

# What Stalin and Reagan Told Us to Think

## The Reproduction of the Cold War Paradigm in American Academia

*Deborah J. Cahalen*

### INTRODUCTION

The so-called "end of the Cold War" has made possible more academic interaction between the "East" (East-Central Europe and the former Soviet Union) and "West" (Western Europe and North America) since 1989. For Western scholars, it has brought about the opportunity for us to re-examine our conceptions about life in the Eastern Bloc in the light of newly available information, see connections between peoples, cultures, states and economies where we previously did not, find out what our Eastern European colleagues have been publishing about all these years, integrate their knowledge, construct joint research projects, and in general expand our

notion of the anthropological subject to include Eastern and Central Europe. Despite these great opportunities, the treatment of studying the Eastern Bloc has not changed significantly in the past 6 years. Instead, there is a widespread exclusion of Eastern Europe from mainstream anthropological discussions. This East/West division can be seen in the distribution of papers and panels at conferences, publication of articles in journals, training of graduate students, and the ideology behind research funding in the U.S.

In this paper, I consider the question of how and why this East-West division has been institutionally reproduced in American anthropology. I argue that a general reliance in American social science on the Cold War as a *gatekeeping concept* for Eastern Europe privileged politics as the most important topic concerning Eastern Europe, and political science as the most appropriate discipline to set the research agenda for this region of the world. This monumentalizing of the Cold War sets up the essentialization of the idea of "The Transition" in the Eastern Bloc as the sole current legitimate object of social science discourse.

This reproduction of the East/West division (and its silencing of Eastern European experiences within mainstream anthropological discourse) is crucial to theories of political economy within anthropology which center around discussion of the division between the First and the Third Worlds. Getting past the Cold War paradigm will allow us to explore more fruitfully the realities of present experiences in Eastern Europe and will force us to radically restructure theory in the social sciences in general and anthropology in particular.

## THE COLD WAR GATEKEEPING CONCEPT

A gatekeeping concept, following Arjun Appadurai's usage, is a concept which, because it is generally associated with a given region of the world, is taken to stand for that region and becomes the only legitimate lens through which to view that region (1986). I argue that the Cold War has been the gatekeeping concept for Eastern Europe in American social science since World War II. Some results of this have been an emphasis on politics as the defining object of Eastern European studies, the privileging of political science for setting research agendas, and in the current era, the obsession with the concept of transition as the new gatekeeping concept.

Eastern European studies in the American social sciences is partitioned off as a specialty perceived as being qualitatively different from and having little relevance to other concerns in mainstream social science discourse. This is due in large degree to acceptance of the Cold War privileging of politics, and by extension economics, as the most important aspects of life in Eastern Europe. If political and economic difference are the defining characteristics of the region, studies of other aspects of life are not highly valued by Eastern Europeanists. Conversely, the exaggerated emphasis on the uniqueness of the political and economic system in the Eastern Bloc makes it difficult for scholars interested in other fields to see the possibility of including Eastern Europe in their analyses.

This privileging of discussions of politics, in which everything comes back to political differences between the West and the East, has been institutionalized in part through the relegation of studies of Eastern Europe to political science. Because of the Cold War gatekeeping concept, work on the current situation in East-Central Europe and the former Soviet Union was left primarily to political scientists and other students of the political realm, with occasional work by sociologists and anthropologists. During the Cold War, Eastern Europeanists in anthropology and sociology virtually abrogated responsibility for setting their own research agendas, turning instead to political science and economics. Verdery comments:

[T]he hegemony of political science strongly influenced the way the anthropology of Eastern Europe developed. It proved all too easy, in retrospect, to solve the problem of how to find an audience by reacting to the issues posed in political science. This meant adopting much of the conceptual agenda of that powerful interlocutor – nationalism, regime legitimacy, the planning process, development, the nature of power in socialist systems, and so forth – rather than defining a set of problems more directly informed by the intellectual traditions of anthropology. (Verdery 1996: 7)

Of course, some scholars did try to pursue other research agendas, for example studies of the *zadruga* family organization. However, these scholars faced a double jeopardy situation: work which fell outside the reigning paradigm was not thought important by other Eastern Europeanists, and other scholars tended to see this work as "Eastern European studies," outside the realm of their theorizing due to the political differences.

