Nesting Orientalisms: Case of Hungary, Its Imaginary Occidentalisation Process, and Inconsistencies

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What is the border between Central and Eastern Europe? This is an unanswered question in the literature of contemporary European history and politics. In the modern state system, imaginary boundaries are products of the imagined communities, and these boundaries also cause either to occidentalize or to orientalize the lands due to its top-down/elitist imagination procedure. During the Cold War years, anti-USSR voices are important to see the certain demand for Europeanization among people in today's Central Europe where there especially had the communist legacy. In general, the ultimate goal is to identify themselves as more western among Central and Eastern European states for the sake of civilizational values of the Enlightenment and to reach today's contested Neoliberal welfare. This desire causes *Nesting Orientalisms*, Milica Bakic-Hayden's concept. *Nesting Orientalisms* are about re-constructing new Orient in the same region to hierarchizeitself as occidental. Through the process of mapping its location and construction of occidental identity, Hungary defines itself as a part of Central Europe. But what are the legitimated reasons of Hungary to define itself as Central European instead of Eastern Europe? Do these reasons perfectly fit in today's Central European formulation and stereotype? What are the possible reasons to reject Hungary's Central European self-definition? Moreover, under the shadow of the discussion on Central Europe vs. Eastern Europe, to what extent does the rise of authoritarianism block ongoing occidentalisation process of Hungary? In this research, I will answer these questions by analyzing modern political history of Hungary by the method of interpretivist process tracing.

Keywords: *Nesting Orientalisms*, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Hungary, Cold War, occidentalisation

Introduction

In the name of the book, *In Search of Central Europe* (Schöpflin & Wood, 1989), the phenomena to separate Europe via invisible borders is clear in immediate post-Cold War atmosphere. This demand can be easily associated with the main motto of the zeitgeist for post-communist states: "return to Europe" (Agh, 1999). However, in geographical context, there is just one continent which is called Europe; hence Pandora's Box opens: To which Europe do the post-communist *European* states want to return? It is quite obvious that the divisions in Europe are politically constructed due to ideological, economic, and social distinctions overtime in the same continent, especially in its modern history. Orientalization and occidentalization processes became daily exercises to re-arrange the borders between Western and Eastern Europe. Then, where is Central Europe?

This is an unanswered question in contemporary history of Europe. For Kundera, "Central European identity" is directly related to "culture" and "its own distinctive profile" (Kundera, 1984). At this point, it is

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necessary to indicate that distinctive profile and culture of Central European identity is a way to separate Central Europeans from "Russians" (Todorova, 1996). Hence, "othering" is still core part in the process of the construction of a new identity in post-communist Europe and the new other is inevitably eastern and repressive one. For Schöpflin, this is also explained as "authentic enough to act as an organizing principle for those seeking something other than Soviet-type reality" (Schöpflin & Wood, 1989, pp. 19-30). Hence, the identity of Central Europe is becoming to closer to the identity of Western Europe by a rupture from Russian (communist) legacy.

Therefore, Eastern Europe became newly hierarchized backward neighbor of Central Europeans. This occidentalization process for the sake of return to Europe is a typical example of Milica Bakic-Hayden's concept, *Nesting Orientalisms* which are about re-constructing new "Orient" in the same region to hierarchize itself as occidental. Orientalized part is not just old communist friends (new foes), also internally orientalized nations, Balkan states, which are important to re-write and re-locate Central European states in global political arena as more European. For the case of Hungary, it is certainly part of the league of the Central Europeans since 1989, and it is a generic example of anti-communist, democratically western and leading figure of Balkan states. Since the collapse of the Empire of Austro-Hungary, visible patterns are the cases for Hungary to classify itself as a Central European state, especially after the Cold War. It clearly aimed to be part of the Hellenic past of European culture and an alien of the Russian world. However, despite successful integration in the western league and *Nesting* orientalization process vis-a-vis Russians and Eastern European states, especially Balkans, Hungary's ongoing occidentalization is questionable today.

