Distinguishing white from white: Images of East Central European difference after the Fall of the Wall

Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, Birkbeck College, University of London

In 1999, Timothy Garton Ash confirmed the existence of the much debated Central Europe on the basis of its legitimisation in western political parlance. He famously asserted: ‘In the 1990s, Central Europe has become part of regular political language … So, that’s official. If the Queen and Henry Kissinger say its exists, it exists’ (Garton Ash 2000, 383). It appears that our conference has been devised as a massive interdisciplinary attempt to vindicate, as well as to debate, this strikingly Foucauldian claim concerning the causative power of the discourse which, by articulating the knowledge about the entity named Central Europe, i.e. by establishing the criteria of the Central European difference, produces the object of which it speaks.

However, from the positionality of the western subject, the disputed markers of the Central European identity might be still closely intertwined with those of Eastern European, and often, despite all the manifest contrast between the heritage of Latin or Orthodox Christianity or Islam, largely indistinguishable. At least, as far as modernity, and modern bodies, are concerned. Moreover, as observed by Iver Neumann, the early 20th-century idea of Central Europe, revived as a moral appeal by Czech, Hungarian and Polish dissidents defending their western roots, has become a replay of the earlier discourses by which Europe, i.e., western Europe was forged in the process of differentiating from their barbarian others, such as ‘the Turk’, and ‘Russia’ (Neumann 1999, 159-60). The discourse on Central Europe is thus inextricably linked to both the invention of Eastern and Western Europe, and therefore cannot be unpacked in isolation from them. [We owe to Larry Wolff a lengthy analysis of the ways in which the idea of backward and underdeveloped l’orient de Europe has been invented by French Encyclopedists in the age of the Enlightenment as a constitutive part in the construction of the progressive, modern, and civilised western Self, and was subsequently legitimised by the Cold War division of the continent, and moreover framed by the Iron Curtain (Wolff 1994). Whilst Larry Wolff scrutinised the invention of Eastern Europe, Maria Todorova analysed the process of imaging the Balkans; what is missing so far is a similar capacious study on the production and the expanding boundaries of Central Europe. ]

This paper, which forms part of a larger research, is focused on the visual discourse on East Central European difference, that is on its representation in western popular imagery post-1989. It looks at the ways in which the related
media of newspaper cartoons and cartographic diagrams - both destined for wide audiences and employing simplification and distortion for the clarity of the argument - contribute to the legitimisation of the notion of East Central Europe, by reproducing and modifying the signifying strategies, which had been foregrounded by the Enlightenment and re-framed by the ‘scopic regimes’ of the Cold War. [My approach is largely informed by Foucauldian discourse theory, as well as by, departing from it, Edward Said’s seminal work on the mechanisms of ideological construction of otherness, Orientalism, and finally by the studies on the socio-cultural patterns of representation and visuality.]

The Fall of the Wall shook the mental and literal map of Europe and many sets of ‘fixed identities’, opening discussions on the meaning of history and ideology, on representation and the idea of Europe (Wæver 1995), as well as challenging the confrontation between the enlightened rhetoric of unity and the modern episteme of difference. Paradoxically, the year 1989 brought also a genuine explosion in the field of East and Central European studies, a massive attempt to ‘fix the meaning’ of the Other Europe, which emerged from behind the debris of the Wall.

Numerous comprehensive histories and analyses of East Central Europe which have been, and still are, produced in the West narrate its full ‘biography’, its ‘making’ in the distant past, while theorising gloomily on the prospects of ‘transition’ of those impoverished, backward, agrarian, obsessively nationalistic and patriarchal societies to western model of democracy and civil society, multiculturalism and global economy. LEFT & RIGHT The new, post-1989-historical atlases of East and Central European history and its peoples, such as the French atlas by André and Jean Sellier of 1995 (LEFT), or a Canadian one by Robert Magosci of 1993 (RIGHT), help thus to visualise, to (re)create, as well as to commodify the unstable body of East and East Central Europe and its spatial ‘evolution’ throughout the ages, from prehistory (or from Charlemagne/ the Enlightenment/ Vienna Congress/ Versailles conference/ Yalta Treaty) to the present. The brand new encyclopaedias of Eastern Europe present their audiences with the tailored doses of power/ knowledge, ready-to-use for ‘classroom teaching’. Some of those publications pledge a detached academic analysis of

