences between its core and various peripheries.

The following classification highlights roles and tasks of Europe's “historical regions” within the new international division of labour.

Northwestern Europe

Due to their specific socioeconomic and cultural dynamics, this region's societies are the primordial core of the new “world-system” which began to form in Europe. As a matter of fact, the feudal system's final and relatively early breakdown, along with the appearance and growth of closely interconnected yet politically and economically autonomous cities, enabled the advent of a fledgeling bourgeois stratum, which, thanks to their specific outlook, spurred outstanding economic growth, as well as primitive accumulation of capital, the likes of which did not occur at that time in other parts of the Old Continent or elsewhere. This economic and socio-cultural process went hand in hand with the invention of major technological tools, especially in the then leading sector such as textiles. These innovations not only boosted the conjuncture but also expanded the industrialisation and marketing of manufactured goods. Such a development model must be regarded as the first appearance of a far more widespread phenomenon known as the “Industrial Revolution”.

The consolidation and accumulation of capital at the core of the rising “*world-system*”, of course, could not have occurred without other sociologically significant concurrent processes: the formation of strong territorial states [Bruner, 1968: pp. 96–99; Wallerstein, 1974: pp. 225–294], the colonial expansion of core countries [Bendix, 1980: pp. 21–28] and the conversion of aristocratic

classes into bourgeoisie in several regions of England and Holland, which, using Saint-Simon's terminology, transformed from *classes paresseuses* into *classes travailleuses* with their own specific entrepreneurial spirit. From the outset, this core included southern England, north-eastern France, Flanders, Holland and the westernmost part of Germany. Northern Spain and northern Italy, other areas of Germany and most of Switzerland, Austria, Bohemia and Scandinavia joined in different subsequent periods.

Mediterranean Europe

This "historical region", being for centuries the Old Continent's socio-economic and cultural hub, was turned into a vast periphery by the new international division of labour inherent in the creation of the "world-system". It provided the core with foodstuffs and raw materials for the growing textile industry. From a socioeconomic point of view, the area comprising Portugal (principally Alentejo), Spain (in particular, Andalusia, La Mancha and Extremadura) and Italy (especially "Mezzogiorno", i. e. the southern part and the islands) was ruled by a system of latifundia reliant on wheat monoculture and/or stock farming belonging to an absentee aristocracy. In fact, as early as the 17th century this class had deserted their latifundia and, in accordance with their ideal of urban life, had moved to large cities such as Palermo, Naples, Rome, Seville, Madrid, Lisbon, etc., where they basically devoted themselves to an "*otium cum dignitate*" disregarding the "*negotium*", i. e. looking after one's own economic interests. Their vast properties were administered by large tenants who were subletting to smaller ones, who in turn would sublease to the smallest peasants. This long rent chain led to a devastating fragmentation. Too many people without any productive activity lived exclusively off the land and backs of those who actually tilled it.

Even though the banking system, rational capitalism's pillar, was developed in Renaissance Italy and the two Iberian states (Spain and Portugal) were the first ones to rely on imperial colonies, Mediterranean Europe's structure was rooted in the above-mentioned agrarian societies and economies from the 16th century up to most of the 20th century. Fernand Braudel [Braudel, 1982: vol. 2, p. 71] has fittingly stated that it was the Mediterranean periphery where the "treason of the bourgeoisie" happened. In other words, during the establishment of capitalist "world-system", the rising bourgeoisie of this "historical region" neither played a specific role nor had their own specific economic behaviour. Their ideal was to imitate the aristocracy as a reference group. This matched the economic and social behaviour of large and small tenants in Andalusia, La Mancha and Extremadura, as well as in Sicily and southern Italy. Roughly up to now, they have led a typically "*Rentenkapitalisten*" passive existence based on the principle of "dignified idleness". Therefore, the absentee aristocracy's behaviour is their model while they hope to rise to nobility through marriage strategies.