Authoritarian nationalism, corruption, and falsification of history are the current problems of Hungary that block its ongoing occidentalization, and cause to return to "Eastern Europe". In this paper, I aim to analyze the grandiose concepts, *Nesting Orientalisms* and *Backwardness*, to define and separate Central and Eastern Europe to show their constructed features in terms of their meanings. Then, I discuss how, theoretically, the differentiation is seen and how it becomes *Nesting*. And, I will analyze the case of Hungary and its pseudo-occidentalization since 1989 by applying to *Nesting Orientalisms* in the region. Finally, I analyze how today's Hungary demonstrates a certain degree of backlashing, and how we can locate it as Eastern Europe instead of central one. In the last part, I draw main conclusions. In this research, the process of occidentalization of Hungary is traced in its modern history by an interpretivist analysis.

Larry Wolff's Concept of "Backwardness" in Europe

Larry Wolff's classic book, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, is important to locate the position of imaginary Eastern Europe because, as he defines in his book, Western Europe needed a "backward" neighbor to be able to occidentalize its modern history. One of the most legitimate reasons of the west to be able to orientalize Eastern Europe is about Eastern Europe's communist/Russian history. Historically, travelers' diaries also show to see the differentiation between Western and Eastern Europe. For example, "Hungary, Wallachia, Bulgaria, or Serbia, eighteenth-century travelers agreed that these otherwise little-known regions were desolate places, engulfed with poverty and misery" (Bakic-Hayden, 1995, p. 921). Modern example of this genre Rebecca West's *Black Lamb Gray Falcon* clearly hierarchies Eastern European, especially the ex-Yugoslavian, states by referring to its daily violence and terror in 1930s. However, criminalization and isolation of the communism is one of the easiest and concrete ways to locate "barbaric" Eastern Europeans as "eastern" (Malksoo, 2014).

For Neumann, the construction of the identity of other to define Russians is not a new project or naming in the continent of Europe (2008). However, its failed modernization and end of the communist history are thought of as lessons for Russians who need to "learn" from Europe to be successful (Neumann, 2008). Hence, Russia and its sphere of influence in Europe are evaluated as the unsuccessful students of the world politics, and they are hierarchized by their successful neighbors. It is also important to indicate that ethnic Slavic identity is referred to demarcate Europe as the west and the east, and Slavism is seen as ethnic reason to hierarchize Eastern Europe by referring to their Slavic Russian "brothers" (Suslov, 2012). However, like travelers' diaries, this is just a secondary reason to consolidate othering process which is mainly about ideologic differentiation during the Cold War.

Thus, the concept of "backwardness" to create a binary in Europe has a Russian tongue also due to its ideologic influence in its near history and ethnic Slavic ties. However, this dichotomy clearly demonstrates a "contrast" which demarcates the west from Eastern Europe. Hence, the anomaly is construction of a third Europe: Central Europe. Radio Free Europe in 1994 "published news in three categories: 'Russia', 'Transcaucasia and Central Asia', and 'Central and Eastern Europe'" (Todorova, 1996, p. 7). Now, we have another Europe which is in the middle of Europe and needed to be differentiated from the Eastern one. Before that, 1980s are crucial times to analyze an emergency for the different naming, Central Europe, despite the lack of concrete change which would occur in 1989. Central European identity and a certain demand to use it came from a Hungarian historian to define Hungarian's identity neither Western nor Eastern (Szücs, 1983). So, today's small state but also heir of the glorious Austro-Hungarian Empire is one of the leading examples of *Nesting* orientalization in the region.

Nesting Orientalisms: Central Europe vs. Eastern Europe

Bakic-Hayden defines the concept of *Nesting Orientalisms* in her article during the last times of the Yugoslavian Wars (1995). In her words, "while geographical boundaries of 'Orient' shifted throughout history, the concept of 'Orient' as 'other' has remained more or less unchanged" (Bakic-Hayden, 1995, p. 917). This is a *Nesting* style othering process in the region for the case of the states of the Socialist Yugoslavia while the dissolution. For example, the dichotomy "Balkan state" and "non-Balkan state" between the former Yugoslav states is a way to see how the states that evaluate themselves as "non-Balkan" try to occidendalize themselves via newly constructed rupture from their modern and socialist history. Moreover, the term of *Nesting Orientalisms* can be also used for the similar cases and othering stories. Hungary's demand to be classified as a Central European state is an example of this term.