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1 See, amongst others Magosci 1993; Held 1994; Hupchick and Cox 1996; Crampton 1996; Lewis 1999; Frucht 2000; Day 2001. Significantly, Eastern European diacritical marks are likely to be omitted from names and geographical places in the majority of those publications for their propensity to confuse the Western reader about pronunciation. ‘We also decided early on to omit the accents from East European names and words, since these unfamiliar signs tend to leave most Western readers even less certain about pronunciation’ – Bideleux and Jeffries 1998, p. x. Conversely, when the use of East European diacriticals is observed by the editors, their disruptive and decentring potential to mislead the ‘lay people’ when they ‘try to learn something about Eastern Europe’, is likely to be pinpointed in reviews, especially if they are not accompanied by an
the formative processes, announcing themselves as not aspiring ‘to offer a comprehensive history of Eastern Europe taken as a whole’. The others, like the cartoon book *The History of Eastern Europe for Beginners* (RIGHT), are luring the mass reader with an ‘easy-to-follow’ and a ‘fast moving’ spectacle of the East European Other. It appears somehow that both of those, the professional, painstakingly researched analytic histories of East Central European ‘evolution’, as well as the popular market-oriented publications, are conceived from the shared subject position of the superior Western Self, and thus operate within the same kind of truth regime. They perpetuate the discourse on East Central Europe which, within the framework of academic analyses, produces and legitimises the alterity of this unpredictable, and largely unreconstructable part of the old continent. And it might seem likely that the reader of *The History of Eastern Europe for Beginners*, might finish the book with not much more than the coarse image of the essentially robust East European Man and Woman in folk costume, systematically repeated throughout its pages (RIGHT).

Clumsy and farcical as those images are, it is difficult for an East Central European reader to shrug her shoulders and ignore the book as a not-to-be-taken-seriously publication which does not really matter in the whole volume of the more academically restrained reference works that are illustrated with much more ‘instruction as to how they should be pronounced’ (Lane 2000). Those two contradictory points of view on the gap between writing and speech in the absence of the publicly recognised codes could be perhaps analysed further within the framework of logocentrism, but what is significant for my argument here is the positionality of the authors defending, either way, the integrity and infallibility of the Western (Anglo-American) subject, which ought to be protected by the act of abjection of the confusing Eastern European diacriticals beyond the boundary of pronounceability.

See also an earlier discussion on this point in Ralph Butler’s book *The New Eastern Europe*, written in the wake of the designing of the Versailles Europe (1919-21), after the fall of three empires of Austria-Hungary, Russia and (earlier) Turkey. Butler tacitly justifies the ignorance of Slavonic philology on the part of western readers (‘it is useless to expect English and American readers to acquire a knowledge of the forty-six Polish letters and double letters’), but he advocates some power-related compromise in the matters of orthography, in a phrase summing up his phallogocentrist premises: ‘If Poland is once again to play a prominent part in Europe, some orthographic *modus vivendi* will have to be evolved for the purposes of West European intercourse’ (Butler 1919, p. v-vi).

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3 Beck, Mast, Tapper 1997, blurb.
4 As written by the editors of this successful publication enterprise, launched in the USA in 1975: ‘Every book in the series serves one purpose: to UNintimidate and UNcomplicate the work of great thinkers. Knowledge is too important to be confined to the experts’.
‘acceptable’ images, such as, for instance, photographs of the destruction of the Berlin Wall. The problem is, however, that those images of dumb, earthy and folklorised East and Central European heterosexual bodies, repeated with an uncanny regularity throughout the pages of The History of Eastern Europe for Beginners from pre-history till the present day (RIGHT), strike a very familiar accord. For all their simplicity and aggressive exaggeration, which otherwise characterises the medium of caricature and cartoon, they reproduce and naturalise the stereotypical image of the next-door Other, adjacent and ordinary, common and unrefined, constructed from the unwanted aspects of the Western Self. Moreover, they share the representational codes with the visual clichés of a peasant-looking Pole, or a barbarian Muscovite, which have been utilised in the characterisation of the inhabitants of the peripheral east of Europe in the repertoire of Western iconography, at least since the early eighteenth century, as in an anonymous painting the Panel of the Peoples (Völktafel c. 1730-40), at the Austrian Ethnographic Museum in Vienna, which both represent and describe the essentialised features of the male representatives of ten European nationalities, ranked on an (d)evolutionary scale from west to east, from ‘civilization’ to ‘primitivism’ (LEFT).