East Central Europe

This "*historical region*", with a few exceptions, lies between the two imaginary boundaries traced by Jenő Szücs. It is Europe's second vast periphery and one of the core's major suppliers of foodstuffs (cereals, potatoes, etc.) and raw ma-

terials (pelts, wax, lumber, etc.). The typical socioeconomic scenery of Europe's second periphery was in West and East Prussia, Lithuania, the other two Baltic countries (Estonia and Latvia), the Great Hungarian Plain (Nagy-Magyar Alföld) and the Lower Danube Plain in Romania, besides Poland's so-called eastern territories. In these boundless areas lay the vast landed estates of East Central Europe's aristocracy: major Polish and Hungarian *noble families*, Baltic *overlords* (descendants of Teutonic Knights), Romanian *boyars*, etc. In contrast to the core regions, where feudal relations had been replaced by wage labour in all sectors of economy, the institution of serfdom was the rule in these vast estates nearly up to the end of the 19th century. As the Romanian example shows, there were also free peasant communities, which, despite their ancestral tradition of autonomy, led a socially marginal existence and were characterised by a subsistence economy [Stahl, 1980: pp. 1–11].

The most distinguishing social phenomenon of this European periphery after the appearance of the “world-system” was that serfdom relationships were neither abated nor uprooted; instead, they were revived in a phenomenon that historians unanimously call “second serfdom” [Marx, 1975: p. 202; Bloch, 1937, pp. 606–610; Stahl, 1980: pp. 1–11; Wallerstein, 1974: pp. 95–103].

However, “renewal of serfdom” does not imply a mere reproduction or persistence. Actually, great landowners introduced new farming methods in order to increase yield of crops, mainly cereals, bringing down harsher labour and living conditions on peasants. Products from the great properties became commodities, increasingly traded on the international market, rather than means of subsistence. The “second serfdom” in East Central Europe was also accompanied by the formation of new groups of great landowners with a strong “corporate spirit” and staunch political and socioeconomic ambitions, such as Prussian “*Junker*”, Polish “*szlachta*” and Hungarian “*gentry*”.

Thus, while the Mediterranean periphery faced the “*bourgeoisie treason*” during the “*world-system*” formation process, the East Central Europe underwent the “*manorial reaction*” whose significant influence is still rife in the region's social and economic structure [Dobb, 1946, pp. 51–55; Wallerstein, 1974, pp. 95–103].

South-Eastern Europe

This “*historical region*” includes mainly the Balkans (except Romania). It is a peculiar case since Europe's south-east was first marked by a late establishment (only in the 11th century) of a specific form of feudalism introduced by the Byzantines; then it was dominated by the Ottoman Empire for almost five hundred years [Kaser, 2002: p. 102].

The Ottoman Empire became a part of the “*world-system*” much later, in the 18th century; i. e. during its manifestation of decadence when it was known as the “sick man upon the Bosphorus”. However, even under Ottoman rule the Balkans was a poor periphery. It was located on the precarious border between the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, which had been confronting each other along the so-called *Militärgrenze* for centuries. Therefore, the circumstances of this “*historical region*” should not be compared to other more flourishing socioeconomic areas of the Ottoman Empire such as the Lower Mesopotamian Plain or the Nile Valley.

To make matters worse, the Balkans experienced a degeneration of the patrimonial system based on land grants (at first non-hereditary) by the sultan to his soldiers and administrators in exchange for tax collecting and soldier recruitment from the local populations. This distortion caused a widespread occurrence of a form of hereditary and parasitic latifundism based on the “*çiftlik*” regime, a type of ownership similar to allodial property that could be abolished only thanks to reforms in the 19th century (*tanzimat*) [Adanir, 1979: p. 31]. However, in the last European ramparts of the Ottoman Empire such as Albania and Macedonia “*çiftlik*” was abolished only in the 1920s.

Autonomous peasants, i. e. not subject to the “*çiftlik*” regime, as the case of Bulgaria shows, lived almost exclusively in the mountainous regions and had to cultivate small, scarcely productive plots of land that yielded only a meagre subsistence.

The Balkans’ destiny within the “world-system” was thus to become a “*periphery of the periphery*” after being a marginal part of what Wallerstein calls an “external area”: a situation whose consequences last up to now.

Eastern Europe

This European periphery roughly corresponds to the third “*historical region*” described by Szücs, not including, however, the vast area south of the Carpathians. Therefore, it is the territory that belonged to the defunct Russian Empire west of the Ural Mountains, which then spread south of the Caucasus with the incorporation of marginal external areas (such as Georgia and Armenia) between 1801 and 1878.

During its first centuries this enormous country was an “external area” in regard to the “*world-system*”, as Fernand Braudel underlines, with a distinctive socioeconomic system [Braudel, 1986: p. 492–520]. A communitarian land property regime (“*mir*”, “*obšèina*”) and a peculiar land patrimonialism by which an imperial “official”, “arrogated” property administrated on behalf of the tsar were the socioeconomic structure’s cornerstone.

