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Research Articles

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Book Review

Research Articles

A Review of Science Diplomacy: Theoretical Evolution to a Post-Naïve Approach and Its Relevance for the Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT   The paper critically reviews the evolution of the concept of science diplomacy and sheds light on the lack of theoretical reflection on the role of science diplomacy in the Czech context. The idealistic vision of science diplomacy presented by the AAAS and the Royal Society in 2010 has recently been replaced by a more constructivist vision that acknowledges the vulnerability of science and emphasises the political and international implications of S&T diplomacy by pointing to clashes between national interests and those of scientific communities. This post-naive vision relies on the growing strategic value of science and technology, which may lead to the acceptance of new policies regulating the inputs and outputs of scientific systems. The paper briefly outlines the current strategy of the Czech Republic within the EU, highlighting its geostrategic dimension and identifying relevant challenges for the future agenda.

INTRODUCTION

Science diplomacy has long been intertwined with the field of international affairs, and practices of what would now be labelled science diplomacy in international affairs can be traced back to the 18th Century (turekian 2018: 5–7). Until recently, it has been seen more narrowly as a part of cultural diplomacy (tomalová 2008; peterková 2016), despite its widespread and growing importance since the Second World War.

The changing understanding of science diplomacy over the last seventy years suggests that science and research are becoming politically relevant as globalisation progresses (robinson et al. 2023). The transformation of international relations and science policy is driving these changes. Intergovernmental bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), transnational organisations such as the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, globalisation, which has spurred big data science, large infrastructures such as CERN (Conseil Européen pour la recherche nucléaire) and others, have made science one of the geopolitical and geo-economic priorities of state diplomacy (kurbalija 2022).

The theoretical concept and framework of science diplomacy are thus relatively new. In a collaboration between the Royal Society's Science Policy Centre and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), a policy paper entitled "New Frontiers in Science Diplomacy: Navigating the Changing Balance of Power" was produced in 2010 (koppelman et al. 2010). This policy paper is the first comprehensive exposition of the concept of science diplomacy, suggesting its place and role in diplomacy and international relations, and introducing science diplomacy as an analytical category. The report was published in 2010, one year after Barack Obama's speech in Cairo in 2009. His speech has been interpreted as the beginning of a new American strategy towards the Muslim world after the events of 11 September 2001. It emphasised the importance of scientific and technological cooperation as a means of progress where traditional political and diplomatic channels are absent or limited.

The theoretical framework of science diplomacy is currently under critical debate (ruffini – krasnyak 2023), as it is caught between idealistic aspirations and realistic needs in an era of new wars and international crises.

Most critics of the original concept (COPELAND 2016; FLINK 2020; PENCA 2018) point out that science as a public good is highly vulnerable, as Jacques Salomon and others have argued (SALOMON 2006: 13). The idealist vision is therefore being replaced in analytical circles by more constructivist approaches that, while not denying science as a highly vulnerable phenomenon, can socially anchor it in real politics (KARACAN – RUFFINI 2023), which most critics counter by highlighting conflicts between state interests and those of epistemic communities (FLINK 2020; RUNGIUS – FLINK 2020).

In line with the 2010 report, Vaughan Turekian and his colleagues (TUREKIAN ET AL. 2015: 4) contend that science diplomacy is a *"process by which states represent themselves and their interests in the international arena when it comes to the areas of knowledge – their acquisition, utilization, and communication – acquired by scientific method."* The definition presented here by prominent contemporary scholars of science diplomacy is derived from their examination of science and diplomacy, according to which science uses a universal language that transcends ideological or political prejudices and embodies principles of transparency, ethical conduct, excellence and civic virtues. Diplomacy, in its conventional definition (DAVIS – PATMAN 2015), is commonly interpreted as a non-violent instrument of international affairs, characterised by efforts to achieve compromise, foster communication and facilitate peaceful negotiations.

The aim of this paper is to clarify the concept of science diplomacy in the Czech context, to briefly present its history and background, and shed light on the lack of theoretical reflection on the role of science diplomacy in the Czech milieu and its consequences. The paper aims to evaluate the Czech approach to science diplomacy against the so-called idealistic version of science diplomacy and open a discussion on the current post-naïve understanding of science diplomacy. I point out a certain discrepancy in the Czech context, where scholars tend to associate science diplomacy with the traditional concept of science as part of cultural diplomacy, while practitioners at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic promote their science diplomacy as part of economic or innovation diplomacy. I argue that the vagueness of the first concept of science diplomacy in Czech foreign policy is confusing and may send confusing messages to our partners.

In the first part of the text, which is more narrative and informative in nature, I therefore focus on the basic milestones used by contemporary theorists of science diplomacy to contextualise the role of science diplomacy in international relations. This is followed by a basic division and introduction of the three dimensions of science diplomacy. The first critique, namely that of the tendency to idealise science diplomacy by viewing it almost exclusively as a means of peace and stability, is presented in the next section. The risk inherent in an undefined concept of Czech science diplomacy is then discussed in the final section, in which the text focuses on the Czech approach to science diplomacy, where the consequences of the related vagueness are immediately apparent.

The text presents examples of both the roles of large research infrastructures and the implementation of the Czech concept of "science diplomacy" in practice. It is thus primarily a review article, but it also highlights the dynamics of the field and the implications of its vague definition for the practical agenda of the Czech Republic's foreign policy.

THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF SCIENCE DIPLOMACY

The link between science diplomacy and national interests and objectives distinguishes it from cultural diplomacy, academic exchanges, and other forms of scientific cooperation, as was stated in Obama's speech "A New Beginning," delivered in Cairo on 4 June 2009. In this emotionally charged speech, Barack Obama outlined for the first time since 9/11 his broad and ambitious initiative for cooperation with the Muslim world and he promised to support educational, scientific, and technological activities based on the premise of American science diplomacy: *"But we must all recognize that education and innovation will be the currency of the 21st century"* (OBAMA 2009). The speech was preceded by the establishment of the Centre for Science Diplomacy by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in 2008 and the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty in Washington, DC, in 2009 (KARACAN – RUFFINI 2023).

The report "New Frontiers in Science Diplomacy" that followed, was initiated in the latter year by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and the Science Policy Centre of the Royal Society, and published in 2010 (KOPPELMAN ET AL. 2010). It explains the post-Cold War world

order that has facilitated the expansion of science diplomacy and its role. It defines science in the international context as a result of increasing globalisation that is challenged by global issues such as the environment, health and security, which require global cooperation.

The authors define the following dimensions of science diplomacy: 1) science in diplomacy, which aims to *"inform foreign policy objectives with scientific advice"*; 2) diplomacy for science, which facilitates international scientific cooperation; and 3) science for diplomacy, which uses scientific cooperation to improve international relations between countries (KOPPELMAN ET AL 2010: VI). Although this simplistic division is now criticised mainly for the vagueness of its definition (COPELAND 2016; FLINK 2020; PENCA 2018), it is a functional terminological tool that has been very well accepted and adopted globally.

Science in diplomacy points to the fact that science is capable of recording, measuring and analysing. The model of future development thus becomes the basis for action, setting agendas, and ranking the priorities of politicians and diplomats. Peter D. Gluckman, the President of the International Science Council, the former President of the International Network for Government Science Advice, and the former Chief Science Advisor to the Prime Ministers of New Zealand, distinguishes between the following types of input that scientists and the scientific community can provide to politicians and diplomats: (1) technical advice, (2) regulatory advice, (3) deliberative advice, (4) informal advice, and (5) scientific advice in crises and emergencies (GLUCKMAN 2016).

In this context, the report "New Frontiers in Science Diplomacy" mentions the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). This panel was set up in 1988 by a decision of the UN General Assembly in cooperation with the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) (RISPOLI – OLŠÁKOVÁ 2020) to objectively and regularly analyse data on climate change and, on the basis of these results, inform policymakers about forecasts of climate change, its further development and possible recommendations. Nevertheless, critical voices raise the issue of the problematic relationship between science and politics within the IPCC's operation in terms of the superiority of politics over science (LIDSKOG – SUNDQVIST 2015).

The second dimension, *diplomacy for science*, invites researchers and scientists to provide and obtain the support of diplomats and the international commitments of their governments in order to create new networks, implement large-scale projects, or establish new contacts. Diplomacy for science means using science to promote a national agenda or one of its priorities at the international level. A typical example is the creation of large infrastructures, which require not only huge investments but also a broad network of international experts. In Europe, three such large infrastructures have required the involvement of diplomats: Conseil Européen pour la recherche nucléaire (CERN) (KRIGE 1996), the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research in Dubna (JINR) (TĚŠÍNSKÁ 2019) and the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2006). All three institutions reflect different tactics in achieving political and diplomatic goals: CERN is an exemplary case of political attempts at closer integration of EU science policy, where science diplomacy served as a platform for building a supranational research infrastructure; JINR Dubna is a typical Soviet product of the Cold War, as the international nuclear institute was built as a primarily Soviet institution with international participation; ITER, which aims to demonstrate the scientific and technological feasibility of fusion as a future energy source, is a de facto global project, the second of its kind after the International Space Station, which aims to stimulate research and monitor progress in the field of thermonuclear fusion. While CERN in many ways serves as an incubator for new projects with a strong international and global impact, such as the successful World Wide Web communication tool that is now standard on the Internet, Dubna was born out of the USSR's colonial attitude to gathering new knowledge from the Soviet bloc, and ITER has become a new challenge for cooperation in the post-Cold War world (BARBARINO 2021).

Bilateral negotiations on science and the use of its potential play an important role here, and the examples I have listed above are typical examples of multilateral agreements (with the exception of Dubna, which arose in the specific environment of the Sovietisation of Central and Eastern European states); nevertheless, national interests take the lead in science diplomacy. This is one of the reasons why the approach to science diplomacy and the support for its objectives vary so much from one country to another. For example, the UK has regular science and innovation meetings with Brazil, China, India, Russia, South Africa and South Korea (KOPPELMAN

ET AL. 2010: 9). In Central Europe, the Visegrad Four (V4) have had the ambition to create a similar platform for science and innovation meetings in the past, but their political potential has been more erratic recently and has not led to a strong strengthening of their position in this area.

The final dimension is *science for diplomacy*, which uses science to build cooperation between countries. This dimension is represented by scientific cooperation agreements, the success and benefits of which are often determined by the geopolitical interests of the countries and organisations involved. In most cases, these agreements are very specific and cover 11 of the 15 reasons for signing bilateral STI agreements identified by Derek Jan Fikkers and Manfred Horvat in their *Basic Principles for Effective International Science, Technology and Innovation Agreements* (see Table 1) (FIKKERS – HORVAT 2014: 3). Specific agreements with these 11 reasons fall under the 'narrow STI paradigm', while the remaining four reasons fall under the so-called 'broad STI agreement paradigm' and could be considered as proper 'science diplomacy' or 'high-level policy' (IBID.).

TABLE 1: FIFTEEN REASONS FOR SIGNING BILATERAL STI AGREEMENTS
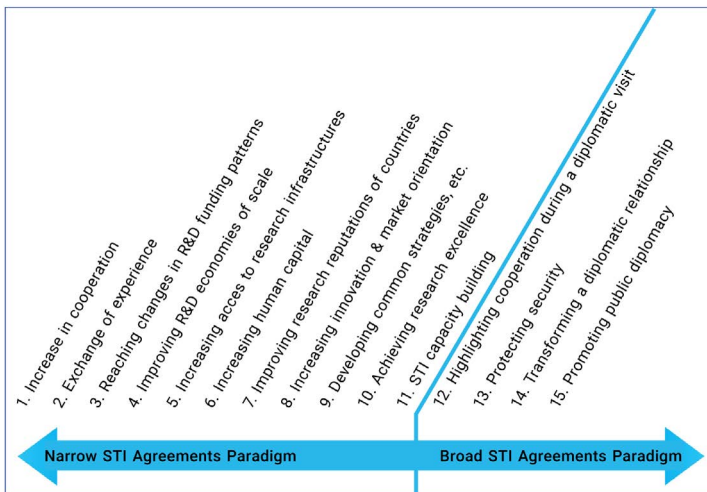
However, the paradigms of 'narrow' and 'broad' STI agreements are irrelevant if we approach STI agreements from the perspective of traditional diplomacy. STI agreements can be divided into symmetrical and asymmetrical agreements. The former are those created with the aim of gradually improving existing mutual relations. Their dynamics are

balanced, proportionate, and linked to the current level of international cooperation. The asymmetrical approach means that science serves as a starting point for a new international cooperation. Its dynamic is not proportional, because the weaker the existing international relations between the two given countries have been in the past, the greater the political interest in influencing the relations between these countries will be in the future. A typical example, also cited by "New Frontiers," is the 2004 scientific cooperation agreement between the US and Libya, which was the first agreement signed between these two countries after Libya abandoned its biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons programmes (KOPPELMAN ET AL. 2010: 11).

This dimension of science diplomacy also includes the sensitive issues of nuclear proliferation, disarmament, environmental risks and environmental security, which are now attracting a great deal of attention. Historically, nuclear weapons have clearly been the main driving force and reason for science to move from a purely national framework to the field of international relations in the course of the 20th century (TURCHETTI 2020; KRAFT – SACHSE 2019). The responsibility of scientists for the advancement of humanity has become part of the integrity of research and the social responsibility of scientists (KRAFT 2022; KRAFT – SACHSE 2019; OLŠÁKOVÁ 2018).

THE POST-NAÏVE APPROACH TO SCIENCE DIPLOMACY

The division of science diplomacy into three dimensions was criticised almost immediately. In particular, academics found it too vague. Simone Turchetti and Roberto Lalli point out in their paper from 2020 that *"the underlying assumption in the literature is that all the stakeholders involved will benefit from science diplomacy initiatives; countries will produce relations that are more cordial, science will advance and through that advancement, the society at large will benefit too"* (TURCHETTI – LALLI 2020). Such an idealistic concept assumes that science diplomacy should remain outside the realm of political or other interests, and that scientists themselves should distance themselves from diplomatic and political games (FLINK 2020). Diplomacy should also uphold the scientific ethic, according to which the transfer of knowledge aims to improve the quality of life and society, not to create a relationship of dependency in the name of colonial expansion.

The 2010 report established science diplomacy as one of the analytical categories of contemporary history and international relations. According to the idealistic vision of the 2010 report, science can influence state-nation relations because of its universal values. These are rationality, transparency, and universality. They provide a non-ideological climate that allows successful relations between two or more countries on neutral ground. Science diplomacy can bridge cultures and values through scientific internationalism (SOMSEN 2008). Obama's speech, however, shows that the role of science and its relevance to society is a two-way street, both externally (TURCHETTI ET AL. 2008) and internally. Science is reflected by the state in different ways in all the major components of identity, i.e. self-identification, prioritisation, and cultural framework, making its role distinctive (KOLMAŠ 2017).

On the one hand, the idealistic vision of science diplomacy is the main reason why the concept has become so attractive and popular in the last decade. On the other hand, this idealism is also the main point of contemporary criticism. The "Dickensian" image of science diplomacy, however, makes us forget the historical experience of authoritarian regimes that were able to use science diplomacy within their political agenda under socialist internationalism, both in the sense of consolidating peace and cooperation and in the sense of limiting cooperation through colonisation or direct control (JACOBSEN – OLŠÁKOVÁ 2020), which is how globalisation took the form of "red globalisation" in the Communist bloc (SANCHEZ-SIBONY 2016).

Rungius and Flink point out that the notion of science diplomacy has been closely linked to the narrative of crisis, albeit in times of peace rather than war (RUNGIUS – FLINK 2020). The idealistic vision of science diplomacy as a quick, peaceful solution that creates synergy through cooperation overrides existing antagonisms. Such an image has led to the emergence of a "pervasive trust" in science diplomacy (LIDSKOG – SUNDQVIST 2015), which, however, ignores the serious fact that science is a social process driven by the concept of national interests. The "soft power paradox" thus arises: *"While science is cherished for being non-political, this property was to be instrumentalized as a form of* ersatz *diplomacy, i.e., it is being used for political purposes that essentially revolve around interests and power"* (RUNGIUS – FLINK 2020: 8).

Science provides a neutral background, but it is still a "state-funded" activity, and therefore it is a reflection of national or state interests. Over the past decade, the relationship between science diplomacy and national interests has come to the fore. The potential to use science to promote state or national interests is based on the following principles: 1) the importance of science for diplomacy is growing along with the possibility of redirecting it to the sphere of implementation; 2) the funding of science always stems from national priorities; 3) scientists in international relations are specific actors bound by the principles of scientific ethics and scientific internationalism, but dependent on their own country in both an emotional and a material/financial sense (RUFFINI 2018: 55).

For some authors (E.G. RUNGIUS – FLINK 2020) the concept of science diplomacy has gained remarkable ground in public policy. Calling for closer cooperation between actors from science and foreign policy, it is often being promulgated as a hitherto neglected catalyst for international understanding and global change. On what grounds science diplomacy entertains these high hopes, however, has remained unclear, and – as a blind spot – unaddressed in a discourse mostly shaped by policy practitioners. Recognizing that the discourse on science diplomacy is still unspecific about how its means and ends should fit together and be comprehended, we reconstruct the concept and its discourse as a materialization of actors' interpretative schemas and shared assumptions about the social world they constantly need to make sense of. Science diplomacy is presented as a panacea against looming threats and grand challenges in a world facing deterioration. The prerequisite for such a solutionistic narrative is a simplified portrait of diplomacy in need of help from science that – romanticized in this discourse – bears but positive properties and exerts rationalizing, collaborative and even pacifying effects on a generic international community in its collective efforts to tackle global challenges. We conclude that these interpretative schemas that idealize and mythify science as overall collaborative, rationalizing and complexity-reducing are problematic. First, because the discourse misconceives ideals and norms for real and will therefore disappoint social expectations, and second, because science is likely to be instrumentalised for political purposes. The Authors are therefore critical of the 'dual identity' of the scientist, both national and scientific.

The revised definition of science diplomacy, as provided by Gluckman et al. in 2017, focuses on the benefits of science diplomacy for national interests, and also for cross-border and global cooperation in addressing global challenges. Science diplomacy thus encompasses 1) *"actions designed to directly advance a country's national needs"* (…*"from exercising soft power to serving economic interests to promoting innovation"*); 2) *"actions designed to address cross-border interests"* (regarding, e.g., *"matters relating to transborder shared resources"*); and 3) *"actions primarily designed to meet global needs and challenges"* (addressing the "global interest" regarding shared challenges across borders and spaces beyond national jurisdictions) (RUFFINI 2020). P.-B. Ruffini and D. B. Karacan consider the potential of science diplomacy to find solutions to common global problems as part of its "universalist" approach (KARACAN – RUFFINI 2023: 1). L. S. Davis and R. G. Patman argue that two conditions must be met in order to promote science diplomacy: The first is the need to improve the flow of information and communication between scientists and diplomats, but not only them – society also plays an important role. The second, and more long-term, requirement is for states to accept the assumption that *"at least some issues are so global in their reach and consequences that states must sacrifice their perceived self-interest for the common good"* (DAVIS – PATMAN 2015: 273).

In contrast to the previously preferred framework of defining science diplomacy as a tool for maintaining cooperation and closer integration, science diplomacy is increasingly becoming a tool for promoting national or supranational interests and strengthening one's own influence. The "statist" approach thus focuses on the state and its interests, which are articulated at the international level through diplomatic channels (KARACAN – RUFFINI 2023: 1). Increased international competition could inevitably lead to increased tensions in strategic research areas and, ultimately, to the most likely case of a renewal of stricter controls on the free movement of scientists (KRIGE 2019). This is so because the regulatory means that any state could use to maintain or protect its own policy on the flow of knowledge are based on the control of the free movement of scientists, and include, for example, visa policy (KRIGE – BARTH 2006).

The reassessment of the idealistic approach to science diplomacy has been interrupted by the Russia-Ukraine war, which has fundamentally shaped not only the functioning of individual scientific institutions

and communities, but also the mechanism and principles of international cooperation in general. The war stands at the beginning of the post-naïve approach to science diplomacy (OLŠÁKOVÁ – ROBINSON 2022A, 2022B), as in the near future I can anticipate a re-evaluation of existing principles and the mechanism of scientific cooperation in a new, polarised environment, while the main premises of science, technology and scientific ethics will be preserved. In view of the growing strategic value of science and technology, I expect a closer cooperation or an increasing overlap between secret and civilian research, which would lead to the acceptance of new strict measures regulating the inputs and outputs of the scientific system.

THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND THE DAWN OF SCIENCE DIPLOMACY

In the Czech environment, the popular image of scholars as Czech revivalists reviving the Czech language or lonely geniuses living in isolated ivory towers has never really corresponded to reality (VÁCHA 2012). In the years right after the establishment of an independent Czechoslovak state, the cultural and science diplomacy of the newly formed country was defined as pro-active, expansive, and quite generous in terms of financial funding (OLŠÁKOVÁ 2023). Cultural diplomacy supported the political goals of Czechoslovak foreign policy and significantly shaped the image of the new Czechoslovak state abroad. In the post-war period, Czechoslovak science policy went through several distinct phases, from being a passive part of ideological propaganda during the harsh sovietisation of Czechoslovakia to a great boom in the 1960s (MÁLEK 1968), when, for example, Czechoslovak members of Pugwash created a strong international network closely linked to the group of Harvard professors working in close contact with the US State Department (OLŠÁKOVÁ 2018). The golden 1960s were later interrupted by the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 (JANÁČ – OLŠÁKOVÁ 2021), and the emigration or expulsion of prominent researchers from active academic life put an end to the period of rich international activities of Czech and Slovak scientists (ŠTRBÁŇOVÁ – KOSTLÁN 2011). The policy of 'normalisation', i.e. the post-1968 policy based on Brezhnev's neo-Stalinism, dealt a severe blow to independent Czechoslovak science diplomacy, and even the great wave of interest in Eastern and Central Europe in the 1990s was unable to remedy this situation.

At present, the Czech Republic is one of the countries that are aware of the growing importance of science diplomacy, but continue to adhere to more traditional practices. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic has established a special department for science diplomacy, the aim of which is not only to strengthen this distinctive and new area of foreign policy, but also to create new conditions for the development of so-called "innovation diplomacy" (GRISET 2020), a specific subdivision focused on innovation and technology transfer. Its role is thus defined as both science for diplomacy and science in diplomacy.

The definition of science diplomacy developed by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is theoretically derived from the AAAS concept. However, the influence of the EU and its current priorities is very evident in it. The EU has been developing the concept of science diplomacy since 2010, which led to the linking of EU science policy with the European External Action Service (EEAS), which, in 2016, openly declared science policy to be an EU 'soft power' (RUNGIUS – FLINK 2020). Since then, the EU Commission's Directorate-General for Research has used science to achieve *"geopolitical goals and strategic research and development goals"* (RUNGIUS – FLINK 2020: 3).

Nevertheless, the position and concept of 'science diplomacy' in the Czech Republic have been weakened by its vague understanding and definition. The numerous analyses of Czech foreign policy since 2015 include science, research, and education under cultural diplomacy. The *Foreign Policy Concept of the Czech Republic* then sees the main contribution of science diplomacy in promoting the good reputation of the Czech Republic abroad (PETERKOVÁ – TOMALOVÁ 2016: 399–400; 2017: 407–408).

The Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time of writing (2023) Jan Lipavský sees Czech science diplomacy as a component of economic diplomacy, which further complicates the vagueness of the Czech term and concept. This attitude is clearly expressed in his statement of April 2022: *"Economic and science diplomats have a shared goal: to support the export of Czech products, services, and technologies with the greatest possible added value abroad and establish cooperation with foreign partners. The well-tested tools of economic diplomacy are available for the further development of science diplomacy"* (LIPAVSKÝ 2022). One of his priorities, he says, is to increase the involvement

of economic diplomats in the science and technology agendas of individual embassies (ŽIŽKA 2022). However, his speech reveals another characteristic feature of Czech diplomacy, which is the absence of the term 'innovation diplomacy'. In general, the Czech Foreign Ministry emphasises the "science in policy" dimension, which is based on "evidence-based policy". The role of science is to provide quantified data on the basis of which analyses are made and used to define foreign policy priorities.

The structure of science diplomacy in the Czech Republic is hierarchical, but it operates both vertically, as part of the structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and horizontally, as an inter-ministerial steering group. Currently, there is an inter-ministerial steering group established within the Czech Council for Research, Development and Innovation, which includes representatives of all the relevant state scientific authorities, i.e. the Czech Council for Research, Development and Innovation, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Czech Science Foundation, the Czech Technology Agency and the Czech Academy of Sciences. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs itself has its own science diplomacy coordination structure and it is headed by a Special Envoy for Science and Technology. Petr Kaiser, who served as the Special Envoy for Science and Technology at the Czech MFA from 2010 to 2014, has held this position again since 2019. So far, cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and inter-ministerial steering group has worked well, and in the spring of 2023, a special science diplomacy unit was approved and launched as part of the revised structure of the Foreign Ministry.

The Czech Republic has so far appointed four science diplomats, making it one of the countries with the lowest representation in this regard. For example, Pierre-Bruno Ruffini claims that in 2015, Hungary had a total of 11 science advisors in nine countries (RUFFINI 2018). The oldest Czech science diplomat position was created at the embassy in Israel in 2015, when Delana Mikolášová was appointed the first Czech science diplomat (LIDOVÉ NOVINY 2015: 4; MAŠÍNOVÁ 2022). The Czech science diplomats' concept of science diplomacy is derived from the dimensions of science for diplomacy and diplomacy for science; in the case of Israel, the science in diplomacy dimension is, at first sight, unclear. Science diplomacy activities in Israel are based on three areas of interest to the Czech Republic: academic communities

(i.e. universities and research institutions), cooperation and partnerships in the field of research and development, and innovative R&D companies. There is a clear emphasis on hard data and implementation in this case. The focus is on innovation potential, applied R&D and the ability to create start-ups and national innovation ecosystems. Israel is the only country for which the Czech government possesses a carefully prepared analysis for developing further scientific cooperation activities (KOSTIĆ ET AL. 2022). As the Czech science diplomacy agenda is still under review, the question arises as to whether the low number of science diplomats is really the result of limited funding, or if it is the result of a highly targeted science diplomacy focused on specific areas in specific regions of the world.

The most recent Czech science diplomacy post was established in Taipei to coordinate science diplomacy across South East Asia. From 2020 until the time of writing (2023), the post has been held by Marie Leflerová, whose priorities are very similar to the Czech approach in Israel, namely innovation and implementation (LEFLEROVÁ 2022).

A science diplomat post has also been created at the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the EU in Brussels and is currently, at the time of writing (2023), held by Hana Vlčková. Her position is somewhat different from those of the other three Czech science diplomats, as she has been dealing with science and research issues, including the space agenda, within the EU's Framework Programmes since 2008. Although her work is not well documented in accessible sources and analyses, the fact remains that four years after she took up her post, the European Space Agency (EUSPA) began operating in the Czech Republic, at that time under the official name of the European Global Navigation Satellite System Agency (GSA). This is undoubtedly the greatest success of Czech foreign diplomacy within the framework of "diplomacy for science".

For the time being, the only Czech science diplomat post that represents all three dimensions of science diplomacy is the one created at the Czech Embassy in the US (ŽIŽKA 2017), which was held by Luděk Moravec until 2022 (vacant at the time of writing). The embassy's priorities are much narrower, focusing on AI, nanotechnology, plasma physics and, exceptionally, even the social sciences. The embassy's cooperation in defence research also deserves special attention. Here the emphasis is on personal

contacts, networking of and with Czech scientists, etc. A strong emphasis on technology transfer and innovation is not evident from the available sources, as is the case for the Asian regions; on the contrary, the description of the post makes it clear that efforts are being made to strengthen the science dimension in diplomacy, primarily through personal contacts and networking.

From the geostrategic perspective of its location and the nature of its priorities, as currently listed in the official communication channels of the Czech Foreign Ministry, the Czech Republic's science diplomacy in the East seems to be based on the dimension of diplomacy for science, with a focus on technology transfer. In the West and in the Euro-Atlantic context, there is an obvious tendency to see science diplomacy in the context of science for diplomacy; however, I also see here a possible overlap with science in diplomacy. In practice, these different approaches can be characterised by a strong emphasis of science for diplomacy on technology transfer and innovation, while science in diplomacy in the traditional sense emphasises the circulation of knowledge and its controlled migration between actors and communities.

The Czech Republic shows signs of proactive behaviour in its attitude to science diplomacy, but it is somewhat limited to a neutral policy, i.e. it sees its role in this field only in the context of mediation and facilitation, with an overriding focus on economic diplomacy. On the one hand, the geostrategic dimension is very well worked out and shows a clear ambition to keep the Czech Republic within the sphere of scientific interest of the major scientific concentrations in the West, with interesting openings toward the Middle East and East Asia, though the partnerships have been chosen in a way that may prevent the formation of broader alliances and clusters. On the other hand, it seems that the Czech Republic does not properly take into account the potential of S&T cooperation and common policy in this field, as it tends to adhere to ad hoc decision-making processes. In our view, this is a consequence of the non-political or apolitical understanding of science and technology, its idealistic depoliticisation and its limitation to economic effects. At a time when international law and politics are eroding, the Czech Republic is depriving itself of an important pillar of multilateral relations that would significantly shape the roles of individual countries in the new global agenda.

It is difficult to find a comprehensive concept of Czech science diplomacy that would take into account the political potential of its dimensions. In its ideal assumptions, the Czech approach is inspired by contemporary trends in the promotion of science diplomacy as a part of the diplomatic agenda, but in practice it is dominated by economic diplomacy and is currently under strong pressure from the application sphere. This dichotomy is derived from the National Priorities of Oriented Research, which are the main priority of the current Czech government in this regard. This fragmentation of Czech science diplomacy has already been criticised in 2017 by Vladimír Majer (MAJER 2017), a former French science diplomat of Czech origin. However, there seems to have been no fundamental reassessment of this agenda; on the contrary, as the statement by Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský makes clear, science diplomacy is seen primarily as an instrument for economic expansion, rather than as an active tool for promoting the wide range of national interests in various fields and international institutions.