Importantly, deprived, as they are, of the discernible, ‘primary’ features of racialised difference, such as colour skin, or slanting eyes, that is, precisely because of the lack of those features, those images had to articulate some other, ‘secondary’ codes of visual stereotypisation suitable for framing the ‘East European Other’ – to objectify him or her as ‘whitey’, but inferior - undershaped, or impure, furthermore as corrupt, venal, and in a way untrustworthy in his or her whiteness, or, as put recently by Julie Burchill in The Guardian - ‘undeservingly’ white (Burchill 2001).

5 Cf. Ole Wæver’s essay on Europe post-1945 in the Open University Book on the history of the idea of Europe, apart from portraits of political leaders, is illustrated predominantly with photographs of the raising and destroying the Berlin Wall (Wæver 1995).

6 The painting is made after a print ‘Fürnehmsten in Europa befindlichen Land-Völcker’, 1719-26, by Friedrich Leopold of Augsburg – see Stanzel 1999.

7 ‘I’ll come clean here, though, about the supposed joys of ethnic diversity. Though I’ve never felt one moment of prejudice towards immigrants from the Carribean or the Indian subcontinent, I will honestly admit that I don’t want white east Europeans here at all. Not one sniff! … Well, the Red Devil is dead now and the market rules the roost. But they still won’t stay there. […] Why have ten thousands of them [Albanians] fetched up here, apparently taking over the sex-slave trade from the Russian mafia in one fell swoop. […] I don’t want a bunch of white Czechs over here getting housed before some Brit single mother […] I don’t want legions of Albanians knifing prostitutes on Dover Beach […] even a redneck like me can see that all those Indians, all those blacks, were first interfered with and then performed totally beyond the call of duty during that war. They won their place here a hundred times over; I just don’t think that a greedy Croatian’s the
What I want to analyse in this paper are thus the ways of distinguishing white from white, in other words, the underlying signifying practices of the East Central European discourse, through which the underdetermined difference between Western and East Central Europe can be captured, inscribed into representational codes of bodies and displaced into class-related signifiers of dress, age and gender, and in this way invested with cultural and socio-political meaning, and naturalised.

I want to focus on three different ways of the visual articulation of the East Central European difference, adopted, and naturalised, by western printmakers, cartoonists, as well as photographers. Not surprisingly the signifying codes correspond to the distinctive features ascribed to Eastern Europe by western historiography, namely:

**vernacularisation and rural backwardness** - as opposed to western civilisation and industrial progress;
**immaturity and the disposition to subjection to authoritarian power** - as opposed to western development and democracy;
**and finally the passivity and victim status of the East Central European subject** – as opposed to the triumphant individualism of the western conqueror.

Vernacularisation of the East Central European subject, in visual terms translatable by the means of dress, seems by far the most persistent and widely spread. Larry Wolff, although his book, like Said’s, remains entirely embedded in the logocentric framework of verbal construction of cultural identities, reproduces in its frontispiece a print, which illustrated the *Voyage en Sibérie*, travel memoirs by Chappe d’Auteroche, published in Paris in 1768 (LEFT). It is a merger of cartography and allegory, which apart from the traveller’s itinerary from Paris via Vienna, Warsaw, Petersburg, Moscow to the most remote towns of Siberia, shows the difference between the allegorical figures of France and the Holy Roman Empire, represented as ‘classically garbed goddesses’, and those of Poland and Russia – ‘as allegorical savages’. Wolff poses the print as emblematic for his argument, concluding his caption by saying: ‘such was the philosophical deployment of the concept of “civilisation” in distinguishing between Western Europe and Eastern Europe’ (Wolff 1994, frontispiece). He does not analyse the print further, satisfied with decoding its meaning as parallel to the main thesis of the book. What is interesting for us is that the difference which defies encoding in racial terms, is displaced onto the external signifiers of the unbridgeable social same. So sue me! But I’m white, and therefore a racist; thank God then, for the ethnic Brits who do realise that it’s far too soon for this country to pile undeserving whitey on top of our more than deserving dark citizens. I like the lovely black lady who picked up my handbag and put it on my lap on the Brighton-Victoria express, “because them gypsos gone get it, girl!”(Burchill 2001).
gap between the superior and the inferior. The most obvious one is dress, which, in this period, is classified according to the classical ideal of magnificence. Sumptuousity of the richly draped fabric, decorated with royal insignia, as well as the splendour of the head-helmets generously adorned with feathers, worn by the closely associated personifications of France and Germany, contrast with the non-western, ‘ethnic’ dress of the smaller looking figures standing for the kingdom of Poland, with a halberd, and the tsardom of Russia, bareheaded and shaved, with an archbow. Their garments are made to appear mediocre, meanly cut, not meaning to add volume to their bodies, neither a stupendous uplift to their heads, and in this way to connote the humble social status and social class of their wearers. Their low social position, or ‘savagery’, as read into the image by Wolff, is further emphasised by their military, yet not imperial attributes. The same signifying devices will recur in the later representations of Eastern Europe, when the ethnic headscarf, standing for backwardness and evoking the oriental veil, becomes an indispensable signifier of the East European woman, whilst moustache and a sheepskin coat would work as a second ‘skin’ of the East European man.