The current most popular gatekeeping concept for East-Central Europe and the former Soviet Union is that of the Transition. Other subjects of research such as civil society, gender, and nationalism tend to fall easily under the umbrella of the transition paradigm. As Abraham Brumberg states,

'Transition' is one name of the game. Another is the question, 'Will Russia make it'? Both invite trouble, because both are based on dubious propositions: that the current period in post-Soviet history is by definition transient, with a clearly distinguishable point of departure and a discernible time of completion, and that the end of this process is either 'normality' – that blessed state of prosperous capitalism, democracy and enlightened relations with the outside world – or a backslide into a barbarism even more chilling than that of the past. (Brumberg 1996: 29)

I argue that the privileging of the concept of the Transition is rooted in an outdated Cold War paradigm in Western social science, which tends to reproduce the idea of the fundamental difference of Eastern Europe by postulating that Eastern Europe is becoming more like Western Europe. The Transition is frequently discussed in terms of the "big four" concepts – privatization, democracy, the free market, and capitalism. These four terms taken together are a mask for a discussion on another level entirely, about a transition to modernity – i.e., to being Western. Both for many residents of Eastern Europe, and for outsiders, the idea that the region is backwards, pre-modern, that it was somehow frozen during the socialist period, and that it is currently thawing and will move on to modernity, has been a powerful justification for encouraging political and economic reforms in Eastern Europe which are intended to make countries there more like Western nations, and in particular, more like the United States. This isolation of the socialist period as outside the paradigm of modernity also legitimates the Cold War mentality, which saw the Eastern Bloc as entirely outside the otherwise "global" political economic system of capitalism. In the next section, I will discuss three ways in which the Cold War paradigm was institutionalized in American anthropology: through the mechanism of research funding, through exaggerated fear of constraints on research in the Eastern Bloc, and through exclusion of Eastern Europe from mainstream discourse in American anthropology.

## THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE COLD WAR PARADIGM

The emphasis on Cold War politics was reproduced in part through the mechanism of funding agencies. Becoming a player in American academia, marshaling a research agenda, means getting research funding, especially for those of us in anthropology who intend to carry out field research. Money goes to those who are doing work which "makes sense" in terms of the current paradigm. Funding agencies are not likely to give their precious, always limited, funds to those who are doing research which does not fit in with the broader field. This tends to be even more true of the field of Eastern European studies. I was told by a former reviewer of proposals for a major U.S. funding agency in this field that the agency rarely funded anthropologists, because anthropologists didn't seem to write the sort of proposals which were concerned with the same issues as political scientists and historians. As a result of this, those few anthropological proposals which were funded tended to fit well within a field dominated by political science paradigms.

Before 1989, many American anthropologists were dissuaded from going to the East-Central Europe or the Soviet Union due to a widespread perception that an appropriately structured anthropological study could not be carried out in there due to perceived political obstacles. There is some truth to this fear, there were certainly some limitations on the kind of work anthropologists could do in the Eastern Bloc under socialism. Many anthropologists were restricted by socialist governments in terms of the research agendas which they

could pursue, and where they could live. State surveillance was an additional problem for some researchers. On the other hand, researchers such as Michael Burawoy managed to gain entry not only into several different countries, but actually to work for periods in factories in order to interview workers and share their experiences. It was possible to do much research in Eastern Europe, but the exaggerated fear of what went on behind the Iron Curtain dissuaded most scholars from even attempting a project.

The gatekeeping concept of the Cold War has made it difficult to fit Eastern Europe into the mainstream of anthropological discourse on many issues. It also makes it more likely that Western researchers will not give full credence to knowledge and theories of Eastern researchers. For example, I recently gave a copy of an article which I had written on gender relations in Poland to an American anthropologist. The paper was conceived and written in Poland, with feedback from several Polish colleagues. The response of this particular anthropologist was that it was very difficult to "get into" the paper, because the concepts and arguments were too specific to the Eastern European experience, and therefore were not broadly anthropological. Yet, this same researcher considers research in their own geographical area of specialty to benefit from "getting into" the academic debates which are specific to scholars from that area of the world.

Simply adding comparative issues is not the problem here: it is the contention, conscious or unconscious, that the very subject of Eastern European experiences and an Eastern European approach to the subject matter is not appropriate for mainstream anthropology. This same phenomenon can be seen in the distribution of panels at academic conferences, and representation of articles in journals, in which Eastern Europeanists tend to be segregated by their area specialty, rather than linked by their theoretical interests, as other scholars are.