As the country is a member of the European Union, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic is well aware that the importance of science diplomacy is likely to grow in the future. This prediction is based on the observation that most of the major players in international relations are currently tending to emphasise and develop their "smart power". The EU's largest and most important member, Germany, has also commissioned its own strategy for the development of science diplomacy in 2020: *"German science diplomacy has always been understood as part of European relations and also as a national contribution to supporting European sovereignty and solidarity, both geostrategically and as an actor, but also as a tool for shaping identity internally and externally"* (AUSWÄRTIGES AMT 2020). Thus, in contrast to the Czech science diplomacy, it focuses on all three spheres of influence for the development of science diplomacy, i.e. diplomacy for science, science for diplomacy and science in diplomacy.

In a situation where the EU has no EU hard power, but has long been strategically and very intensively working to create a common and strong EU soft power, it would very likely tend to replace the non-existent technological-military hard power with smart power, in which science and technology diplomacy would play an important, if not decisive, role.

Recommendations from various analyses emphasise the role of the foreign ministry, which should place greater emphasis on science and technology and their role in diplomacy in its strategy and agenda. Geopolitical interests, the influence of science and the impact of politics on scientific priorities (and vice versa) must be demonstrably and continuously taken into account in the implementation of the state's foreign policy, while maintaining the vision of science as a bridge for cooperation between nations. While the role of EU science diplomacy is clear both inside and outside the EU, national policies vary considerably. Despite the fact that there are some restrictive regulations based on the principles of due diligence, such as the recent termination of cooperation with Russia, there is still enough room for independent science diplomacy, as the potential of science diplomacy far exceeds that of cultural diplomacy, and in certain areas, such as security policy, it plays an even more important role than public diplomacy.

CONCLUSION

For a long time, science diplomacy fell into the category of "cultural" and "Track II" diplomacy (MONTVILLE 1991; VOLKAN – MONTVILLE – JULIUS 1991; MAPENDERE 2000: 68–69; DIAMOND – MCDONALD 1996; MELISSEN 2005A, 2005B: 34). The dynamic development of science diplomacy has led more and more states to actively separate it from cultural diplomacy. I have shown that around 2010, the close link between science and politics began to be emphasised much more than it was at the beginning.

Science diplomacy has received a major boost in the new world order following the dissolution of the bipolar worldview. But another main impetus has been the emergence of new transnational actors and movements, including transnational terrorism. With the emergence of new actors in international relations, new forms of diplomacy are emerging, such as public diplomacy, environmental diplomacy, etc. The emergence of transnational actors was one of the factors that led to the division between science diplomacy and cultural diplomacy (MAPENDERE 2000; TURCHETTI – HERRAN – BOUDIA 2012). Under these circumstances, it was necessary to find a sufficiently strong counterweight, one with sufficient importance and weight to play a similar role on the international scene, but with the opposite label: peaceful cooperation instead of violence; science diplomacy is always constructive instead of destructive. Science has a lot to offer, which

is why it is naturally at the centre of the attention of politicians, diplomats, analysts and, last but not least, scientists.

The shift in the understanding of science and technology in international relations is now evident in contemporary literature, where science diplomacy has gradually emancipated itself from cultural diplomacy and is now interpreted primarily from a realist position, i.e. as a tool to fulfil national interests (RUFFINI 2018, 2020; DAVIS – PATMAN 2015; MELISSEN 2005A, 2005B; RUNGIUS – FLINK 2020; SALOMON 2006; NYE 2021).

Until the Russian-Ukrainian war, there was a general consensus at EU level that science is impartial and provides an ideal atmosphere for building relations and trust between two or more states, even those with different regimes (RUFFINI 2020; COPELAND 2016; PENCA 2018; FLINK 2020). States can use science to promote their own national interests and to implement their own foreign policy agendas in places where cultural, social, religious, or ideological barriers are difficult to overcome. Especially during the Cold War, science also became a matter of national prestige, and scientific internationalism, driven by idealistic approaches to international scientific cooperation, strengthened the positions of the two opposing blocs in scientific and technological relations (KRIGE 2006A; KRIGE 2006B).

Nowadays, however, few countries realise the potential of S&T cooperation in foreign policy, although the trend to create new posts of science diplomats or science attachés has been growing recently, at least until the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war, after which states reassessed their political and economic priorities (OLŠÁKOVÁ – ROBINSON 2022A, 2022B). As a result of the Russia-Ukraine war, a fundamental reassessment of the existing idealistic view of science diplomacy is taking place not only in the Czech Republic, but in Europe as a whole. The concept of science diplomacy as it was created in 2010, mainly in the context of efforts to establish a cooperation with the Muslim world, is undergoing a revision characterised by a shift from an idealistic vision of science diplomacy as a diplomacy promoting peace and cooperation to a post-naïve, realistic and statist approach. Given its geopolitical context and its potential for cooperation with different political regimes, science diplomacy represents a fundamental impulse for a state's security policy.

As part of a rethinking of the existing vision of an idealistic approach to S&T diplomacy, new venues for further research are emerging alongside the classic issues of global cooperation on global challenges, which are likely to focus on issues that reflect developments over the past decade. Thanks to the recent global experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, the international community has identified strengths and weaknesses in 'health diplomacy' that will be of interest to individual states and stakeholders in order to optimise relevant agendas in the future. Newly unleashed wars, international crises and local conflicts raise issues of international cooperation and competition in science and technology, where cooperation will always be measured in terms of keeping one's strategic and technological sovereignty, and the goal will be to balance national and global interests. The potential misuse of technology and vulnerabilities will raise the big issue of global governance and global multi-stakeholder structures. Further studies should analyse the changing geopolitical strategy of individual actors, which will most likely also lead to a shift of some geopolitical activities into the digital environment due to the digitalisation and globalisation of society and information flows. Thus, on the one hand, we should focus on cooperation for peaceful solutions, while, on the other hand, we should not neglect the study of similar cooperation with opposite goals. Further, the research agenda is likely to be more complex than in the past because of the fragmentation of the international scene due to the unstable international environment. Non-state actors will come to the fore, but at the same time smaller actors and stakeholders such as regions or cities will appear on the stage of science and technology diplomacy due to decentralisation tendencies of the state structure. Thus, the main directions of science diplomacy will continue to be defined by issues closely related to democracy and security, the very values that brought science diplomacy into the spotlight after the second Gulf War.

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NOTE

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Exploring Populism in Erdogan's Discourse on Turkey–European Union Relations

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ABSTRACT	Many political leaders have adopted populist themes in their foreign policy discourses, motivated by, for example, revisionism, domestic mobilisation, and personalisation of foreign policy. Since the failed coup attempt in 2016, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has become a prime example of this trend. This article analyses Turkey's relationship with the European Union (EU) by deciphering populist themes in his discourses. The article's method, thematic discourse analysis, examines speeches and statements from multiple data sources using a deductive codebook. According to the study's qualitative and quantitative in-depth analysis people-centrism, partnership diversification, general will, positive partisanship, and personalisation emerge as distinct populist themes in Erdogan's speeches. Erdogan uses populism to project the image of strong/charismatic leadership as a genuine representation of the will of oppressed people(s). In his discourses, special weight is given to people-centrism, and it is supported by the themes of general will and personalisation.

INTRODUCTION

Populism is a contested and multifaceted research concept with numerous definitions and methodologies. As a thin concept, it is an *"ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups – the pure people vs. the corrupt elite – and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people"* (MUDDE 2004: 543).

The large body of the literature on populism problematises the concept primarily in connection with domestic politics. Its constitutive features have been examined with regard to party politics, ideologies, political sociology, and specific agenda settings. However, as the number of hybrid regimes has grown, populism has spread beyond domestic politics and become prominent in foreign policy as well (SCHENKKAN 2017). Populism, as a contested concept and an empty shell, emerges in foreign policy discourse as a strategy, a communication style, a rhetoric, or a combination thereof. The domestic/international distinction has become increasingly blurred and meaningless; politicians use populist foreign policy discourses to reflect their identities, preferences, and values (CHRYSSOGELOS 2017: 14).

In foreign policy analysis, populism is an underexplored and relatively neglected sub-field. The extent to which populist politicians politicise foreign policy has not been addressed in the literature (DESTRADI – PLAGEMANN – TAŞ 2022). More specifically, the ties between populism's internal and international elements are blurred which is an underexplored issue. The question of what constitutes a *populist* foreign policy and under what conditions remains an ambiguous subject. Another gap in the populist foreign policy literature concerns its methodological implications. Drawing attention to the ongoing theoretical and conceptual debate, Chryssogelos (2017) calls for empirical studies on populism, particularly ones driven by critical and discursive methodologies. This study responds by problematising and exposing the populist tendencies that arise in Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's foreign policy discourses on ties with the EU. Moreover, by using thematic discourse analysis, the empirical analysis seeks to bridge a methodological gap in studying populist foreign policy.

The paper considers populism as a state of discourse with the overarching notion that Turkey's current state of behaviour (Europeanisation) shows a negative trend of disengagement from the EU (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2023: 3). We analyse Erdogan's speeches and statements between July 2016 and September 2022 using nine populist theme codes inspired by Destradi et al. (2019, 2021, 2022): general will, bilateralism, diversification, new Turkey, anti-elitism, positive partisanship, negative partisanship, people-centrism, and personalisation. The study also interrogates Erdogan's populism by contrasting alternative datasets, relevant bureaucratic structures, rival agenda shaping, and his roles as president and party leader.

People-centrism, partnership diversification, general will, positive partisanship, and personalisation are among the distinctive populist themes in Erdogan's foreign policy discourse. Given his clear emphasis on people-centrism, which is reinforced by general will and personalisation, the analysis demonstrates that Erdogan utilises populism to project the image of strong/charismatic leadership as a *true/real* representation of the will of *oppressed* people(s). Partnership diversification and positive partisanship are rarely deployed in his personalised foreign policy language, which emerged most prominently during election campaigns and in discussions on the issues of Syria and counterterrorism.

The article is divided into four sections. The first section outlines the theoretical framework – populist foreign policy discourse – to explain the deductive research codes used. The second section details the rise of populism in Turkey since 2016, and also includes a literature review. The third section describes the research design and the methodology of thematic discourse analysis. The final section presents both a qualitative and a quantitative data analysis and the findings of the study.

POPULISM AS A STATE OF DISCOURSE IN FOREIGN POLICY

According to Zürn (2004), populism represents the response of national societies to the collaboration and emancipation of state apparatuses. The populist worldview underlines the competition of *good* versus *bad* as a political technique, a style, and a form of communication. Populists regard their followers, *the people*, as empty signifiers amenable to contestation and reinvention (LACLAU 2005: 40–41). Populist leaders survive through the

polarisation they create in their political discourses, seeking the support of the grassroots against their political opponents. In this context, Barr (2009: 44) defines populism as a *"mass movement led by an outsider or maverick, seeking to gain or maintain power by using anti-establishment appeals and plebiscitary linkages"*.

The conflict between good and evil can occasionally transcend national borders and take shape through foreign policy agendas. International politics can reflect popular politicisation, as opposed to new transnational political groupings that aim to re-politicise governance on an international scale. Although there is no scholarly consensus on populist foreign policy discourse, empirical studies reveal how themes such as nativism, anti-elitism, people-centrism, stress on national sovereignty, and the rejection of globalisation, pluralism, and multilateralism emerge as the rationale behind populist discourses (BALFOUR ET AL. 2016: 23).

For populists, foreign policy is a field on which it is easy to fight *corrupt elites* and those scary others who threaten *virtuous people* (ALBERTAZZI – MCDONNELL 2015; ENGESSER ET AL. 2017). Populism, as a state of discourse, can target foreign leaders, countries or international/regional organisations. Non-interference in domestic affairs and demonising the "autocratic" bureaucrats (anti-elitism) of the international community may emerge as common themes of populist movements (CANOVAN 1999). Using rhetoric pitting the pure against outsiders, populist actors claim to be the defenders and voice of the *general will*. This narrative may result in furthering popular sovereignty as a populist principle in foreign policy discourse.

Populist actors tend not to adopt traditional positions in international affairs (VERBEEK – ZASLOVE 2017). Their discourse foments opposition to transgovernmentalism with the aim of re-politicising external relations (ZÜRN 2004). First, from a zero-sum game approach, populist leaders frame international institutions and principles as foreign-control mechanisms or devices used by certain groups (CHAMBERS 2017). Since multilateralism may challenge the status quo and also due to the share of sovereignty in the transnational order, they prefer *bilateralism to multilateralism*. Empirical studies on multilateralism show that anti-Americanism (opposition to the US-led world order, which includes the related ideology and international organisations) and Euroscepticism are two separate features of

populist foreign policy discourse. Because of its unique structure, the EU is increasingly targeted by populist actors adopting principled (hard) or contingent (soft) Eurosceptic attitudes (BALFOUR ET AL. 2016; VERBEEK – ZASLOVE 2017; PIRRO – TAGGART – VAN KESSEL 2018; LAMMERS – ONDERCO 2020). Second, antipathy towards the current status quo and global order may open the way to a new foreign policy, shifting the network of interactions, and opening the door to fragmentation and *partnership diversification* (DESTRADI – CADIER – PLAGEMANN 2021). An exclusive kind of nationalism with reactionary, chauvinistic, nostalgic, and ethnocultural features, may pave the way for a shift in international orientation: that is, the (re)construction of a *new state identity* in world politics (HERMANN 1990).

Populists often reinforce national identities along such lines as legitimate versus illegitimate and national versus non-national (KALIBER – KALIBER 2019). An anti-establishment appeal and an *us versus them* dualism are incorporated into foreign policy rhetoric for domestic consumption in multiple ways. First, populists can portray their foreign policy as a reflection of the domestic society's viewpoints (MANOW – SCHÄFER – ZORN 2008). They depict themselves as the true representatives of the people's rights and interests (people-centrism), using a morally framed vocabulary to rail against the internal and external powers that hurt the country and its people. They paint a picture of a leader/party as the protector and servant of the pure nation. Second, populist leaders overstate threats both at home and abroad (HALL 2020), and use sensationalist and provocative language to portray opposition organisations as treacherous accomplices of external powers (negative partisanship) acting against pure and virtuous people (MOUNK 2014; WICAKSANA – WARDHANA 2021; DESTRADI – PLAGEMANN – TAŞ 2022). Third, people-centrism and negative partisanship combine to create *positive partisanship*, which serves as another populist ingredient for domestic (electoral) mobilisation. Discourses may evolve to achieve this goal, glorifying national identity and its characteristics (language, religion, civilisation), as well as historical heroism from a majoritarian perspective. In such discourses, external perils and domestic collaborators pave the way for a plea for unity and togetherness, particularly during elections.

Populism, as a political style in foreign policy discourses, exhibits not only bad manners such as coarse language and constant representations of threats and crises, but also a desire to depart from traditional

and appropriate ways of policy behaviour (MOFFITT 2016). If populist actors gain power, their tenets can alter decision-making processes and foreign policy practices.

First, anti-elitism and people-centrism steer decision-making processes towards centralisation and *personalisation* (around a leader or a party) of foreign policy – namely autocratisation. In this context, individual (leader) populism in foreign policy is characterised primarily by a reliance on centralised power in direct, unmediated, noninstitutionalised support from large numbers of mostly unorganised followers (WEYLAND 2001: 14). If the actor is in power, populism refers to the process and practices of foreign policymaking that go beyond the state of discourse (DESTRADI – CADIER – PLAGEMANN 2021). However, populism as a state of discourse remains an important topic for us to investigate with regard to two questions: (a) whether the relevant institutions and actors have moved away from the traditional language of politicisation and polarisation that populists use in their statements; and (b) whether the institutions have developed parallel thematic discourses with the populist leader.

Second, the unity required for the conflict between good and evil produces an environment which fosters faith in powerful leaders offering a Manichean and moralistic worldview (COLGAN – KEOHANE 2017). Centralised foreign policy affords the image of a *strong and charismatic leader*, contributing to the cult of the saviour and protector leader (WOJCZEWSKI 2022). Foreign policy, as a manifestation of people-centrism, anti-elitism and popular will, is reduced to the leader, free of diplomatic traditions and institutions. Personalisation in foreign policy is evident in the methods of communication, the content of the discourse – simplicity (simplistic terms of good versus evil) and emotionalisation (emotionalise – to present and/or interpret something emotionally) – and those to whom it is addressed. Populist politicians will employ undiplomatic rhetoric – often aggressive, occasionally vague – on social media, and overemphasise personal connections with foreign leaders (LOWNDES 2005: 146; LACLAU 2005; DESTRADI – PLAGEMANN 2019).

While scholars have explored what constitutes a populist foreign policy – including its impact, style, and process, as well as pattern-type relationships (TAŞ 2022A) – a significant gap in the literature remains regarding when, in what form, and how populism emerged in international politics.

Additional research on alternative populist themes is needed to address this gap. Moreover, empirical analysis, particularly critical and discursive analysis, is required to widen and strengthen the current conceptual and theoretical discussions on populism (CHRYSSOGELOS 2017).

THE POPULIST DISCOURSE IN TURKEY:
EU RELATIONS SINCE 2016

Turkey's bid for EU membership, dating back to 1987, constitutes one of the most complicated Europeanisation/enlargement cases. In the 1990s, as Mayor of Istanbul and a member of the Islamist Welfare Party, Erdogan frequently referred to the EU as a 'Christian Club'; he fought Westernism in domestic politics and Western Orientalism in foreign policy, injecting identity politics and strong populist elements into the debate (TANIYICI 2003). The coup of 28 February 1997 sparked an intra-party schism between traditionalists and reformists. The reformist wing, led by Erdogan, expressed its rejection of old attitudes and beliefs by establishing the Justice and Development Party (JDP – *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*), described as a conservative democratic party.

During the early years of his government, Turkey was Europeanising, including in its foreign and security policy, with EU membership as its reference point and goal (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2005). In the early years, the JDP's populist tendencies were less in evidence. Turkey implemented major reforms in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria and began membership negotiations in 2005. However, this honeymoon period lasted only another couple of years. Veto barriers to negotiating chapters, unresolved disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus, and changes in Turkey's political environment stalled the progress towards EU membership. In Turkey, the transition toward a competitive authoritarian regime became evident due to the problems in elections, violations of human rights and freedoms, and repression of opposition after the 2013 Gezi Park protests (ESEN – GUMUSCU 2016). Subsequently, Erdogan's populist tendencies began to re-emerge in his foreign policy speeches. Specific EU-related initiatives after the Syrian crisis, such as the readmission agreement, visa liberalisation, and modernisation of the Customs Union, failed to propel the progress in EU-Turkey relations.

The coup attempt of 15 July 2016 marked a milestone in Turkish domestic and foreign affairs. The declaration of a state of emergency and the implementation of a political system that concentrated power in the president caused tension and recrimination between Turkey and the EU. Erdogan's position on the West, particularly the EU, became harsher, and populist themes became more prominent in his foreign policy discourses (ROGENHOFER 2018). Since then, he has deployed a thick populism characterised by anti-Western discourses redefining the West as the 'other' (KALIBER – KALIBER 2019). Erdogan has accused the West of encouraging a pro-coup mindset (DW 2016), supporting terrorists (ANADOLU AJANSI 2017), and applying double standards (YENI ŞAFAK 2020). Meanwhile, the EU has become more explicitly critical of the changing political environment in Turkey – in particular the passage of emergency laws and the transition to a so-called 'presidential' system – highlighting the increase in illiberal and undemocratic initiatives and policy practices (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2018: 3–4) and accusing Turkey of democratic backsliding (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2021: 10–15).

Previous researchers investigating populism in Turkey concentrated on causal explanations at several levels, such as ideological roots, leadership, domestic policy, and international relations. One group categorises the ideological foundation and type of populism in Turkey as right-wing (AYTAÇ – ÖNIŞ 2014) with an Islamist and authoritarian orientation (BAYKAN 2018). The rise of populism in Turkey is also discussed with a focus on the JDP's ideological shift from conservatism to nationalism (SHUKRI 2019; TAŞ 2022B) as a reflection of the regime's new competitive authoritarian structure (CASTALDO 2018) and as an anti-democratic practice (ROGENHOFER 2018).

A second group of studies focuses on domestic reasons for the rise of populism in Turkey. Some frame the Turkish populism as a response to political and economic crises (ARSLANTAŞ – ARSLANTAŞ 2023; DOĞAN 2020). Others look to the leadership, depicting Erdogan's populism as a political tool for manipulation and public mobilisation (TÜRK 2018), as a means for his supporters to tap into a politics of belonging (SAWAE 2020), or as a means of reinforcing his authority via intra-party dynamics (LANCASTER 2014). His populist discourses emerge as a reflection of the cult of personality: he portrays himself as the father of a conservative nation by virtue of his political masculinity (EKSI – WOOD 2019).

At the international level, the populist rhetoric in Turkey is framed as a reflection of changes in state identity (KALIBER – KALIBER 2019; ÖZBEY ET AL. 2019) and as an issue of civilisation (GÜRSOY 2021). For instance, Cook (2009) argues that the populism in Turkey is a breakaway from the traditional Euro-Atlantic line (IBID.). Avatkov (2021) concludes that the rising Turkish populism is a way to form a new Turkish-centric subsystem of international relations – a *Turkic world* enriched by neo-Ottomanism, neo-pan-Turkism, and Islam. A security-oriented study, on the other hand, associates the Turkish populism with the concept of *the non-Western self*-based on ontological insecurity (ÇAPAN – ZARAKOL 2019).

A final group of studies of populism in Erdogan's foreign policy discourses comes to varying alternative conclusions. Taş (2022A) reveals the personalisation of foreign policy in Turkey by underlining the civilisational dimension in Erdogan's discourse. Drevet (2017) contends that Erdogan's populism is motivated by emotions and that he tends to ignore the consequences of his speech. According to Erçetin and Erdoğan (2023) insecurity, threat perception, victimisation, and scapegoating all contribute to group differentiation based on the us-versus-them narrative in Turkey, while Grigoriadis (2020) and Hisarciklioglu et al. (2022) conclude that Turkish foreign policy is politicised to create the traditional populist schisms between corrupt elites and pure people. Yesil (2020) explores how anti-elitism and nativism evolved into anti-Westernism in Turkey. Finally, Bulut and Hacıoğlu (2021) analyse the impact of populism as a communication style in inter-party contexts in Turkey, with a focus on foreign policy and religious symbolism.

Although previous research using Turkey as an empirical case has made substantial contributions to the populism literature, there are gaps, controversies, and limitations in the current knowledge. First, there is no consensus in the literature about a consistent ideological foundation. This brings up the question of whether ideology is a consistent variable for discursive populism in causal analysis. Second, much of the available work is limited to domestic sources and makes no assumptions about foreign policy dimensions. The scholars either interpret populism as a response to political and economic crises or take a bottom-up approach to populism by addressing social polarisation (secularist versus Islamist). In other words, they ignore the leader's role and impact in creating populist

themes through discursive tactics. Third, identity- and civilisation-related explanations do not offer much to explain either change or continuity in Turkish foreign policy. Hence, this analysis, which is original in terms of both research design and methodology, makes an important contribution to the literature.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Our analysis differs from the existing literature on populism in Turkey in terms of research design and methods. First, it analyses a large and unique dataset created by incorporating alternative sources neglected by prior research. Second, the use of thematic discourse analysis and empirical assessment helps clarify the nature and substance of Erdogan's populism, while also contributing to the contested and complex concept of populism in international politics. While scholars have been debating the impact, style, process, and pattern-types of populism in relation to foreign policy, the epistemology and ontology underlying populism's implications for foreign policy are still an under-researched area (TAŞ 2022A). That is why we have adopted thematic discourse analysis to analyse populist foreign policy discourse. As Alahou (2023) argues, thematic discourse analysis on a comprehensive scale is useful for determining the terms that dominate or support the overall work of a contested phenomenon. Moreover, identifying the themes by process-tracing allows us to locate the presuppositions that underpin populism and gain a better understanding of it through empirical assessment.

Our research design is heavily influenced by the models developed by Destradi et al. (2019, 2021, 2022), which allow for a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis of populist themes in foreign policy. The first model developed by Destradi and Plagemann (2019) establishes three variables: *"i) more conflict-prone bilateral relations; ii) a weakening of global governance and its institutions; and iii) more centralised and personalised foreign policy-making."* In a more recent model, Destradi, Cadier and Plagemann (2021) explain the interaction between populist discourses and foreign policy with four indicators: *"i) amenability to compromise; ii) bilateralism, multilateralism, and support for the EU and other international institutions; iii) diversification of foreign relationships; and iv) foreign policymaking: centralisation, personalisation, and communication."*

TABLE 1: THEMATIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS RESEARCH CODEBOOK

Populist Themes	Code Names
Popular sovereignty	General will
From multilateralism to bilateralism	Bilateralism
Partnership diversification	Diversification
Construction of a new/strong Turkey	New Turkey
Anti-elitism	Anti-elitism
In-group mobilisation: nativism and conservative nationalism	Positive partisanship
Out-group bias: naming and shaming the opposition	Negative partisanship
People-centrism	People-centrism
Centralisation and personalisation	Personalisation

Their modelling forms the starting point of our research design. The nine unique codes (populist themes) for the thematic discourse analysis were initially chosen for the deductive codebook (Table 1). Because the study problematises populist themes in foreign policy discourses, thematic discourse analysis is employed as the research method. The thematic analysis allows for the identification and investigation of meaning patterns known as *themes* in discursive research (BRAUN ET AL. 2019).

The data sources for the analysis are extensive, as they include texts pertaining to election campaigns, media statements, party manifestos (JDP), and Erdogan's speeches as president in the Turkish parliament (TGNA) and as JDP leader at party group meetings (PGM), as well as statements by the Presidency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Directorate of Communication (DoC). The data cover the period from July 2016 to September 2022 based on the assumption that the 15 July failed coup attempt constituted a major turning point in Erdogan's leadership and foreign policy discourses.

With the assistance of a Ph.D. student, repeated readings of the documents ensured that the data's saturation point was sufficient. After we selected pertinent paragraphs using keywords, all the speeches and statements were compiled into 117 documents. A computer-aided program (Maxqda) was used for coding, with the paragraph serving as the unit of analysis. During the coding process, keywords associated with the populist themes were employed (see Appendix 1). For example, alternative powers such as Russia, China, and Iran, relations with non-Western

countries, and approaches to other regional projects were all considered as keywords of partnership diversification. Similarly, for the new Turkey theme, we identified terms referring to, for example, a new/strong(er) Turkey, a constructive and decisive country, foreign policy activism, a regional power/global actor, pro-activism, independence, Turkey-centrism, passivism and old syndromes, and the old Turkey. Indirect statements that did not contain keywords but featured populist themes in the spirit and meaning of the paragraph were included in the study, but labelled as indirect in the analysis.

The article refers to populism as a *state of discourse* in foreign policy, but evaluating the centralisation and personalisation of foreign policy requires an analysis of the *state of behaviour*. The research acknowledges its limitations in this context; however, we focus on discourses as output, with the assumption that centralisation and personalisation have already existed in Turkish foreign policy at the time of the rise of populism (TAŞ 2022A). For this reason, the analysis compares the populist themes that emerged in the documents and statements of the relevant actors and institutions (the MFA, the DoC and the JDP) to the leaders' discourses to identify any fit/misfit (centralisation) at the discourse level. Correspondingly, the analysis considers Erdogan's explicit references to other political leaders (personal ties and meetings) and his use of undiplomatic language and social media to be indicators of personalisation in foreign policy.

The coding procedure was repeated for validity and reliability: 41 out of 686 codes were updated, yielding a consistency rate of 94%. Because some specific sources were in Turkish, some direct quotations were translated. Expert opinion was sought in cases of dispute. The selected coding for pertinent populist themes is available in Appendix 2. Although the analysis retained many qualitative characteristics, computer programs were used to perform a frequency analysis, a Pareto analysis, a code co-occurrence model, and a word cloud. The frequency analysis reveals the general distribution of populist themes and their distribution in the alternative data sources; the code co-occurrence model allows for identifying interrelated themes; and the word cloud tells us which international actors appear most often in the discourses.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

With regard to the frequency distributions of the codes (Figure 1), people-centrism (207), diversification (86), general will (84), positive partisanship (81) and personalisation (72) appear to be the leading populist themes. According to the Pareto analysis, four of the nine codes in the codebook yield no relevant findings. Anti-elitism, negative partisanship, bilateralism, and the new Turkey are insignificant and irrelevant at the 80% level. Given the evident weight of people-centrism, as well as general will and personalisation, it is clear that populist foreign policy rhetoric is politicised to enhance the leader's image. This finding is significant because it demonstrates how "us versus them" populist thinking (people-centrism and general will) has morphed into a cult of the leader and a personalisation tendency in foreign policy. The qualitative study of Erdogan's foreign policy discourse reveals that relevant populist themes aim at projecting the image of a strong and charismatic leader as the representation of the will of oppressed people(s). Partnership diversification (86) and positive partisanship (81) have little impact on his populist foreign policy discourse.

FIGURE 1: CODEBOOK FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION AND PARETO ANALYSIS
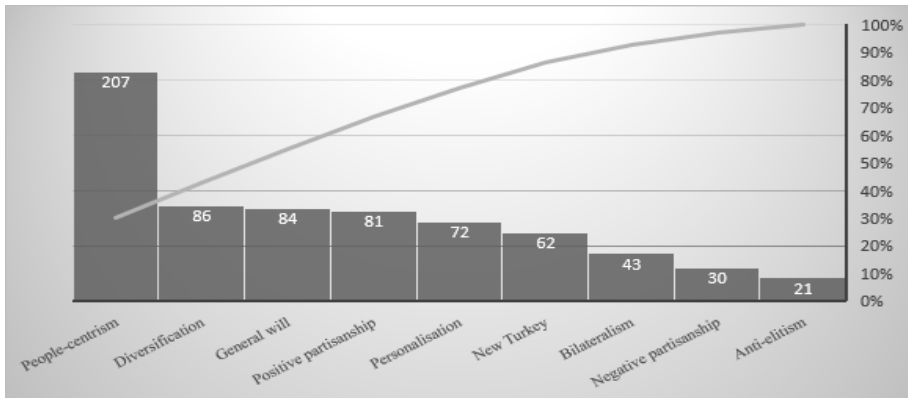
When the distribution of the codes is analysed in different data sources (Figure 2), populist motifs emerge mainly in election speeches, party documents and party group meetings. This result demonstrates how Erdogan's status as party leader shapes populist discourses more intensely. The second-highest-frequency group includes his declarations and speeches in the media, in the presidency and on Twitter as president.