Apart from the identification with the vernacular, the East Central European subject is regularly imagined as immature, underage, underdeveloped, and easily manoeuvrable – which in visual terms is often expressed by infantilisation. While in the eighteenth century, the east peripheries of Europe would be identified as the large tracts of uncivilised and underpopulated territories overflowing into Asia, in the interwar period the signified of ‘Eastern Europe’ would rather dramatically shrink to the size of the group of small and immature ‘latecomers to the Europe of nation-states’, sandwiched between the mature bodies of Germany and Russia, and pursuing their own fiercely nationalistic interests. Bolshevist Russia was then excluded from the concept of Eastern Europe, and it was precisely the small size of those newly (re)drawn countries of Central Europe,
and their ‘underage’ insecurity and vulnerability which will be singled out as the essence of the collective identity ascribed to the ‘Eastern European’ states, represented by cartoonists as the misbehaving, ‘spoilt, ungrateful and truculent’ children.  

Bernard Partridge’s editorial cartoons for Punch of the 1930s (LEFT), in particular around the time of Hitler’s assaults on Czechoslovakia, dwell on the idea of smallness and a childish mischievousness by representing the countries of Central Europe, such as in the representation of a group of unruly children, two urchins, standing for Poland and Hungary, bully a smaller kid representing Ruthenia, all of them wearing clothes connoting their social inferiority, such as a sheepskin coat, and shoes made of straw. The cartoon refers to the events following the Munich conference, when Czechoslovakia not only lost the Sudetenland to the Third Reich, but also other parts of its territory to Poland and Hungary, the latter occupying a large portion of Ruthenia, then the easternmost province of Slovakia. The cartoonist warns here of the pernicious results of violent nationalisms which were said to characterise the immature East Central European states. The juxtaposition of maturity to a detrimental immaturity, the latter signalling the need for a stronger protector to install order, was already worked out by the Enlightenment in its concept of the underdevelopment of the eastern peripheries and their inhabitants which, quoting Mme Geoffrin on Poland, were ‘made to be subjugated’. 

The same trope will return as an essential feature of the Cold War representational regimes, notoriously identifying East Central European countries with the subjugated children. While the position of ‘Eastern Europe’ as an ‘object under construction’ will remain unaltered, there will be a geographical shift as regards the occupier of the subject-position, now inhabited by an empowered