In Szücs's piece, the description of Western Europe is related to the dominance of the west over the east culturally, politically, and economically, moreover "Latin Christianity" vs. "caesaropapist Orthodoxy" is used to define the hierarchy in Europe (Todorova, 1996). Thus, Hungary assumed to be part of the developed west, but this occidentalization process is not easy to be completed overnight for Hungary. Then, the new naming, Central European identity, became a positive label for Magyars to facilitate rupture from Eastern Europe. For Deak, "Hungary was a bastion of Western Christianity against the pagans, against such Balkan heretics as the Bogomils, against Byzantium, and (beginning in the fifteenth century) against the Muslim Turks" (1992, p. 1043). Hence, from both modern and primordial perspectives, story of *Nesting Orientalisms* is inevitable part of Hungarian nation-state formulation.

Even during the communist regime, Hungarian uprising of 1956 can be interpreted as a clear mass demand against Stalinism and its impact on Hungarian politics. Hence, 1950s is a period that is associated with

de-Stalinization among Hungarian people, and the revolutionary leader of this period in Hungary, Imre Nagy, turned into an iconic figure to commemorate his "moderate" ideas (Miklos, 2014). After Cold War, Imre Nagy and the Hungarian uprising for the sake of de-Stalinization assumed one of the efforts for a rupture from communist influence and legacy of Russia.

Therefore, deciding on the exact time to search a Central European identity is not certain in the history of Hungary, but it is quite clear that it is an ongoing aim for Magyars and its most concrete version is the accession period to the EU and the result of full membership. The full membership signifies a total integration to Neo-liberal and Western Europe.

Case of Hungary: Do Magyars Belong to Which Europe?

Despite the uncertainty on time when the Magyars wanted to be a part of the west and western civilization, as discussed above, the 20th century is crucial to analyze ideas and social movements on the road of Europe even in the communist regime.

End of the Cold War is a legitimate beginning for the Magyars for a certain and visible rupture from Eastern Europe. The Round Table process for Hungary is important for internalization and settlement of democratic principles because however the system is designed at the beginning, it will try to conserve its first structure (Lijparth, 1992). Although the election system is not designed to protect the rights of minorities and does not aim a total minority inclusion, a parliamentary system welcomes different political parties (Lijparth, 1992).

Next steps were institutionally integration to the west, and the EU became an ultimate goal for the Magyars to reach the welfare of the west as soon as possible. Hence, democracy and integration to the west mean "immediate access to Western levels of prosperity" (Schöpflin, 1994). Agenda Hungary (1997) is a clear summary of Hungarian accession period since the end of the Cold War to the west, and for Agh "elites are much more interested in European integration than the masses with their particular short-term interests" (1999, p. 850). Moreover, as Kopecky and Mudde stated "the Hungarian elite has become less Europhile over the years and, in particular, the last government had a somewhat strained relationship with the EU" (2002, p. 307). However, the total accession to the EU in 2004 is successful completion of a task on the road of the west and rupture from Eastern Europe despite the fluctuating relations during the accession period between the EU and elites (enlargement fatigue vs. Euro-fatigue).

After institutional integration, it was time for the social integration for Magyars to the west, and the crucial part is the memory of this small and formerly communist state. Imre Nagy turned into a public hero, and his monument eradicated in front of the Hungarian parliament in Budapest (BBC, 2018). *Terror Haza*, Terror House is a Hungarian museum, which was founded to negatively commemorate the communist history of Hungary in 2002. Moreover, Holocaust Memorial Center was founded in 2004 to commemorate Holocaust in Hungary which is in accordance with the collective memory of the EU.

However, despite the full membership and mnemonic integration to the west for a Central European identity and to be a part of Western welfare, Hungary re-arranged its façon and changed its direction under the Fidesz government, especially since its victory in 2010. Now, there is an ontological rupture in Hungary's aim for a more European identity in its modern history.

Fidesz and Return to "Eastern Europe"

Despite the efforts of integration to the EU by Fidesz, a Magyar political party founded in 1988 and rose to

power since 2010 in the parliament, in the current politics, there is a clear attempt to refer to another Europe which is neither Central nor Western one (Kreko & Enyedi, 2018). What it is interesting in this context is that the norms of the west (interchangeable with the EU) are alienated and labeled as enemies of Fidesz-based definition of Europe (Kreko & Enyedi, 2018).