The hegemonic construction of American anthropology as "not concerned with Europe" created a kind of scholarly black hole for Americans into which fell not merely works about East-Central Europe and the Soviet Union which did not conform to the gatekeeping concept, but the entire region, so that for many American anthropologists the issue of going to Eastern Europe was never even considered. Europe as a whole, and Eastern Europe in particular, has not been an area of strong interest to American anthropology as a discipline. This is manifested in a kind of aggressive ignorance about the particulars of European history, politics and culture that I could characterize as Europhobia in anthropology. That is, not only do most anthropologists not know very much about Europe in an anthropological sense, but even given the chance to learn, they are actively uninterested.

This is quite evident in the attitudes to which many anthropology graduate students are exposed as they begin to formulate research proposals. American graduate students are told that we will not get our research projects funded, because "anthropologists don't go to Europe. That's not anthropology." Institutionalized disregard for Eastern and Western Europe can be seen in graduate curricula, in which European ethnographies are not usually assigned, Europe is rarely discussed, and courses focusing on Eastern Europe are to be found primarily in other disciplines, such as political science and history.

We need to get away from these restrictive gatekeeping concepts, not just by reconsidering the current conceptualization of Eastern Europeanist anthropology, but also by challenging the entire paradigm of the Cold War. I would also challenge anthropologists to look at the conceptualization of the First World/Third World split, as I see this as flowing directly from the Cold War paradigm. Cold War rhetoric drove elimination of

the Second World from discussions of the global economy and culture in the First and Third Worlds. This silencing of the role of Eastern Europe in First and Third World politics and culture which occurred in First World academia as well as politics allowed the categories of First/Third World to be set up in diametric opposition, and has shaped the approach of (American) anthropology to its (primarily Third World) subjects since at least the end of the Second World War. This hegemonic focus on the First/Third World split is sometimes simplified further into the North/South division, which eliminates even the question of what the missing "Second World" was.

In the Third World, the practical necessity of playing the two major Cold War opponents against one another for money, position and power was never absent from political, practical or academic understandings of the political/economic world system. But American readings of theories of political economy, from modernization to dependency to world systems schools, have been shaped by the Cold War gatekeeping concept. "Modern," "developed" and "core" have all been glossed as "capitalist industrial democracy." Even the current era in Eastern Europe is being conceived as a transitional era, after which these countries will finally be absorbed into the dominant political-economic world system as part of either the First or the Third World. This simplistic analysis mutes real historical differences in an effort to force the Eastern Bloc into fitting the dominant paradigm of political economy.

#### PRESCRIPTIONS

This segregating off of Eastern European studies from mainstream arguments in the social sciences will not be alleviated by simply training Eastern Europeanist researchers more broadly, or injecting explicit comparative issues into our work. It is a task of reincorporating Eastern Europe into anthropology and bringing more sophistication to discussions of the world system. This would involve changing perceptions of the First, Second and Third Worlds to reflect their actual relationships, and expanding ideas about the global political economy to see actual connections.

I am aware of the irony of arguing for studying Europe, at a point when as a discipline we are trying to get away from Eurocentrism. However, turning a truly analytical eye to Europe we can better see and deconstruct Eurocentric theory. This in turn helps to deconstruct the

First/Third World split, and deconstructs the still prevalent idea of Europe as the hegemonic center, progenitor of theories which are universally applicable, vs. the Third World as periphery, acceptors of European *Geist* and development. This project explodes the monolithic idea of Europe, deflates Eurocentrism in theories, explodes the privileging of the First/Third World paradigm and the silencing of Eastern European experiences, and goes back and looks for those silenced connections and in order to see what they meant.

To overcome this hegemonic distancing from European experience and issues, we as researchers and theorists need to break out of the paradigm from both sides of the theoretical fence. For social scientists who do not deal with Eastern Europe, this means recognizing that mainstream theories do not necessarily admit a place for considering the region in terms of its particular issues, or in terms of issues which are common themes throughout the world. It means particularly rethinking the paradigm of the dichotomy into North and South, or First World and Third World. For Eastern Europeanists, it

means breaking out of the gatekeeping concepts which have structured so much of our research. Of course the Cold War structured many aspects of life in East-Central Europe and the former Soviet Union, and in the United States and many other countries as well. But we as researchers are able to write about other places outside the Eastern Bloc without always having the political and economic structures of the Cold War there overwhelm our thinking about those places. A perspective which takes into account the consequences of the Cold War but is not in itself determined by the hegemonic construction of the Cold War and the Iron Curtain will radically change the construction of theory in anthropology and in many other social science disciplines.