The DoC, the MFA and his speeches as president in parliament are less relevant arenas of populist discourse. The code distribution among alternative actors suggests a discursive amount of centralisation in foreign policy. People-centrism is the defining populist motif in the MFA, JDP and DoC declarations. This quantitative finding demonstrates that relevant domestic institutions collaborate with leader discourses to enhance the leadership domain.

FIGURE 2: CODE DISTRIBUTION ACROSS ALTERNATIVE DATA SOURCES
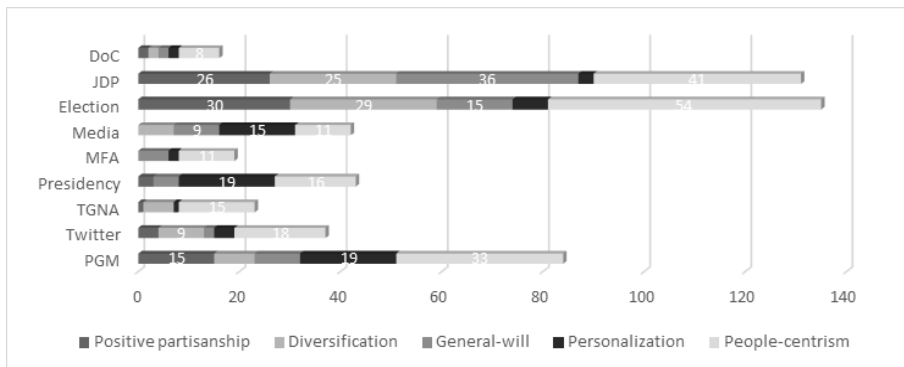
The code co-occurrence model presented in Figure 3 also reveals the prominent role of people-centrism in the populist foreign policy discourse. People-centrism is the theme that co-occurs the most with all the other themes, as it co-occurs with personalisation 24 times, with general will 34 times, with diversification 23 times, and with positive partisanship 46 times. In other words, other populist themes include components of people-centrism, which confirms our main conclusion.

FIGURE 3: FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF CODE CO-OCCURRENCES
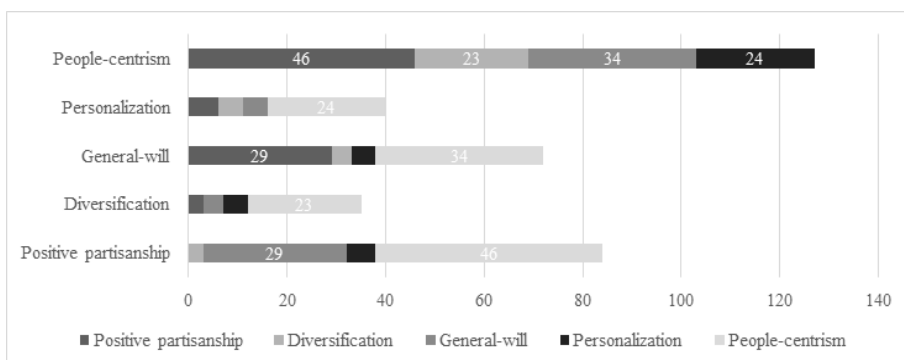
REPRESENTING THE WILL OF OPPRESSED PEOPLE(S): PEOPLE-CENTRISM, GENERAL WILL AND PERSONALISATION

The JDP, which describes itself as a conservative democratic mass party of the centre (of the ideological spectrum), claims to be the insurance of Turkey's unity and integrity with the help of civilisational values based on national will. The ruling party explains its people-centric ideas in its 2023 Political Vision (AK PARTI 2023) thus: *"Because we have a vision of a great and powerful Turkey. Our passion is Turkey, and our foundation is the country. Our nation, which we serve, is the wellspring of our legitimacy and authority."* The JDP claims to have implemented a foreign policy that has eliminated the symptoms that undermined the nation's self-confidence. Since then, they argue, they have prioritised EU membership to achieve the universal principles that the Turkish people deserve.

By referring to civilisation, Erdogan positions himself as the real representative of the people's rights and interests in foreign policy, which underpin his leadership and aim to resurrect the Turkish civilisation. According to him, Turkey has thousands of years of a strong state tradition and a strong cultural heritage behind it, an unbreakable national unity, and solidarity. By referring to Turkishness, Erdogan's foreign policy discourses declare his ambition for Turkey to become an adequate regional power: *"In this great geography, Turk is the name of a civilisation, not a tribe. That is why, at every opportunity, we say Turkey, Turkish nation. Today, we are attempting to resurrect this great civilisation and make it long-awaited throughout the world"* (ERDOGAN 2019A).

Erdoga's Manichean and moralistic worldview appears in his emotional interpretation of foreign policy based on the cruel versus the oppressed, an indicator of personalisation through simplification: *"Our values support our claim that Turkey is the hope of oppressed peoples, the guardian of innocents, and the key to a solution"* (ERDOGAN 2021). Being the voice of the oppressed is portrayed first as a mission to actualise divine justice, and second, as necessitated by the Turks' ancient past. In fact, Erdogan (2019A) claims, *"Wherever you go in Ottoman geography today, my brothers, you will see a sparkle of love, respect, and affection in people's eyes when Turks are mentioned."* Regarding the Syrian crisis and refugee burden, for example,

Erdogan (2020A) states: *"Turkey is a country that has embraced every oppressed person who has come to its door over the years and has kept four million people alive on its territory by providing all kinds of humanitarian aid and support."*

People-centrism in Erdogan's populist discourse encompasses not only the true representation of Turks living in Turkey, but also the rights and interests of sister and related communities in neighbouring regions. Erdogan frequently appeals to the Ottoman heritage of the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East and Central Asia for this purpose and, more specifically, promotes the rights and interests of Turkish or Muslim relatives and kin groups. Each year, he expresses his sorrow for the Srebrenica Genocide, which immediately leads into his discussions of current situations, such as those in Crimea, Palestine and Myanmar. Erdogan (2017A) is the voice and leader not only of Turks, but also of all oppressed people (nearly all Muslims) in the lands of the shared ancestral heritage: *"How can we say that the developments in Libya, where our brothers and sisters with love for Turkey engraved in their hearts, do not concern us? How can we ignore the events in Yemen, for which we sing folk songs? How can we see Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, where our ancestors left their mark on every corner, as the other? How can we abandon the oppressed people in Arakan, Turkestan and Crimea? How can we leave our brothers in the Gulf alone with the crises they are experiencing? When you go to the geography we call the Middle East, for example, when you look at Jerusalem, many of the silhouettes you see are heirlooms of our ancestors."*

Simplicity and emotionalisation, as characteristic reflections of personalisation, find a place in Erdogan's discourses, with the support of historical motifs and identity politics. Erdogan has increased his anti-Western rhetoric and aggressive tone, claiming that the rising anti-Islamism in the West has turned into an all-out assault on their valued religious beliefs (CUMHURBAŞKANLIĞI 2020). According to him, Europe died in Bosnia and was buried in Syria; the bodies of innocent children washed up on the beach are Western civilisation's tombstones (CUMHURBAŞKANLIĞI 2017). During elections, Erdogan often addresses Turks residing in Europe, supporting their rights and freedoms and urging them to vote. The JDP leader claims to be the voice of the continent's oppressed Turkish and Muslim immigrants: *"While attacks on Muslim places of worship and workplaces have become an increasingly common event, violations of migrants' rights are overlooked. Unfortunately,*

European politics is captivated by far-right movements and a hate language [that grows] more powerful each day" (ERDOGAN 2019B).

Erdogan's foreign policy discourses demand equal relations with partners and highlight the values of mutual respect and non-intervention (general will). In this regard, sovereignty is a priority for the JDP, which claims its foundational purpose is *"to protect and maintain the country and state of the nation, and the independence and unitary structure of the State"* (AK PARTI 2012). The party believes that territorial integrity and sovereignty is a right that should be respected and protected by international organisations. Thus, relations with the EU are framed as seeking strategic aims based on mutual respect and equality on a win-win basis (ERDOGAN 2017B). His discussions of popular sovereignty primarily bring up the debate on the death penalty, tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, and Turkey's anti-terrorism agenda. Referring to the general will (expressed by a referendum and/or a parliamentary resolution), Erdogan argues that the reinstatement of the death penalty is the Turkish people's natural right. He depicts the European Parliament's criticisms as an intervention in Turkey's domestic affairs, and a clash with its sovereignty (DW 2016). Similarly, Turkey interprets the developments in Cyprus as a violation of equal treatment, with claims that a small group of Turkey's antagonists in the EU disregard Turkey's and Turkish Cypriots' rights (MFA 2021). Turkey repeats that the EU depends on inconsistent and biased arguments, and is a foreign-control mechanism and a device of Greek and Greek Cypriot interests.

Erdogan's exclusive nationalist rhetoric and image of the EU as an enemy threatening Turkey's unity and territorial integrity are developed indirectly. He constantly complains about violations of the principle of pacta sunt servanda and double standards and criticises *some Western/European states* for their hesitant tactics in the battle against terrorist organisations (FETO, PYD/PKK, Daesh). He accuses some Western powers of attempting to act in Turkey through terrorist organisations, and he blames other partners for failing to express solidarity with Turkey and remaining silent. He claims these plots have been foiled thanks to the Turks' historical national pride: *"The reality is that the issue is not DAESH or even the PKK, but the implementation of a project directed primarily at our region. [...] At this point, we had two options: either succumb to the role allocated to us in this drama created in Europe and America, accept what had happened to us*

and what was to come, and submit our necks to the butcher knife, or we could fight. In Turkey's and the Turkish nation's history, capitulation has never been an option. We did what was necessary; we raised the flag of struggle alongside our nation. Nothing else would suit a nation that has formed its state by saying either independence or death" (ERDOGAN 2019C).

Erdogan promotes his strong leadership image through Twitter (now X), using it as a communication tool in diplomacy, and making public announcements of his meetings with other leaders (some as friends, some as foes). His international visits, attendance at summits (such as the G20 and NATO summits) and conversations with foreign leaders all contribute to Erdogan's image as a respected world leader. Erdogan, like other populist politicians, uses Twitter to communicate his foreign policy objectives and highlight his high-level international contacts: *"Aside from my regular contacts, I met with the President of France, who holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU, [and] the Prime Ministers of Italy, Estonia, Spain and the UK"* (ERDOGAN 2022).

Erdogan, who reduces relationships to the leader's diplomacy and individualises them, does not hesitate to use undiplomatic language. As a nod to his supporters' campaign mottoes *"Stand tall, do not bow! The people are with you!"*, Erdogan exclaims to Europe, *"O, West [Eyy Batı]!"*. He particularly targets French and Greek politicians for personalisation. He urges Emmanuel Macron to consider his country's colonial history, bringing up the Algerian genocide and encouraging the international community to oppose Macron's anti-Islam agenda. He accuses German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy of breaking their promises on visa liberalisation, counterterrorism, negotiation chapters and the refugee crisis (REUTERS 2017). He argues similarly about the Greek Cypriots' accession to EU membership. Erdogan routinely attacks Greek leaders for their policies on refugees, equating the related humanitarian catastrophe and Greek policy with World War II and Nazi torture. Erdogan (2017B) even sees the increasing populism in Europe as an enormous threat to the EU: *"Without a doubt, the most serious threat facing the future of the Union is to let exclusionist discourses be a means of populist policies. Such social diseases as discrimination, cultural racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia are unfortunately becoming widespread across the continent."*

While Erdogan refers to the former Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, the German politician Günter Verheugen, and the Russian President Vladimir Putin as valuable and sympathetic friends in his discourses, he employs the names of US presidents in a more neutral sense. Erdogan frequently characterises European leaders as having negative qualities such as a lack of character, insincerity, dishonesty, and multifacetedness, and as having failed the leadership test. When he raises his voice, he does not hesitate to scream, "They are colonialists committing crimes, they are (neo-)Nazis, and they are jealous!"

PARTNERSHIP DIVERSIFICATION AND POSITIVE PARTISANSHIP HAVE A LIMITED PRESENCE

While the populist themes of people-centrism, general will, and personalisation marginalise the EU and generate negative content in Erdogan's discourse, the fourth populist theme, partnership diversification, produces a more flexible vocabulary. The JDP promotes both change and continuity in foreign policy by adding a Eurasian direction to Turkey's traditional Euro-Atlantic dimension (AK PARTI 2002: 109). It lists its core foreign policy principles as *"zero problems with neighbours, security for all, economic integration, multiculturalism, and living together in peace"* (AK PARTI 2023). In addition to the EU and NATO, Erdogan prioritises relations with the United Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the Organisation of Turkic States, the Economic Cooperation Organisation, the G20 Summit, the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC), the Shanghai Five, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

Turkey's geographical position – neighbouring the Balkans, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus – is an important factor in terms of Turkey diversifying its foreign policy partners to become a regional power. Erdogan frequently highlights Turkey's foreign policy activism in neighbouring regions as a complement to the EU rather than an alternative to it (ERDOGAN 2018). However, his supportive statements on the EU membership process are conditional – *"But nobody should forget that Turkey always has many other alternatives"* (EURACTIV 2016) – and sometimes more hostile – *"Turkey does not need to join the EU at 'all costs' and could instead*

become part of a security bloc dominated by China, Russia, and Central Asian nations" (REUTERS 2016)**.**

For Erdogan, foreign policy change and partnership diversification are not a choice but a necessity, for various reasons. First, Turkey's immediate neighbours are depicted as *Ottoman* and part of a very close network of historical, cultural and social connections with Turkey. The glorification of Turkish history leads Erdogan to frame Turkey's foreign policy activism as its historical responsibility. Second, given Turkey's geopolitical position and its east–west and north–south hinterlands, partnership diversification is considered a geographical necessity. Third, drawing attention to the end of the Cold War enables Erdogan to reiterate the opportunities and advantages that originated from the new world order. Finally, foreign policy diversification is associated with Turkey's foreign economic relations, particularly with international projects such as the Turkey–Africa summits, the Silk Road, the Caspian East–West Central Corridor Initiative and the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars Railway. The following statement in the JDP Party Program summarises its perspective on foreign policy: *"The post-Cold War dynamic conjuncture has produced an appropriate climate for building a multi-alternative foreign policy. In this new environment, Turkey must reorganise and forge alternative, flexible, and multi-axis ties with the centres of power. Our party will pursue a realistic foreign policy that is consistent with Turkey's history and geographical situation, devoid of prejudices and obsessions, and based on mutual interests"* (AK PARTI 2002: 105)**.**

FIGURE 4: WORD CLOUD FOR FOREIGN ACTORS

Designed at https://wordart.com/.

Erdogan's foreign policy agenda most prominently features Syria in relation to the EU (Figure 4): Turkey has criticised the EU and its member states for failing to provide adequate support for refugees displaced by the Syrian crisis, the battle against terrorism (DAESH and PKK/PYD) and Turkey's military activities in northern Syria. The most prevalent – and largely unfavourable – content relating to EU member countries is with regard to Greece, Cyprus, and sometimes Germany. Iraq, Russia and Libya are vital concerns for Turkey, as are relations with the United States and NATO. Finally, Africa and Asia receive some attention as arenas for foreign policy activism.

Following the failed 2016 coup attempt, Erdogan's discourses revealed a threat perception and a strong securitisation rhetoric. They evolved into speech acts using the word *survival* to mobilise voters, particularly during election campaigns. Although the EU is not directly addressed in the content of his securitisation discourses, certain Western powers are marked as enemies by him. Based on threat perception and security agendas, the JDP leader employs a positive partisanship strategy with a negative identification method. The politician emphasises that Turkey is facing international sieges, imperialism and threats of an embargo (on economic and military technology) from the West. Global enemies attempt to carry out operations in Turkey through terrorist organisations and separatist approaches to foreign policy. Alluding to these challenges, particularly during election campaigns, Erdogan attributes political, economic, and social crises to a global focus: the Gezi Park protests, the economic crisis, the failed coup attempt and Syria.

Erdogan's framework, threat perception and security agenda necessitate a domestic mobilisation. As a projection of the dominant and collective worldview, he underlines the need for unity and solidarity: *"It is forbidden for us to stop or rest until Turkey reaches its goals. In times of struggle, 83 million of us are one; we are together, #TogetherTurkey, we are strong together"* (ERDOGAN 2020B). Appealing to the urgent need for a spirit of majoritarian collectivism, nativism, and national mobilisation, a famous slogan is chanted in the election squares: *One nation, one flag, one homeland, one state.* In Erdogan's 2018 post-election balcony speech his language is typical for him: *"You were with us during the Gezi protests, the police–judiciary coup*

attempt on December 17-25, and the presidential election. We worked together to repel vandals and shady gangs. You supported us during the 2015 elections, particularly on November 1. We taught those who were wringing their hands and waiting for Turkey to kneel a lesson" (ANADOLU AJANSI 2018).

In Erdogan's speeches, the positive mobilisation of *us* is built on two ideological devices: Turkishness and Islam. Turkishness is extolled in chauvinistic language, with allusions to military and historical events. Turkish culture is portrayed as a bastion of civilisation. Erdogan, as the religious leader, frequently employs Islamic analogies to express his thankfulness to Allah. He paints himself as the protector of the Islamic prophet and his legacy and claims solidarity with oppressed Muslim peoples (in Palestine, Myanmar, and the Balkans), whom he names as *brothers*. He calls on Turkish communities, particularly those in Europe, to protect and maintain their languages and religion. His positive partisanship combines Turkishness with Islam.

CONCLUSION

The reflection of populism in foreign policy is an emerging research subject, and its conceptual, analytical, and methodological structuring is at an early stage. Using thematic discourse analysis, this study explores the populist themes that developed in Erdogan's foreign policy discourses in the context of Turkey–EU relations. Relevant declarations, statements and speeches made between July 2016 and September 2022 were gathered from numerous data sources. Using computer-aided software, they were compared across different populist themes. The large and unique dataset, previously unexplored in the literature on the Turkish case, reveals two methodological implications. First, statements made by Erdogan as a *party leader* have a significant impact on his populist discourse. Party documents and his statements during elections and at party group meetings provide more opportunities to examine his populist themes. Second, foreign policy organisations, such as the MFA and the DoC, are valuable for analysing Erdogan's populist discourse. The parallelism and compatibility between his populism and the relevant organisations in Turkey support the diagnosis of a trend toward centralisation and personalisation of Turkish foreign policy.

Erdogan's foreign policy discourses are designed to portray him as the true representative of the people's rights and interests. The most vital populist motif, people-centrism, is employed to strengthen Erdogan's image as the nation's leader. The essence of populism, namely the people versus the elite, emerged clearly from the examination of the first pillar, the "people". Erdogan employs populist discourses on foreign policy to foster a cult of real leadership. His populism reinforces his role as the voice of the people by emphasising not only people-centrism, but also the general will and personalisation as prominent themes in his speech. Erdogan's discursive populism shows how the populist worldview of us versus them (people-centrism and the general will) may be politicised to further the cult of the leader and the personalisation tendency in foreign policy.

Erdogan, who bases Turkey's relations with the EU on symmetric and equal relations founded on mutual respect, prioritises the general will in his speeches through the concepts of sovereignty and non-intervention in domestic matters, particularly in relation to elections and referendums. He values leader-to-leader diplomacy, and engages in personal polemics against Greek and French leaders, calling their leadership into question. This decisive conclusion verifies populist claims about the incentives of strong leadership. Ideology, domestic political motives and international-level explanations have no significant causal impact on his instrumentalisation of populist foreign policy discourse. Erdogan's populism serves the same objective as the personality cult. Our results are consistent with previous similar findings by Taş (2022A) and Eksi and Wood (2019). The research findings are not unexpected. However, none of the prior analyses handled the subject using such a multidimensional scale; our results therefore suggest that even on a more encompassing scale, these populist elements remain outlying themes in Erdogan's discourse.

Our findings on the ideological underpinning of Erdogan's populism are notably different from those of the existing literature. First, the ideology variable, which is elsewhere defined as an independent source of populism, appears in our analysis to reinforce the notion of the leadership being the voice of the people (people-centrism). In other words, ideology has a place as long as it helps to shape the leader's image without directly being the source of populism. Hence both religious and national identities are combined, defining not only the people, but also the nation's leader,

who is safeguarding the rights and interests of Turks and Muslims across borders, including immigrants in Europe. Secondly, contrary to the nationalism/ Islamism divide discussed in the literature, Erdogan has recently emerged as the proponent of a third way: a Turkish–Islamic synthesis. It is clear from the discourses that "us versus them" is built through a more intensified Turkish–Islamic conjunction. Erdogan's Eurosceptic rhetoric reflects a continuation of the Islamist Welfare Party; to that he has added Turkish nationalism as an ideological foundation.

Erdogan upholds Turkey's traditional line in foreign policy, although he emphasises the populist themes of partnership diversification in terms of revisionism in foreign policy. His discourses reflect assertions of intention regarding the development of relations with the EU – but with a footnote stating that membership is not an indispensable goal. Although the traditional Euro-Atlantic approach still exists, Eurasianism has become prominent in discussions of history, geography, political economy, and the emerging international order. In this framework, largely positive discourses considering the significance of relations with neighbouring regions and alternative powers such as Russia, China, and Iran, are formed.

It is difficult to generalise the conclusion regarding the domestication of populist foreign policy agendas. Although the domestic dimension of populism is neither decisive nor relevant in Erdogan's discourses, two exceptions appear. First, when he targets voters during election campaigns, the JDP leader instrumentalises Turkey's relations with the EU and the foreign policy agenda. The gap between "us" and outsiders becomes more evident, and the tone rises during election campaigns. Second, Erdogan advocates domestic unity against the operations of destructive Western forces. Based on threat perception and securitising discourses, the strategy of positive partisanship works as a survival speech act for political competition.

Turkey–EU ties are centred on foreign and security policy, which we might classify as high politics, and extend beyond the agenda specified for candidate states (the Copenhagen criteria). Syria is at the top of Erdogan's agenda as an issue of concern. The EU's vague and contradictory approach to it is criticised by him, and Greece in particular is singled out for blame for the Syrian refugee crisis. Again, he also criticises the West for

its hostile or unsupportive attitudes and policies in the fight against terrorist organisations (Daesh, PKK/PYD, and FETO). Aside from Syria, the 2016 failed military coup, tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Cyprus problem also dominate Turkey's foreign policy agenda with the EU.

Populist foreign policy as a new field of research is controversial and context-dependent. This in-depth analysis, based on the model by Destradi et al. (2019, 2021, 2022), leads to certain theoretical and methodological recommendations. First, certain themes make it difficult to incorporate the concept of populism into foreign policy discourse at the leader level. For example, the contrast between the general will and people-centrism is ambiguous; alternatively, in issue/actor-based assessments, the themes of bilateralism and partnership diversification necessitate an examination of the major pillars of foreign policy. As a result, rather than attempting to create a generic framework for populism in foreign policy, alternative models can be established that incorporate flexibility while taking actor, time, target audience, and agenda factors into account. Second, future studies and research can consider the function and position of the actor who produces populist speech. The study's findings and conclusions reveal a substantial gap between Erdogan's roles as head of the executive and as party leader. Accordingly, populism studies should interact with other disciplines and research fields, particularly the literature on authoritarianism and leadership styles. Third, there is a need for further analysis and enquiry into the methodological framework of populism research, particularly data collection; in our research, several datasets provided in the literature had no effect on the analysis, such as those drawn from Twitter and parliamentary speeches. Finally, because centralisation and personalisation of foreign policy need an examination of states of behaviour rather than states of discourse, new operationalisation styles are required for populist foreign policy discourse research.

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Forum: Double Standards of Religious Freedom and Women's Rights

Double Standards and Dissonance: Women's Rights and Freedom of Religion in the Global North[1]

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ABSTRACT   In this article, I explore the complex intersection between women's rights and religious freedom in liberal democracies, particularly focusing on the Global North. I demonstrate how both religious freedom and women's rights have been instrumentalized by Western powers, often as tools of foreign policy. I highlight the dissonance between Western nations' rhetoric, which promotes these rights globally, and their domestic practices, which sometimes impose restrictions, especially on Muslim women. Through case studies, including countries in the Middle East, France, and the United States, the article underscores the hypocrisy of Western democracies that criticize religious restrictions in authoritarian regimes while enforcing their own limitations on women's religious expression. In the conclusion, I emphasize the importance of consistent application of human rights to avoid reinforcing cynicism and authoritarian practices.

INTRODUCTION

Freedom of religion is one of the most important characteristics of liberal democracy and one of its aspects that the international community has emphasized at least since the adoption of the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Article 18 of this declaration clearly states that everyone is entitled to freedom of religion, which includes freedom to change one's religion, and to *"manifest[it][...] in teaching, practice, worship and observance."* In recent years, women's rights have also been understood as an element of democracy promotion by the international community, especially in the West (DONNO ET AL. 2022). This has led to abuses such as the weaponization of women's rights by authoritarian regimes (BJARNEGÅRD – ZETTERBERG 2022), but the West is also guilty of instrumentalizing women's rights.

The intersection of these two types of rights (freedom of religion and women's rights) is often understudied. However, it is important to examine these rights jointly because they often constitute cudgels used by the international community/West to dismiss if not attack countries and societies of the Global South. In addition, it is important to discuss freedom of religion and women's rights together, especially in the cases I highlight, because freedom of religion is a gender-based right that is often threatened.

Precision in language is important, so I will define how I understand these two concepts. *Freedom of religion* is the fundamental human right of everyone to worship, and practice and observe their religious beliefs so long as those practices do not infringe on the rights of others. I understand *women's rights* to be an umbrella concept simply stating that women should have the same social, political, and economic privileges as men. This includes the entire corpus of rights and protections that should be supported under the law, such as freedom of movement; access to education, work, and healthcare; economic and environmental security; the right to vote and hold public office; the right to bodily autonomy (e.g., the right to choose one's own mode of dress); and the right to bodily integrity (control over decisions relating to one's own body, e.g., reproductive rights and the right to make other medical decisions about oneself) (HERRING – WALL 2017; FELDMAN 2002). When we combine these two perspectives together, it leads to the basic conclusion that women should have the same right to practice their chosen religion as men.

In this analysis I emphasize that women's rights are infringed upon in many parts of the world. This is the case especially in authoritarian regimes, but also sometimes in liberal democracies. Sometimes women's rights are constrained in the name of religion, and sometimes they are constrained in pursuit of an anti-religious ideology. The examples that I use are drawn from the places I know best: the Middle East, France, and the United States.

The hypocrisy of the West, which positions itself as the locus of rationality, enlightenment and moral authority, is manifest in its treatment of women's rights and religious rights. The double standard in that treatment is often a fig leaf for racism, Islamophobia and a utilitarian approach to international politics where women's rights and freedom of religion become bludgeons used to disparage non-Western societies and label them as outside the norm. It is therefore not surprising to see regimes from the Global South resort to performative attempts at presenting themselves as corresponding to Western norms of human rights and women's rights to avoid Western opprobrium. The performance of women's rights in this case has rightly been called "genderwashing."

The following discussion regarding the status of women's rights and freedom of religion in the contemporary world is divided into three parts: (i) the phenomenon of "gender-washing," (ii) the persistence of double standards, and (iii) the importance of unconstrained choice. This is to illustrate the weaponization of women's rights by authoritarian regimes as an answer to Western norms, to demonstrate the dissonance between the West's discourse aimed at the Global South and its practices at home, and to show that women's choices are regulated in the West in the name of religion.

PART I: GENDER-WASHING

In September of 1995, at the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women, Hillary Clinton famously declared that *"women's rights are human rights"* (CLINTON 1995). This conference came to be recognized as a turning point after which Western powers began emphasizing women's rights as part of their international agenda. An emphatic connection between aggressive "democracy-promotion" and women's rights was soon enunciated in US foreign policy, particularly in relationship to the invasions of Afghanistan

and Iraq. For example, a public appeal made by First Lady Laura Bush in November of 2001 foregrounded the conditions of Afghan women and their rights to dignity and freedom as a justification for the war. In that speech she says: *"Civilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror [...] because, in Afghanistan, we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us. All of us have an obligation to speak out… Fighting brutality against women and children is not the expression of a specific culture; it's the acceptance of our common humanity, a commitment shared by people of good will on every continent"* (BUSH 2001).

The speech was rightly criticized by observers and scholars for instrumentalizing women's rights to legitimize the administration's broader goals; that is, for putting a "feminist glow" on a brutal bombing campaign (FLANDERS 2001). Along with subsequent statements by the US administration where it positioned itself as the defender of women in Iraq, this rhetoric has been described as portraying brown or Muslim women as needing to be "saved" by white men from brown men, to use Lila Abu-Lughod and Gayatri Spivak's terminology (ABU-LUGHOD 2002; SPIVAK 1985). Encompassing a universal scope, it portrayed US military action anywhere in the world as justifiable if the aggressor state deems it necessary to come to the aid of such women. It's not surprising, therefore, that many people felt non-Western women were becoming "symbols and pawns" of US power, a phenomenon that continued to expand as wartime justifications transitioned into a focus on women's lives in subsequent diplomatic and state-building endeavors (AMIRI 2001).

The European Union has also expressed a connection between women's rights and democracy-promotion since 1995, particularly in relation to its "southern neighborhood," which includes the Middle East and North Africa. Indeed, the EU views gender equality as being *"at the core of European values,"* and it seeks to be a *"global gender actor"* by promoting women's rights internationally (DEBUSSCHER – MANNER 2020: 1). While the EU relies more on soft power than on military violence to achieve these goals, the increasing centrality of women's rights as a moral justification for its political influence mirrors the rhetoric of the US.

In other words, both the EU and the US have used both hard and soft power to promote women's rights in the world ostensibly as part of their

democratization agenda. However, that promotion of women's rights has had a counter-intuitive impact in the targeted countries, where local authoritarian regimes have used these rights as a legitimating tool.

THE RISE OF GENDER QUOTAS

The norms of gender equality promoted by Western powers became so influential they swayed the thinking of many authoritarian leaders in the Arab world. The leaders' aspiration to be perceived as conforming to these imposed norms is the main explanation for the sudden moves by Arab states to grant rights to women after the turn of the millennium. During this period there was a particularly dramatic increase in the use of gender quotas as an instrument to increase women's political participation. Primarily as a result of these quotas, the percentage of women in parliaments in the Arab world expanded from less than 7% in 2005 to over 18% in 2022 – although this regional percentage is still one of the lowest in the world (INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION 2023). Some Arab countries, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia, however, have seen the representation of women in legislative or advisory bodies rise as high as 30%.