11 Punch, 7 December 1938. I owe this example to Colin McArthur, who kindly send me copies of both cartoons mentioned above, the other one also published in Punch, on 21 December 1938.  
12 The subaltern status of Ruthenians, an ethnic community of Sub-Carpathian Rus which lives across half a dozen frontiers, inhabiting today the south western Ukraine, south eastern Poland, and eastern Slovakia, and describes itself as ‘the Kurds of Central Europe’, can be grasped from a joke about a ‘Ruthenian’, who ‘was born in Austro-Hungary, went to school in Czechoslovakia, married in Hungary, worked for most of its life in the Soviet Union, and now lives in Ukraine. “Travelled a lot, then?” asks his interviewer. “No, I never moved from Mukhachevo.”’ The joke is quoted by Timothy Garton Ash in his short article ‘Long Live Ruthenia!’ which outlines the complex vicissitudes of Ruthenian ethnic community, in Garton Ash 2000, pp. 376-81  
13 Cf. Butler’s condescending commentary on Polish aspirations to lead the Slavonic people after the ‘elimination’ of Russia by the revolution and Civil War – ‘Megalomania is so childish, so pitifully out of relation to the world of actualities, induces a sinking in the breast of every friend of Poland’ (Butler 1919, p.6).  
patriarch coming from the East rather than West. There is no shortage of the post-1945 cartoons, which would reuse the old signifying code of the ‘subjugated children’, such as David Low’s image, in the *Evening Standard* (RIGHT), which metaphorised the Soviet intervention against Czechoslovakian and Polish participation in the Marshall Plan in 1947 by showing Madame Molotov who is refusing to the column of marching schoolgirls - by ordering: ‘Noses Left’ - the right to look at the American Hot Dog Stand.¹⁵ The same representational strategy, emphasising the childishness, the naïve credulity and the unrestrained desire to be subjugated, has been deployed a few years ago by Steve Bell in his cartoon published in *The Guardian* in July 1997 (RIGHT); it represents three little bears, signifying the former Warsaw Pact members: Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary, and enthusiastically soaring high into the air to follow the old NATO eagle, cigar-smoking and blasé; the radical shift was to be accomplished only in February 1999.¹⁶

¹⁵ E. H. Shepard, ‘One Man River’ (The Danubian countries dance to Mr Vyshinsky’s tune), *Punch*, 25 August 1948; Cf. also Leslie Illingworth, ‘Believe it or Knout’ (The warmonger Truman has launched a brutal and unprovoked attack upon the defenceless peoples of North Korea), *Punch*, 12 July 1950.

¹⁶ The identification of the East European countries with immaturity, underdevelopment and weakness persists in both the Cold War and the post-Cold War signifying regimes, when the post-Communist societies are roundly represented as a ‘younger’ sibling of the West (measured against the ‘absolute’ West European time), embarrassingly un instructed in the politically correct games of liberalism and tolerant multiculturalism, and tainted with the ‘Communist’ legacy. It was particularly pronounced during the 1990s secessionist and political conflicts in post-multicultural society of the former Yugoslavia, when the notion of political immaturity and moral baseness is being fixed and historicised as an essential feature of the Balkans, the legacy of both Ottoman and Byzantine absolutisms. In the liberal, multiculturalist perception of the West, the Balkans are thus identified with ‘a site of ethnic horrors and intolerance, of primitive, tribal, irrational passions, as opposed to the reasonableness of post-nation-state conflict resolution by negotiation and compromise’ (Žižek 1999). Slavoj Žižek’s psychonalaytically oriented marxist reading of the Balkan wars and the dilemma surrounding the NATO intervention, through his theory of the postmodern racism as a symptom of the multicultural logic of late capitalism, emphasises precisely the western infantilisation and the victimisation of the Balkans as the source of the misunderstanding of the agenda of the fighting sides, which reduces their political goals to irrational ethnic hatred. In his public lectures Žižek has been quoting, almost obsessively, an Austrian TV programme of 1998 which presented an exchange of political-territorial arguments between an Albanian and a Serb relating to Kosovo, and an incident at the end of the programme when an Austrian journalist was trying to intervene with a habitual moralistic and pacifist appeal to non-violence, which triggered in turn the condescending exchange of the gazes between the Albanian and the Serb: ‘What was false about the pacifist was not his pacifism as such, but his depoliticized racist view that the ultimate cause of the post-Yugoslav war was the ethnic intolerance and reemergence of old ethnic
The representation of the East Central European difference in terms of surrender and acquiescence, connects, finally, to another trope which frames subservience as feminine, leading to gendering Eastern Europe as a victim of sexual aggression. It will become explicitly pronounced in the phallogocentric language and visuality of the Cold War, and in particular in the totalising discourse of ‘sovietisation’.