Of course, there are many kinds of changes presently occurring in Eastern Europe, and 1989 was a watershed year for those "transitions." However, this does not mean that every research project needs to be structured by the notion of the Transition, a unidirectional, evolutionary concept in which the end point is a capitalist industrial democracy. For example, there are similar processes underlying the sweeping changes in the concepts of the nation in the Western European experience with setting up the European Union, and in East-Central Europe casting off ties to the former Soviet Union. The merging of political and economic boundaries in Western Europe, such as currencies and passports, has produced anxiety over patrolling political, ethnic and linguistic borderlands. Ideals of linguistic purity have become prominent as populations attempt to delineate their national identities in opposition to the integrating tendencies of the European Union. Eastern Europeans must reconstruct national identities (some of which were maintained in opposition to socialism) into forms which resonate with current national ideals. Some common themes which can be traced worldwide are changing collective memories and national identities, counter-hegemonic discourses attempting to manipulate mass historical consciousness, and the effects of changing attitudes towards authority and freedom under different historical circumstances.

My concern is that bringing considerations of the Eastern Bloc back into good graces in the discourse of the social sciences not mean merely that these countries are "tamed" into fitting into extant theories. This would strip them theoretically of their experiences under socialism, and the particulars of how the Cold War was experienced by those who were (or were perceived to be, in the case of Yugoslavia), on the other side of the Iron Curtain. This would impoverish both an understanding of Eastern European countries, and of First and Third world countries. Rather, I would suggest that the "end of the Cold War" gives us the opportunity to remove a conceptual paradigm which silenced discussion of East-Central Europe and the Soviet Union in mainstream academia, and enables us to see more deeply. It allows us to penetrate the silence about the Eastern Bloc, which has existed in discussion in and about the West, and to reformulate broad conceptualizations of "how the world works."

#### REFERENCES CITED

- Appadurai, Arjun (1986): "Theory in Anthropology: Center and Periphery." In *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 28: 356-361.
- Brumberg, Abraham (1996): "Sic Transit Post-Sovietology." *The Nation*, January 29 (1996): 29-31.
- Verdery, Katherine (1996): *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

## What's In A Name?

### The Persistence of East Europe as Conceptual Category

*David A. Kideckel*

Europe between Germany, Russia, the Baltic, and Aegean has long been a source of wonder. The origins of the east as East, that is as "other," was first evident in the "long sixteenth century" when portions of the European landmass seemed to diverge in fundamentally different ways. As the story goes, developing Western capitalism produced an East of "second serfdom," persistent underdevelopment, differentiated class structures, and undemocratic political regimes. However, it also created a Western science that concretized these conditions in the Western mind (and some would say in dependent Eastern mentalities as well). Such distancing was further elaborated through two world wars, a host of military conflicts, and the Cold War, where the dichotomous nature of the now-halves of the European continent were formalized by political economic, diplomatic, and even academic structures (Sampson and Kideckel 1988).

Still, categorization of east as East was never total or certain. Even during the twentieth century's wars, hot and cold, it was and remains a set of overlapping regional categories. Depending on the criteria employed – geographic, political, cultural or linguistic – the region between Germany and Russia, the Baltic and Aegean, was also variously conceived. The concept of Central Europe was ascendant between the two World Wars, while south of the Danube the fragmentary states with nationalist intrigues were defined pejoratively as the "Balkans." The control of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania by the then-Soviet Union hived these states off from the "East" and moved them further east, conceptually at least, into Russia. The failed Communist insurgency in Greece, meanwhile, ultimately made this nation, more eastern and Eastern than most, a Western state as well.

All this movement, however, more firmly entrenched the "Bloc" states as the conceptual East for Western political authority. Even then-Yugoslavia was so relegated, though as much due to its history of ethnic conflict as to its Titoist political economy. Further, following the lead of political forces, though the states and peoples of post-World War Two Europe between Germany and Russia still varied extensively, in Western minds they were readily conflated into an invariant East. A knowledgeable few sought to retain a concept of Central or East-Central Europe (Seton-Watson 1972) emphasizing a common

#### INTRODUCTION: THE ORIGINS OF EAST EUROPE

Europe between Germany, Russia, the Baltic, and Aegean has long been a source of wonder. The origins of the east as East, that is as "other," was first evident in the "long sixteenth century" when portions of the European landmass seemed to diverge in fundamentally different ways. As the story goes, developing Western capitalism produced an East of "second serfdom," persistent underdevelopment, differentiated class structures, and undemocratic political regimes. However, it also created a Western science that concretized these