I argue that by adopting these gender quotas, the regimes were seeking to appropriate and work within the legitimizing framework that Western powers had previously set up for their own authoritarian adventures. The emerging norms around using women's rights to justify political and military power allowed these autocratic Arab regimes to similarly "weaponize" the rights rhetoric to support their continued rule. This is a form of what the French scholar Amelie Le Renard has called "women's rights washing" (LE RENARD 2019) and what the Swedish scholars Pär Zetterberg and Elin Bjarnegård have described as "autocratic gender-washing" (BJARNEGÅRD – ZETTERBERG 2022). Its primary goal was to encourage Western powers, donor organizations, and domestic progressives to believe that continued autocracy was in the citizens' best interest.

Such legitimization strategies became even more prevalent in the aftermath of the Arab Spring protests of 2010–2011, when they became a part of counterrevolutionary movements and projects of "authoritarian renewal" (PRATT 2020). These years in particular saw a striking upsurge in women's quotas, including in countries that had not previously used them.

Algeria, for example, implemented a 30% gender quota for the 2012 legislative election before canceling the quota system altogether in the next legislative election cycle. It seems reasonable to suggest that the reason for implementing this quota was to defend and legitimize the continued rule of the regime in the face of popular protests.

In general, the use of quotas for women in political positions in Arab countries has tended to swing widely during the past two decades, with little evidence that it has contributed to more substantive social impacts. In Egypt, for example, the parliamentary quota system was removed in 2012 after the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, resulting in women's representation plunging to 2%. Egypt quickly changed course and reinstated the quotas in the 2015 legislative session, mandating a 15% representation, which was then further increased to 28% in the most recent elections.

I do not believe that these quotas should be dropped as a means of promoting societal change, since the presence of women in prominent positions has an important symbolic value. It helps habituate the public to the presence of women in such positions, while providing role-models and points of aspiration for younger women to see themselves as potential leaders. However, when responding to these policy changes it is important to keep in mind the phenomenon of authoritarian gender-washing and to carefully evaluate the extent to which such policies are associated with actual, substantive improvements in women's rights.

GENDER-WASHING AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The dramatic and often temporary rise in women's political representation in the Arab world has not been accompanied by similarly broad changes in rights, including the right to religious freedom. Saudi Arabia is often mentioned as a hopeful example in this regard, particularly after that country granted women the right to drive in 2018. This change was part of the current Crown Prince Mohammed Ben Salman's turn away from the severely patriarchal interpretations of Islam that had previously defined the country's policies. It was accompanied by an easing of other aspects of Saudi Arabia's male "guardianship" system and a curtailing of the power of the "morality police" (officially the *Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice*), who lost their authority to pursue, question, and arrest

citizens who violated gender segregation or religious dress codes. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom heralded the changes, stating that *"the Saudi government understands that freedom of religion and belief, especially for women, is a right and not a privilege"* (WEINER 2020: N.P.).

However, I do not believe that the Saudi government has truly understood that freedom of religion is a right or acknowledged it as such. Simply granting women the right to drive and a reprieve from certain forms of harassment does not entail the full freedom of religious practice. Furthermore, these policy changes are presented by the regime as being allowances rather than rights. In fact, women who had previously fought for the right to drive in Saudi Arabia were imprisoned and tortured, and remained imprisoned even after the new law was passed. Loujain al-Hathloul, a persistent driving advocate, was arrested and charged with "attempting to destabilize the kingdom" in May of 2018, just one month before the new policy change was announced, and she remained in prison until April of 2021 (TANIS 2021).

Thus, the Crown Prince seemed determined to clarify that this new expansion of women's freedom of movement was a grace given by the royal family, not a recognition of inalienable rights, which would have required a release and reparations for the wrongly imprisoned advocates. While the new policies in Saudi Arabia are welcome changes, they also need to be understood in the context of gender-washing and authoritarian renewal. The fundamental purpose of these policy adjustments is to put a modernizing, benevolent veneer on what remains a system of formal religious authoritarianism, while emphasizing citizens' dependence on a generosity that can be rescinded at any time. Such allowances do not go nearly far enough in providing freedom of religion, and they are not the same as a recognition of human rights.

Thus, the international community should approach with caution claims made by authoritarian and aggressive regimes, in any region of the globe, who say they are spearheading women's rights or serving to defend those rights. There is a fundamental dissonance between autocratic power and the concept of inalienable rights, and progress that can be bestowed or retracted at whim by an authority is not fully genuine. Policies and rhetoric that appear positive on the surface may simply be a way for regimes to

consolidate and justify their control of society. Ultimately rights are only truly secure when they achieve a saturation of broad public acceptance.

PART II: DOUBLE STANDARDS AND HYPOCRISY

The lack of religious freedom in theocratic regimes should not blind us to the ways in which secular states can also sometimes limit the expressions of belief, a phenomenon which again seems to focus inordinately on the comportment of women. There is a significant problem of double standards in this area, as some Western countries decry constraints on women's public dress and behavior that occur in the Middle East, while simultaneously imposing state-mandated dress codes in their own countries. This lowers Western countries' credibility when they argue that women's rights are universal. The examples of Iran and France show how these Western double standards play out in regard to women's right to choose what to wear in observance of their personal faith.

WESTERN OPPOSITION TO FORCED VEILING IN IRAN

Soon after the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran, the new regime implemented a compulsory hijab law, which forced women to cover themselves in public with a semicircular cloak called the *chador*. Many Iranians did not welcome this imposition, and as time went by some women started to push the limits of what the government would accept, for example by wearing coats and scarves instead of the traditional garment. The state tolerance for such divergence has fluctuated over time, with administrations such as those of President Khatami and President Rouhani demonstrating a relatively lax enforcement of the dress codes, and others, such as those of President Ahmedinejad (ZAHEDI 2007) and the current president Ibrahim Raissi, reacting brutally to dissenters.

Most recently, international observers and domestic critics in Iran have focused on the death of Mahsa Amini (also known by her Kurdish name, Jina), who was arrested in Tehran because a part of her hair was showing from under her scarf. Amini's arrest and subsequent death while in the custody of the police led to widespread protests, during which hundreds of additional Iranians were killed by the state (AL JAZEERA 2023). Women protestors played a central role in these events, as demonstrators from all

backgrounds came together to chant, *"zan, zendegi, azadi"* (women, life, freedom) in opposition to the regime. These demands for religious freedom were heard all over the world and received a sympathetic ear, especially as prominent women in the Iranian diaspora, in addition to politicians such as the Belgian foreign minister Hadja Lahbib and the Swedish member of the European Parliament Abir al-Sahlani (both of Arab origin), gave voice to the cause by cutting their hair (REUTERS 2023). In 2023 the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to one of the champions of women's rights in Iran, Narges Mohammadi, with the committee heralding *"her fight against the oppression of women in Iran and her fight to promote human rights and freedom for all"* (NOBEL PRIZE COMMITTEE 2023).

Among those who expressed the strongest support for religious freedom in Iran were members of the French Republic, where prominent figures such as the movie stars Juliette Binoche and Marion Cotillard performatively cut their hair in solidarity with the Iranian protestors. What was surprising is that these European women did not seem to have a similar understanding of or concern for the ways in which their own country had constrained women's freedom to choose their dress and religious expression. Their performative haircuts were quickly labelled "white savior outrage" by netizens on Twitter, and their hypocrisy flagged (DAWN NEWS 2022). This kind of hypocritical behavior was not limited to movie stars. President Emmanuel Macron hailed the protests as a "revolution" and met with Iranian women's rights activists (FRANCE24 2022). The French National Assembly also adopted a resolution condemning the repression of the protestors and affirming its *"support for the Iranian people in their aspirations for democracy and respect for their fundamental rights and freedoms"* (RFI 2022).

SUPPORT FOR FORCED UN-VEILING IN FRANCE

While the French elites, both cultural and political, were criticizing Iran, they were wrapping themselves in the mantle of an alleged French exceptionalism when it comes to the separation between Church and state. There is a strict constitutional separation between political power and religion in France; this separation dates back to the revolution of 1789 and is further enshrined in the Law of Separation of Church and State of 1905. This resistance to theocracy has, unfortunately, developed to the extent that many individual public expressions of religious faith are severely curtailed.

The French tradition of secularism, or *laïcité*, has come to extend not only to prohibiting state-sponsored religion but also to limiting individual expressions of faith in public spaces.

In 2004 France passed a law barring the individual display of "ostentatious" religious signs in public schools. While this law applies equally to the symbols of various religions, such as Christian symbols of the cross or Jewish yarmulkes, many people believe that the law was a specific response to the increasing presence of traditional Islamic dress in French society. The controversy over this clothing began in earnest in France in 1989, when three teenage girls were excluded from school for wearing headscarves. The school principal argued that such attire was incompatible with the good functioning of a school and that the girls should respect the secular character of the institution. Eventually the girls were allowed to return under the condition that they remove their scarves upon entering the school and not put them back on until they leave (BOWEN 2010). The issue was heavily debated in the media, and the French public was divided over it, which eventually culminated in the formation of a government committee to discuss the topic and the subsequent passage of the 2004 law.

Justifications of curtailing individual expressions of faith in this fashion generally focus on protecting individuals from social pressure to participate in a religion, and especially on providing underage children with the opportunity to experience a secular lifestyle and freedom of self-determination outside of parental influences. Even so, the outright banning of religious dress strikes many as simply substituting one prohibitive regime for another. In subsequent years, the secular dress codes in French public schools were interpreted in a broad fashion that almost always focused on Muslim women, to the extent that students wearing long skirts or dresses perceived as having a culturally Islamic appearance were often sent home. Such interpretations of the law were recently formalized when the then French Minister of Education (and later Prime Minister) Gabriel Attal forbade the wearing of abayas and kaftans to school. This decision was upheld by the French Council of State in September of 2023, which described such dresses as participating in a "logic of religious affirmation," and thus being unacceptable (BREEDEN 2023). The ruling was regarded with much derision on social media, especially in the Middle East, with some commentators posting photos of famous French actresses and public

figures wearing similar attire and pointing out that kaftans had long been sold by major French haute couture fashion houses.

The view that these laws were intended to protect children and other vulnerable people from religious indoctrination is undermined by the minority status of Muslims in France and the simultaneous targeting of adult practitioners. In October of 2010, France passed a law that forbade any woman from wearing religious face-coverings in public, despite the fact that such dress was preferred by only an estimated 0.003% of the country's population (DAVIES, 2010). It seems absurd to suggest that these adult women's choice of dress posed any meaningful threat to the rights and security of other French citizens, or that the women had no opportunities for exposure to a secular lifestyle or making free and informed choices. Taking note of this, the UN Human Rights Committee found the French law to be in violation of women's freedom of religion (FRANCE24 2018).

BODILY AUTONOMY AND THE BURKINI CONTROVERSY

The dissonance between the French behavior at both the elite and popular level in France and the French behavior vis-à-vis non-Western states is also visible in another ridiculous infringement on women's bodily autonomy and religious freedom which occurred in France in the summer of 2016. During that summer, 20 cities in the Mediterranean (including Nice and Cannes) issued local ordinances banning "burkinis" on public beaches. The burkini – a playful portmanteau of the words "burka" and "bikini" – is a full-body swimsuit often incorporating a small skirt around the waist, created in 2004 by the Australian-Lebanese fashion designer Aheda Zanetti. The banning of this garment occurred amidst anti-Muslim sentiment in the wake of a terrorist attack in Nice that killed 86 people. It was endorsed by several mainstream French politicians, including then Prime Minister Manuel Valls, who referred to the burkini as *"the expression of a political project, a counter-society, based notably on the enslavement of women, [and] [...] not compatible with French values"* (KROET 2016). Essentially, those who enacted the ban were declaring that a few women's choice of swimwear was an act of terrorism and an unacceptable threat to the nation meriting a constraint on their right to bodily autonomy. This view was fortunately not universal in France, and within a few months the courts

suspended the burkini bans, stating that they *"seriously, and clearly illegally, breached fundamental freedoms"* (BBC NEWS 2016).

As these examples show, it is hard to believe that the recent movement toward suppressing religious dress in France is anything other than a smokescreen for anti-Muslim sentiment. These laws remind me of a discussion I had with a fellow graduate student when I was doing my doctoral studies in France. She was a sociology of religion student, and argued that the country was not actually secular, but rather *"Catho-laïque,"* in a play on the words "Catholic" and *"laïcité."* Other scholars have made similar observations, such as John R. Bowen's argument that the French dress codes are intended not to protect citizens' freedom from indoctrination but rather to enforce a specific cultural and religious identity (BOWEN 2011: 344). Anxieties about cultural difference have been rising in France, as in most Western nations, as highlighted by the popularity of Renaud Camus's 2011 book *The Great Replacement*, which theorizes an intentional plan by elites to replace white, Christian European populations with Muslim immigrants. An October 2021 survey found that 67% of the French respondents were worried that the "Great Replacement" would happen (LE FIGARO 2021). Although Muslims currently make up a very small portion of the French population, these cultural fears of a potential decline in Christian hegemony are the most likely explanation for the spate of new laws limiting women's freedom to dress as they choose.

Similar laws constraining Islamic women's dress have been enacted in, among other European states, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, and Germany (JUSTICE INITIATIVE 2022). In all these cases, the number of women affected is vanishingly small – for example, the BBC estimated that a total of 30 women in Belgium wore the full-face veil at the time when that country banned it (BBC NEWS 2010). Nonetheless, politicians in these nations have seized upon anti-Islamic discourse as an issue that resonates with voters and have taken the opportunity to pass laws limiting religious freedom. Westerners who are outraged by constraints on such freedoms abroad often seem oblivious to the blatant hypocrisy.

The cases of Iran and France demonstrate different ways in which threats to women's religious freedom can arise, either through theocratic consolidation or through secular suppression. Supporters of human rights

should maintain an awareness of both. If we are to argue for preserving women's bodily autonomy and freedom of religious expression, then these principles need to be applied consistently. The extent of physical repression and state violence faced by dissenters in authoritarian theocracies such as Iran is much more severe than anything confronted by women today in the West; however, laws banning religious expression need to be taken seriously wherever they occur. The public in the Global South is highly aware of these issues, and the double standards of judgement that the West applies to "pariah states" such as Iran and "good states" such as France is a common topic of derision in the related social media discourse. The West should be careful not to reinforce these perceptions, as they encourage cynicism toward the human rights paradigm and enable authoritarian leaders to easily engage in practices such as gender-washing.

PART III: RELIGION AND CHOICE

While women's ability to dress and act according to their beliefs is unjustifiably constrained in many countries, these rights restrictions become even more problematic when they are applied to issues of basic bodily integrity, such as reproductive decisions and medical treatment. The US is currently experiencing tremendous backsliding in this area, as overtly religious arguments for state restrictions on reproductive rights, sexuality, and gender identity have become more commonplace there.

The wall of separation between religion and the state in the US as outlined by Thomas Jefferson (1802) was always a bit tentative, and it has been thinning over the past several decades. Recent studies have found that a large majority of US citizens (69%) now believe that the country's founders intended it to be a "Christian nation," and more than 60% of US citizens think that the US *should be* a Christian nation (SMITH – ROTOLO – TEVINGTON 2022). As a matter of fact this belief about the country's founding is inaccurate, since most of the US "Founding Fathers" did not hold orthodox Christian views and they expressed tremendous concern for preventing the rise of a state religion (VINEY 2010). Among other counters to religious influence included in the US Constitution was Article IV's prohibition on religious tests for political office. The very first sentence of the US Bill of Rights begins with *"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof"* (AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION 2023).

Despite these guardrails, the US public has never felt comfortable with elected representatives who diverge from the country's white Protestant Christian norm. Even Catholic Christians long struggled for acceptance in the US, and were frequently portrayed as subversive outsiders, which was an issue that came to the forefront when the country's first Catholic president was elected in 1960 (JOHN F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY 2023). Although President Barak Obama was an avowed Protestant, his political opponents made great efforts to cast suspicion on his religious affiliation, often emphasizing Obama's "Muslim" and "foreign"-sounding middle name (Hussain) to suggest an association with Islam (TARABAY 2008).

The growing politicization of evangelical Christians in the US, and their newly forged alliances with conservative elements in the Catholic Church, have in recent years led to a growth in Christian nationalist thinking and explicit attempts to apply religious doctrine through law. The current speaker of the US House of Representatives, Mike Johnson, is an avowed Christian nationalist who has described the separation of church and state as a "misnomer" and a "misunderstanding" of the US Constitution, and who flies a Christian flag outside of his congressional office (DAVIS 2023; PILKINGTON 2023). One result of this growing trend in the US has been a severe erosion of women's rights to bodily integrity. Christian nationalists have pressured political leaders to appoint judges who will roll back protections for women's rights (SMITH 2019), which most notably led to the recent "Dobbs" ruling of the Supreme Court[2] that rescinded the national right to abortion. This ruling allowed conservative local legislatures to ban abortion outright *"in recognition that Almighty God is the author of life"* in the words of the bill banning abortion in Missouri (COHEN 2023). It also allowed legislatures to impose severe penalties on women who seek abortion-related care and doctors who perform abortion procedures. For example, in Texas, doctors who perform abortions can now face up to 99 years in prison, among other penalties (BENDIX 2023). It has already led to horrific consequences for women living in the US, including several prominent cases in which women were forced to risk their lives to carry fetuses that were not viable or that had already died in the womb (COHEN 2023; BENDIX 2023; SIMMONS-DUFFIN 2023). Such consequences have been disproportionally felt by low-income women who cannot afford to travel to get an abortion (IBID.).

Religious groups have also successfully pressured public agencies in some regions of the US to take action against sexual and gender minorities, for example by removing books that contain positive representations of LGBTQ+ individuals from school libraries (SCHWARTZ 2023), and by enacting legislation that prohibits affirmative medical care for transgender people (HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN 2023; EQUALITY FEDERATION 2023). As with abortion rights the primary impetus behind these state actions is religious conviction, with legislators frequently quoting Christian scriptures in relation to the bills, citing their goal of limiting rights that conflict with Christian beliefs, and sometimes even working directly with religious organizations to draft the text of the laws (CRARY 2023; POPE 2023). In short, the rights of women and sexual minorities in the US are being severely curtailed through state applications of Christian religious doctrine.

In this context, some readers may be surprised to learn that Iran is one of the few countries in the world where gender-affirming medical care is officially recognized. In fact, it is subsidized by the government. Men or women with gender dysphoria can transition to social identities that reflect their preferred gender and receive new birth certificates and passports that are appropriate for their identity (ALIPOUR 2017). This policy is due to a fatwa (religious edict) issued by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in the 1980s after discussions with the Iranian transgender activist Maryam Khatoon Mulkara. After considering Mulkara's testimony and consulting with doctors, the Ayatollah declared that gender transition, including surgery, was permissible under Islam. Mulkara was even later presented with a chador (a traditional women's garment) by Ali Khamenei, the second supreme leader of the Islamic Republic (SAIEDZADEH 2020).

This feature of Iranian law needs to be understood in context, however, as hostility toward transgender individuals – especially transgender women – continues to be pervasive in the social realm in Iran. Iranians who are known to have transitioned usually struggle to find employment. In addition, shunning by peers and relatives, threats and acts of violence, and often a need to resort to survival sex are still daily realities for many transgender Iranians (IBID.). It should also be noted that while Iran permits gender transitions, all non-heterosexual forms of sexuality are firmly prohibited, and may result in sentences as severe as the death penalty (KARIMI – BAYATRIZI 2018). This leads many cisgender gay and lesbian Iranians

to reluctantly transition, and even undergo unwanted surgeries, so that they can live according to their sexual orientation (for example, a gay man who is otherwise comfortable with his gender may reluctantly transition to living as a woman so that he can openly partner with another man).

Iranian law allows abortions up to a gestational age of 19 weeks, but only in cases where there is a medical reason – that is, when there is a fetal abnormality/disease or when the health of the mother is threatened (ABBASI ET AL. 2014). While new restrictive laws aiming to boost the fertility rate have been ratified in 2021 (BERGER 2021), they are nonetheless more permissive than the current abortion regimes in some US states.

The theocracy in Iran continues to severely undermine women's rights to bodily integrity, even if the contours of these constraints are somewhat different from those in other nations such as the United States. Nonetheless, the laws discussed in this section should make it clear that a simple dichotomy of religious freedom as existent in the West and non-existent in the Middle East is too simplistic. The right of women to choose their own religious views and make their own decisions about their bodies remains tenuous throughout the world.

CONCLUSION

I draw several conclusions from this brief overview of the current intersections between religious freedom and women's rights. First, the distinction between authoritarian and democratic regimes when it comes to religious freedom is not as stark as some commentators would like to believe, especially when women's bodily integrity is considered. The West tends to present itself as morally superior in this area, but that claim cannot legitimately be made so long as women in Western countries face severe restrictions on their religious expression and rights to self-determination and choice. It would benefit advocates in the West to attend more to their own laws and societies in this regard before lecturing others.

Second, the perception of double standards when it comes to rights has the effect of generating cynicism and mistrust of the West in regions such as the Middle East. These publics are aware of the difficulties faced by women and minorities in the West, and particularly of the way Muslims

(especially Muslim women) are treated in countries such as France. The resulting view, namely that religious freedom and rights discourses are simply a bludgeon that the West uses to claim superiority, contributes to the willingness to instrumentalize those rights and the intractability of phenomena such as gender-washing. Rights advocates should carefully consider the ways in which these discourses have become linked to power dynamics and authoritarian legitimization strategies, and continually ask if the demand for nations to respect rights is being sincerely and equally applied.

I believe the West should be careful and avoid sounding hypocritical. It needs to practice what it preaches and stop giving itself a free pass. If religious freedom is important, then Muslim women in France and other European countries should not be forbidden from practicing their under-standing of their religion and wearing outward signs of religiosity. If wom-en's rights are important, then American women's choices should not be constrained by the religious beliefs of some in that polity. Alternatively, the West could avoid promoting freedom of religion or women's rights under the banner of universality.

ENDNOTES

1   This is the updated text of a keynote speech given on November 30th, 2023 at the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance Ministerial Conference at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic in Prague, <https://mzv.gov.cz/jnp/en/foreign_relations/freedom_of_religion_or_belief/international_religious_freedom_or.html>.

2   The ruling for Dobbs vs. Jackson Women's Health Organization was issued in June 2022.

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Performative Contradictions of Women's Rights and Religious Freedoms: Dissonance Across Space and Time

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ABSTRACT	This piece deliberates on Rola El-Husseini's contribution to contemporary debates on double standards and dissonance at the intersection of women's rights and religious freedom in the Global North by highlighting similar performative contradictions of the past. In exercising thinking through current dilemmas with Mark Twain's commentary on non-dyadic marriages in the Ottoman Empire and the United States, this article suggests that across time and space, whoever the manufactured "other" may be, the processes and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion generally favor the interests of those who hold and seek to maintain the greatest martial, economic, and political power.

INTRODUCTION

Rola El-Husseini's "Double Standards and Dissonance: Women's Rights and the Freedom of Religion in the Global North" takes us to the intersection of women's rights and religious freedom to persuasively argue that the "Global North" is not genuinely devoted to either. This doesn't surprise historians of the Middle East, especially since the conversation isn't about the "Global North," *per se*, but where its imagined spaces overlap with those associated with a more value-laden signifier, namely, "the West," as flagged throughout El-Husseini's contribution. In other words, the genealogy of the "hypocrisy" El-Husseini skillfully elaborates on is marred by encroachment, exploitation, and extraction, all of which continue to this day. I had intended to build on the commentary on how women's rights and religious freedom are (ab)used in contemporary politics, international relations, and the mainstream media by illustrating their history, focusing on discourses surrounding Muslim women. I hesitated on account of two issues that kept me from writing. First, there are too many examples. Second, we already know. Deep down, we know, even if we pretend not to. Then I thought, Mark Twain – hear me out.

WHAT'S TWAIN GOT TO DO WITH IT?

A Twain travelogue is not what first comes to mind when discussing double standards shaping women's rights and the freedom of religion. *Our Moslem Sisters: A Cry of Need from Lands of Darkness Interpreted by Those Who Heard It* could have been a more obvious choice. There is much to unpack in this missionary work's title alone, let alone the actual body of the text, which is revealing of circumstances that gave "Christian womanhood" unique opportunities to elevate itself by traveling to lands with imperial home state interests to save women who were *"buried alive and yet live[d] on"* because they were veiled (VAN SOMMER–ZWEMER 1907: 5–6). The hypocrisy is stark. These saviors – missionary women abroad – had little rights of their own and the veil was/is not uniquely Islamic, as the text suggests (IBID.: 5). Veiling is a transtemporal, transregional, and transcultural sartorial custom we've been familiar with since the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and have seen much of, for example, in countless depictions of the Virgin Mary in "Western" art (at times adorned with pseudo-kufic elements subtly reminding us of less dichotomized pasts) and Franciscan Sisters' attires. Local variations include

bonneting, i.e., *čepení nevěsty* in Czechia.[1] Still, I felt compelled to exercise thinking it through with *The Innocents*.

The Innocents Abroad or the New Pilgrim's Progress; Being Some Account of the Steamship Quaker City's Pleasure Excursion to Europe and the Holy Land; with Descriptions of Countries, Nations, Incidents and Adventures, as They Appeared to the Author is just that, and it was published by Twain in 1869. Some read it as a parody of the Christian allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* nestled in the title, which was widely circulating and building an imperial legacy in British colonies and American territories at the time.[2] Twain claims in his preface that he aimed to present Europe and the Holy Land to his readers as they would have seen and interpreted them with their own eyes, not how they *"ought to look at objects of interest beyond the sea – other books do that"* (TWAIN 1869: V). One presumes these "other books" provided some material for Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Still, *The Innocents* is full of tropes, essentialist stereotypes, and a condescending air of supremacy. The scholarship animating debates on Twain and the history of race and racism in the US is also useful here; he both challenges and reinforces prejudices. Nevertheless, his text can still converse with El-Husseini's, as it also brings us to the intersection of women's rights and the freedom of religion.

NON-DYADIC MARRIAGES, "WE DO NOT MIND IT SO MUCH IN SALT LAKE"

Twain comments on non-dyadic marriages while in Ottoman Istanbul. Marital multiplicity also rests at the intersection of the freedom of religion and women's rights, especially because it is mostly practiced as polygyny. Outsiders' fascination with it and the veil meant that these were staples of nineteenth-century travelogues on the "Orient," though polygamy was rare. Less than 3% of married Istanbulite men were in such unions by the nineteenth century (BEHAR 1991; SEE ALSO DUBEN – BEHAR 1991). Twain paints it differently: *"They say the Sultan has eight hundred wives. [...] It makes our cheeks burn with shame to see such a thing permitted here in Turkey. We do not mind it so much in Salt Lake, however"* (TWAIN 1869: 368). What "they said" about Sultan Abdulaziz's (r. 1861–1876) harem was even less convincing than the affair "they said" he had with Napoleon III's wife, but that's neither here nor there. Twain is not after accuracy. He wants to foreground his compatriots' double standards – they judged polygamy more severely in Muslim-majority lands

than in North America. Whether he advocates stronger condemnation of the Salt Lake variety or less of the other is open to interpretation. Either way, we accept that ethnocultural prejudices are at the root of the imbalance. Point taken. Where do we go from here? Back to the text.

Twain does not court audience engagement with polygamy in each US state and territory. New York's Oneida community is unmentioned. He only alludes to the doctrine of plural marriages of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints *in* Salt Lake. With this, he sarcastically calls hypocrisy on a women's rights issue (the defense of women factors large in anti-polygamous discourse) and lets readers interpret racism as the cause (since colonialism and imperialism racialized religion). Though accurate, to an extent, the statement is also misleading. The "we" did "mind" the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' polygyny, just not "so much" in Salt Lake as elsewhere, like in New York, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois, and in the postbellum South, especially Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Kentucky, and the Carolinas, i.e. the seven states where members of the church were subjected to the most violence (MASON 2011: 129). The geography is vast, and not without reason.

Joseph Smith founded the church in New York in 1830, a long way from Salt Lake. Its followers kept migrating, precisely because they were "minded." Smith was choked, stripped, tarred, and feathered by a mob in Ohio in 1832; he was killed in Illinois in 1844 (IBID.: 153). Hate crimes affected the whole community: poisoned farm animals, choked wells, homes burned to heaps of ash (IBID.: 142); children were among the "butchered" Mormons (St. Louis Republican 1838). Violence always caught up *wherever the Mormons went […] local residents saw them initially as a curiosity, then as a nuisance, and then as a threat that needed to be removed, by force if necessary* (IBID.). "Force" in Missouri was an executive extermination order preceding the Western Exodus (MASON 2011: 153), the two-thousand-kilometer-long journey of many who fled persecution on the "Mormon Trail" to Utah, then a part of Mexico and beyond US jurisdiction. Nor was Twain their kind publicist.

Twain's *Roughing It* (1871) shares unflattering impressions of Salt Lake, which the author visited after Utah became a territory (1850) but before it achieved statehood (1896). The city is described as *"the capital of the only absolute monarchy in America,"* (TWAIN 1913: 92) and the Mormon Bible, as

"chloroform in print" (IBID.: 110). On polygamy, Twain claims to have changed his mind about the "great reform" after seeing Mormon women: *"the man that marries one of them has done an act of Christian charity […] the man that marries sixty of them has done a deed of open-handed generosity so sublime that the nations should stand uncovered in his presence and worship in silence"* (IBID.: 101). The misogyny is footnoted; readers are referred to the appendix, where Mormons are described as *"ignorant, simple, of an inferior order of intellect"* (IBID.: 308). That being said, there is also mention of other injustices:

> *"[…] let it be remembered that* for forty years *these creatures have been driven, driven, driven, relentlessly! and mobbed, beaten, and shot down; cursed, despised, expatriated; banished to a remote desert whither they journeyed gaunt with famine and disease with their lamentations and marking the long way with the graves of their dead — and all because they were simply trying to live and worship God in the way which* they *believed with all their hearts and souls to be the true one. Let all these things be borne in mind, and then it will not be hard to account for the deathless hatred which the Mormons bear our people and our government"* (IBID.).

This contextualizes what Twain follows with, in condemnatory terms, which is the violence they perpetrated at the Mountain Meadows Massacre of 1857 (IBID.: 310–314). Suffice to say, they were minded, just not *"so much in Salt Lake"* (TWAIN 1869: 368).

MORAL ENTREPRENEURS AND THE (BY) PRODUCTION OF A SHADOW SOCIETY

The rhetoric conveying why Latter-day Saints were unwelcome reveals imagined conflicts where honor and American-ness are assumed to be at odds with polygamy (MASON 2011: 5), sometimes called "American 'Barbarism'" (SEE, F.E, PHIPPS 2009). Outrage was also expressed on women's behalf. Moral entrepreneurs waxed barbarism as a threat to the re-/production of ideal citizens, i.e. perpetuators of the socio-economic structure (of inequality). An alternative to the heterodyadic family that is the modern nation's micro-cosm was portrayed as dangerous. The message was deployed in a manner quite reminiscent of colonialist discourse: *"The children of said marriages are generally growing up as wild animals. […] It drags men down to the level of the beast. Woman is placed in the same social position. She is looked upon as*

a drudge and a slave, fit only to perform the hardest work and to gratify the slavish passions of those to whom she believes herself married" (JSTOR 1875). Though compared to Islam, some were more generous with their very own local "superstition" and saw polygamy as *"an excrescence of Mormonism"* (JSTOR 1881) – its extraction could even deliver a *"frugal, temperate, industrious, and, incredible as it might seem, in one sense, a chaste people"* (IBID.). It was convincing that *"[t]he religion is simply a pious fraud, while the institution of polygamy is a crime. The Government has nothing to do with the former; it has everything to do with the latter"* (IBID.). So it legislated.

The anti-polygamy laws enacted in the process of Utah's incorporation into the US culminated in predicating statehood on banning polygamy, which the Church of Latter-day Saints accepted and backed *"with the threat of excommunication for those who continued its practice or advocacy"* in 1890 (DAVIS 2010: 1969). Legislation also clamped down on wealth and economic independence, and, by extension, political power. The Morill Anti-Bigamy (1862) and Edmunds-Tucker Acts (1887) achieved the Church of Latter-day Saints' disincorporation, forbade any church from having property over $50,000, confiscated accordingly, and raised the penalty for practicing polygamy – both in dollars and in years of incarceration (MASON 2011: 92). Fiscal losses were significant, as shared by the press: *"The suit was brought about in the Supreme Court of Utah, under the act of Congress of February 10th, 1887 […] a Receiver was appointed for the church corporation, succeeding in collecting over $1,000,000 worth of property, real and personal, The [sic] decree now entered is a complete triumph for the Government"* (JSTOR 1888). In other words, the law seemed to deliver more financial gains (for the state and federal government) and restraints (on the Latter-day Saints) than protection for women and children. The law didn't eradicate polygamy so much as it created a "shadow society."

Marital multiplicity was a felony offense in all US states until 2020. As explained by Senator Deidre Henderson, who sponsored its decriminalization in Utah, *"the fear of government prosecution has created an environment that enables abuse"* (SMARDON 2020).[3] As the law was under deliberation, Shirlee Draper, a former member of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also elaborated on how fear of law enforcement made women like her feel trapped. It took her six years to escape: *"I had no way to get help. Everywhere I went, I was visually identifiable as a felon,*

and I was greeted with hostility" $\overline{\text{(IBID.)}}$. The law criminalized a community and a practice that, in and of itself, cannot unequivocally be linked to the subjugation of women and minors while protecting predators because it turned victims of sexual violence, incest, and child and spousal abuse into outlaws who faced social and legal repercussions for coming forward.[4] Accordingly, the reasons that justified the criminalization, i.e. protecting vulnerable women, also justified the decriminalization. By this point, the financial and political potential of the church was curbed and checked into alignment with the mainstream political apparatus that reinforces existing power relations. It is plausible that it wasn't ever about protecting women.

BACK AT THE INTERSECTION: DISTINGUISHING LIBERATION FROM OPPRESSION

At the intersection where hypocrisy, double standards, and dissonance abound, so, too, do inconsistencies. We may ask, for the sake of this exercise, what *is* consistent? Hasn't it always been that choice and consent better distinguish liberation from oppression than laws dictating what women (and the marginalized, more broadly) can and cannot do, and what can be done *to* them – even if consent is still constrained by internalized values that reinforce structural inequalities disadvantageous for them, regardless of their non-/dyadic marriage patterns, race, or creed, in this patriarchal, and exploitatively capitalist, world system? Isn't it obvious by now that criminalizing those designated as victims on account of culture doesn't ensure their protection but increases their vulnerability? This rings as true today as when Twain asked for equal condemnation of polygamists resisting obedience to norms determined by those holding the greatest martial, political, and economic power, locally and globally – those with long-term investments in the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Such power shows its teeth via legalities, for example, also on the veil.

El-Husseini's contribution reminds us of inconsistencies at the intersection of women's rights and freedom of religion. Reflecting on this through *The Innocents* pushes us to probe further. Why is it so, to what end, and for whose benefit? The premise of protection (of honor, identity, and those vulnerable) that framed, for over a century, the discourse of federal legislative action taken against non-dyadic marriages in the US was eventually delegitimized because the laws harmed the most vulnerable within a harshly

otherized non-dominant community. Crucially, and contrary to what one may assume from a cursory glance, one could argue it was *not* for nothing and that the score is not nil-nil. The process of delegitimization in and of itself ensured that a socioeconomically cohesive group was denied political viability on the national stage *until* it was mainstreamed (with legal and fiscal pressure) into conformity with the existing power structure. This may indeed be another consistency between then and now. It seems inevitable that the possibility of liberty, equality, solidarity, and justice for victims of gender-based violence existing alongside legislation on what women may conceal or reveal for public consumption on the canvas of their own bodies will no longer convince enough of a margin on election day in any hemisphere. Women may then be "given" choice and protection. In the meantime, the creative enterprise of manufacturing new internal and external others from reshuffled marginal identity registers to fuel politics of division over non-issues to maintain the interests of those with the greatest martial, political, and economic power, locally and globally – those with long-term investments in the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion – will already be underway.

ENDNOTES

1   Multimedia artist and AAU lecturer Alena Foustková engages with Czech bonneting in her exhibit on aspects of women's trauma, "Ženy si musí zakrýt hlavu, protože nejsou obrazem božím/Women must cover their heads, because they are not the image of God." Museum Kampa, 2 December 2023 – 28 January 2024.

2   For a couple of studies on its circulation, see Hofmeyr (2023) and Williams and Clift (2023).

3   Beyond the stigma, those in legally unprotected non-heterodyadic marriages also face many legal hurdles, such as not having legitimacy and legal recognition, as well as property, inheritance, custody, and hospital visitation rights, to name a few.

4   That it is hard to claim polygamy is bad for women, in general, is also supported by the rejection of the dyadic norm by some radical feminists and black nationalists for very different reasons: *"The latter sees polygamy as the patriarchy's savior, the former as its death knell"* (see Davis 1973). For a recent case that combines some of these crimes, see Fonseca (2022).

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NOTE

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Religion, Coloniality and Women's Rights

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ABSTRACT — In response to Rola El-Husseini's article, "Double Standards and Dissonance: Women's Rights and Freedom of Religion in the Global North," this paper addresses the French approach to secularism and women's rights within a context of coloniality. Analyzing France's secular framework, I explore the secular control over Muslim women's attire and identity, tracing these regulations back to colonial practices. By examining how religious expression, particularly in relation to Islam, is selectively restricted, this commentary highlights the paradox of French "laïcité" as both a liberating and oppressive force, revealing ongoing colonial legacies in contemporary women's rights discourse.

I have read with much interest the fascinating and inspiring paper by Dr. Rola El-Husseini, and admired the way she shows how women's bodies are a major issue for political powers all around the world, and how they keep on trying to control it, either in the name of religion or in the name of a secular ideology. In conversation with her, I should like to focus on the French case and highlight a few points that seem particularly significant to me.

SECULARISM AND COLONIALITY

Commenting on the Burkini controversy, Dr. El-Husseini remembers a discussion she had once in Paris with a fellow student, who spoke about the French *"laïcité"* as a *"catho-laïcité"*: a mutation of Catholicism in the French way of secularism. Prominent specialists in the history or the sociology of religions, such as Jean-Paul Willaime or Jean Baubérot, use this expression, which seems accurate for characterizing the French *"laïcité"*, as nowadays it addresses mainly Islam, and lost its initial purpose, the effective separation of the State and religion, which in 1905 meant freedom of worship in a country which had been under the domination of the Catholic Church. Over the last twenty years or so, the number of Catholics in France has fallen sharply, with Catholicism taking on a largely cultural form. Willaime and Baubérot refer to this new falsified form of secularism (*"laïcité falsifiée"*, wrote Jean Baubérot) (BAUBÉROT 2014) as 'civil religion', echoing the republicanism so often invoked.

And in fact, according to the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg, with the French Revolution, civil religion became the religion of a civil state, in which secular power *"uses the aura (which is also a weapon) of religion"* (GINZBURG 2017). More recently the historian Valentine Zuber (2014) has shown how at the time of the French Revolution, a civil religion was established in which Catholicism was replaced by a new humanist ideology, and in which the State, now named the Republic, was made sacred and became the object of its own cult. As Catholicism in the old Ancient Régime, the French *laïcité* claims exclusivity and universality while proclaiming freedom of worship, *"provided that their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law"*, according to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789.

One must not forget that the claim to universality was invented inside and by the Catholic Church and used to conquer, dominate and colonize large parts of the world, even if the Christ message has been also used as a tool towards emancipation (Liberation Theology). With this vision of the world, not only secularism was designed on the basis of the model of Catholicism, as other faiths were also designed according to this same model. Within the frame of Christianity, as was the case with Judaism at the beginning of the 19th century, Islam is being asked to become a religion of the interior in the sense of being invisible in the so-called public sphere. In September 2023, when qamis and abaya were banned from French schools, the philosopher Abdenour Bidar, who presents himself as an intellectual of Muslim culture, and who argued, many years ago, that women who say they wear a *hidjab* voluntarily don't know what they are saying, wrote the following in the newspaper *Le Monde* (BIDAR 2023) (translated by the author):

"There is certainly an opportunity for Muslims to see this external impediment as a reminder that faith is an inner affair, that it is not essentially worn on the garment or outside, but is lived and expressed within, in the intimacy of the soul and heart, the place of a personal and secret relationship with the divine [...]. Nothing today in France, absolutely nothing, prevents Muslims from cultivating their interiority as believers, and outside themselves, nothing prevents them from worshipping in mosques, or from expressing their faith in the most sublime of its manifestations: 'good behavior', the 'noble qualities' (Makârim-al-Akhlâq) whose model Islam finds in the figure of the Prophet."

Actually the related issues, and then the ban on the Islamic scarf and other "clothing expressing religious affiliation", have arisen when Muslims, mainly Muslim girls and women, went outside of their assigned space. As housewives or cleaning ladies, Muslim women were invisible. Now that they are students, civil servants or employees, their Muslimness must remain invisible if they want to be truly a part of the nation, and not be considered as aliens and potential enemies. As Dr. Rola El-Husseini (2024: 8) states, *"it is hard to believe that the recent movement toward suppressing religious dress in France is anything other than a smokescreen for anti-Muslim sentiment."*

Henri Grégoire, known as l' Abbé Grégoire, advocated during the French Revolution for the emancipation of and access to citizenship for the Jews. But he said that Jews first had to be "regenerated". But at the same

time, according to him it was also necessary to combat the *"Talmudic reveries"* that constitute *"a cesspool in which are accumulated the delusions of the human mind"*. He urged others to break up the Jews' "burlesque" religious rites and traditions, which, according to him, are ultimately nothing but "trifles". Two centuries later, the same republican principles are invoked with regard to Muslims and especially Muslim women. They are at the same time constructed as others and summoned to become "similars", i.e. to erase their otherness. Through this assimilation policy, the nation state defines its own identity by drawing a border in relation to an Other that is deemed unassimilable (HAJJAT, 2012).

Meanwhile the specificity of Islam is completely ignored. By showing the historicity and the diversity of Islam as a "discursive tradition", the anthropologist Talal Asad highlighted the importance of practices. *"A tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history"* (ASAD 2009: 20). Muslims are "practitioners", not just believers individually reduced to their inner selves. Religion is not a *"transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon"* in spite of the *"Christian attempts to achieve a coherence in doctrines and practices, rules and regulations"* (ASAD 1993: 29). Religion, as separated from other practices, is a European concept imposed on the colonized people *"as a means of exercising Western cultural and political hegemony"* (MEZIANE 2021). So secularization is one of the faces of colonialization, and today of coloniality, as defined by the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano: the living legacy of colonialism in contemporary societies in the form of a social discrimination that outlived formal colonialism and became integrated in the succeeding social orders (QUIJANO 2000).

GENDER, SEXUALITY AND COLONIALITY

At this point, according to my own researches and writings, I'll try to complete Dr. El-Husseini's brilliant analysis by pointing out the role of coloniality in the current situation of Muslim women in France. Colonization is gendered. It is a typical masculine and masculinist enterprise. In the 19th century, the Orient (the Muslim world) was associated with the *"escapism of sexual fantasy"* and *"the freedom of licentious sex"* (SAID 2023). In fact, colonization has most often been accompanied by rape. But rape also appears as a fantasy as well as on a symbolic level, as colonization has often been

described as raping or penetrating a virgin, who is at first reluctant, but then so pleased to be possessed. The metaphorical figure of rape underlies the sentences used by some Orientalists to characterize their work. Commenting on a passage from a book by Raphael Patai, Edward Said writes: *"The Middle East is resistant, as any virgin would be, but the male scholar wins the prize by bursting open, penetrating through the Gordian knot, despite the 'taxing task'. 'Harmony' is the result of the conquest of maidenly coyness; it is not by any means the coexistence of equals"* (IBID.: 309).

All these sexual fantasies have exacerbated the desire for undressing and unveiling "Oriental" women. The brothel becomes a substitute for the harem, and French European males visiting Algeria at the beginning of the 20th century, sent postcards representing supposed *"almehs"* and *"bayaderes"*, revealing an intense preoccupation with the veiled female body (ALLOULA 1986). In his famous essay "L' Algérie se dévoile" (*Algeria Unveiled*) Frantz Fanon, as a psychiatrist and an activist, gives a powerful analysis of this male colonizer obsession. He emphasizes the ambivalence of the European men towards the Algerian women who veil their faces.

"A strand of hair, a bit of forehead […] strengthen the European's persistence in his irrational conviction that the Algerian woman is the queen of all women. But there is also in the European the crystallization of an aggressiveness, the strain of a kind of violence before the Algerian woman. Unveiling this woman is revealing her beauty; it is baring her secret, breaking her resistance, making her available for adventure. […] The European faced with an Algerian woman wants to see. He reacts in an aggressive way before this limitation of his perception. Frustration and aggressiveness, evolve apace. […] The rape of the Algerian woman in the dream of a European is always preceded by a rending of the veil. We here witness a double deflowering. Likewise, the woman's conduct is never one of consent or acceptance, but of abject humility" (FANON 1965: 43–44).

Fanon wrote this piece in 1959, after a classic campaign of Westernizing Algerian women that took place on May 16th 1958, where *"servants under the threat of being fired, poor women dragged from their homes, prostitutes, were brought to the public square, and symbolically unveiled to the cries of 'Vive l'Algérie française'"* (IBID.). The public unveiling of these Algerian women was presented as a recognition of the French domination of Algeria and Algeria being a French possession, and as the liberation of these Muslim

women from the Muslim patriarchy in which they were supposed to be imprisoned. At a time when Algerian women were struggling against colonization, some of them carrying weapons and being thrown in jail and tortured, they were exhibited as mere sex symbols.

As Marnia Lazreg asserts, the veil made not only men but also colonial women feel uncomfortable. It was the *"perfect alibi for rejecting the Algerian woman's culture and denigrating her"* (LAZREG 1994: 136). When she is in presence of an unveiled woman, the colonial woman exults *"in what she perceives as the triumph of her culture over that of the colonized"* (IBID.: 136). Unveiled Muslim women had to face remarks like "You see, if it were not for us, you would be wearing the veil just like your mother". Colonized women, and in particular Muslim women, could only be seen as passive victims who had to be not only rescued but freed from the native patriarchy which was supposed to imprison them. Their agency was completely denied.

One of Eugène Delacroix's (1798–1863) most famous paintings is *La liberté guidant le people*. Here freedom is represented as a half-naked woman, with both breast bare, waving the French flag. Delacroix also painted some Orientalist paintings that were beautiful indeed, where the depicted women were either naked like in some imaginary harem (*Odalisques*) or only very lightly clad (*Femmes d'Alger*), thus offering Oriental women's faces and bodies to the gaze of the European public. The contrast between these fantasies and the women colonizers met or could not meet was very deep. This colonial view or, better, colonial blindness persisted in the postcolonial era, when *"laïcité is primarily understood as sexual secularism, insofar it pertains to women and sexuality rather than the separation of church and state in schools, as was the case from the Third Republic until the 1980s"* (FASSIN 2010). It is expressed in particular in the widely shared conviction that Muslim women, as victims of Islamic oppression who are supposed to be sexually repressed (SCOTT 2018), cannot claim freedom of religion. They have to be liberated from the retrograde and archaic manifestations of their religion and, if possible, from their religion itself.

A NEW THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL ORDER

In August 2023, with the ban of the "abaya", the discourse changed completely. The question was no longer about women's rights or women's liberation,

but about the threat this piece of cloth worn by a small number of students (298 in September 2023) represented. Nobody could really define what the abaya is. Probably a long, possibly loose dress or jacket. But long dresses were in fashion then, and in one or two cases, girls with long dresses without sleeves were accused of wearing an abaya at school. Of course they were Muslims: their long fashionable dresses could only be abayas. However, some teenagers, uncomfortable with their bodies, simply wore loose clothes to hide their curves. These imprecisions have been the source of many conflicts within schools, with Muslim girls being the only targets.

However, the main question is why and how a minor phenomenon could unleash such a media and political storm. Olivier Véran, at that time a minister in the French government, declared that the abaya was a political attack on the republic. In an interview for the French radio channel France Inter on September 13th 2023, Édouard Philippe, another important right-wing politician, declared at the same moment that Islam could not be treated the same way as other religions. In his view, the 1905 law imposing *"laïcité"* should not apply to Islam. He added that one day the day will come when the state will force Islam to either organize or reform.

One needs to also understand the apparent consensus surrounding the ban of the abaya, as if all types of controversy or debate have been forbidden. And in fact all forms of public debates were replaced by an anathema (I intentionally use the religious word "anathema") against all those who may wish to sustain another opinion or initiate a rational discussion. This strategy was, and still is, aimed to disqualify political opponents, and exclude them from the political community similarly to how, formerly, one could be excluded from the religious and social community (excommunication). But moreover it appears as a symptom of a collapsing democracy, as dissensus and debate are fundamental for the democratic principle (RANCIÈRE 2005).

In place of the political order, we see the imposition of a new theological political order based on the "republican" civil religion, which is limited to the national community while defining it. Islamic dress proclaims that those who wear it refuse to form an alliance with the rest of the French society, *"which makes it impossible for Muslims to fully integrate into a non-Muslim society"*, states the sociologist Philippe d'Iribarne in an

OpEd published in *Le Monde* on August 18th 2016. Thus there is no longer a border between the political realm and this new religion. Regardless of freedom of religion, a sacralized state with a heavy colonial past seeks to take control of Muslim women's bodies, using symbolic and sometimes physical violence against them. As most convincingly demonstrated by Dr. El-Husseini in her outstanding paper, when it comes to Muslim women, France, as a secular state, uses gender washing and double standards. My few remarks intended to show that this hypocritical policy contains a legacy of colonial times, and the imposition, behind secularity, of a new authoritarian religion and a new theological political order which excludes diversity.

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Power, Institutionalisation, and Religion: Gender-Washing as a Tool of Autocratic Control

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ABSTRACT   This article reflects on Rola El-Husseini's critique of the Western double standards concerning women's rights and religious freedom in her work "Double Standards and Dissonance: Women's Rights and Freedom of Religion in the Global North." It expands on the concept of "gender-washing," illustrating how both left- and right-wing authoritarian regimes exploit gender equality rhetoric for political gains without genuine efforts toward equality. Through examples from Czechoslovakia and contemporary India, the article explores how different ideologies – from Marxism-Leninism to religious nationalism – use women's rights as a façade while maintaining autocratic control. It also engages with postcolonial feminist critiques of Western universalism.

INTRODUCTION

In her article "Double Standards and Dissonance: Women's Rights and Freedom of Religion in the Global North", Rola El-Husseini articulates the following main theses: First, the adoption of affirmations like quotas in politics for the representation of women may not necessarily reflect a genuine effort to reach gender equality but may just formally pretend it, and rather use or misuse this agenda as an alibi to create an image of a focus on human rights and even to cover the autocratic character of particular regimes. Second, the author applies a post-colonial critique to disclose the double standards and hypocrisy of the so-called West (meaning here, more specifically, the U.S. and also the EU, particularly France, which is mentioned briefly) in its criticism of discrimination of women in the countries of the global South and/or from other religious and cultural backgrounds, while not reflecting upon gender inequalities in their own countries.

The aim of this commentary is to develop the concept of gender washing on more examples, emphasizing the perspective of autocracy as a global phenomenon not bound with a particular ideology – it can be declaratively right wing or left wing, religious or atheist. That's why this text refers in its first part to autocratic regimes of state socialism (focusing on Czechoslovakia) and then also briefly points to parliamentary regimes of South Asia (particularly contemporary India), where a significant rise of autocratic tendencies based on religious nationalism can be noticed. The second emphasis of this text touches upon the on-going discussions on the cultural relativist critique, which also resounds in El-Husseini's article. I try to distinguish between the "double standard" approach of European or American critics who focus on encroaching on human rights in other countries besides their own – on that point I am in full agreement with El-Husseini – and the question of whether a critique of violations of human rights anywhere can be justified if coming from a different cultural background. I do not claim to give a solution to that complex issue, but just find it important to mention that dilemma in this context.

As an example of the first case, characterised in the article as "autocratic gender washing"[1], the text mentions the recent changes in Saudi Arabia in the area of women's rights. It rightfully points out that mere quantitative changes do not guarantee actual gender equality. They rather

serve as an alibi for autocratic regimes or politics of religious nationalism. Such regimes could thus, to some extent, successfully pretend a change in their attitude to human rights and turn international attention away from their otherwise oppressive politics. Examples of this lip service to the idea of human rights could be found in various types of autocratic regimes or ideologies. The one-party systems (though some of them were or are formally multi-party) of state socialism in China or the satellites of the Soviet Union in the second half of the 20ᵗʰ century could be brought up as particularly eloquent examples of this.

FEMINISM IN AUTHORITARIAN CZECHOSLOVAK STATE SOCIALISM

Czech feminist scholars, especially Hana Havelková, coined a very fitting term for using the discourse of women's emancipation as this type of alibi cover in Czechoslovakia between the communist putsch in 1948 and the fall of the totalitarian regime in 1989 – the expropriated voice (SEE HAVELKOVÁ – OATES-INDRUCHOVÁ 2015). While feminism was successfully developing in Czechoslovakia as a movement within the civic society between the two world wars, its spontaneous development from below was suppressed after 1948. The topic of female emancipation was expropriated by the official political rhetoric of class struggle, one of its symbols being the socialist woman-builder, or rather super-woman, for whom the labour market became open. However, that was not a matter of free choice. The socialist woman, like every citizen in state socialism, had to be an employee of the state or otherwise would have faced legal punishment. Also, an important insight into gender relations and their specifics during that period was introduced by Jiřina Šiklová, who was articulating and developing feminist issues and ideas in the Czechoslovak dissent (SEE ŠIKLOVÁ 2016).

Moreover, feminists of the post-communist countries in the 1990s articulated the concept of the double burden – the workload at one's job and the unpaid labour for one's family and household, which remained on the shoulders of women (SEE, E.G., ŠIKLOVÁ 1998).

Last but not least, women in the state socialist countries did not break the "glass ceiling" to reach the most lucrative and powerful positions in politics and the economy (which were closely interconnected) either.

So for these authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, emancipation and the rights of women were rather just one of the political slogans for covering up their undemocratic character. This hypocrisy was not connected with religion in politics, as in the example used in El-Husseini's article, but with a particular type of Marxist-Leninist ideology which endorsed atheism. Autocratic gender washing can be used or misused by religion if politicized as an ideology or by other ideologies supporting an autocratic political power, no matter if the regime declares itself to be right-wing or left-wing.

So as El-Husseini maintains, *"policies or rhetoric that appear positive on the surface may simply be a way for regimes to consolidate and justify their control of society"* (EL-HUSSEINI 2024: 5). This can also be found in countries with democratic regimes where, however, there are strong discussions about the danger of autocratic tendencies. One such example can be India under the BJP government, i.e. a party following the ideology of Hindu nationalism.

In many ways, India cannot be treated as a parallel to the other discussed examples, as India has never become an autocratic state, and though Hindu nationalism has been the ideology of the government party since 2014, the political system has remained democratic. Hindu nationalism has been criticized by Indian feminists as androcentric and as supporting gender hierarchy (CF. E.G. BACCHETA 2004, MUKHERJEE 1999). Despite some internal discussions on the issue, some authors who declare themselves feminists (though for others, they represent a "conservative" form of feminism) also emphasize that some interpretations of the key classical Hindu ethical codexes (*dharmashastras*) like the *Manavadharmashastra* and *Manu's Laws*, are actually misinterpretations and should be analyzed carefully to avoid critical interpretations on purpose (CF. PADIA 2002). So Padia, who presents herself as a feminist, is rather careful in discussing the radical criticism of these traditional scriptures by some Indian feminist theorists (e.g. Prabhati Mukherjee), and compared to them, her standpoint is, to some extent, apologetic. This example, however, is about a religious ideology, and not so much about autocratic political praxis.

POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE OF DOUBLE STANDARDS

The main critical concept of El-Husseini's text lies in her identification of double standards in the (so-called) West's approach to religious freedoms

and women's rights, both within its own countries and in the Global South. El-Husseini is right in pointing to the campaigns using Christian fundamentalist or nationalist rhetoric against abortion, or even contraception, not only in some states of the U.S. (we could add Nicaragua, Ireland till 2020 or Poland under the last conservative government as cases of this), whose participants are mainly conservative Catholics. Still, these advocates of restriction of women's rights in their own societies often sharply criticize violations of women's rights in countries of the global South, especially in particular Muslim countries.

Regarding veiling in Muslim countries, the critique obviously corresponds to Chandra Talpade Mohanty's famous essay "Under Western Eyes" (MOHANTY 2003/1984). Building on Said's concept of Orientalism as a colonial discourse, she enriches it with a gender aspect. Mohanty criticizes the simplified generalizations which occur when one comments on phenomena from different cultural backgrounds, while ignoring the local contexts and universalizing interpretations which are not, in fact, universal but West-centric. She also accuses many European and American feminists of a colonial approach when they construct the general category of 'third world women' as oppressed victims of patriarchy, while not specifying what type of patriarchy they speak about. Mohanty maintains that there is no 'universal' patriarchy. Rather, it must always be described and analysed in a particular context.

These discussions go back to the tensions between universalism and cultural relativism. However, the feminist standpoint within them may not always be one-sided and unequivocal. For postcolonial feminism, the position of cultural relativism may be closer, as postcolonial feminists primarily criticize Western-centric universalism. On the other hand, feminist critics of cultural relativism like Susan Moller Okin (SEE OKIN 1997, 1998) openly support promoting human rights and the cultural rights of minorities. In this respect, she emphasizes that if we gave up on calling out discrimination in cultures other than our own, it would mean the practical impossibility of anti-discriminatory political movements across state borders.

This, however, is clearly not what El-Husseini means. She focuses on the hypocrisy of some European and US human rights commentators, speaking about *"double standards of judgement that the West applies to 'pariah*

states' such as Iran vs. 'good states' such as France[, which] is a common topic of derision in social media discourse". She further states, *"It would benefit advocates in the West to attend more to their own laws and societies in this regard before lecturing others..."* (P. 11).

This line of critiquing is heavily represented in much of the critical postcolonial literature on European governments' approaches to their domestic Muslim communities too (BEHIERY 2013). The increasingly frequent banning of religious garments in schools and other public institutions is a case in point here. The decisions of women and girl students to veil themselves are often understood in the governmental justifications as a symbol of their forced indoctrination rather than their own conscious decisions (SYED – PIO 2010). Understandably, El-Husseini and other postcolonial authors perceive this as *"instrumentalizing women's rights"* (p. 1) – a colonial practice of state interference in cultural and family matters that prevents Muslim women from exercising their free will (SEE ALSO MARTINO – REZAI-RASHTI 2008). Yet the question of whether the decision to veil oneself is a question of free will is not as straightforward as it may seem.

Indeed, El-Husseini and other critical postcolonial authors correctly point out that the secular state increasingly interferes in religious and cultural affairs previously governed by churches – a practice that has been targeted not only towards Islam but towards other religions as well (KRATOCHVÍL 2023). But is veiling a free, conscious decision by Muslim girls and women, or is it a historically and culturally derived dictate perpetuated by a patriarchal society and patriarchal family structures? And who bears the costs of breaking the increasingly tight anti-religious laws across Europe – does it not primarily fall on those most vulnerable, who are caught between the grinding mills of family education, social customs and governmental prerogatives? (GOLNARAGHI – DYE 2016) Indeed, this is a complex discussion and there are no easy answers. Yet, the discussion which El-Husseini raises hits at the core of the problem and requires further input.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the basic ideas about religion and its institutionalization. El-Husseini (p. 2) correctly argues that the West's *"locus of rationality, enlightenment and moral authority is manifest in its treatment of women's rights and religious rights."* Yet, I believe that institutionalization by any types of power (religious or other) plays a large

part in defining how it is used and to what extent it supports or suppresses human rights. Religion may be institutionalized as a state doctrine and political ideology, and as such, it is very close to becoming oppressive, no matter in which part of the world it works. It can be institutionalized as a community doctrine, which can also be oppressive (let's just remember the history of authoritarian sects and their criminal leaders – e.g. Nexium in the U.S.A., where women were kept as sexual slaves, or Aum Shinrikyo in Japan, which committed a terrorist attack in the Tokyo underground.) (SEE MURPHY 2011). Here, El-Husseini's criticism is fit and apt.