Explicit gender and sexual reading of the sovietisation of Eastern Europe is particularly pronounced in H.E. Shepard’s cartoon in *Punch*, commenting on the communist coup in Czechoslovakia (LEFT). The cartoon, highly intertextual and intermedial, merges together several tropes of East Central European difference as well as anti-Communist/sovietisation discourse, pasting them on the pre-existing codes of fairy-tales and horror stories. While walking in the street, a peasant-woman in the city, the vernacularised personification of Czechoslovakia, is being abducted by a (Soviet) bear. Its presence is signified synecdochically by the voracious paws which reach and grab the victim from behind the open door in the otherwise firmly closed shutter. The persuasiveness of this cartoon stems from the ways in which it metaphorises the act of political assault on the democratically elected socialist government in Czechoslovakia representing it paradigmatically through the maculinist narrative pattern of ‘beauty and the beast’, which underpins, amongst others, the Red Riding Hood fairy tale or the *Murder in the Rue Morgue* narrative, to name just a few of the popular texts to which the cartoon is structurally and associatively related. Masculinist signifying economy reduces the personification of Czechoslovakia to a defenseless victim of sexual abuse, paving the way to the widely disseminated and still current representational regime which would degrade the ‘Central East European

hatreds. In other words, this apparently innocent pacifism really treats the other people in the Balkans as children. The idea is love each other, do not hate each other, do not fight each other, and everything will be okay basically’ (a lecture at Bard College, Žižek 1999, ‘Human Rights and its Discontent’s’). Žižek inserted the same argument into his lecture ‘The Ticklish Subject of Ideology’, at the School of Humanities and Cultural Studies, Middlesex University, 16 June 2000.

It seems to me that a similar prejudicial misunderstanding of the ways in which the post-multicultural identities in Yugoslavia are constructed guides Kathryn Woodward’s Introduction to the concepts of identity and difference in one of the series of the Open University books; when quoting from Michael Ignatieff’s report from the ‘village war’ between Serbs and Croats in 1993, she totally overlooks the fact that the story of the Serbian soldier and his choice of the cigarette pack as a signifier of the constructed ethnic difference was in the first instance addressed specifically to the western journalist, and was subsequently narrated by him in his book, thus that what Woodward analysed as a particularly transparent example of the simplistic ways in which the Serbian soldier conceptualised his essentialist identity was already a case of framing ‘Serbian’ identity from the position of the western European supematist discourse (Woodward 1997, pp. 8-12).
woman’ to her vagina, objectifying her as a potential object in the globalised sex-trade (the trope which dominates the Channel 4 documentaries on Eastern European prostitutes in London).

Patriarchal victimisation of East Central Europe appears to be one of the strongest and effective tropes of the Cold War narratives, perpetuated and disseminated by a number of disciplines, favoured by novelists, as well as strategically exploited by central European dissidents and émigrés in the West. Histories of Eastern Europe habitually include in their introductions a paragraph characterising the region as composed of forests, marshes and slow-flowing rivers, and hence easily accessible, deprived of natural geographical boundaries and therefore open to penetration by ‘marauders and interlopers’ from both East and West.

Milan Kundera’s well-known identification of Central Europe as this part of the West which was ‘kidnapped by the East’ (1984) relies heavily on

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17 But, it is the unsettled image of the (im)penetrable and liminal Iron Curtain, firmly shut and open at the same time, which not only delineates the urban setting of the narrative but also separates the acting subject from the passive object, and furthermore addresses directly and somewhat disturbingly the Punch reader. Its distressing potential is enhanced by the way in which the reliability of the Iron Curtain as a western safety measure, as a highly desirable defence against the ‘Bolshevik barbarians and bears’, is undermined here by the ‘Iron Door’, which might endanger not only the peasant Czechoslovakia, but also an urban West European passer-by, including the reader. As in an overdetermined dream, in which its latent elements ‘are combined and fused into a single unity’ (Freud 1961, p. 171), the door pushed ajar in the middle of the closed shutter opens the ‘royal road to the unconscious’, to the house of horror and repressed desires, to the unrepresented, and unrepresentable, the uncanny world behind the Iron Curtain. Whereas one might speculate about the directions of unconscious desires, provoked by the (im)penetrable screen of the Iron Curtain (which in its propensity to stay shut and open resembles vagina), as well as dispute the reversability of the subject/object positions of the cartoon vis-à-vis that of the reader, what remains constant is the masculinist and occidocentric, hegemonic victimisation of the feminised and sexualised Eastern Europe.

18 The medieval and early modern history of these marshlands was blighted by persistent warfare against marauders and interlopers from both East and West: Avars, Huns, