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## Latin America and Eastern Europe. Ideas for Historical Comparisons

**Abstract:** This article compares state and nation building in Latin America with Eastern Europe, including the Balkans. It comes to the conclusion that different imperial legacies (land empires vs. maritime empires) have led to different interpretative paradigms of understanding the world, with national/ethnic problems dominating the literature in and on Eastern Europe, whereas a social and post-colonial paradigm has become the dominant key of self-understanding in Latin America. As one of the consequences, the terms „left“ and „right“ do not have the same meaning in both regions. The article concludes with outlining a research agenda for further comparative work.

**Keywords:** Latin America, Eastern Europe, state building, nation building, imperial legacies

Not every comparison between regions is meaningful; for example, the Fiji Islands and the Eastern European states are so different that analogies merely serve to confirm this. For example, Fiji controls its borders, if at all, with boats, whereas the EU's external borders in eastern Europe are monitored with fences and cameras - but this finding teaches us nothing about human societies, because the different border protection here is not a human choice, but primarily a consequence of natural conditions. What is more interesting are cases where different results arise under comparable starting conditions.

### *Different empires, different heritage*

Eastern Europe and Latin America share a lot of contextual similarities, allowing for more in-depth analytical queries. Both are postcolonial spac-

es in which decolonization took place at roughly the same time, see, for example, the declarations of independence in Latin America and Southeast Europe, which essentially fall into the 19th century (Russia, as a country with imperial traits to this day, falls somewhat out of the scheme; but at least it also feels colonized by the West). Following independence, both regions replicated the European model of the democratic nation state, resulting in significant tension between the political paradigm and the socioeconomic reality. In both areas, there is a perception of a periphery facing a center - in Latin America, this is predominantly the United States (which appropriates the name “America“), while in Eastern Europe, it is primarily Western Europe (which equates itself with “Europe“).<sup>1</sup> In both regions, the center is frequently seen as imperial, with an ambivalent combination of admiration, resentment, pragmatic cooperation, and cultural synthesis. In the context of Samuel Huntington’s cultural struggle theories, which are still relevant today, there is debate over whether both regions are civilizations in their own right or rather “branches“ of the West that (will) fully adapt to the Western model of civilization as part of a successful transition.<sup>2</sup> East Asia or the „Islamic world“ are approached very differently; the question of future convergence is usually not even raised here.<sup>3</sup>

However, this position has been strongly countered over the last two decades: in the context of the major global power shift and the relative loss of importance of the West, there is hope in both regions that they themselves will rise to greater global visibility and “respect“ and thus also be able to leave the adaptation model. This sentiment manifests in the “populisms“<sup>4</sup> of both regions, whose core business intends to openly provoke, if not outright demonstrate, the perceived hegemon.

Against the backdrop of these Eastern European-Latin American analogies, however, the differences become even more apparent. The equating statement that these are post-imperial spaces remains nothing more than a

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1 Klaus Buchenau, “Anti-Europeanism in the Balkans, Anti-Americanism in Latin America. A Comparison“, *Religion, State & Society* 3–4/2012, 379–394.

2 Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 240–241; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 17.

3 While uprisings against communist rule in Poland, Hungary etc. are usually treated as a wish of Central European societies to return to their „real“ European identity, the Arab spring events were quickly forgotten in Western discourse, or treated as casual events.

4 I prefer to write this term in quotation marks since it usually occurs in a polemic context, rendering it difficult for scientific use.

smokescreen as long as the differences between continental and maritime empires are ignored. It is true that all empires are pyramidally structured, treating the accumulated groups and territories according to certain ad hoc principles that are often known as “diversity management”; however, because they are held together by an often absolutist monarchical top and elites loyal to it, they are neither compatible with democracy nor capable of consistently striving for social justice.

Despite these similarities, which the postcolonial approach emphasizes, it makes a difference whether someone was a subject of the Habsburg Empire, the Ottoman Empire or the Russian Empire in the 18th century, or of the Spanish colonial empire. In the continental empires, the geographical and social proximity between the dominant and the dominated groups was greater, as was social mobility. In Central and South America, on the other hand, the Spanish governors erected a border that was difficult to break against all others, even against those of Spanish descent already born in the Americas, and even more so against the indigenous peoples and the slaves imported from Africa.<sup>5</sup> This social order, often associated with the concept of casteism, was maintained by precisely defined exploitative interests. The precious metals, which were mined in Latin America by people on the lowest rungs of the social pyramid under considerable coercion and use of force, filled the vaults at the top of the pyramid.<sup>6</sup> After its demise, this empire not only left behind an extremely steep and differentiated social order, but it also encouraged refugee movements of the most oppressed sections of the population into the high mountains, jungles and deserts, where both indigenous and Afro-American groups asserted and consolidated their distinctiveness.<sup>7</sup> An ethnically mixed stratum formed as a middle link, primarily from the union between male Europeans and female indigenous people and, more rarely, blacks. In many Latin American countries today, the majority population consists of *mestizos* (mixed race), a group that Mexican intellectual José Vasconcelos predicted in 1925 would rise to global leadership as a “cosmic race”.<sup>8</sup> In reality, there is not much evi-

5 Krishan Kumar, *Visions of Empire. How five imperial regimes shaped the world*, (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), 54–55.

6 Vitus Huber, *Beute und Conquista. Die politische Ökonomie der Eroberung Neuspaniens*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus-Verlag, 2020).

7 Michael Riekenberg, *Geteilte Ordnungen. Eine Geschichte des Staates in Lateinamerika*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus-Verlag, 2017).

8 Edward Burns, *Latin America. A concise interpretive history*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 193; David Brading, “Nationalism and State-Building in Latin American History“, *Iberoamerikanisches Archiv* 20/1994, 83–108, here 98–100.

dence of this in Latin American countries; as a rule, higher social status is generally associated with lighter skin, and advancement through marriage into “white” circles is called *blanquearse* (becoming white).<sup>9</sup>

*Structural continuity after independence in Latin America*

Even in the continental empires, the reality was far from equitable when compared to the ideals of the French Revolution. In contrast, elite reproduction in the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg empires operated under more open principles, where “foreign-born” individuals outside the dominant ethnic-social group could, under certain conditions, attain the highest positions in the empire, with loyalty often valued more than ethnic origin.<sup>10</sup> This was unthinkable within the Spanish colonial empire. Despite the above-mentioned *mestizaje*, administrative and ecclesiastical offices, as well as the large landholdings, were reserved for people of European descent, while politically and economically important tasks were assigned to emissaries sent from Spain, who were favorites of the royal family.<sup>11</sup>

Behind these distinctions were also different core logics: while the expansion of the continental empires was often driven by the pursuit of a militarily secure border, the Spanish and Portuguese conquests were strongly motivated by mercantile logics. While conquistadors enslaved foreign-born populations, continental empires frequently resisted this strategy by creating military alliances that offered opportunities for advancement among the colonized.<sup>12</sup>

In the course of decolonization, the differences between the empires by no means disappeared. In the successor states of the European empires, a

9 Tomás Pérez Vejo, “La extranjería en la construcción nacional mexicana”, *Nación i extranjería. La exclusión racial en las políticas migratorias de Argentina, Brasil, Cuba y México*, ed. Pablo Yankelevich, (Mexico D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2009), 147–185.

10 Andreas Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall*, (München: Beck, 2008); Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference. The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*, (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2008); *Eliten im Vielvölkerreich: Imperiale Biographien in Russland und Österreich-Ungarn (1850–1918)*, eds. Tim Buchen, Malte Rolf, (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015).

11 Tulio Halperin Donghi, *Geschichte Lateinamerikas von der Unabhängigkeit bis zur Gegenwart*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1994), 163.

12 Franziska Davies, “Confessional Policies toward Jews and Muslims in the Russian Empire and the Case of the Army,” *Jews and Muslims in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union*, eds. Martin Schulze Wessel, Michael Brenner, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 47–63.

partial change of elites occurred as members of the “imperial peoples” (Russians, Germans, Ottoman Turks) made way for a new elite from the titular nations, some of whom had already risen during the empire due to the relative social permeability of the continental empires. The fact that the continental empires, unlike Spain and Portugal, had often refrained from converting foreigners to their religion or imposing their own language on them also played an important role. In the 18th century, Russia, the Habsburgs and the Ottoman Empire ruled vast territories in which “non-leading” ethnic groups dominated. To a certain degree, they administered themselves through their own religious institutions and cultivated their own language, which they were also able to develop further in some cases.<sup>13</sup>

In the former Spanish colonies, independence did not bring leadership to a previously subordinate ethnic group; instead, it had the opposite effect. The Creoles, descendants of European settlers born in Latin America, who had already set the tone before independence, merely expanded their power by removing their overseers appointed by the Spanish crown.<sup>14</sup> They soon split into liberals and conservatives, with the former attaching importance to civil liberties and formal legal equality, while the latter primarily wanted to secure the social pyramid from the colonial era, and thus their own privileges. After all, the liberals were so influential that the Latin American states (with the exception of Brazil) initially constituted themselves as democratic republics and abolished slavery. However, this did not change the steep social pyramid: those who had previously worked on the hacienda of white people of European descent usually continued to do the same.<sup>15</sup> Slavery, if it still existed, was abolished, but the freed black slaves now also became poor agricultural workers, unless, like many indigenous people, they retreated to particularly inhospitable areas in order to shake off the direct rule of the landowning upper class.<sup>16</sup>

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13 Martin Schulze Wessel, “Religion, Politics and the Limits of Imperial Integration – Comparing the Habsburg Monarchy and the Russian Empire”, *Comparing Empires: Encounters and Transfers in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Ulrike von Hirschhausen, Jörn Leonhard, (Göttingen etc.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 337–358, here 350; Siegfried Tornow, *Handbuch der Text- und Sozialgeschichte Osteuropas. Von der Spätantike bis zum Nationalstaat*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 299–310.

14 David Brading, “Nationalism and State-Building”.

15 Halperin Donghi, *Geschichte Lateinamerikas von der Unabhängigkeit bis zur Gegenwart*, 163.

16 Cf. the history of the black population at the Pacific coast of Colombia: Sergio Antonio Mosquera, *Descendientes de africanos en la independencia*, (Cali: Programa Editorial Universidad del Valle, 2022).

The young Latin American nation states were therefore ruled by elites who had a lot in common, including a Romance language, their European origins and the Catholic faith. Above all, they shared the latter with the vast majority of the ruled. In the new nation states of Eastern Europe, the picture was very different; the imperial elite was replaced by national elites who spoke an “indigenous” language, often from pre-imperial times, which was regarded as the people’s vernacular.<sup>17</sup> Those who continued to insist on the code of the empire, i.e. Russian, Ottoman or German, had little chance of remaining part of the elite and were expelled or chose to emigrate. The same applied to religion: the new states, insofar as the majority of their population was Christian Orthodox, each referred to a national church, different from the religion of the former empire, but also from that of neighboring states. Even the actually universal Catholic Church and the nationally rather indifferent Islam attempted over time to emulate the model of the national religion. Only those who showed religious affiliation could really become part of the national elite.<sup>18</sup> Such elite, which was generally too small to run a state, was then systematically expanded to include people from lower social classes, therefore reducing the empire’s socioeconomic divide.<sup>19</sup> Driven by national myths, most of which dated back to proud pre-imperial kingdoms, this elite set about further expanding the national territory, whereby violent conflicts between the post-imperial nations were unavoidable due to the many mutually disputed territories. These conflicts, which led to full-scale wars, especially in the Balkans, were the real school of nation-building; they enabled the expulsion of national others and transformed ordinary men who had not yet been captured by nationalist ideas into combatants, whereby the ethnic-national friend-foe mentality became a mass phenomenon.<sup>20</sup>

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17 Tomasz Kamusella, *The Politics of Language and Nationalism in Modern Central Europe*, (Basingstoke etc.: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

18 Martin Schulze Wessel, “Die Nationalisierung der Religion und die Sakralisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa“, *Nationalisierung der Religion und Sakralisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa*, ed. Martin Schulze Wessel, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006), 7–14.

19 Holm Sundhaussen, “Eliten, Bürgertum, politische Klasse? Anmerkungen zu den Oberschichten in den Balkanländern des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts“, *Eliten in Südosteuropa, Rolle, Kontinuitäten, Brüche in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, eds. Holm Sundhaussen, Wolfgang Höpken, (München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1998), 5–29.

20 The most important event in this sense were undoubtedly the Balkan Wars 1912–13, since they sharpened not only the Christian-Muslim divide, but also the divides between the populations of the Christian Balkan states. Cf. *The Wars of Yesterday. The Balkan Wars*

Latin America took a completely different path here. The national elites did not differ categorically from those of the empire, nor were they much different from state to state. As the Spanish empire had essentially disintegrated peacefully along its internal administrative borders, there were fewer territorial conflicts between the successor states. Not only culture, but also war was rarely used as a moment of nation-building.<sup>21</sup> Especially in the states with large indigenous populations, the “nation“ was a huge patchwork quilt, characterized by enormous social and cultural variations. *Nation building* was much slower and in many cases was never completed. This seems paradoxical in view of an elite that, through its origins and education, always wanted to be normatively part of the Western intellectual world and thus also embraced ideals such as popular sovereignty, universal suffrage and equal citizenship. However, the reality in which this elite lived hardly matched this - many stages in the development of European history had only taken place in their minds. The often unrealized normative aspects of European statehood also included the formation of a monopoly on the use of force, state domination of the territory, the establishment of a comprehensive school system and much more.<sup>22</sup>

*Spaces away from the state and social policy*

The maritime empire’s obsession with economic exploitation reappeared here as well. Everything that a nation state required to dominate was missing in mountainous or rainforest-covered areas that were regarded economically uninteresting, including roads, bridges, schools, and so on. In view of the enormous explosive potential resulting from the social pyramid, this was not without danger - the Latin American nation states offered, and in some cases still offer, areas of retreat for anyone who disagrees with the order or undermines statehood through criminal activities. In many states in the region, government officials either refuse to access these places at all or seek shady deals with entities that can only be classified as criminal under the law.<sup>23</sup> The

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*and the Emergence of Modern Military Conflict, 1912–13*, eds. Katrin Boeckh, Sabine Rutar, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018).