On the one hand, the peasant communities’ agricultural activities were characterised by an extremely low productivity, as well as by the endurance of obsolete farming methods and an archaic technology [Riasanovsky, 1984: pp. 429–434; Gerschenkron, 1962: p. 706]. It is not surprising that in the late 19th and early 20th century some enlightened reformists, such as the then prime minister Stolypin, tried, nearly always in vain, to replace communitarian ownership with an individual one [Riasanovsky, 1984, pp. 415–417]. On the other hand, the patrimonial ownership system was characterised by a marked absenteeism of the beneficiaries and by an obsolete and parasitic latifundistic production.

For these two reasons, historians compared the situation engendered by such a structural peculiarity, which lasted up to the Russian Revolution (1917), to a “*bog of misery*” [Riasanovsky, 1984: p. 415]. However, Eastern Europe’s gradual integration into the “*world-system*”, which began in the 18th century, would always be wanting. From then on, Russia continued to be a European “external area” and never became an actual periphery or a core state.

Peripheries in the core and cores in peripheries

The new international division of labour and the establishment of the “*world-system*” have not rigidly and concisely differentiated the European continent; there are significant asymmetries within each “*historical region*”. In other words, there are peripheries in the core, such as Scotland, Ireland and some mountainous or isolated regions, e. g., in the Alps or the Pyrenees, as well as “micro-cores” in peripheries, such as some commercial ports on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea (Königsberg, Danzig/Gdańsk, Riga and other Hanseatic cities, etc.), on the Adriatic (Ragusa/Dubrovnik), the Aegean (Thessalonica, Smyrna/Ýzmir) and on the Black Sea (Odesa).

“Historical regions” and present socioeconomic gaps

The reason why reference is made to the historical processes that established and afterwards characterised the social organisation and economic structure of the “*world-system*”, particularly of Europe’s “*historical regions*”, is, first of all, a socio-anthropological concern regarding the present relevance of the course of history. Indeed, the establishment of the “*world-system*” and the increasing international division of labour, which melded the European core with its peripheries, are the primary components of an epochal historical change whose socioeconomic and cultural consequences are still visible and acting to this day.

The gaps that appeared between Europe’s “*historical regions*” during the establishment of the “*world-system*” are still plain to see. The North–South gap within the Old Continent mirrors the past historical, socio-structural and economic differences between the core and the Mediterranean periphery. However, even the integration of these two “*historical regions*” into the European Union has not eliminated this gap to date. The so-called “EU enlargement towards the East” is also problematic specifically due to discrepancies between East and West (not only because the former lived under socialism for fifty years), which embody old boundaries between the European core and the east central periphery. The Balkan situation, which is characterised by a feeble industrialisation and an incomplete modernisation from both a socio-cultural and an economic viewpoint, is owing to the fact that this area has been a *periphery of the periphery* for centuries. Finally, the present-day Russia with its distinct “development model” torn between capitalist models and (pre)socialist communitarian revivals, is adhering to its typical “tradition” of lingering on the borders of the “*world-system*”. The gaps between core and periphery are detectable not only inter-regionally but also within the states. In fact, states that straddle “*historical regions*” have strongly “dualistic” societies, economies and cultures. For example, Italy is divided into North and South; Spain has discrepancies between Catalonia, Basque Country and the rest of the country. There were certain differences between Bohemia and Slovakia in the former Czechoslovakia; as far as the former Yugoslavia is concerned, Slovenia and Croatia were more connected to the core while Serbia, Bosnia and Macedonia belonged to the south-eastern periphery.

***Persistent peripheries:
from Soviet dominance to European Union asymmetries***

At this point, we need to remark that the enlargement of the European Union towards the East and the so-called *acquis communautaire* of the former communist bloc countries have fallen short of the new members' expectations. In the end, the *acquis communautaire* has turned out to be a chimera just like socialism, i. e. a rhetorical ornament showing disquieting similarities with the notion of *mission civilisatrice* used by the French in Africa to provide a humanitarian veneer to hegemonic colonialist policies. Yet, we need to add that the term "socialism" also was an ideological ruse employed by the Soviet Union to disguise a semi-colonial imperial dominance in Eastern Europe.

On the whole, between the socialist and post-socialist epochs there is probably more continuity than discontinuity, especially in terms of a persistent peripheral condition of Eastern Europe's societies. Indeed, I am far from claiming that the Soviet dominance policy is analogous, or even identical to the incorporation of the former Eastern Bloc countries into the European Union. Yet, the failed transition after the imaginary revolution has undeniably led to a situation of socioeconomic dependence in Eastern Europe overall compared to the traditional centre represented by the European Union's more dynamic countries and regions (such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, Scandinavian states, as well as northern Italy and northern Spain), albeit a definitely less constraining dependence than that imposed by Moscow.

This dependence between Northwest and East, just like the evident one between Northwest and South, has been a bonanza for the core. Business in the core has been able to rely on cheap labour force, politically very docile because of being rather sceptical of the new trade unions perceived as a *déjà vu* of the previous period. Delocalisation to the periphery and immigration to the centre have been a shot in the arm for Europe's more prosperous areas, but not for post-socialist Eastern Europe, which, despite the introduction of a market economy and so-called democratic political systems, experienced a further economic and social decline, aside from a few exceptions such as Poland. Eastern Europe, therefore, is still a periphery, no longer dependent on Moscow but on Brussels.

The Euro-sceptic wind blowing especially over the Eastern European peripheries is evidence of *peripheral social knowledge*. Practically no one wants to backtrack and reintroduce a Soviet-like system; on the other hand, practically everyone is aware of the current peripheral status of their country, dependent on an economically and politically more powerful centre. There is a growing understanding that the European Union is an organisation where a structural asymmetry and disparity between *rich and powerful relatives* and *poor and uninfluential relatives* are at work. Analysing both the socialist and post-socialist periods, a Hungarian historian Ivan T. Berend aptly speaks about a *detour from the periphery to the periphery* [Berend, 1996: pp. 341–381]. The point, though, is that the detour, in Braudel's terminology (thus avoiding an overly presentist approach), is a *longue durée* [Braudel, 1977: pp. 47–85]; since, as mentioned above, it stems from the rise of the "world-system".

Dwelling on aspects of dependence and disparity would fall short of the mark, as I also need to thematise the current power relations between Europe's

centre and peripheries. Centuries-old and, as shown above, currently reconfirmed structural asymmetries occur along with relationships of dominance by which core countries are able to impose their will on other societies in order to ensure and assert their own political and economic interests. At this very moment, we are witnessing an obvious manifestation of how these power strategies are set in motion by core countries over the heads of periphery countries within the EU, despite the purported equality of its members. I am clearly referring to Southern European countries, the so-called PIGS — Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain — though the peripheral Ireland and a number of the former communist bloc countries (Latvia, Lithuania, Romania in particular) have also had to comply with the harsh financial measures decreed by the EU in agreement with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, but actually devised and demanded by traditional core nations such as Germany, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The case of Greece is only a glaring example of the centre's hegemonic policy that has been brought to bear on all the continent's peripheries. Eastern European countries (all of them affected to some extent by these measures) have swallowed the bitter pill with little ado and few sporadic objections, probably still mindful of their Soviet-era lessons.

Instead of dwelling on revolution, transition, transformation and post-socialism, one might rightly wonder whether talking about hegemony and subordination is still to the point. Therefore, we could legitimately consider whether specific elements derived from *postcolonial studies* may prove more useful to analyse the situation in Eastern Europe's post-socialist countries.

In fact, a critical approach which underlies *postcolonial studies* highlights that the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the end of Muscovite domination whose distinctive trait was an *accumulation by dispossession* that expropriated the owners of the means of production to the advantage of the communist party [Harvey, 2003: pp. 158–162; Chari, Verdery, 2009: p. 16]. Yet, this approach also emphasises that the subordination of the former Soviet Union's satellite states persists (and not only in terms of economy) in Europe's new post-socialist order.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, riding on the wave of a hardly realistic Occidental universalism and thanks to ideologically shaped concepts such as modernisation and democratisation, hegemonic political and cultural models were imported and possibly imposed — though softly, still not trouble-free. The fact that importing these models has not succeeded so far is unquestioned. The modernisation (as it had been conceived by Euro-American theories) was rather minimal or did not take place at all. The democratisation process was likewise very incomplete at best.

Yet, precisely because of this partial failure of the modernisation projects and democratisation policies, the political and cultural subordination of Eastern Europe's societies and states on the one hand and the hegemonic stance of Western Europe's *strong* countries on the other have ultimately intensified.