But religion can also be supportive or dissident – and the Eastern European experience with communism has shown us what role various church communities can play in the struggle against oppression (URSU 2024). Religion may also be understood as a belief or, more broadly, a spiritual journey – it is individual or social when its role is positive and should be respected. These cases can be more or less found within nearly all the religious systems. There are feminist and progressive streams of religion which highlight ideas of equality, justice and loving solidarity in various religions, no matter if it is Hinduism (PADIA 2022), Buddhism (GROSS 1993), Islam (HASSAN 2001), Judaism (PLASKOW 2005), or Christianity (SÖLLE 1997). These examples show that religion, in its very substance, is non-patriarchal, non-discriminatory and emancipated from any type of inequality or violence. And yet, this does not mean that El-Husseini's words are wrong. To the contrary, it only makes the double standards of Western governments ever more visible.

ENDNOTES

1   *"The emerging norms around using women's rights to justify political and military power allowed these autocratic Arab regimes to similarly 'weaponize' rights rhetoric to support their continued rule. This is a form of what the French scholar Amelie Le Renard has called 'women's rights washing' and what the Swedish scholars Pär Zetterberg and Elin Bjarnegård have described as 'autocratic gender-washing.' Its primary goal was to encourage Western powers, donor organizations, and domestic progressives to believe that continued autocracy was in the citizens' best interest."* See El-Husseini, p. 2.

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Freedom of Religion and Freedom from Religion in the Context of Contemporary Anti-Gender Politics

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ABSTRACT | In the contemporary world, the topic of women's rights has often been employed and manipulated in debates on religious freedom. In her article Rola El-Husseini shows that whereas Western politicians have promoted liberal values, including religious freedom, internationally, they have rarely upheld these principles domestically. Often, these values have been applied selectively, leaving Muslim communities – especially Muslim women – without the protections usually afforded by liberal democracy. This contribution discusses how opposition to women's rights unfolds in contemporary Poland, where the Catholic Church has been instrumental in opposing women's and minority rights. In the conclusion, it poses the question of whether we truly need more freedom of religion, or whether maybe what we should strive for is more freedom from religion and a firmer division between the state and the church, indiscriminately of what type of church or religious belief this may be. Such a perspective is rooted in the recognition that so far every religion has contributed to infringing women's rights, and establishing and reinforcing social hierarchies.

INTRODUCTION

In her illuminating text Dr. Rola El-Husseini shows how the issue of women's rights is being used and abused in contemporary debates on religious freedom by various political regimes, including both autocratic theocracies such as Iran and liberal democracies such as France or the US. She contends that while Western politicians are quick to advocate for liberal values on the global stage, they fail to apply these principles consistently within their own countries. More specifically, they implement them selectively, often excluding Muslim communities, and particularly Muslim women, from the protections typically provided by liberal democracy. Moreover, the comparison between specific countries, such as Iran and the US, suggests that liberal regimes do not always offer more protections for discriminated groups: whereas trans rights have become a staple of American culture wars and some states have severely restricted access to trans health care, in Iran medical transition is available for persons experiencing gender dysphoria, even though trans persons still face discrimination in the country.

According to El-Husseini the falseness of the West's claim to be the center of rationality, enlightenment, and moral superiority is starkly exposed in its handling of women's rights and religious freedoms. The double standards and hypocrisy in the treatment of these issues in countries such as France or Germany are clearly visible as the regulations aimed at "protecting" vulnerable women frequently serve as a thin veil for racism and Islamophobia. In these contexts, women's rights and religious freedom are often weaponized to criticize non-Western societies, casting them as deviations from Western norms. The scholar cautions that such hypocritical actions not only alienate migrants and Muslim communities in Western countries but also fuel cynicism and distrust toward the West and liberal democracy among populations in the Global South.

El-Husseini's argument aligns with a broader body of literature discussing how, in recent decades, the concept of women's rights has been politicized and used to serve the interests of those in power (E.G. FARRIS 2017; SAGER – MOULINARI 2018; STOLTZ ET AL. 2021). As gender equality and women's rights have gradually (and often reluctantly) been acknowledged as essential components of a well-functioning democratic system, politicians are increasingly eager to present themselves as defenders of women. And more often than not they are happy to pay lip service to liberal values and group rights

without acting on them in any meaningful way. The initial results of our Horizon Europe project Co-Creating Inclusive Intersectional Democratic Spaces Across Europe (CCINDLE), which includes seven European contexts, among them Sweden, Belgium, Spain and the UK, confirm the arguments put forward by El-Husseini (KARLBERG ET AL. 2024). In the Swedish context, there is a growing tendency among the right to use femonationalist arguments, and a trend toward co-opting feminist rhetoric to promote xenophobic and anti-immigrant agendas is clearly visible. Right-wing politicians, such as representatives of the Sweden Democrats, readily employ the concept of gender equality as a "Swedish value" to oppose intersectional feminism and promote racist and xenophobic ideologies. They instrumentalize women's rights and gender equality to justify policies and discourses that marginalize Muslim and immigrant communities, casting men as a threat to the society and women as victims in need of being saved and monitored (E.G. MULINARI 2016). Within this context religious freedom and, indeed, human rights are marginalized and readily sacrificed in the name of "security" without encountering much societal resistance.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND RELIGION IN THE "SECOND WORLD": THE CASE OF POLAND

As someone from the "Second World" – namely from a post-socialist country perpetually striving to catch up with the West – I need no convincing that representatives of well-developed Western European democracies often harbor a sense of superiority towards the rest of the world. This feeling of superiority is also evident among certain groups of Western feminists and advocates of women's rights. Moreover, double standards and hypocrisy are not uncommon among politicians, no matter their political affiliations, and in recent decades the issue of women's rights has become a convenient vehicle for virtue signaling and lecturing countries that "lag behind." Simultaneously, my geopolitical positionality raises questions as to where post-socialist and post-Soviet countries are located in this debate: are we part of the West, as our economic development and membership in the European Union would suggest? Or are we closer to the authoritarian regimes in the Global South? Between 2016 and 2023 Poland was the fastest autocratizing country in Europe: the then ruling right-wing coalition managed to take over the public media, effectively dismantled the independent judiciary and seized control over large parts of civil society (E.G. BILL 2020; SZULEKA 2017).

When it comes to reproductive and minority rights, my country falls behind all the countries discussed by El-Husseini, including Iran. Poland has minimal protection for trans persons, and never introduced marriage equality or legislation allowing civil partnerships for LGBTQ couples. As of 2020, Polish women have lost the right to abortion in cases of severe fetal malformation, which was previously one of the three exceptions to the country's strict abortion ban (apart from rape and danger to the mother's life). The ongoing harassment of LGBTQ persons and the further tightening of the corresponding law in 2020 reflect the enduring political influence of the Catholic Church in Poland. Representatives of the Church have consistently advocated for more restrictive reproductive regulations, arguing that God's teachings should take precedence over democratic decision-making processes. In 2023 the chairman of the Polish Bishops' Conference, Stanisław Gądecki, declared that *"in the case of intrinsically unjust laws, such as those permitting abortion and euthanasia, one must never comply with them, nor participate in shaping public opinion favorable to such laws, nor express support for them in voting"* (GĄDECKI 2024). While the Polish Catholic Church is often credited with contributing to the process of democratization in the 1980s, after the transition its representatives have claimed that individual rights and women's rights, and indeed the democratic process of deliberation, endanger the country's Catholic identity and values (MISHTAL 2015).

Thus, while I fully agree with the author's analysis of how women's rights and gender equality have been appropriated by political forces in Western countries, I have concerns about some of the assumptions that underpin her argument. Framing religious rights in terms of individual women's freedom to worship, dress, and live as they choose works well in the text as a strategy to highlight the double standards in enforcing personal freedoms in many Western nations, such as France. However, religious freedom is never solely about an individual's right to choose, is it? The deep connections between religion – as a system of beliefs and religious institutions – and political authority make it impossible to separate personal beliefs from issues of identity, belonging, and power. While the nature of the connection between the state and the church differs between Iran and Poland or the US, it still dictates how women can exercise their freedoms in each of these countries.

The Polish case also shows that the political influence of a specific religious authority is not just an expression of people's religious beliefs. As the moral authority of the Catholic Church wanes, especially among the young generation of Poles, its political influence remains relatively strong due to the conservative views of a part of the political elites and the enormous resources that the Church has access to, including its own media outlets, civil society organizations and charity initiatives. Moreover, as shown by El-Husseini, even in France, which prides itself on the separation between the church and state, the famous *"laïcité"* can be interpreted as a form of Christian hegemony, and thus the country should be rather seen as a *"Catho-laïque"* regime enforcing a specific cultural and religious identity and establishing a clear hierarchy between different religious traditions. In other words, freedom of religion is not personal but political and should be analyzed as such.

RELIGION AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE ERA OF ANTI-GENDER POLITICS

Keeping this in mind is even more crucial today, as we witness a global reversal of the long-standing trend of secularization. Secularization, characterized by the decline of religious influence and practice, reduced religious affiliation, and the diminished role of religious institutions in public and political life, has shaped many societies over the past decades. While it is often linked to Western countries, where secular values, scientific reasoning, and individualism gained prominence, this process also occurred in Central and Eastern Europe, former Soviet states, and various nations across the Global South. In recent years, however, we can observe a tendency to reinstate the political power of religious institutions in many countries across the globe, including Brazil, India, Israel, Poland and the US. The Brazilian activists and scholars Petra Costa and Alessandra Orofino (2024) observe that in order to understand the crisis of democracy that we witness in so many different contexts, including the Brazilian one, we need to account for the growing power of religious groups that seek to establish theocratic regimes ruled by fundamentalists. These groups are the key actors within the global anti-gender movement, which includes religious fundamentalists, ultraconservative civil society activists and right-wing politicians who oppose the very idea that gender is socially constructed and malleable, and challenge women's and minority rights, marriage equality, trans rights and gender studies.

Depending on the context, anti-gender actors may be openly anti-feminist – like the Polish right-wing politicians – or claim that they are the true defenders of women against racialized immigrant men and gender ideologues, as is the case in Sweden. As I argue together with Agnieszka Graff in our book *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment* (2022), the political influence of ultraconservative xenophobic forces is growing globally because of the opportunistic synergy between religious fundamentalists and right-wing populist parties. While these actors might disagree on other issues, they align on their resistance to changes in traditional gender norms and sexual freedoms, seeing them as a threat to their respective cultural, political, or religious interests. Religious authorities join forces with populist political leaders who use anti-gender rhetoric to gain votes from traditionalist segments of society and also to strengthen the moral division between the corrupt elites and the people. Simultaneously, far-right nationalists readily adopt the language of "protecting the family" and the traditional gender order to appeal to religious or socially conservative voters more broadly because such language serves well their primary goals, which focus on anti-immigration policies.

Moreover, in Central Eastern Europe and the Global South, anti-gender actors routinely demonize women's rights as "foreign" and "alien" to the local tradition and promote the view that gender equality and minority rights are a form of Western colonialism, an "Ebola from Brussels" imported to Central Eastern Europe or Africa to manipulate, brainwash and ultimately control the people (KOROLCZUK – GRAFF 2018). To this end they readily silence local feminist voices and obliterate feminist histories of opposition and emancipation. Thus, while we rightly criticize the West for its hypocrisy and double standards, we should also acknowledge that the wave of critique of the West that El-Husseini observes, comes from both: the disillusioned populations of the Global South and East, and the right-wing actors who happily fuel this frustration and disillusion.

We live in a world where the pressure from religious institutions on individuals to conform to specific norms and behaviors is, in many contexts, growing rather than dissipating. People seldom enter religious communities on their own accord as adults; the vast majority of us are born into them and usually there are penalties for leaving. Whether these penalties are relatively insignificant, such as enduring the scorn from family

members during Christmas dinners, or severe, such as having our health or life endangered, freedom of religion can be achieved only if there is a viable option of choosing to leave it. While El-Husseini rightly highlights that Western observers often view Muslims, particularly Muslim women, as passive victims of oppression rather than active agents, we should not overlook the broader question of how modern states can simultaneously uphold both freedom of religion and freedom from religion.

In her text El-Husseini references the UN Declaration of Human Rights, stressing that religious freedom is *"the fundamental human right of everyone to worship, practice, and observe their religious beliefs, so long as those practices do not infringe on the rights of others"* (emphasis mine). Ideally, it should be understood by all that freedom of religion does not include the right to limit the freedom of others. In reality, however, the representatives of the Polish Catholic Church are deeply convinced that only a total ban on abortion will secure full religious freedom for Catholics in the country. Similarly, American evangelicals and Iranian ayatollahs firmly believe that recognizing women's rights or LGBTQ rights infringes upon their own religious freedoms. As shown by El-Husseini, neither democratic institutions nor liberal traditions have managed to fully eliminate the tendency to use religion as a basis for inciting discrimination and violence. In Western countries such as France, the separation of the state and the church is still underpinned and heavily influenced by the legacy of Christian domination. With this in mind, one may ask a question: whether we truly need more freedom of religion, or whether maybe what we should strive for is more freedom from religion and a firmer division between the state and the church, indiscriminately of what type of church or religious belief this may be – not in the name of *"laïcité"* or a naïve universalism, but out of the recognition that, in practice, so far every religion has contributed to infringing the rights of certain groups, and to establishing and reinforcing social hierarchies.

P.S.

In 2022, I was invited to take part in a theater production titled *Radio Mariia*, which was co-written and directed by the renowned Ukrainian theater director and performance artist Roza Sarkisian. My role involved portraying myself – a Polish sociologist and feminist activist – ín a future

scenario set in 2035, where I gave an interview discussing how the Catholic Church in Poland had lost its status as a political institution and moral authority. Since this vision is still far from reality, I had no script for my role; I had to envision a future without the Catholic Church, a cornerstone of Polish history and identity for centuries. Growing up in a working-class, deeply Catholic family in rural northeastern Poland, I saw firsthand how religion can serve as both a profound source of hope and a cause of despair and constraints for women. Thus, my task proved to be an exercise that was both terrifying and exhilarating: I was encouraged to imagine a world where women were liberated from religious authority and where people could explore diverse forms of community and spirituality beyond the strict confines of Catholicism. The play turned out to be one of the longest played productions in the recent history of the theater. Apparently, many Poles shared our desire to imagine a future without the Catholic Church.

I wanted to finish my short commentary with a personal story because, as a feminist scholar and activist, I strongly believe that recognizing and articulating our positionality promotes dialogue and enhances the understanding of our perspectives. I am confident that my views are grounded in established scientific knowledge, and my research and analytical skills, yet I also acknowledge that my background, experiences, and ideals shaped my stance on the issues at hand. My knowledge and my personal experience have taught me that the terms "freedom" and "religion" seldom go well together because they often represent conflicting values and interests, especially when religion plays a significant role in public life or politics in a specific country or region. And when you add "women's rights" to the mix, it becomes even more problematic, as many feminist scholars and activists have already shown. On an individual level, most systems of belief have established moral codes and doctrines that followers are expected to adhere to, as these dictate what behaviors, lifestyles, or expressions are (not) acceptable. On the collective level, religious systems are usually structured around authority figures or texts that demand adherence to specific beliefs and practices, leaving little space for freedom and dissent. And in most contexts women bear the brunt of these restrictions.

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Book Forum on Hans Kundnani's Eurowhiteness: Culture, Empire and Race in the European Project

Book Forum on Hans Kundnani's Eurowhiteness: Culture, Empire and Race in the European Project

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ABSTRACT	This book forum discusses Hans Kundnani's pivotal book on "Eurowhiteness" and the role of race in the EU integration project. It includes three reactions from Stefan Auer, Pavel Barša, and Agnes Gagyi, along with Kundnani's response. *Eurowhiteness* skillfully reveals what has been obscured by the European Union as a vehicle of "imperial amnesia". The three reactions and the author's response continue a polemical discussion on this imperial amnesia, as viewed through different intellectual traditions and regions, including Central and Eastern Europe and anti-colonial perspectives. As a result, the forum uses the book to either deepen the debate on the EU's civilizationism with new perspectives or expand the *Eurowhiteness* narrative with new geo-historical contexts and connections. Issues of Russian imperialism in Ukraine, the Israeli war in Gaza, and the economic dimensions of European coloniality are brought to the foreground, particularly when viewed through the imagination and reality of Central (and Eastern) Europe.

Editorial

DANIEL ŠITERA

Hans Kundnani (2023) has written an excellent book. His *Eurowhiteness: Culture, Empire and Race in the European Project* brings two important contributions to the debate on the EU and whiteness, the one being a style and the other being a social experiment. First, the book provides a bridge from an increasingly prominent but still academic debate on the whiteness in and of EUrope to broader non-academic audiences. The critique of (Euro)whiteness and racism has been already developed and applied in the academic debate. However, Kundnani's accessible grasp and insightful elaboration of these discussions deliver the argument to wider audiences beyond university classrooms and academic conferences. Second, the book and its well-received status among the "European mainstream" are also a social experiment. Kundnani admits in the biographical introduction that he himself used to be a naïve "pro-European" who had apparently moved to the margins of this mainstream in search of becoming its intellectual *enfant terrible*. There is thus a grain of truth in that his book is a product of "Anglo-American hegemony" (BEJAN 2024) or "anti-imperialism of the centre" (LACZÓ 2024). The fact that this centre is at least partially ready to acknowledge and even appreciate Kundnani's critique of Europe's civilizational turn shows a new *zeitgeist*. The times are changing as the mainstream crumbles and the margins are ready to speak inside and outside of Europe, for better or worse.

This forum is also an experiment on or from Europe's (semi)margins. It consists of three reactions by Stefan Auer, Pavel Barša, and Agnes Gagyi, as well as of Kundnani's response. The recent forum in the CEU Review of Books (BEJAN 2024; LACZÓ 2024; KUNDNANI 2024A) manifested that the Central and East European reception of Kundnani's grasp of the region might easily put him into the category of *Westsplaining*. Even though Kundnani himself is using a decolonial perspective, this forum might ironically encounter a critique of reproducing *"epistemic imperialism"* (HENDL ET AL. 2024) from the very same perspective, simply because it gives space to a book written by a West-born and -based and left-leaning author. Indeed, Kundnani responded to his Central and Eastern European critics by pointing to the lure of *"innocence"* in the region (KUNDNANI 2024A). It is worth it to take the risk.

This lure of *"innocence"* (SLAČÁLEK 2016: 34, 38) is not new in this region and has problematized applying anti-colonial (postcolonial or decolonial, broadly speaking) perspectives there. Thanks to Auer, Barša, and Gagyi's contributions, such forum touches on both the region of Central Europe or Central and Eastern Europe, and this anti-colonial intellectual traditions.

Kundnani's Eurowhiteness skillfully makes us see again what has been unseen by the EU as a vehicle of Europe's *"imperial amnesia"* (p. 95). The three reactions continue in this mission through either a polemical critiquing of the book or by using it to deepen or broaden its interpretation of the place of Central (and Eastern) Europe in Europe's imperial amnesia. Auer challenges Kundnani by pointing out that he might both idealize the *"non-West"* and overestimate the internal sources of the EU's defensive civilizationism, particularly by underestimating the very real *"Russian imperial amnesia"*. Auer brings in the Central and East European experience as a reminder of Russia's imperial ambitions in Ukraine and beyond. Barša continues in discussing this experience by pointing to Central and Eastern Europe's very own *"reductive memory"*. Among other things, this reductive memory explains why Czech elites can openly support the Western complicity in the Israeli war in Gaza. Finally, Gagyi challenges Kundnani's interpretation by seeing it as a *"coloniality without capitalism"* which neglects the capitalist dimension of European internal and external coloniality. According to her, Kundnani thus fails to take the full implications of the anti-colonial intellectual traditions for his own critique on paper and for the EU in practice. In the concluding part, Kundnani polemically responds to all three reactions and the issues raised.

The Empire That Never Was:
The European Project and Its Limitations

STEFAN AUER

The West is not the best. But the fact that the West has thought of itself as being the best is a liability that it seems unable to overcome. Europe is particularly bad in this respect, Hans Kundnani argues. The more Europe congratulates itself on leaving its dark legacies behind, the more it per-petuates past mistakes, the biggest one being a racialised ordering of the world in which 'whites' are superior and must guide those who are deemed less accomplished. The West is thus destined to lead the rest; that is its historical mission. The red thread that runs through *"the history of the idea of Europe from ancient Greece to World War II"*, in Kundnani's succinct historical survey, *"is a sense of superiority and a concomitant impulse to 'civ-ilise' the rest of the world, which evolved from a religious mission in the medie-val period to a rationalist, racialised mission in the modern period"* (p. 42). So far, so good. The truly controversial claim Kundnani advances, however, is that the postwar European project does not represent a radically new departure from this awful past, but its logical continuation. Rather than creating a better world, he argues, the EU *"had become a vehicle for imperial amnesia"* (p. 95) enabling Europeans to ignore their dark legacies. Thus "pro-Europeans" who are in favour of European integration display a ne-ocolonial mindset when they predict that Europe will *"run the twenty-first century"* (LEONARD 2005). Imagining Europe as *"the laboratory of the future"* and a model for the world is nothing more than *"a new, somewhat technocratic version of the old idea of Europeanising the world"* (p. 97). And the idea that the European Union represents a new kind of power, a *"civilian power"* (p. 120) that would *"'civilise' international politics"* (p. 124), has blinded EU proponents to seeing Europe's many past and current failings.

Eurowhiteness is a truly iconoclastic study that challenges well-en-trenched misconceptions about EU origins and the purpose of the European project. Kundnani is in an excellent position to mount his critique. As he explains in the introduction, more than a decade ago, when working at the European Council on Foreign Relations, he too considered himself

a "pro-European", assuming *"that the EU was a force for good, both internally within Europe and in the world beyond"* (p. 2). However, the more the author learned about the EU the less he liked it, defying the common assumption that the problems with growing euroscepticism can be addressed by spreading better knowledge about this noble political project. Instead, what we appear to observe is the rise of *"Eurodisappointment"* (MARKOWSKI – ZAGÓRSKI 2023; PAVONE 2024). Thus, Kundnani's is a major contribution to the growing number of studies making *"the left case against the EU"* (LAPAVITSAS 2019). But while the likes of Chris Bickerton (2016), Costas Lapavitsas (2019), Claus Offe (2015), or Wolfgang Streeck (2021) tend to focus on the EU's failure to live up to its promise of building a social Europe, Kundnani's critique is in many ways more fundamental as it raises questions about the key aims of European integration.

THE WEST AND ITS WESTERN CRITICS

EU proponents mistake Europe for the world and assume that they are worldly simply by virtue of being European. Not so, argues Kundnani, pointing out that the European project should be thought of *"as being analogous to nationalism"* (p. 15), just at a bigger, regional level. And like nationalism, such an expression of regionalism can be good, or bad, progressive, or reactionary. There is no second guessing where Kundnani locates the EU we currently have. It is basically racist, aiming at defending Europe's privileged position in the world, rather than pursuing the goals of global justice it proudly claims to represent. While in its early stages the project aimed to protect the imperial possessions of its founding members, such as France and Belgium, today it claims to protect *"the European way of life"*. Both are defensive postures towards the outside world, which ought to be dominated, or if that's no longer possible, against which Europeans need to be protected. Thus, the guiding principle developed already in the interwar period was that *"Europeans must unite in order to recover their dominant position in the world or at least prevent their further decline"* (p. 63).

Insular in their outlook, "pro-Europeans" fail to see the lasting impact of these legacies, considering instead Brexit with its emphasis on *"Global Britain"* as a neo-imperial project. This is because *"the colonial origins of the EU"* – what Kundnani calls its original sin – *"have been written out of the narrative of European integration"* (p. 75). In a nuanced discussion

of the varieties of motives that led to Britain's departure from the EU, Kundnani convincingly demonstrates that for many ethnic minority voters, their support for Brexit wasn't *"an expression of racism but its opposite – a rejection of a bloc that they saw as racist"* (p. 154). And while Kundnani is willing to sketch his vision for a better, post-Brexit Britain, one that would be more at ease with its multicultural and multiracial composition and even more open to newcomers from the outside world, his vision for a better Europe remains sketchy. This is partly because a more thorough engagement with Europe's imperial histories would have centrifugal effects, he argues, pulling the nations of Europe apart from each other rather than strengthening their unity.

And yet, Europe's imperial past – including its nasty, violent excesses – is also a common inheritance. Kundnani traces it back to the Enlightenment. As he puts it, *"the Enlightenment was not a separate intellectual tradition, unrelated to the history of European colonialism from which the idea of whiteness emerged. Rather, the two went together. The colonial project was bound up with precisely the same Enlightenment thought that 'pro-Europeans' claim differentiates the EU from pre-World War II versions of European identity"* (p. 53).

To be sure, Kundnani does not want to suggest that there is nothing valuable to be found in the Enlightenment, but as he goes on demolishing its key contributors, it is not clear what is left that he would subscribe to. For example, Immanuel Kant is rightly criticised for his lecture *"Von den verschiedenen Racen der Menschen"* (On the Different Races of Human Beings), but I do not see how this, per se, invalidates his cosmopolitan ideals. As Kundnani also acknowledges, there were different strands of the Enlightenment and some of them undoubtedly enabled human progress. In other words, the Enlightenment also contained the ideals which helped Europe to overcome its own limitations. Maybe this was not done as successfully and comprehensively as "pro-Europeans" would have us believe, but there surely has been some progress in relation to racism, for example. Similarly, slavery and colonialism were indeed all too often pursued in the name of the Enlightenment, but thinkers and politicians doing so betrayed the enlightened ideals of equality and freedom rather than acting on them. Thus, when Kant sought to advance racist ideas, he betrayed Kantian ideals, exposing his personal limitations rather than the inherent wickedness of his political and philosophical project. By contrast, when

contemporary ideologues of Vladimir Putin's Russia, such as Alexander Dugin, argue that Russians should rule over Ukrainians and enforce that rule by violent means (AUER 2015), they live up to their chauvinistic ideals, which seek to unmake Europe as a cosmopolitan project.

Ironically, Kundnani's radical critique of the West is very western. He is right to caution against *"the tendency to simplistically invoke the Enlightenment without recognising its problematic aspects"*, but that criticism reflects rather than challenges its key legacy. The West is all about critical self-reflection. Modernity's discontents were there from the very beginning. It is not accidental that one of the programmatic texts that came to define the movement was Kant's attempt to answer the question *"What is the Enlightenment?"*. Thus, recognizing problematic aspects of the Western tradition and its vulnerabilities has strong roots in the western canon. Thinkers as different as Edmund Burke, Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jan Patočka and Jacques Derrida criticized – from their vastly different viewpoints – the excessive confidence of the Enlightenment, which is the source of Europe's greatness and of its awfulness. That is, in fact, the *"Dialectic of the Enlightenment"* as the 20th century diagnosticians of Europe's disastrous path to modernity argued – for example, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer *"showed how civilisation and barbarism went together"* (p. 77). In other words, Kundnani is right to cite the Frankfurt School and Hannah Arendt in support of his argument, but he could also have cited a number of major thinkers before and after this school: from Burke in the eighteenth century to Wolfgang Streeck (2021) and Perry Anderson (2021) today. Thus, Kundnani's critical position might be rare within the world of think tanks, but within broader academic debates in history, cultural studies and even political science, the idea that the West is not the best is very much the new orthodoxy.

AN IDEALIZED NON-WEST?

All the same, I have a great deal of sympathy for Kundnani's unsparing attack on "pro-Europeans", including those who have shaped academic debates within the peculiar sub-discipline of EU studies. The *"[p]ro-integration bias in mainstream"* EU studies (LECONTE 2015) led to numerous distortions, constraining the free debate on the nature of the European project. Too many scholars were co-opted as the EU's disciples, embracing its bold (if often vaguely articulated) ambitions. As Joseph Weiler put it, the

EU's messianic vision *"has animated generations of European idealists, where the ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe, with peace and prosperity as icing on the cake, constitutes the beckoning promised land"* (WEILER 2011). This needs closer examination, particularly as Europe appears to be moving further from its self-proclaimed values. Kundnani is thus to be commended for exposing the EU's many hypocrisies. And he is right to be skeptical about the most recent attempt to turn the EU into a *"war project"* in response to the Russian aggression while *"many pro-Europeans are idealising its history as a 'peace project'"* (KUNDNANI 2024B).

And yet, Kundnani may well be guilty of idealizing the rest of the world. For example, isn't the very description of thinkers as being *"from the anti-imperialist and black radical traditions"* undermining Europe's universalist aspirations rather than representing *"a step towards developing a genuinely universal universalism"* (p. 58)? And while Central Europeans are rightly criticized for their past imperial fantasies – with *"intellectuals in Czechoslovakia and Poland"* in the interwar period demanding that their nations *"be given extra-European colonies of their own"* (p. 115) – the Russian past and present colonial projects tend to be underplayed, with the author repeatedly describing *"the perception of threats from a revisionist Russia"* (p. 138, emphasis added). Over the last decade or so, Europe didn't just become *"more defensive as it came to see itself as being surrounded by threats"* (p. 125, emphasis added); it has been threatened from both within and without. Thus, Emmanuel Macron's idea of *"a Europe that protects"* shouldn't be dismissed lightly (p. 138). One does not need to subscribe to Thomas Hobbes' views to accept the idea that a political regime that proves unable to protect its citizens loses its legitimacy.[1] The problem, in my view, is not that the European project *"was, always, also about power"* (p. 64), but rather how and to what purpose this power was deployed. The more EU leaders talk about *"a Europe that protects"* while proving unable to deliver on that promise, the more they expose their weakness. Internally as well as in relation to its Eastern neighbors, particularly Ukraine, the EU has consistently overpromised and underdelivered (SCICLUNA – AUER 2023).

CENTRAL EUROPE AND RUSSIA

Where does this leave the nations of Central Europe? Not without reason they see themselves as victims of another kind of European imperialism, as

acknowledged by Kundnani (p. 173) – Russian imperialism. This doesn't excuse Central Europeans' amnesia about their past failings, let alone their present racist attitudes towards foreigners; Kundnani is right on this. Yet, the ultimate irony is that Russia itself sees itself as a major victim of western imperialism – a posture that seems to resonate in the developing world. Russian anti-imperialist rhetoric also finds supporters amongst the left-wing forces across Europe, including the former youth communist leader Robert Fico, who is (once again) Slovakia's prime minister. In fact, Russia has repeatedly justified its aggression against Ukraine as a defensive war against the West. That the Russian regime resorts to racist propaganda directed against Ukrainians – who are at times seen as Slavic brothers and at other times seen as a nation of renegades who should be exterminated – doesn't quite fit in this story. At any rate, it is the Russian imperial amnesia that is of primary concern to many people in Central and Eastern Europe right now. This takes us back to the demise of communism in Europe in 1989. It was first the Soviet empire that collapsed in 1989, followed by the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Kundnani is right to ask, *"what kind of imagined Europe [did] central and eastern Europeans who joined the EU in 2004 [think] they were becoming part of – and in what sense [was it] a 'return' to something they had previously been part of?"* (p. 114).