21 Brading, “Nationalism and State-Building“.

22 Charles A. Hale, “Political ideas and ideologies in Latin America, 1870–1930“, *Ideas and ideologies in twentieth century Latin America*, ed. Leslie Bethell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 133–205.

23 Peter Waldmann, “Nachahmung mit begrenztem Erfolg. Zur Transformation des europäischen Staatenmodells in Lateinamerika“, *Politische und ethnische Gewalt in Südosteuropa und Lateinamerika*, eds. Wolfgang Höpken, Michael Riekenberg, (Köln etc.: Böhlau, 2001), 19–35.

Habsburg Empire and the Russian Empire took much greater care to keep such „anarchic“ areas as small as possible, and were helped in doing so by geography, infrastructure, and other factors. The issue of a lack of state penetration is most likely to be found in the mountains of the Balkans and the Caucasus, where very similar gaps of retreat have formed.<sup>24</sup>

Certain aspects of the contemporary reality in Latin America and Eastern Europe can be understood through the analysis presented thus far. The comparison shows the great “success“ of national thinking in Eastern Europe, where nationalism often functions as a kind of guiding episteme that subordinates all other concepts. A good example is the history of (South) Eastern European agricultural reforms, which were purportedly about more equitable land distribution but frequently included discriminatory national criteria, ensuring that only farmers who also belonged to the titular nation would be supported.<sup>25</sup> Latin American land reforms, on the other hand, are about completing the unfinished nation in the first place through elementary redistribution from top to bottom, i.e. granting the poor of different ethnicities and skin colors participation - politically, economically and socially.<sup>26</sup> The nation in the sense of the French Revolution is therefore a classic left-wing theme here, which certainly sounds unfamiliar to Eastern European ears.

As a consequence, being “right-wing“ in Eastern Europe and Latin America does not mean the same thing either. The Latin American right primarily protects the existing social pyramid, the privileges of the upper class. It has an affinity with liberal thinking as far as existing property rights are concerned; this in turn also made it possible to form an axis with Washington, i.e. the joint fight against supposed or actual “communist“ forces, which until the 1980s were to be prevented by all means, be it through military coups, the founding of paramilitary groups and the like. The right in Eastern Europe has little to do with all of this and is a far more complex, “deeper“ phenomenon, without being politically more powerful as a result. Right-wing leaders such as Viktor Orbán reject the notion that “right-wing“ means teaching a complicated social pyramid and deference for those who rank higher. They see them-

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24 Peter Waldmann, “Rache ohne Regeln. Wiederaufleben eines archaischen Gewaltmotive in Albanien und Boyacá (Kolumbien)“, *Politische und ethnische Gewalt in Südosteuropa und Lateinamerika*, eds. Wolfgang Höpken, Michael Riekenberg, (Köln etc.: Böhlau, 2001), 173–194; Moshe Gammer, *Muslim resistance to the tsar. Shamil and the conquest of Chechnia and Dagestan*, (Abingdon: Cass, 2004).

25 Dietmar Müller, *Bodeneigentum und Nation. Rumänien, Jugoslawien und Polen im europäischen Vergleich – 1918–1948*, (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2020).

26 Brading, “Nationalism and State-Building“.



selves as leaders of a compact, unique nation, which they want to protect from external attacks with the help of national sovereignty. These “right-wingers“ do not see themselves as an aristocratic class, but as advocates of underdogs who are under attack from global elites.<sup>27</sup> The philosophical arsenal they refer to is far more complex than that of the Latin American right - there is much more to the Eastern European right than the pure class politics prevalent on the Latin American right, which masquerades as Europeanism. Rather, the right in Eastern Europe combines religious teachings from the respective “national churches“ with romantic philosophy, ideas from advocates of the French ancien régime, borrowings from the German conservative revolution, a dash of eugenic thinking, modern criticism of capitalism, leveling ideas of the “national community“ and much more.<sup>28</sup>

It is true that there are signs that these differences are being somewhat eroded by the global circulation of ideas, as can be seen in the reception of the anti-Western German philosopher Oswald Spengler in both regions.<sup>29</sup> However, the difference is unlikely to disappear completely, given the different social realities in Eastern Europe and Latin America.

This also indirectly indicates the most important thing about the counterpart - the left in both regions. In Latin America, the left are powerful and often quite principled opponents of the right, i.e. they are the ones attacking the social pyramid ultimately inherited from colonial times and, depending on how radical they are, aiming for the expropriation and expulsion of the traditional elites or a gradual redistribution of wealth. The more radical approach is represented by the “Russian clients“, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, while the current administrations in Colombia, Chile, Brazil, and Mexico choose a softer approach.<sup>30</sup> When the left is successful in elections, which is more of-

27 Blendi Kajsii, “Nationalist versus Populist Constructions of ‘the People’: Eastern Europe and Latin America in Comparative Perspective“, *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 2/2024, 486–506.

