



**Symptomatic blind spots -  
Inequalities between Eastern and Western  
Europe in German academia**

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# Experiences

- + „Has care [as an issue] already arrived to Hungary?“
- + Invitation to a Special Issue on a political phenomenon in ECE
- + Editorial comments to a paper by editors
- + Story of a blogpost based on an English peer reviewed article by ECE scholars
- + Also: Positive experiences

- Every idea comes from the West
- Blind to own entanglements in the problem (care drain, care migration, exploitation of ECE care workers)
- Without language skills doing a research on that country?
- Without the 30 years of literature on the region
- Theory from the West, data from the East
- 30 years of literature on ECE (political economy, social sciences, gender policy, activism) unknown, except Ivan Krastev
- Thoughts better accepted if the same inequalities quoted from Western scholars → credibility (West-quoting trap)
- No sociological and no regional expertise
- Questioning even facts from politics of own country
- Pushing a theoretical framework alien to the research & accusing actors of being right-wing
- Treated not as „a voice from Hungary“ but an expert on the topic (not even on the own country)

# Blind spots are symptomatic because...

- + ...political economy
- + Covid: agriculture, meat industry, elderly care
- + How do we measure progress & gender equality
  - + Carework on the backs of Southern and Eastern European women
  - + „Distorted emancipation” (Uhde 2016)
- + Shalini Randeria and Regina Römhild call the EU Eastern Enlargement a “crypto-colonial inclusion” of the Eastern regions of Europe which are interpreted through “a lack of modernity and Europeanness” (Randeria/Römhild 2013: 21);
  - + through calling the parties Old and New Europe cultural hierarchies are produced and reproduced (23),
  - + these “crypto-colonial inner hierarchies in Europe” (24) are still in place.
- + What does this have to do with social sciences?

# Social sciences I.

## Alatas 2003

- + the imperialistic relations in social sciences parallel those in international political economy: „exploitation, tutelage, conformity, secondary role of dominated intellectuals and scholars, rationalization of the civilizing mission, and the inferior talent of scholars from the home country specializing in studies of the colony” (601),
- + Social Science Powers (US, Great Britain, France), semi-peripheries (like Germany, with a relative autonomy and a certain radiation towards the peripheries) and peripheries (Global South) (– and CEE)
- + „The social sciences in intellectually dependent societies are dependent on institutions and ideas of western social science such that research agendas, the definition of problems areas, methods of research and standards of excellence are determined by or borrowed from the West” (603).
- + Division of labour (607)
  - + 1. The division between theoretical and empirical intellectual labour
  - + 2. The division between other country studies and own country studies
  - + 3. The division between comparative and single case studies

# Social sciences II.

## Müller 2018

- + „the East does not fit the frame through which we think the global”
- + “[T]he binary of North and South creates a black hole” (734)
- + „The East is too rich to be a proper part of the South, but too poor to be a part of the North.”
- + „The Global North, often in the guise of ‘Europe’, serves as the teleological horizon against which the East becomes a not-quite-North. Countries may join the European Union, but the „racism that Eastern European immigrants experience in Western Europe” (Nowicka 2017) prevail and „mark the difference between the East and the West” (Kuus 2014).
- + „Just as it is not quite North, it neither is quite South. In the push for decolonial knowledge and theorising from the South, the East gets no mention: it is not that it is lumped in with Latin America, Asia and Africa. No, it simply is not part of this project.”

## Kremmler 2020

- + ECE: „an epistemic flyover zone”



# Social sciences III.

- + Poststructuralism as the new universalism / Western superiority
  - + Material inequalities sidelined or understood as identities (class → strata, classism)
    - + Kováts & Land 2021
  - + Travelling of theories: along power relations
  - + “Judith Butler’s work, for instance, is known and read in even the most materially deprived of European countries, whereas the work of women from those countries themselves remains virtually unknown outside of their own land” (Griffin and Braidotti 2002, 27–28.)
  - + poststructuralism / deconstructivism as any other social theories are products of and conditioned by the material and geopolitical circumstances they were born in (Soiland 2017)
  - + Poststructuralism has become a marker of progress in GS. The late or reluctant adherence is interpreted as essentialism and backwardness (Garstenauer 2018)
  - + How this plays out in politics, e.g. LGBT issues: Re-establishing the borders between true and second-class Europeans (Slootmaeckers 2019, Kulpa 2014)

# Gender studies in ECE

## + Garstenauer 2018

- + Alatas → Russia related Gender Studies, funding and other dependencies (research questions, who delivers theory who the data etc.)

## + Wöhrer 2016: Gender studies as a multi-centred field?

- + CEE scholars: in 0-2% of the researched textbooks and encyclopedias in US and Germany and the studied international journals – even when they explicitly state that they invited „feminists from the globe” to contribute (2016: 330). „I doubt that we have achieved multi-centrality. It is mainly theories and critique based and acknowledged in the USA that then travel to Germany, Slovakia or India via readers, textbooks and journals.” (338)

## + Zimmermann 2007 on institutionalization of GS in CEE

- + Gender Studies were „symbolic markers of compliant westernization” (Zimmermann 2007: 141)

# Conclusions

- + Lack of regional expertise
- + Lack of political economy (of knowledge production, of diffusion of ideas, of inequalities)
  - + Structural inequalities reduced to the symbolic („Othering”)
  - + Global inequalities reduced to Global North vs. Global South: ECE is a blind spot
- + Hypocrisy & double standards
  - + One cannot understand the authoritarian turn without the economic side (Scheiring 2020)
  - + German automotive industry in Hungary, North Stream II etc. (Panyi 2020)
- + Poststructuralism and queer feminism as new universalisms → resistance interpreted as backwardness / right-wing
- + Overemphasising of positioned knowledge used also by the Right: if not on the grounds of universal moral criteria, how do we know that their interpretations and positioned knowledges are worse?



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