True, whatever hopes and expectations the people in the new member states might have had both about their political regimes *after* communism and about their place in Europe were bound to lead to disappointments. The Europe that the nations of Central and Eastern Europe sought to return to – one in which they would become prosperous and well-governed virtually overnight – never existed. But one of the key aspirations of the 1989 revolutions, to become free from the Soviet (and also Russian) tutelage, was largely realized. What was for Putin Europe's greatest geopolitical catastrophe, represented a moment of national liberation for the countries of Central Europe. Yet, suggesting that these *"were also nationalist revolutions whose aim was to create not just democratic but also ethnically homogenous nation states"* (p. 114), as Kundnani does, citing Branko Milanovic, goes a bit too far. Notwithstanding numerous instances of nationalist mobilization in the region, no major political party advocated ethnic cleansing (with the notable exception of the nations in former Yugoslavia).

In many ways, 1989 could be seen as the first step towards the reversal of what Milan Kundera famously described as "The Tragedy of Central Europe".

And as Kundnani also discusses, Kundera's was a civilizational project openly directed against Russia (CF. AUER 2023). Central Europe did not merely belong to the European civilization, but in Kundera's view, it was its embodiment. *"By returning to Europe"*, Kundnani summarizes, *"central Europeans would save it from itself"* (p. 116). Is this what happened though? Undermining my own past arguments in support of Ukraine, I wonder whether *Eurowhiteness* may end up being vindicated in relation to the Russian aggression against Ukraine, on which European political elites are divided more than Kundnani acknowledges. While the EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (2024) continues to promise that the EU *"stands firmly by Ukraine, financially, economically, militarily, and most of all, morally, until [Ukraine] is finally free"*, the support from the individual member states was never quite that firm and appears to be waning further. This, alongside the constraints of the US and the UK military support for Ukraine, has resulted in a situation in which Ukraine receives sufficient support to continue fighting (at least at the time of writing), but without a realistic chance of repelling the invader. The result is a protracted war of attrition with enormous (and rising) human and material costs. But this is hardly the result of Europe's imperial hubris, but rather of its relative impotence in the face of a revanchist Russia.

Whether and how this constellation could have been prevented will be debated by historians and political scientists for decades to come. Was Europe's success in reversing the Russian/Soviet imperial ambitions in 1989–91 a case of a pyrrhic victory? Were our celebrations back then premature? If the (re-)integration of Central Europe occurred at the expense of the countries further to the East (not just Russia, but also Ukraine and Belarus), then the gains may well end up being short-lived. As the likelihood of defeating, or at least constraining Russian imperial ambitions appears to be diminishing, the European project is threatened not merely by its internal contradictions (masterfully exposed by Kundnani), but also by the militant Russian revanchism that does not tolerate self-doubt. Its bold rhetoric notwithstanding, the EU is far from becoming an empire, let alone a credible "war project". It remains an in-between polity permanently stuck between the ambition to become a state-like actor with quasi-imperial ambitions – "a Europe that protects" – and the reality of its relative impotence (AUER 2024). In order to overcome this, the European Union will require more than just coming to terms with its dark legacies. It will need to redefine its purpose commensurately with its abilities.

Post-Communist Central Europe and Eurowhiteness: Comments on Hans Kundnani

PAVEL BARŠA

Hans Kundnani's book has opened a debate that had been long overdue. Since I agree with the main thrust of his argument, my task is modest. Here I develop or modify some of his points pertaining to Central Europe: a sub-region of the EU that, as Kundnani rightly observes, strengthened the ethnic/cultural pole of the EU self-understanding in the 2000s and has become a vanguard of its "civilizational turn" since the refugee crisis in the mid-2010s. As I and Ondřej Slačálek (BARŠA – SLAČÁLEK, IN PRINT) have tried to show, post-communist Central Europe (encompassing the so-called Visegrad countries) can be conceived as a regional "imagined community" of its own, albeit one with blurred boundaries and no established political structure. We have applied Rogers Brubaker's (1996) insight that the nation can be conceived as a *"contingent event"* – the result of an interplay between historical circumstances and actors using them as an opportunity to mobilize and/or create a certain collective identity on behalf of which they raise their claims.

The time span of Central Europe as it was imagined and acted upon by significant segments of cultural and political elites in Prague, Budapest, Warsaw and Bratislava stretched over the last two decades of the 20th century and the first two decades of the 21st century. Even if it began to take shape in the discourses of its important spokespersons already in the 1970s and 1980s, its political contours emerged only in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Bloc at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. It began to wane when the post-Cold War era, which began to unravel in the 2010s, was given the final death blow by Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and Israel's war in Gaza in 2023. My hunch is that those two wars have ushered in a new period in which the boundaries of imagined collective identities that were drawn in the 1980s and 1990s are being re-drawn or replaced by others. Thus, Central Europe as we have known it in the last 40 years

or so is losing its political relevance and becoming a thing of the past. It played a significant role, however, in the transformation of the EU which Kundnani analyzes in his book.

A KIDNAPPED WEST

One of the key intellectuals among the émigrés and dissidents participating in the construction of this Central Europe was Milan Kundera (1983/2023). Kundnani rightly identifies his *Tragedy of Central Europe* as a key work that set some of the parameters for the discourses of a "return to Europe" during the 1989 revolutions. His essay is the perfect starting point for our subject-matter precisely because Kundera carried out in it the paradigmatic shift from the ideological argument against Soviet socialism to the thesis of the civilizational gap between the Russian empire and Central Europe, which became its political (semi)periphery after WWII.

This was a different kind of argument than a Christian Democratic defense of Europe against the atheistic USSR in the first years of the Cold War. Far from being civilizationist, as Kundnani claims, the latter argument only updated the rejection of liberal and socialist secularism which characterized conservatism since its birth in the wake of the French Revolution. The only, albeit substantial, innovation was the reconciliation of Christianity with democracy that drew on Jacques Maritain's democratic turn in the 1940s. In all other respects, Christian democrats followed in the footsteps of their predecessors from the 19th century. If this was a *conflation* of the ideological dimension and the civilizational dimension, then we would have to conceive the very conservative ideology as such a conflation. In contrast to the Western Christian Democrats of the 1950s, Kundera – following in the footsteps of some authors of the previous generation such as Czeslaw Milosz (1959/2002), Sándor Márai (POSTHUMOUSLY 2013/2018) or István Bibó (1946/2015) – did not conceive the tension between Central Europe and the USSR in the 1980s primarily as a struggle of two projects for *the future* – one grounded in religion, the other in atheism – but, rather, as stemming from the incompatibility of their respective cultures which they inherited from *the past*.

Even if we gave the benefit of a doubt to Kundnani's "conflationist" thesis with regard to Western Europe, the center of gravity of both official

and unofficial discourses of the first 25 years behind the Iron Curtain after WWII lay in the ideological arguments. Only after the last big attempts at democratic reforms of Soviet and Yugoslav socialism at the end of the 1960s had failed, an ideological void opened in which the political projects invoking universal values could be replaced by those referring to particular regional traditions. This culturalist turn ran in parallel to the rise of politics of identity in the Western Left after the last wave of utopian hopes at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s had subsided and the neo-liberal ideology gained the hegemonic position in the socio-economic realm. In the same period, Central European dissidents at home and Central European émigrés in the West began to complement the universalist, i.e., human rights-based, criticism of the late Soviet regimes with particularist recollections of the pre-Soviet and even pre-WWI periods as times of a flowering Central European culture that was subsequently destroyed by a(n) (half-)Asiatic empire.

The political biography of Kundera himself was a perfect case in point of this replacement. He was one of the leading communist intellectuals of the Prague Spring. After his hopes for "socialism with a human face" had been crushed by the armies of the Warsaw Pact and the subsequent "normalization", he turned his gaze fondly to the Habsburg *fin de siècle* culture. The crux of his case for Central Europe in his essay from 1983 is a Huntingtonian "clash of civilizations" *avant la lettre*. There was one substantial difference between him and Huntington, however. Whereas the American political scientist formulated his thesis as a response to the new situation brought about by the end of the Cold War, Kundera translated its very fault lines in Europe into civilizational terms.

His essay became one of the sources of the "return to Europe" discourses of the early 1990s. The "kidnapped" sub-region of Europe was "returning" to it *both* as a repository of true European culture that had been already diluted in the West by mass media and commercialization, and as a bulwark not only against Russia's barbaric imperialism but also against the "Munich-like" tendency of Western Europe to appease it. One example of such an appeasement was precisely its abandonment of Central Europe, as pointed out by Kundera in his essay. The lesson the new post-communist elites drew from this abandonment was that the security of Central Europe had to be guaranteed by the US, which they – unlike Kundera – included

in "the West". They did not make any effort to account for the concerns and perspectives of the non-European and non-Western parts of the planet called "the Third World" (MARK ET AL. 2019). Thus, they reversed the official USSR position which claimed to defend it against Western imperialism. For Central Europeans this was a piece of Soviet propaganda with no real base. That is why they proudly embraced the Eurocentric identification of the world with the West. Hence Kundnani is right that their *"return"* was also a return to *"Eurowhiteness"* (p. 118).

For some intellectuals of my generation, it was true quite literally. Hence their bitter disappointment when they saw the multiracial populations of the Western cities which they imagined in their dreams as white. I recall meeting one of my classmates from my university studies in the early 1980s (who became a professor of Czech literature at one of the most prestigious Czech universities in the 1990s) in a London student hostel in the spring of 1991. He complained about the noisy Black students at the hostel and, on a more general level, expressed a disenchantment with the multicultural nature of London: he had spent all those years behind the Iron Curtain dreaming of a "good old England" only to find a London crowded with Africans and Asians.

WITH WESTERN NATIONS AGAINST EMPIRES

I have already hinted at the major difference between Kundera and the post-communist elites of Central European countries. While he embraced an anti-Americanism which was widespread among the intellectuals of his adoptive homeland, France, and therefore explicitly limited the "West" to Europe, those elites were using the slogan of a "return to Europe" while having the West enlarged by the United States in mind. An important part of the new political common sense of the Central Europe of the 1990s was an uncritical Atlanticism in both the geopolitical and the civilizational sense.

The new post-communist elites saw the US not only as an indispensable guarantor of their newly won independence, but also as an example of a free and democratic society whose institutions they wanted to emulate. Even the center of the left post-communist intellectuals and politicians who were critical of the incompleteness, if not absence, of the welfare state in the US, did not doubt that it is part of one civilizational

whole with Western and Central Europe. Thus, the first milestone of the promised "return to Europe" of the Central European countries was not their EU accession, but their obtaining a membership in NATO in 1999. By that time the discourse of the "return to Europe" had already been complemented and, at times, even superseded by the identification with the "Euro-Atlantic Civilization".

The enlargement of the West by a "New", i.e. Central and Eastern European, "Europe" strengthened not only the *"imperial amnesia"* of *"Old Europe"* (Kundnani), in which the memory of empire was replaced by what Timothy Snyder calls the *"fable of the wise nation"* or *"the creation myth of the EU"* (SNYDER 2019). It also strengthened the self-flattering image of America, which Madeleine Albright, a daughter of Czechoslovak émigré diplomats and a US Secretary of State, framed as an "indispensable nation" – a force for good in the world and a challenger of all its evil empires. For Americans, it was much more pleasant to see their country in the mirror of the eyes of the Central European satellites than in the eyes of the countries in the south of their continent that spent one and a half centuries under their hegemony. Who would not prefer to be seen as a liberator rather than a master, a benevolent "nation" rather than an "empire"?

The latter image of the US and other Western nations was at cross-purposes with the version of history that prevailed in post-Communist Central Europe. Its cultural and political elites assumed that what mattered most in modern history had its center of gravity in the Global North, not the Global South. Non-Western peoples and parts of the world have had no significant place in the historical narratives of Central European nations. With the help of Snyder's terminological dichotomy, we can say that at least since WWI they have depicted themselves as trying to get out of the hold of autocratic *empires* – at first, the Central Powers (Austria, Germany), and later on, the Third Reich and the USSR – with the help of democratic *nations* – Great Britain, France and the US. In the Czech case, this narrative took on a paradigmatic shape with the programmatic book *Světová revoluce* (World Revolution) – translated into English as *The Making of a State*–which was written by Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1925/2004) as a founder of the First Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. He presents all three of the above mentioned Western powers as bearers of higher humanitarian principles and democracy without mentioning the French and British

colonies or the Jim Crow laws in America. Thus, he implicitly identified humanity with the peoples of European stock.

THE REDUCTIVE MEMORY AND ITS POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

Sixty years later, "world revolution" was replaced by the "Velvet Revolution", and Masaryk by Havel as the founder of a new, that is, post-Communist Czechoslovakia. By that time the Russian and German autocratic empires in their later forms were remembered as two versions of totalitarianism while the Manichean frame – based on the invisibility of the crimes of democratic empires in the West – remained untouched. The erasure of one half of humankind from the history of the 19th and 20th century was all the easier in the post-communist period because, as mentioned above, Soviet discourses about Western imperialism and racism were dismissed as totalitarian lies.

The result of the prevalence of this reductive history of the last century in the Central European post-communist societies was that they remembered only crimes committed by Europeans against other Europeans (e.g. Jews, Poles, "kulaks") but never those committed by them against non-Europeans (e.g. Blacks, Arabs, Asians). The latter crimes did not even have to be forgotten or suppressed since they have never even been registered as something important and relevant. If they were mentioned at all, it was always as something contingent and accidental having no significance for the proper understanding of Western history. Some malfeasance may have happened due to the imperfect human nature and moral failures of individual politicians, but this could not undermine the fundamental goodness and humanity of the West and its benevolent effort to bring its higher standards to the rest of humankind. If this civilizational mission has occasionally taken on an imperialist form, this amounted to a regrettable deviation from the history of Western nations, whose club the Central European nations wanted to join.

Russian imperialism, on the contrary, has, in their view, belonged to the very essence of Russia as much as German imperialism had belonged to the very essence of the pre-1945 Germany. Similarly to the dismantlement of Germany's Central European empire in 1945, the present Euro-Asian

empire is to be dismantled in the near future if European security is to be ensured. The Central Europeans draw post-colonial lessons exclusively from the Global North. In their eyes, no such lessons can be drawn from the Global South since colonialism and racism are not attributes of the West they have joined.

Every major event of our times, either in Europe or elsewhere, is read through the prism of this reductive memory. Putin cannot but be another Hitler or Stalin and those who are soft on him cannot but be Munich-like appeasers or his agents. If, in the view of Polish and Czech elites, 24 February 2022 marked the entry into a new Cold War, they suppose that it has become the only relevant fault-line of global politics as, in their view, the only relevant fault-line in the second half of the last century was the conflict between the Soviet East and trans-Atlantic West while decolonization struggles amounted to its epiphenomena with no substance of their own. Hence, they cannot conceive the neutralist tendencies of a large part of the Global South with regard to the war in Ukraine otherwise than by considering them a result of Russian manipulation and propaganda. Since for them, the history of Western colonization does not exist, what else could cause the fact that the rest of the world does not see the situation in Ukraine the way they do – namely as a struggle between Good and Evil?

The same reductive memory projects itself on the Gaza war but with the opposite effect as far as the moral judgment is concerned. This time the crimes of a power that infringes international law by occupying foreign territory are made invisible while the crimes of the occupied are bearing the weight of the guilt for the suffering of the innocent on both sides of the conflict. Since October 7, 2023, the mainstream Czech media and politicians have faithfully parroted the official Israeli narrative about an attempt at a 2nd Holocaust.

As Central Europeans are unaware of the European colonization of the Middle East by the victorious powers of WWI, which laid down the framework of the success of the Zionist project, the only prism which they have at their disposal as a tool of deciphering the present Middle East conflict is the memory of WWII with the Holocaust at its center. Their identification of Hamas with the Nazis entails the association of the suffering of the Palestinian civilians of Gaza under Israeli (and American) bombs

with the suffering of the German civilians of Dresden and Hamburg under Allied bombs: both are seen as a terrible but legitimate price to be paid for ridding the world of an absolute Evil. Whereas the public opinion of "old Europe" with regard to the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza is split due to the struggle between the memory of European antisemitism and the Holocaust, and the memory of European racism and colonization, the mainstream public opinion of the Central European "new Europe" is more or less unified: it stands fully behind Israel since the latter memory is missing.

THE END OF CENTRAL EUROPE AS WE HAVE KNOWN IT

The fact that Germany and Austria have belonged, together with most of New Europe (with Slovenia being the major exception to the pattern), to the unconditional supporters of the Israeli war in Gaza, is usually explained by the special situation of those nations as inheritors of the guilt of the perpetrators of the Holocaust, which entails more responsive behavior towards the state which claims to represent its victims. What may look like a justified exception to moral universalism in the context of the remembrance of the European past functions as a zero-sum game in the context of the Middle Eastern present. There the German and Austrian philo-Semitism looks like the last refuge of white European anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism.

The German and Austrian disposition to give an incomparably higher status to the suffering of European, i.e., Jewish, victims of European violence than to that of its non-European victims rhymes nicely with the post-Communist ignorance of the latter. The refusal of Germans to acknowledge the genocide of Herero and Namu, as mentioned by Kundnani, is in line with the Central European idea of different moral scales that should be applied to the crimes against the members of Western civilization and those against its barbarian outsiders – be they African tribes, Germans fanaticized by Hitler or Palestinians fanaticized by Hamas.

Since the horrific Hamas attack of October 7, the German cultural and political establishment has used the "cancel culture" tactic to silence the voices of dissent against the official German position as manifestations of anti-Semitism. Despite some success in the short run, this tactic may prove self-defeating in the long run. There are already signs of a shift

towards a more balanced view of past German crimes that would confer on the genocide against non-European groups the same moral significance as has been so far conferred on the genocide against European Jews (without denying, of course, the significant difference in the numbers of victims). Correlatively, a more universalistic German foreign policy posture could emerge which would consider not only crimes *against* the Jews and the Jewish State in the Middle East but also crimes by the Jewish State and its Jewish citizens. With this new posture, those who point out the latter could not be automatically labelled as anti-Semites anymore.

The pressure for an overhaul of Germany's memorial regime testifies to the destabilization of the larger consensus of the post-Cold War era. Many fundamental assumptions that were taken for granted in the 1990s and 2000s began to erode and be replaced already in the 2010s within the "civilizational turn" in the EU, as analyzed by Kundnani. Even so, until the Gaza war it had still made sense to use the post-Cold War distinction between the countries of "Old" and "New" Europe. The strong overlap between the position on the Gaza war taken up by Old Europe's Germany and most of New Europe's countries signals that the usefulness of that distinction is decreasing.

This distinction entered the public discourse in 2002 when the post-Communist Central and Eastern European countries enthusiastically backed G. W. Bush's plan to overthrow Iraq's Saddam Hussein while Germany and France opposed it. French President Jacques Chirac reacted to the vocal support of New Europe for G. W. Bush with the words *"They have failed to shut up."* In 2022, New Europeans, with their Atlanticist hawkishness, relished the moment of great satisfaction when Putin's invasion of Ukraine "proved" that they had been right all along, and German and French "appeasers" had to repent for their previous arrogance, as epitomized by Chirac's remark. The response to the French defenders of European "strategic autonomy" whom Central Europeans always resisted in the name of the North Atlantic Alliance was loud and clear: "We told you so".

By the time of writing in November 2024, however, things have become more complicated. Many Western Europeans finally embraced the unreserved backing of Ukraine, which is signaled by the nomination of

Kaia Kalas for the post of External Representative in the new European Commission. The US support for Ukraine, on the other hand, has begun to vacillate. The power of Republicans in Congress and other geopolitical concerns (such as Taiwan, the South Chinese Sea or North Korea) have made Americans less keen to take maximalist positions: if many Europeans are open to Zelensky's calls for a lift on the geographical restrictions on the use of Western weapons against Russia, the Biden administration has so far resisted them. With the return of Donald Trump to the White House, it is not to be ruled out that this and other differences (e.g., the more protectionist economic policies of the US) will progressively lead to a geopolitical rift between the EU and the USA. This could make Central and Eastern European elites revise their assumptions about the Euro-Atlantic civilizational and geopolitical unity as the main foothold of their security. A moment may come in which the French defenders of European "strategic autonomy" whom Central Europeans always resisted in the name of the trans-Atlantic alliance will say "We told you so!" in return.

As mentioned above, the "New" / "Old" Europe distinction has been eroded by reactions to the Gaza war: Western Europe is split between the unconditionally pro-Israeli position of Germany (shared by many post-communist countries), the more balanced position of France and the staunchly pro-Palestinian position of Spain and Ireland. The post-Cold War categories and distinctions are no longer helpful for understanding the political differentiation within the EU. Moreover, even if the invasion of Ukraine by Putin strengthened the position of New Europe (and its anti-Russian hawkishness) as a whole, it gave a fatal blow to the Visegrad Four, which has consequently lost the status of its leader. The Czech Republic and Poland agreed with the three Baltic States on the unconditional support for Ukraine against Russia, while Orbán's Hungary, later joined by Fico's Slovakia, took a more neutralist position towards the conflict.

The unraveling of post-Communist Central Europe gave Poland an opportunity to seek a position of regional hegemony by gathering around itself a new Central Europe which will encompass the three Baltic states, to which Ukraine will be added in the future. Unlike the Central Europe that was anticipated by Kundera's essay and incarnated later in the Visegrad Group, the new Central Europe will shift its center to the North

and East. Its historical framework will not be provided by the memory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire but rather by that of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The re-drawing of the imaginary boundaries of Central Europe and re-invention of the narratives carrying its new identity will not change much with regard to its position vis-à-vis the civilizational turn of the EU pointed out by Kundnani. The stark contrast between the rejection of Syrian and Afghan refugees in 2015 and the ostentatious hospitality with which Poland and the Czech Republic welcomed Ukrainian refugees in 2022 only highlighted their ethnic-cultural self-understanding. No matter how much the other attributes of Central Europe will change, it will certainly retain its whiteness in the near future.

Coloniality Without Capitalism?
The Critique of a "Blind Spot"
in Hans Kundnani's Eurowhiteness

AGNES GAGYI

Hans Kundnani's *Eurowhiteness* challenges liberal narratives of the EU: it brings up uncomfortable points that, in Kundnani's view, may be used as an opening to reassess the binaries of Europeanism/Euroskepticism and liberalism/illiberalism, and rethink both the EU and the UK's post-Brexit political identities. These points refer to the trace of colonialism in the project of European integration, the main expression of which is described through the concept *Eurowhiteness* – Kundnani's reinterpretation of József Böröcz's term $\overline{(2021)}$ as the ethnoculturalist element of EU regionalism. In a rhetorically ingenious and historically convincing argument, Kundnani shows that what liberal narratives rejected as dark forces of nationalism to be transcended by the European project, has been reintroduced into the same project as qualities of EU regionalism – presented, this time, as morally and politically desirable. The reintroduction of *Schicksalgemeinschaft* as an acceptable term when applied to the EU, or Germany's 2020 EU presidency slogan "Making Europe strong again together" are just two examples of places where the book's rhetoric brings this point home at maximum efficiency.

The book's main observation, that the EU's claim of universalism is limited to principles of regionalism that include defensive, competitive, and ethnoculturalist elements, is made possible by an acknowledgement of the EU's outside: namely, that regionalism works as a cooperative strategy to maintain and possibly expand European countries' standing within global hierarchies. Eurowhiteness, Kundnani claims, is the still existing ethnocultural element of European identity that has direct historical roots in Europe's colonial past, and has been systematically obscured and denied by EU discourses while remaining constitutive of the European project through the external, global implications of regionalism. Written at a moment when Brexit had been interpreted in liberal circles as the victory of ethnonationalism over Europeanism in the UK, and as part of a larger

process of a rightward shift in Europe, Kundnani's book aims to break the silence on this blind spot of Europeanist discourses and use it as an opening for a constructive relation with former colonies, and progressive engagement with the right-wing element inherent in the EU's constitution.

COLONIALITY AS BLIND SPOT?

I will comment on the book's argument from a perspective rooted in left and anti-colonial traditions which critically analyzed the EU from a similar perspective, pointing at its role within global power hierarchies. Kundnani quotes this tradition at length, from W.E.B. Du Bois, Franz Fanon and Aimé Cesaire to paradigms of analysis marked by Immanuel Wallerstein, Paul Gilroy or Dipesh Chakrabarty, statements from political leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, the Frankfurt School's criticism of the post-war paradigm of Holocaust memory, and even new sociological research on attitudes towards Brexit of non-white voters by Neema Begum. It is only where the book gets to its main topic – the question of coloniality in the EU's architecture – that the coverage of this tradition becomes more scarce. Kundnani quotes Gurminder Bhambra's (2022) paper *A Decolonial Project for Europe*, and states that *"[l]ittle has been written about where the EU itself might fit into such a decolonial project"* (p. 171). Several streams of relevant left and anti-colonial traditions are skipped here, like critical political economy analyses of EU integration (E.G. VAN APELDOORN ET AL. 2008), postcolonial sociologies of contemporary Europe (E.G. RODRÍGUEZ ET AL. 2010), or current debates on climate reparations (E.G. PERRY 2021) and the coloniality of green policies (E.G. ALMEIDA 2023). From the perspective of this book forum, the lack of East European left analyses of EU integration is noteworthy: this process is covered by Krastev and Holmes' (2019) book on symbolic grievances, quoting their point that EU accession *"was in some ways a humiliating experience for the applicant countries"* (p. 108). Existing research on how the economic, sociological and political aspects of that humiliation were wired into the EU's architecture, including their adverse effects in post-2008 illiberalism (E.G. HANN – SCHEIRING 2021; GAGYI – SLAČÁLEK 2021), might have had import for the book's core question if these aspects were recognized as a relevant part of EU integration. Finally, an omission to note is that of József Böröcz's (2010) own book on the EU, which provides the context of his *Eurowhiteness* analysis as well as a detailed argument on the question of racialized regionalism that Kundnani's book also addresses.

The book's aim is not to fully represent these traditions, but rather to formulate one basic linkage that they also speak of into an argument Kundnani hopes may be heard and processed on the level of liberal political narratives. Consequently, my observations do not aim to review the book's success in recapitulating such traditions, as that is not what is at stake in the book. Instead, I try to point to places where insights from these traditions could throw light on key aspects of the book's own argument, and show how their recognition may impact the argument itself.

Summed up on an abstract level, the main aspect that left and anti-colonial traditions of criticizing Europe systematically deal with, and Kundnani's argument seems to avoid, is the functional connection between European racist/colonial forms of identification, and the economic aspect of accumulation based on a systematic subordination of non-white populations. While Kundnani's argument aims to visibilize the link between European integration and *Eurowhiteness*, this link is primarily conceived at the level of political narratives about the EU (their blind spot). Although historical references to colonization, or Europe's claim to global power, repeatedly surface in the book, they function as momentary illustrations, and are not built into the argument's main structure, which is maintained at the level of ideas. One consequence is a lack of methodological depth in what regards the political sociology of the narratives Kundnani analyses: the book tends to treat the construct of Europe as a subject capable of self-perception/self-identification without asking about the power coalitions, institutional structures, and shifts of (global) external integration that organize their relations in producing these symbolic representations. This methodological choice is contradicted by proposals for a more complex approach in the book's last chapter on Brexit.

Yet, at points quite central to the book's argument, it results in extremely flat, aseptic formulations that seem to reinstall, rather than deconstruct, the colonial blind spot the book strives to argue against.

It is on the pages describing colonial history where the book's argument comes closest to directly naming the link between racism and European economic interests, and where the rhetorical effect of formulations working against this visibility stand out most. Kundnani (2023: 49–51) describes the link between European colonialism and racism in an

ideational story about the *"emergence of the idea of whiteness"*, with a persistent evasion of any direct expression that may imply that Europeans actively subjugated other populations, and actively formulated an ideology of racist difference to legitimate and formalize this practice. Instead, Europeans *"encounter"* non-white populations, the first African slave ship *"is brought"* to Portugal, discovery *"became"* conquest, and the *"emergence"* of the Atlantic slave trade happens as the result of a shift of focus in *colonies'* economy. As a result, the idea of whiteness has *"the function"* of differentiating native populations as subordinate to Europeans who *"had settled"* in their lands. These formulations, reminiscent of the passive voice of contemporary Western headlines on Israel's war on Gaza, seem unnecessarily forced, as the book's stated aim is to name the link between European identity and colonialism.

Why the avoidance then? This contradiction persists across the book: statements of historical facts of exploitation are repeatedly flattened back into an abstract, bodiless history of Europe's/the EU's self-reflection. On the level of argument, this results in a reduction of Europe's inherent coloniality problem to a symbolic one: that of a *"blind spot"* (p. 37) or *"original sin"* (p. 75) which could be corrected by well-intended reflection, as encouraged by the book. Yet if the European project is the contemporary expression of a prerogative to maintain and expand economic gains originally accessed through colonialism, then renouncing the colonial element of European regionalism would involve actively hurting specific European interests. The book remains ambivalent in this respect, a quality enabled by its avoidance of economic analysis.

FROM INTEGRATION TO CRISIS: THE CONSTRUCT OF THE EU'S SELF-REFLECTION

In the book's account of European integration, this effect works through a more detailed historical analysis which seeks to link current aspects of the European crisis to the long-term problem of ethnoculturalist regionalism. Kudnani reminds us that post-WWII Europeanism started with a relaunch of the EuroAfrica project, which Kwame Nkrumah described as a new cooperative moment in European colonialism. He points out how the European model of the welfare state and social market economy was connected to gradually closing Southern borders (while gradually opening

them to Eastern Europe) at the turn of the Cold War and post-Cold War periods, and participating in NATO's wars outside of Europe. He shows how this model implied a symbolic bifurcation that made the memory of the Holocaust into the core of European identity, and expelled the problem of coloniality/racism from European discourse: the EU became the *"vehicle of imperial amnesia"* (p. 95.). Interest-based aspects of this amnesia are named as *"power"* (p. 64), or as a problem of centrifugality among EU countries differently involved in colonial histories (p. 172).