28 Cf. the contributions in *New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe*, eds. Katharina Bluhm, Mihai Varga, (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2020).

29 Anke Birkenmaier, “Spenglers Rezeption in Lateinamerika“, *Spengler ohne Ende. Ein Rezeptionsphänomen im internationalen Kontext*, eds. Gilbert Merlio, Daniel Meyer, (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2014), 193–204; Zaur Gasimov, “Spengler im heutigen Russland. Zur Neu-Eurasischen Konzeption der Kulturmorphologie“, *Spengler ohne Ende. Ein Rezeptionsphänomen im internationalen Kontext*, 243–255.

30 Klaus Meschkat, *Krisen progressiver Regime. Lateinamerikas Linke und das Erbe des Staatssozialismus: eine Flugschrift*, (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 2020); Alexandra Sitenko, *Strategische Partnerschaften in der Außenpolitik: die Beziehungen zwischen Russland und Ländern Lateinamerikas im 21. Jahrhundert*, (Opladen: Budrich Academic Press, 2020).

ten the case in this millennium after the end of right-wing military dictatorships and the disappointment with neoliberal attempts, they work intensively on this agenda. They are often populist and authoritarian in their approach; those among them who invoke the communist tradition go particularly far in eroding civil liberties and also in confronting the United States. While the right sees this confrontation as a disaster for the economy and for its own business, the radical left, and parts of society with it, do not see this as a problem because the USA has now discursively assumed the role of colonial Spain, i.e. it is seen as the new exploitative empire.<sup>31</sup>

In Eastern Europe, one could say, there is actually no real left in the redistributive sense described above, at least not since the end of state socialism. The parties that call themselves “social-democratic” in post-socialist Europe, which historically can mostly be traced back to the overthrown communists, have proven to be the real stirrup-holders of neoliberalism, as those who have pushed ahead with Western integration far more smoothly and professionally than the new, founding anti-communist parties, accepting all the negative side-effects: including high unemployment, the decline of industries, the hardship of private households. Of course, they were also able to win some laurels, in particular EU integration and access to the European (labor) market; however, these achievements have little to do with left-wing programs, the “job” could have been done by liberal or conservative parties if they had had appropriately “supple” personnel who were familiar with all the techniques of power.<sup>32</sup> The question arises as to whether this phenomenon of “left-wing absence” can only be explained by the experience of the communist system. Certainly, it makes a difference whether someone associates real socialism with hours of queuing for sausage and vodka or - as is sometimes the case with the Latin American left - a romanticized long-distance relationship with the Soviet Union, which they never knew from the inside. Or with Cuba, which they

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31 Alan L. McPherson, “Introduction: Antiyanquismo: Nascent Scholarship, Ancient Sentiments”, *Anti-Americanism in Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. Alan L. McPherson, (New York: Berghahn, 2006), 1–34; Michael Radu, “A Matter of Identity: The Anti-Americanism of Latin American Intellectuals”, *Understanding Anti-Americanism. Its Origins and Impact at Home and Abroad*, ed. Paul Hollander, (Chicago: Dee, 2004), 144–164.

32 Cf. the examples of Romania or Bulgaria, in Ulf Brunnbauer, Klaus Buchenau, *Geschichte Südosteuropas*, (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2023), 542–565. Similar trends can be found among the social democratic (former communist) parties of Poland, the Czech Republic, or East Germany. An exception to this rule is Greece, which never went through the discreditation of leftist thought via communist rule, thus maintaining vibrant left political sector, namely the Communists or the Syriza Party.

also do not know from their own experience, but defend as an eternal victim of US imperialism.<sup>33</sup>

From a historical perspective, it seems that the factor “experience with real socialism“ falls short as an explanation. In Latin America, the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist discourse can be traced back to the 19th century as an alternative to the existing oligarchic order. This social discourse has no direct equivalent in Eastern Europe, where the tendency to translate social conflicts into ethnic-national ones already dominated in the 19th century<sup>34</sup>; this difference is obviously linked to the above-mentioned distinctions between the colonial empires and the legacy they left behind.

As might be expected, social injustice was also always present as an issue in Eastern Europe, but it is noticeable that many actors and thinkers on the left compromised with the national over time in order to eventually become entirely national. This applies to a large part of the non-Marxist left, especially the peasant politicians of the region, who, in the course of their political establishment, transformed themselves into national bourgeoisies and advocates of nationalist programs. But it also applies to the communists themselves, who initially courted the nationally motivated opponents of the empire in the motherland of the revolution, the Soviet Union, on a massive scale with national offers (*korenizacija*, federalization), then renounced “cosmopolitanism“ and the world revolution, ultimately embracing a traditional patriotic card to the full during the Second World War.<sup>35</sup> Finally, after 1945, the communists tried everywhere in satellite states to present themselves as the accomplishers of the national project and in this way to compensate for their legitimacy deficit. In a number of cases (Albania, Macedonia, Central Asia), the legitimacy of the communists stems largely from the fact that they were actu-

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33 Kristin Ross, Andrew Ross, “Introduction“, *Anti-Americanism*, eds. Kristin Ross, Andrew Ross, (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 1–16, here 22.

34 This is best illustrated by Miroslav Hroch’s work on the emergence of nationalist movements in Central Europe, where he identifies problems in social upward mobility as the key driving force for nationalist elites within the Habsburg Empire. Cf. Miroslav Hroch, *Social preconditions of national revival in Europe. A comparative analysis of the social composition of patriotic groups among the smaller European nations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

35 Jan Claas Behrends, “Stalins slavischer Volkskrieg. Mobilisierung und Propaganda zwischen Weltkrieg und Kaltem Krieg“, *Post-Panslavismus. Slavizität, slavische Idee und Antislavismus im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert*, eds. Agnieszka Gąsior et al., (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2014), 79–108.

ally the ones who completed *nation building* or initiated it in the first place.<sup>36</sup> They pursued this strategy across multiple fronts: linguistically, by establishing national languages; institutionally, by extending influence and authority; and ideologically, by promoting a standardized historical narrative through the education system, which was often established only after 1945. In ideologically particularly piquant cases, the communists, who were inherently hostile to religion, even created their own Orthodox churches or promoted their development, as shown by the founding of the Czechoslovak Orthodox Church, the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and the autocephaly of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. All of these were “national” works that would have been impossible without the help of communist parties, and which fit perfectly into the pattern of Eastern European ethnonationalism.<sup>37</sup>

Even Eastern European communists were only “left-wing” in a very limited sense, if at all. Today’s ideological landscapes reflect this well; so-called “right-wing populism” is strongly linked to communist nostalgia and can build on its emphasis on security, equality and national homogeneity. However, liberal pro-European parties can also easily draw on communist heritage, particularly reform Marxist approaches, a certain freethinking that has been spreading in the communist nomenclature since the 1960s, and, most strongly a deeply practiced pragmatism that saw communist party membership as a prerequisite for career-making and regarded ideology as basically lip service.<sup>38</sup> Everything but genuinely left-wing thinking can apparently be traced back to Eastern European communism (such thinking is most likely to be found in the region where there was never any real socialism: in Greece).<sup>39</sup>

In comparison, the Latin American left seems extremely fresh because, unlike the right, it promises to tackle the most difficult post-imperial legacy directly: the steep social pyramid. The vitality of this thinking can be seen above all in the fact that even historical setbacks do not lead to a lasting discrediting

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36 On Central Asia, see Alexandre Bennigsen, S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslim national communism in the Soviet Union. A revolutionary strategy for the colonial world*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979).

37 Buchenau, Brunnbauer, *Geschichte Südosteuropas*, 425–433.

38 This profile of the socialist managerial class was an open secret ever since the 1960s, cf. the example of Yugoslavia in Klaus Buchenau, “The third path into the twilight? Corruption in Socialist Yugoslavia”, *Tokovi istorije* 3/2021, 89–120.

39 Leonidas Karakatsanis, Nikolaos Papadogiannis, “Introduction: Performing the Left in Greece, Turkey and Cyprus”, *The Politics of Culture in Turkey, Greece and Cyprus. Performing the Left since the Sixties*, eds. Leonidas Karakatsanis, Nikolaos Papadogiannis, (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2017), 1–30.

of left-wing thinking. Everything is actually forgiven: that the Cuban model has its dark sides and, in any case, its best days behind it; that Nicaragua turned into an autocracy after the Sandinistas returned to power; that the Venezuelan “model“ has turned into poverty and mass exodus; that the authoritarian turn of left-wing presidents Evo Morales in Bolivia or Rafael Correa in Ecuador could only be ended by overthrowing them - all of this apparently has little effect on the electoral success of left-wing politicians, as evidenced by the election victories of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico, Lula da Silva in Brazil, Gustavo Petro in Colombia or Gabriel Boric in Chile.<sup>40</sup>