Before listing Fidesz's current actions and party position in Hungary, how to locate Fidesz as a political party in terms of its ideology and discourse is an important step. There is a clear "authoritarian turn" in Fidesz after 2010 victory (Jenne & Mudde, 2012). Also, Fidesz combines its authoritarianism with an ethno-populist party discourse which is a clear illustration of its tendency to ethnically exclusionary party ideology (Jenne, 2018). Both authoritarian and direct exclusionary discourse and policies of Fidesz are contrast to normative framework of the EU. Hence, Fidezs's U-turn is a backlashing and alienation from the EU/Western perspective. This U-turn also signifies possible populist electoral victories because Fidesz hierarchizes desires of "the people" of Hungary as primary and demonstrates the EU as guilty due to economic situation.

Orban states that "there was no sense that European policy needed to be broadly consistent with some long-term national objectives" (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2013, p. 26). Hence, ethnic friends and national sentiments are used as a tool to establish a barrier between Hungary and the EU or Western Europe. From the perspective of Fidesz, Europe is not related to the EU's value system; it is related to "European Christian values" (DW, 2019). Hence, Christianity is used as a tool to mention a new Europe. Is this a new one? Fidesz and its certain change from Europhile to Eurosceptic party signify a blurring in the political map of Europe.

This sharp change can be interconnected to several reasons in the modern politics of Hungary. First one is about emergence of a *mafia state* in the period of Fidesz and consolidation of the oligarchs of Fidesz (Magyar, 2016). One of the crucial examples of the Fidesz's oligarchs is the monopoly over tobacco by an oligarch all around Hungary (Yavuz, 2019). Also, clientelism (Yavuz, 2019) became an inevitable part of Hungarian elections, and illiberal democracy and its victory are clearly observable in Victor Orban's Hungary.

Even in the domain of the memory politics, there is a direct attempt to falsify the history which is not in accordance with the standards of the EU style (collective) memory. For example, in the *Terror Haza*, the communist history is totally distorted, and there is no room to face "real" Hungarian Nazi history. In other words, Hungarian Nazi history is depicted as a top down period and irreverent with Hungarian national sentiment which is a clear example of falsification of history. For the sake of the consolidated relations with Russia, Imre Nagy's monument was replaced overnight, and it was exiled from its popular location (BBC, 2018).

Moreover, there are current cases that remind us of neo-Nazi movements, such as attack against an LGBTQI+ friendly pub, expulsion of the Central European University, founded a left-leaning Jewish millionaire, and strong opposition to receive the refugees. These are important empirical evidences to see the rise of fascism in current Hungary, and also a clear rupture from the norms and identity of Europe. Despite the rise of fascism in Europe, Fidesz case is different because Fidesz rose to political power and clearly attack and alienate the idea of the EU to defend the cultural norms of Hungary (Pytlas, 2013).

Hence, an effort for the sake of westernization is interrupted by Fidesz in Hungary in a very sharp discourse and mobilization. This definitely destroys Central European identity of Hungary that was aimed to be obtained especially in the 20th century even in the days of the communist regime. Hence, the embedded backwardness emerged in Hungary, and it could be evaluated as a "return to Eastern Europe" not a creation of a new Europe.

Conclusion

In this paper, I aim to analyze the binary between Central and Eastern Europe. From the historical perspective, the idea of Central Europeanness turned into a way to be part of the western civilization and the welfare. That's why there is a clear aim to alienate and other the backward and ideologically remnant of communist part of Europe. To demonstrate *Nesting Orientalisms* in the region to complete their occidentalization process, I selected the case of Hungary and its *Nesting* orientalization process vis-à-vis Eastern Europe. It reached the peak with the collapse of communism, and the final stage was the total accession to the EU for Magyars to be part of the civilized world.

However, current ruling party, Fidesz, and its direct effort for a rupture from the dream of Western Europe is clearly traced. The rise of authoritarian nationalism and fascism in Hungary cause an uncertainty to map its imagery location. It directly others Western Europe and the EU and demonstrates a clear rebellion to defend barbaric and Nazi-based cases. Hence, there is a contrast mapping on behalf of Hungary, and in which Europe we can locate Hungary is questionable now.

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