But how were the closing of the Southern border, and the maintenance of a military presence in former colonies (or other tools not mentioned in the book, like the CFA franc system – the French African Colonial franc in its original name) connected to the sustained dominance of European companies over the most profitable economic segments of African countries, or the profitability effect of migrant labor made cheap through institutional impediments? By omitting the economic connection, Kundnani's argument lends itself to a reading where long-lasting effects of coloniality only stem from a misunderstanding of self-perception. Another consequence is that the underlying structure of economic interests in the EU's buildup – e.g. the integration of European big capital into the global system of Fordist production dominated by the US (E.G. VAN APELDOORN 2003) – is left unclear, which has direct consequences on how the crisis of the same architecture is later analyzed.

Following left-liberal interpretations of the EU's neoliberal phase and the Eurozone crisis, Kundnani explains how the institutional system of economic integration disconnected the heights of economic governance from popular participation, and how this led to the expression of economic grievances through the framework of Euroscepticism. While stating this polarization, the argument yet again avoids naming the different social groups situated at the opposing poles, and the relations of economic interest that this opposition entailed. Instead, austerity measures enacted by EU institutions are described as a crisis within European identity: *"The euro crisis shattered the confidence that the EU had had […] about its success and its role in the world. A bloc that had thought of itself as standing for prosperity and generous welfare states was now imposing apparently endless austerity"* (p. 127).

Who is this "bloc" that finds itself imposing austerity to its own surprise? The striking reduction of the dimensions of a crisis where EU institutions used bare economic coercion in the interest of the EU's dominant capital groups, breaking the democratically expressed will of whole countries like Greece, makes it seem again as if the book's focus on regionalism as symbolic identity was used to conceal, rather than clarify, the contradictions it addresses.

STRUCTURAL CRISIS, DEFENSIVE CIVILIZATIONISM

As Kundnani proceeds to analyze the post-2008 phase of the European polycrisis – from the so-called migration crisis to Brexit or Russia's aggression against Ukraine – this effect manifests itself even more strongly. He illustrates the EU's turn towards *"defensive civilizationalism"* (p. 126) in the 2010s with the relationship between Germany and East European illiberals' stances on migration and competitiveness. He shows that the simplistic binary between the two does not stand: in the same period, Merkel signed a deal with Turkey to outsource a part of the management of the EU's borders, and Hungary's Orbán enacted liberal economic policies. While the evocation of these facts efficiently disturbs the binary, the same section omits the economic connections that link these elements. It skips over the different roles of the same migration wave in these economies, as well as the fact that Hungary's economic reforms at this time directly served German companies' relocations to Europe's East for reasons of cheaper labor (GAGYI – GERŐCS 2019). Fitting into the long tradition of liberal interpretations of far-right politics, this section concludes with a statement on political ideas: center right and far right positions were converging at the time, but this process was masked by the cognitive mistake of the liberal-illiberal binary. Methodologies from the left/anti-colonial works quoted by Kundnani could help link such symbolic developments to shifts in underlying dynamics in interest positions – which is a type of analysis that has been amply carried out on East European illiberalism – see the overviews by Hann and Scheiring (2021) and Gagyi and Slačálek (2021).

Arriving to the effects of Russia's war on Ukraine, the analysis skips both the structural constraint on Europe which pushes it to support Ukraine as part of a US-dominated military alliance, and the interest contradictions underlying this situation – most importantly, the dependence

on cheap Russian energy of Germany (as Europe's industrial powerhouse around which the whole structure of the European Monetary Union was built). Like before, Kundnani mentions these facts, but omits their consequences for the analysis, telling the story at the level of peak politicians' symbolic expressions of strategic shock, their discovery of a necessity to increase the EU's military capacity (a program that in fact has been upscaled since the 2010's) and cut off its energy system from Russia. The strategic constraints that these expressions reflected, and the conflicts of interests that developed on their heels – leading to increasingly conflictual divergences in the European architecture, which were further deepened by the pressures of the US-China geoeconomic rivalry, and expressed politically by the strengthening of far-right parties that oppose both the war effort and the Green New Deal – are yet again flattened out in a story of how the symbolic unit of the "EU" perceived the war (p. 148): *"Having previously hesitated to support Ukraine [...] the EU now suddenly and wholeheartedly embraced it. Ukraine was widely seen as defending, or fighting for, Europe or 'European values.'"*

As before, Kundnani makes critical incisions into this symbolic surface, pointing at the inherent contradictions between welcoming Ukrainian war refugees and rejecting those from Syria, and between defining Ukraine's struggle as one for democracy and ignoring the Azov Battalion's integration into the Ukrainian National Guard. Here, too, these observations disturb the symbolic narratives through which the conflict in Ukraine has been represented by peak EU politicians at the beginning of the war, but do not provide the tools to conduct a different analysis of the same process.

A CRITIQUE OF EUROWHITENESS: TO WHAT CONCLUSION?

The final section on Brexit is where the book's argument comes closest to an empirical analysis of the effects of Eurowhiteness, and a formulation of lessons for political alternatives. Unlike in previous sections, where statements by peak politicians or canonical philosophers are treated as standing for the self-reflection of a whole region, here Kundnani (2023: 155) proposes to differentiate between *"the supply and demand sides of politics – that is, between political entrepreneurs on the one hand and voters on the other"* (p. 155). This welcome proposal is followed up by a summary of sociological

research on non-white voters' perceptions of Brexit, which demonstrates that contrary to liberal perceptions of Brexit as a far-right project, there is an element of Brexit politics that was motivated by the rejection of the EU as more racist than the UK (a perception underscored by the effects of European integration on the UK's migration policy). Building on this insight, the book's political conclusion is a proposition for the UK left to consider a post-Eurocentric turn: *"… a post-Brexit Britain might instead, or in addition, think of itself as part of a different post-imperial network of countries […] rebalancing the way the national story is imagined away from an exclusive focus on Europe"* (p. 177).

While the proposal is formulated on the level of symbolic identity, the last pages of the book contain hints of concrete implications, mainly in foreign policy. The example Kundnani brings is immigration policy, where the post-imperial preference could work as a form of reparations – an unconvincing example at this level of details, as brain drain has been a long-standing element of neocolonial relations. These changes, Kundnani claims, would require the British left to *"move beyond its reflex that any relationship with the UK's former colonies must be a neo-colonial one. Instead, it should see Brexit as an opportunity to make the UK become a less Eurocentric country"* (p. 179).

This closure reinstates the ambiguity of the book's argument: it simultaneously points beyond colonial relations, and refuses to mention (asks us to forget) any concrete standards for transcending them. In an environment where Labour took power after ousting its former leader for supporting Palestine, and continues in its active support for Israel's war among praises by BlackRock's CEO for steering Labour to the center, this type of silence may invoke negative connotations in the anti-colonial/left frameworks the book quotes.

One constructive interpretation that would use the tools of left/anti-colonial analysis, but would not expect the book's argument to match its conclusions, may be to place Kundnani's proposal for extra-EU alliances in the context of the current deepening of geoeconomic tensions, where an increasing number of countries use polyaligned foreign policy to stabilize benefits and reduce risks in an increasingly volatile global environment (SCHINDLER ET AL. 2024). In this case, the book's primary target would not be

the debate on colonialism per se: instead, like in debates over Western vs. Chinese investments in Africa, the concept of colonialism would serve as a symbolic surface to negotiate new stakes of a transforming geoeconomic order. While the book does not state its position in the context of other interventions addressing this problematic, it seems to stand closest to arguments that strive to reformulate political identities of Western powers in ways that recognize emerging Global South powers without escalating new Cold War tensions (E.G. FARRELL – NEWMAN 2023; PURI 2024). Here, again, the question of the analytical method that sets the standards of progressive global politics is raised – e.g. how does Kundnani's global opening relate to conservative versions of the original Brexit agenda, and its initial slogan "Global Britain"? What would differentiate his proposal for a post-Eurocentric UK from conservative projects of polyalignment that seek new capitalist alliances in the environment of a global crisis?

Capitalism, Colonialism and Racism: A Response to Auer, Barša and Gagyi

HANS KUNDNANI

I am grateful to the *Czech Journal of International Relations* for organizing this forum on *Eurowhiteness* and to Stefan Auer, Pavel Barša and Agnes Gagyi for their contributions. As I emphasized in the introduction to *Eurowhiteness*, it is a short book that was meant to stimulate debate rather than to provide a definitive account of ideas of Europe or the history of European integration. In this response, I will discuss the three different aspects of the book on which the contributors focus: the relationship between the European Union and empire (Auer), the role of central and eastern Europe in European identity (Barša), and the relationship between capitalism and European colonialism (Gagyi).

THE EU AND EMPIRE

The title of Auer's contribution, *"The Empire That Never Was"*, suggests that I argue in *Eurowhiteness* that the EU is an empire (and that he, on the one other hand, thinks it was never one). But this is not really the thrust of my argument. Jan Zielonka $\overline{(2006)}$ has made such an argument in his book *Europe as Empire*, but although I draw on his work in *Eurowhiteness* when I discuss the enlargement of the EU to include central and eastern Europe, the emphasis is more on the idea of a *mission civilisatrice*, or civilizing mission – which I see as one of the long continuities in thinking about Europe. In other words, my argument in the book does not depend on the idea that the EU is an empire.

I make two claims about the relationship between the EU and empire. First, I argue that the EU begins as a colonial project – though I should emphasize that here I am not making an original argument but rather summarizing an argument that had been made by others, above all, Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson $\overline{(2014)}$ in their important book *Eurafrica*. Second, I argue that, even after formal decolonization, a version of the idea of a European civilizing mission remained. I do not quite argue, as Auer suggests, that

the EU is "neocolonial". This is certainly an argument that could be and has been made by others, but in order to make it, I would have needed, for example, to analyse EU-Africa relations after formal decolonization.

Auer also simplifies my argument about race and racism in Europe. I differentiate between ethnic/cultural ideas of Europe on the one hand and civic ideas of Europe on the other and argue that there has been a complex interaction between these two different sets of ideas of Europe. I show that ethnic/cultural ideas of Europe did not simply disappear after 1945 but rather persisted and influenced European integration. I also suggest that during the last decade since the refugee crisis in 2015, those ethnic/cultural ideas of Europe have been becoming stronger – in other words that the balance between ethnic/cultural and civic ideas seems to be shifting towards the former. But that is not quite the same as claiming, as Auer suggests I do, that the EU is *"basically racist"*.

I do not quite understand Auer's criticism of my brief discussion of the Enlightenment in *Eurowhiteness*. I am particularly puzzled about why he thinks that even referring to thinkers from the anti-imperialist and black radical traditions as such is somehow problematic. He concedes my point that colonialism was itself often justified by Enlightenment thinkers – and in the name of Enlightenment ideas. But he goes on to say that in doing so, they *"betrayed the enlightened ideals of equality and freedom rather than acting on them"*. Thus Kant's racial theories, for example, were a "betrayal" of Kantian ideals. Simply externalizing all the problematic aspects of the Enlightenment in this way seems to me to be too easy.

What is really at stake for Auer becomes a bit clearer in his discussion of Russia and the war in Ukraine. While accepting much of my criticism of the EU (Auer [2022] has himself written an excellent book, *European Disunion*, which is also very critical of the EU, albeit from a somewhat different, perhaps more right-wing perspective), he seems to want to emphasize that Russia is much worse. He thinks that in criticizing the EU, I am *"idealizing the rest of the world"*. In particular, he thinks that I underplay what he calls Russian colonialism. His point seems to be that even if the EU is, in a sense, an empire, it is a relatively benign one compared to Russia – and that I should have focused more on that.

I do not quite understand why Auer thinks that, in a book about the EU, I ought to have discussed the history of Russian imperialism more than I do. For what it's worth, I am not convinced that Russia's past or present approach to Ukraine or other countries in central and eastern Europe can be described as being "colonial" – attempts to describe it as such depend on a conflation of colonialism and imperialism and often function as a way to draw attention away from the history of the European colonialism and to exonerate Europe. But that is not an argument that I make in *Eurowhiteness*. I do discuss the war in Ukraine briefly at the end of chapter 5, but only in relation to what I call the civilizational turn in the European project.

The conclusion of Auer's contribution is also puzzling. He writes that the EU *"remains an in-between polity permanently stuck between the ambition to become a state-like actor with quasi-imperial ambitions – a 'Europe that protects' – and the reality of its relative impotence."* This sounds a lot like what Christopher Hill (1993) famously called the *"capability-expectations gap"*. It is not entirely clear to me how Auer thinks the EU can close this gap and, as he puts it, *"redefine its purpose commensurate with its abilities"* – after all, he does not want the EU to integrate further and become a political union. But I also don't quite see how it contradicts anything that I argue in Eurowhiteness.

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY

I am especially grateful to Pavel Barša for his kind words about Eurowhiteness and the way he elaborates and develops the arguments I make in it about central and eastern Europe. I do not claim to be an expert on the region and when I wrote the book, I expected that my claims about its relationship to ideas of Europe and to whiteness would be challenged – as they have been (SEE KUNDNANI 2024A). So I was gratified to see that Barša agrees with me that central and eastern Europe, as he puts it, *"strengthened the ethnic/cultural pole of the EU self-understanding in the 2000s and has become a vanguard of its 'civilizational turn' since the refugee crisis in the mid-2010s."*

Perhaps the most controversial claim I make in *Eurowhiteness* about central and eastern Europe is that its "return to Europe" after the end of the Cold War can be understood as a return to whiteness – or, to be more precise, to full whiteness or Eurowhiteness (BÖRÖCZ 2021). Again, Barša agrees

– and adds a fascinating personal story about a Czech student he knew in London in the early 1980s who was disappointed to discover a city that was *"crowded with Africans and Asians"* – in other words, that it was no longer European. (Since *Eurowhiteness* was published last year, I have been told several similar stories about people from central and eastern Europe who were horrified by the multiracial London in which I grew up.)

Barša makes a very interesting point about the Christian Democrat thinking that informed the early phase of European integration. In *Eurowhiteness* I argue that in the context of the Cold War, which was imagined in both ideological and civilizational terms, European integration was conceived as both an anti-communist and a Christian bloc. Barša disagrees with this – what he calls my *"conflationist"* thesis. This, as I understand it, is because Christian Democrats like Robert Schuman were part of a longer conservative Catholic tradition in France and all that was new in their thinking was an acceptance of democracy. But my whole argument is that the currents of thinking that informed European integration after 1945 drew on older ideas of Europe.

Barša also picks up on my discussion of Milan Kundera's (1983/2023) essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe", which he says *"set some of the parameters for the discourses of a 'return to Europe' during the 1989 revolutions"* and constructed a new idea of central Europe based on *"the thesis of a civilizational gap between the Russian empire and Central Europe"*. (Auer also concedes in his contribution that Kundera thought in civilizational terms, but nevertheless sees him as prescient.) Barša helpfully adds that whereas Samuel Huntington understood the West as a single civilization, Kundera took the view prevalent in France that Europe is a civilization that is distinct from the United States – a view which, as I discuss in *Eurowhiteness*, Emmanuel Macron also expresses.

I find Barša's discussion of collective memory in central and eastern Europe very useful. He writes that central and eastern Europeans *"remembered only crimes committed by Europeans against other Europeans (e.g. Jews, Poles, 'kulaks') but never those committed by them against non-Europeans (e.g. Blacks, Arabs, Asians)"*. This echoes my own argument that the EU itself was based on the internal lessons of European history rather than the external lessons. But whereas in the western European countries that initially

shaped the EU, colonial crimes had to be forgotten or repressed, in central and eastern Europe they had *"never been even registered as something important and relevant"*.

Barša's contribution also seems to me to provide an interesting counterpoint to Auer's discussion of Russia and the war in Ukraine. As Barša says, the way that the history of European colonialism has not been *"registered"* in central and eastern European countries helps to explain why they cannot understand how the Global South views the war in Ukraine in a different way than they do. But he also suggests that while many in central and eastern Europe essentialize Russia and view it as inherently imperialist, they tend to dismiss Europe's colonial history as an aberration from its ideals. European colonialism cannot *"undermine the fundamental goodness and humanity of the West and its benevolent effort to bring its higher standards to the rest of humankind"*.

CAPITALISM AND EUROPEAN COLONIALISM

Of the three contributions, Agnes Gagyi's is the most critical. I also found it the most difficult to follow. But as far as I can understand it, she thinks that I deny the role of capitalism in the history of European colonialism and racism and in the construction and evolution of the EU. If Auer is criticizing me from the right, Gagyi tries to do so from the left – she begins by declaring that she is commenting on my book from *"a perspective rooted in left and anti-colonial traditions"*. But although she speaks of these traditions in the plural, she does not seem to see the heterogeneity within them and especially the different ways in which they conceive of the relationship between capitalism and colonialism and racism.

Gagyi says that in Eurowhiteness I challenge *"liberal narratives of the EU"* in a persuasive way and, in particular, expose the ethnic/cultural element of European identity and what she calls the "traces" of colonialism in the postwar European project. But she thinks I focus exclusively on ideas and, in doing so, fail to discuss *"the power coalitions, institutional structures, and shifts of (global) external integration that organize their relations in producing these symbolic representations"* (I can't help but wonder whether this is a criticism of my book or of intellectual history). Because

I avoid *"economic analysis"*, Gagyi argues, I somehow *"reinstall, rather than deconstruct, the colonial blind spot the book strives to argue against"*.

Gagyi focuses on one section of chapter 2 of *Eurowhiteness* in which I discuss the history of European colonialism until 1945. As even the title of the section ("Whiteness and Modern Europe") makes clear, it is not even *about* colonialism and is certainly not meant to be a history of European colonialism, let alone an exhaustive one. Rather, it aims to establish how, just as Christianity was central to medieval ideas of European identity, whiteness became central to modern ideas of European identity. Yet on the basis of this section, Gagyi claims that I seek to ignore or erase the role of capitalism in the history of European colonialism – hence the title of her contribution, *"coloniality without capitalism"*.

Gagyi's basis for making this rather large claim is somewhat flimsy. She says that I use *"flat, aseptic formulations"* in my brief discussion of European colonialism and avoid *"any direct expression that may imply that Europeans actively subjugated other populations and actively formulated an ideology of racist difference to legitimate and formalize this practice".* She is determined to believe that I am seeking to somehow avoid Europe's colonial history or deny European responsibility for it – a very strange reading of *Eurowhiteness*. She goes so far as to say that my formulations are *"reminiscent of the passive voice of contemporary Western headlines on Israel's war on Gaza"* – an extraordinary, outrageous accusation.

As well as misunderstanding the focus and function of one section of one chapter of the book, which leads her to imagine an avoidance of economic analysis where there is none, she also seems to think that the answer to the question of the relationship between capitalism and colonialism and racism is a straightforward one. This is where the importance of the plurality of left and anti-colonial traditions comes in. Even Marxists disagree with each other about the question of the role of capitalism in European colonialism and racism. Meanwhile many post-colonial thinkers view Marxist analyses as too economistic. To discuss this in any depth simply goes beyond the scope of the book – and was never the aim of it.

What makes Gagyi's claim that I avoid economic analysis even more odd is that she has almost nothing to say about the aspects of my argument that do discuss the role of the economy in the shaping of European identity. In particular, I argue that it was the neoliberalization of the EU, and especially the depoliticization of economic policy in the eurozone, that produced the civilizational turn in the European project. Although Gagyi skips over this part of my argument, it was not lost on the *Economist's* (2023) Charlemagne columnist, who, in an otherwise rather positive review of *Eurowhiteness*, wrote that *"Kundnani also indulges in a bit of left-wing rhetoric by pinning the blame on neoliberalism."*

Even as she almost completely ignores this rather important part of my argument, Gagyi complains that I do not discuss the role of economic policy in the EU, especially after the beginning of the euro crisis. She thinks I ought to have gone further in analysing the internal dynamics within the eurozone and named the specific actors who were responsible for imposing austerity on the bloc and the interests they represented. I discuss some of these questions in my previous book, *The Paradox of German Power* (KUNDNANI 2017), and in other work. But it seems as if for Gagyi, an author has to do everything, all at once, in one short book – and anything that is missing is evidence of *"avoidance"*.

ENDNOTES

1   As expressed succinctly by the controversial legal theorist Carl Schmitt: *"The* protego ergo obligo *is the* cogito ergo sum *of the state"* (Schmitt 1928/2007: 52; see also Auer 2022: 50).

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Book Review

Aliaksei Kazharski: Central Europe Thirty Years after the Fall of Communism. A Return to the Margin?

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Three years after the publication of his *Eurasian Integration and the Russian World. Regionalism as an Identitary Enterprise*, Aliaksei Kazharski (2019, 2022) has now published a book on the Central European Visegrad Four countries: Czechia, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary. This order of publication is one of the book's greatest possible strong points; the author does not approach Central Europe from the West, but from the East. This could provide him with a different perspective than the usual comparison between the Western "norm" and the Central European "pathology". What is more, as stated in Milada Anna Vachudová enthusiastic endorsement of the book on its cover, the book explains the *"complexities of domestic political change and regional cooperation among the four Visegrad countries".* In other words, one might hope that in the book, the region will be understood through looking at various countries and not only via selected attributes of Hungary and Poland, as the latter approach has been very common in political analyses during the last decade.

Right at the start of the review, it ought to be said that this potential was realized only partially. The book stands somewhere in between. It is a well-written and condensed introduction to contemporary Central European political identities with many valuable insights, but it simultaneously causes the reader to wonder about many things. The most important of them consists in how hard it is to differentiate an analytical *reconstruction* of a stereotype from an uncritical *reproduction* of a stereotype.

The book is divided into seven relatively short and easy-to-read chapters (plus, of course, an introduction and a conclusion). Three of these chapters are devoted to the (re)construction of the region and the transformation of the concept of *Central Europe* from its previous shapes up to the region's reconstruction during and after the refugee crisis of 2015. All this is sketched out in a very schematic way, and the book thus resembles a collage rather than a systematic historical reconstruction. Three other chapters are devoted to country studies of Czechia and Slovakia (put together in the same chapter, but with a partial sensitivity to their differences), Poland, and Hungary, respectively. The last chapter focuses on the Covid-19 pandemics in the region.

On the one hand, the book is grounded in careful research and presents not only a clear thesis, but also many arguments and examples to back it up. Kazharski's focus on discourse makes him very sensitive to various

formulations of power relationships, as well as to instances of telling political rhetorics. He combines the influences of Laclau and Mouffe with selected approaches to IR theory, creating a good basis for approaching the symbolic dimension of the re-constitution of the region in conflict with the liberal European mainstream. He also combines a regional approach with a focus on selected countries, thus showing that *Central Europe* as a region is still mostly constructed in political debates and imaginaries developed on the national levels. Unlike Vachudová, I did not find an explanation of their interplay in the book, although this underlining of their mutual relationships (and differences) is an important achievement.

On the other hand, the book also raises some doubts. Because the author's own approach and analysis give importance to words and their meaning, one might start with having doubts about the book's subtitle: *"Return to the Margin."* I must ask about the *Return*: a *Return* from where? Has Central Europe, during the last more than thirty years, been somewhere else than in the margin, both politically and economically? Unfortunately, the book is *"chiefly preoccupied with identities and ideologies"* (p. 181), which means that the discussion of political- and socio-economic *realities* enter the author's analysis mostly at the moments when they entered the discourse. The author thus cannot fully and consistently understand the region's historical and real marginalization that co-produces the discursive struggles. Kazharski presents in relatively vivid detail the debate concerning "Poland A" and "Poland B", for example, since it was developed by the actors in their discourse (p. 106). Much less developed is his discussion of the debate about the role of oligarchs in Czech politics or the struggles over cheap labor and outflows of profits in the region.

Indeed, economic inequalities, even in those economic debates that the author covers and whose importance he accepts, are not the most important driver, according to him. Kazharski is much more convinced by the perspective that *"socio-economic cleavages take a back seat to the normative conflicts between the 'liberal-open' and 'conservative-protective' mindsets"* (p. 106). As if we could differentiate this cultural-normative side from the socio-economic side without falling into the "chicken or egg" problem. Although this piece provides me with no space for a more nuanced counter-argument that would go beyond binary distinctions, I must rhetorically ask: Are not "liberal-open" views defended mostly by those who profit from globalization, while the "conservative-protective" mindset is accidentally

produced by those who need to be protected from its consequences? Gagyi (2016) and Scheiring and Szombati (2020) among others, answer this question affirmatively.

This choice, of course, predetermines the author's analysis of the relationship between the core of the EU and Central Europe as based in discourse, not in any real economic subaltern position. Thus, the region does not become marginal until it deviates from its alleged transition to or place in the supposed Western European mainstream. The author understands that Central Europe's criticism of Western Europe is of an *"embedded nature"* (p. 62), which does not mean a split with the West. But he is not thoroughgoing enough to show that it is, in fact, part of the Western development.

Kazharski quotes Milan Kundera almost *ad nauseam*. Kundera's short essay on Central Europe (none of his other texts are mentioned in the book) is the most quoted text in the book, but the author apparently did not catch the main point of Kundera's ideas: the characteristics that were for a long time attributed to Central European nations are now common to *all* European nations. Any European nation can become extinct now, and this can cause existential anxiety for them. Thus we can read the essay by Kundera also as a call to understand a deeper unity in the problems of Central and Western Europe, a call that was not heard by the author.

May we really conclude that in the times of Trump, Johnson, and Meloni, one particular region moves to the margins merely as a result of adopting conservative nationalist positions? Kazharski contrasts the nationalist xenophobia of V4 leaders with *"German Chancellor Angela Merkel's universalist humanitarian approach"* (p. 45) and *"Merkel's universalist stance"* during the refugee crisis (p. 49). Even in this case, however, we might wonder how "universalist" and "humanitarian" Merkel's position really was if we consider her refugee deal with Erdogan, which allowed Germany to stop accepting further refugees in exchange for substantial payments to an authoritarian leader for keeping refugees within his own borders. But above all, Merkel is not a synecdoche for the West, where not only is the conservative nationalist right on the rise, but also more liberal politicians are more and more reluctant to side with "universalist" and "humanitarian" positions. The author describes a phenomenon that exists both in the West and in Central Europe to the effect that somewhere the

glass is half full and elsewhere it is half empty. In his view, what is marginal in the West becomes almost the essence of Central Europe as a region. Sometimes it is even hard to tell when the author is describing the region (divided between "nationalists" and "liberals", as are other regions) and when he is depicting conservative discourses in the region. Kazharski even partially acknowledges this on the last pages of his work as a *"potential shortcoming of the book"*: he states that he *"focuses more on Eurosceptic discursive practice and the related geopolitical imaginaries, and perhaps does not pay enough attention to the opposing counter-discourses"* (p. 183).

This is all true, but the problem lies even deeper. By telling the story of the national conservative *part* of the V4 as *the story* of whole V4 the author reifies the face that was dominant in only some parts of the region at the moment when he wrote his book. After the Polish parliamentary elections in 2023, however, we might wonder if this book is as timely as it was before.

The author's focus on the conservative nationalist side of V4 discourses has its limits and shortcomings. What he presents as discourse analysis is often based on too limited and too biased a sample (choosing the word "core" [in the sense of the "core" of the EU] as the basis of the sample in his research, of course, will bring about the expected results). In consequence, the last chapter on the Covid-19 pandemics in the region does not tell us the fascinating story of the divisions in the conservative discourse, which range from the use of the pandemic to mobilize the national conservative agenda by Viktor Orbán to the almost libertarian pandemic denialism of Václav Klaus. Instead, it mostly focuses on what was common to all these discourses and what we could expect based on previous chapters: Central Europe's othering of Western Europe. Although it might be very fruitful, the analysis again mostly confirms what was written already in the previous chapters.

To sum up, Kazharski's book does not fulfill its potential or possible promise of bringing in the comparative perspective from the East, which could have been a comparative advantage in relation to other works and the academic mainstream. Only in a few places does he do things like, for example, anecdotally compare the *"Russian concept of sovereignty"* with Orbán's (p. 157), which is something that could be the basis of an interesting

comparison. Nevertheless, the author prefers the Western European supposed liberal normalcy as the basis for comparison.

What I consider to be probably the major negative aspect of the book, considering the culturalist point of departure of the author, is the absence of its historical sense. There are two problems. The first is that the book contains some relatively bizarre lapses like the *"Kosciuszko uprising in 1830–1831"* (p. 112), or the thesis that *"at the end of the interbellum period, only the Czechoslovak (read Czech) democratic institutions had been able to withstand the temptation of authoritarianism"* (p. 74–75), as if the authoritarian Czechoslovak "Second Republic" after Munich did not exist.[1] The second problem is more serious. Kazharski does not seem to have a very deep knowledge of the intellectual and historical sources of the various cultural and historical building blocks of the discourses which he mentions. He then works with aspects of the discourses that he analyses in a relatively decontextualized way. This starts with the first chapter and the declared non-systematic approach combining elements of various historical depictions of Central Europe. Elements of these discourses are combined in a relatively loose way, without sensitivity to various layers of temporality where they originate and spread. Thus they often also miss the necessary context. This is visible even more in the chapters on individual countries. Here, the author reconstructs important moments from the history of the countries and important stereotypes which are used in their evocations. However, without sensitivity to the contexts in which those stereotypes were created and how and by whom they are used, he often depicts them in a cartoon-like stereotypical way.

The book provides many valuable insights and summaries of both regional debates and country cases. Without a deeper contextual knowledge, however, it often schematizes. In the end, it can be read not only as a valuable scholarly contribution to the debate, but also as a document of its time: a time when (at least for many influential analysts) conservative nationalism could look like something that may be localized on the European "margins" and considered a re-creation of regionalized pathologies of Central Europe, while the western part may be characterized by a "universalist", "liberal" and "humanitarian" stance. Maybe the world would be a much nicer place in which to live if we could accept the author's view – both for the time which is depicted in the book, and for the time we live in now. Unfortunately, we live in a very different world and

Western Europe can be recognized much more according to its privileged position than according to its alleged committed defense of universalism.

ENDNOTES

1   Another bizarre lapsus is "the 2004 invasion of Iraq" (p. 5). Do these prestigious British publishing houses not have any editors?

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