As a matter of fact, I have observed that one of the key concerns is linked precisely to the question of a purported political and cultural backwardness of post-socialist countries and societies. This is clearly a social representation built by these countries, which, however, has been considerably fuelled by the *Orientalistic* opinions constructed in the core. Nevertheless, as stated above, this is an

imagined form of backwardness since all the European peripheries including south-eastern ones have unquestionably produced outstanding cultures.

So, the harrowing question regarding Eastern Europe's subaltern societies is as follows: how come this European region inhabited by the continent's most virtuous people has been unable to be on a par with other nations such as France, Germany, Great Britain and lastly, chronologically speaking, with the United States? Especially the prominent intellectuals and the more cultivated public of South-Eastern Europe's subaltern states will often compare their societies to those of the hegemonic states perceived as more advanced ones. At the same time, the core countries view their extraordinary achievements in regard to progress, civilisation, modernity, democracy, civil society, welfare, security, etc. with conceit or even arrogance by which they can avoid taking notice of their so-called partners in the peripheries. On the other hand, post-socialist countries experience a patent though highly ambivalent fascination with the purported political, cultural and socioeconomic accomplishments of the metropolises.

Therefore, in line with an American sociologist Reinhard Bendix, the hegemonic nations may aptly be defined as *reference societies* for the peripheries, meaning that subaltern societies react to the values and institutions of *another country* with ideas and action strategies pertinent to their *own country* [Bendix, 1980: p. 292].

This observation pinpoints the striking ambivalence that characterises the relationship between the European peripheral societies and centres in North-western Europe. Bendix thinks that this stance is grounded in both specific *social knowledge* and a corresponding *type of argumentation*. According to these collective representations and discourses, the power of the hegemonic country is definitely impressive, yet its society is rife with false values, moral corruption, moral decadence, lack of both sincerity and spontaneity. At the same time, the socioeconomic problems of one's own subaltern country are immense, but the undisputed virtues of its people are the prized and ultimate models of thinking and action. On the one hand, therefore, due to their economic and political achievements the hegemonic reference societies hold powerful attraction for others and ought to be imitated or even excelled. On the other hand, the artificiality and depravation of those societies' life-styles are appalling; there is a demonstration of a folklorised backwardness represented as the virtuous authenticity of one's *own society* and one's *own nation*. Michael Herzfeld has rightly called this phenomenon the diglossia of guidelines, discourses and consequently of identities [Herzfeld, 1987: pp. 112–115]. In my opinion, this *diglossia*, typical of all peripheral societies of Europe, is what underlies the above-mentioned ambivalence.

In this regard, Eastern Europe's peripheral and subaltern societies show an urge to accelerate the modernisation/Europeanisation. The latter implies introducing Western standards in the economy (e. g., industrialisation), politics (e. g., importing a parliamentary democracy) and culture (adopting models and trends from Western European metropolises like Paris, Vienna, Berlin, London, etc.). Alexander Kiossev has justifiably called this imitative behaviour a sort of *self-colonisation* [Kiossev, 1995: pp. 73–75].

Along with these Europeanisation and modernisation efforts, however, we can observe a massive recourse to nativistic representations, stances and action strategies aimed at staging the superb qualities of one's own people and nation.

This form of nativism, brilliantly analysed by Wilhelm Emil Mühlmann in subalpine countries, may be defined as the aspiration and determination of Europe's peripheries as historically marginalised societies to break away from the excessive economic, political and cultural power of the *reference societies* (i. e. the core ones) and publicly demonstrate the feeling that *we are notable too* [Mühlmann, 1961: p. 12].

In fact, this is the clear expression of the genuine contribution to the material and spiritual culture by one's own group, ethnicity, nation and society. Nativism always implies a more or less folklorised reprocessing of traditions, thus an invention, or better say, a social production of authenticity.

Conclusion: the demise of a mythical construction

Europe's current problems, therefore, cannot be ascribed to a short-term conjuncture of temporary phenomena caused by a bungled political orientation or momentary administrative shortfalls, but rather, citing Fernand Braudel once again, to *très longue durée* processes, thus of a structural nature, due to the socio-economic, political and consequently cultural asymmetry between the Old Continent's various regions. Hence, it should not be surprising that the project of a United Europe, laudable in the abstract, is proving to be not only infeasible, but indeed catastrophic. And the current populisms are not its cause, but its effect.

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