I have only picked out a few aspects here that arise from a mutual mirroring of Eastern Europe and Latin America. As a field of research, the comparison of the regions, but also the interdependence of the regions, has far greater potential. Some of the basic assumptions outlined here could be tested through systematic research limited to case studies. For instance, the hypothesis that identities in Eastern Europe are ethnicized and “religionized“, whereas in Latin America it is rather social criteria that determine identity – perhaps I have exaggerated and a detailed comparison will yield more nuanced results? Research into historical memory in both regions would also be worthwhile in order to test the hypothesis formulated here of the compact ethnic-national historical narrative in Eastern Europe and the social “disunity narrative“ in Latin America. It would also be possible to take a comparative look at how identities and memories are then translated into concrete policy fields, such as regional integration. If it is true that the Eastern European ethnations not only define themselves as post-imperial, but also against each other, whereas the Latin American nation states are much more fixated on (pseudo)imperial counterparts, then it should follow that regional integration in Latin America can take place from within “against the external enemy“, whereas in Eastern Europe it must be guided primarily from the outside, because mutual mistrust in the region often prevents otherwise. Anyone comparing the South American integration project Mercosur<sup>41</sup> with EU enlargement<sup>42</sup> seems to find this basic pattern reflected in reality.

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40 This is a main line of criticism in Klaus Meschkat, *Krisen progressiver Regime*.

41 Marie Anne Madeira, “Hegemony and its discontents. Power and regional integration in Latin America“, *Power Relations and Comparative Regionalism. Europe, East Asia, and Latin America*, eds. Min-hyung Kim, James A. Caporaso, (London, New York: Routledge, 2022), 69–102.

42 Christophe Solioz, *Thinking the Balkans out of the Box. EU Integration and Regional Cooperation – Challenges, Models, Lessons*, (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017), 107.

*(In)formal structures*

Another field of research would be that of (in)formality. If both regions have become societies of public mistrust<sup>43</sup> due to their imperial experience, where people tend to assume that the state wants to harm them, this helps to explain why rules are generously broken. In this respect, the legacies of the Ottoman Empire and the Spanish colonial empire appear to be quite similar. However, it is also possible to leave well-trodden historical paths, as in the case when institutions are intensively monitored and restructured in the course of EU accession. Since the 2000s, certain types of everyday corruption have been extremely reduced in Eastern Europe, for example in the police sector.<sup>44</sup> In Latin America, where there was never an impetus to join the EU and regional integration was primarily limited to trade policy, there do not appear to have been such radical changes - or have there been?

Finally, it is worth taking a look at the epistemes that dominate area studies within both regions. In Latin America, as in Eastern Europe, the “self-explanation“ is strongly influenced by the academic centers outside the region, i.e. in the field of knowledge there are still imperial structures that extend from Western Europe or the USA to the peripheries being researched and influence academic self-interpretation. However, in Eastern Europe, due to a historically strong right-wing with a corresponding intellectual tradition, the mostly liberal-dominated epistemes from the center are facing powerful competition, which is expressed, for example, in the founding of conservative think tanks in Russia, Hungary, Poland or Serbia.<sup>45</sup> This does not seem to be the case in Latin America, which might be due to the relative strength of the left and the sparser intellectual resources of the right described above.

*Lessons from Latin America: A perspective on diversity, trust and social anomie for today's Europe*

I would like to conclude with a question that is relevant for all of Europe today, not just for Eastern Europe: what can we actually learn from Latin America, in a positive sense? I have already mentioned the tremendous diffi-

43 On this terminology, cf. Christian Giordano, Dobrinka Kostova, “The Social Production of Mistrust“, *Postsocialism. Ideals, ideologies and practices in Eurasia*, ed. Chris Hann, (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 74–91.

44 Cf. Stephan Hensell’s comparative work on police reforms in Albania and Georgia: *Die Willkür des Staates. Herrschaft und Verwaltung in Osteuropa*, (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009).

45 Bluhm, Varga, *New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe*.

culties that some countries and societies in the region are experiencing. Nevertheless, or precisely because of this, there seems to me to be considerable learning potential for us. In the previous pages, there was a lot of talk about the dominance of national, ethnic thinking in Eastern Europe. If we look at the societies of today's *Western Europe*, however, it is obvious that national homogeneity now plays a significant role in the discourse here too; parts of our society are obviously afraid of "abolishing themselves" or losing the historically established homogeneity again due to migration. In fact, our notions of public trust, actually a "pride" of the West, are at least indirectly linked to homogeneity - we rely on rules that we have agreed upon because we assume that others are similar to us and therefore consider it just as natural to follow certain rules. When I trust strangers, it is because I assume that they "tick", in roughly the same way as I do. Our societies as a whole have not yet succeeded in transferring this public trust from a relatively "homogeneous time" to a new, ethnically and ideologically more diverse context. There are undoubtedly biotopes of a conscious, lived and functioning multiculturalism; but there is also the obvious combination of massive migration, ethnic separation and mutual mistrust between different groups in an immigration society, in which each group adheres primarily to its own rules and the validity of the set of rules that unites everyone is called into question.

Since the Spanish and Portuguese conquest, Latin America has long been a place where people from different backgrounds coexist, leading to both diversity and social anomie. The kind of public trust that Western European societies were familiar with until the 1990s is unknown here. However, and this is the advantage, there are fewer problems in Latin America for those coming from outside to integrate into society where there is no "dominant culture", which eliminates the possibility of failure. The most important message that these countries send out can also be understood optimistically: the world will not end from the loss of homogeneity, you may live with it for generations. However, the chronic social injustice, which is often ethnicized here as well as in our Western European migration society, remains an incentive not to forget the value of universal human dignity.

### Summary

This article explores different patterns of interpreting reality in Eastern Europe (including Southeastern Europe) and Latin America. It claims that the social paradigm, or a cognitive emphasis on the contrast between the rich and the poor, the empowered and the powerless, is a dominant method for

comprehending society, politics, and international relations in Latin America. In contrast, Eastern Europe has developed a dominant national paradigm that tends to underline national differences rather than societal conflicts. This contrast is rooted in different imperial legacies: while the highly exploitative Spanish colonial empire left behind societies with vast social cleavages, the land empires of the Romanovs, Habsburgs, and Ottomans produced certain possibilities for social advancement for the subjugated populations, thus laying the ground for later national projects of these populations. Other factors producing the different paradigms are historical memory and geography – national liberation in Eastern Europe proceeded from competing historical projects usually rooted in the middle ages, which often pretended to the same lands on a limited territory. The resulting wars, particularly in Southeastern Europe, reinforced national identities and generated societies accustomed to viewing threat in terms of national foes. In Latin America, national states arose from colonial provinces, making border disputes and wars between neighboring states uncommon. Here, economic exploitation and domination, both within society but also on the international level, advanced as main themes of discourse, a fact that rather helped to develop elements of a common Latin American identity than solid national identities. Both paths have deep consequences for contemporary integration projects, since Latin American states (or civil societies) occasionally tend to form anti-US coalitions. Meanwhile, Eastern European states find it harder to overcome the legacy of mutual national conflicts in formulating common agendas vis-a-vis the power centers of this world, especially in Southeastern Europe.

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## Резиме

Клаус Бухенау

### ЛАТИНСКА АМЕРИКА И ИСТОЧНА ЕВРОПА. ИДЕЈЕ ЗА ИСТОРИЈСКА ПОРЕЂЕЊА

**Апстракт:** Есеј се бави поређењем изградње државе и нације у Латинској Америци са Источном Европом, укључујући и Балкан. Анализа је показала да је различита империјална заоставштина (копнена и поморска империја) довела до различитих интерпретативних парадигми разумевања света, са националним/етничким проблемима који доминирају у историографији Источне Европе, док су друштвена и постколонијална парадигма постали главни кључ саморазумевања у Латинској Америци. Услед тога, појмови „лево“ и „десно“ немају исто значење у оба региона. Чланак се завршава скицом планова за даља компаративна истраживања.

**Кључне речи:** Латинска Америка, Источна Европа, изградња државе, изградња нације, империјално наслеђе

Овај чланак истражује различите обрасце тумачења стварности у Источној Европи (укључујући Југоисточну Европу) и Латинској Америци. Према његовим налазима, друштвена парадигма или когнитивно истицање контраста између богатих и сиромашних, јачих и немоћних, главни је метод за разумевање друштва, политике и међународних односа у Латинској Америци. Насупрот томе, Источна Европа је развила доминантну националну парадигму која тежи да, уместо друштвених сукоба, истакне националне разлике. Овај контраст је укореењен у различитим империјалним наслеђима: док је експлоататорско шпанско колонијално царство оставило за собом друштва са огромним друштвеним поделама, копнена империја Романових, Хабзбурга и Османлија створила је извесне могућности за друштвени напредак потчињеног становништва, постављајући тиме темеље за потоње националне пројекте ових народа. Други фактори који производе различите парадигме су историјско сећање и географија – национално ослобођење у Источној Европи потекло је од ривалских (најчешће средњовековних) историјских пројеката, који су често претендовали на исте земље на веома ограниченој територији. Ратови који су уследили, нарочито у југоисточној Европи, ојачали су националне идентитете и створили друштва навикла да сваку опасност и претњу

поистовећују са делатношћу националних непријатеља. У Латинској Америци, националне државе су настале из колонијалних провинција, што је граничне спорове и ратове између суседних држава чинило доста неуобичајеним и ретким. Тамо су економска експлоатација и доминација, како унутар друштва, тако и на међународном плану, допринели да се из таквих дискурзивних тема развију првенствено елементи заједничке латиноамеричке припадности, уместо чврстих националних идентитета. Оба пута остављају озбиљне последице по савремене интеграционе пројекте, пошто латиноамеричке државе (или цивилна друштва) повремено теже формирању антиамеричких коалиција. У исто време, источноевропским државама је теже да превазиђу бремене међусобних националних сукоба при формулисању заједничких планова у односу на савремене светске центре моћи, посебно у југоисточној Европи.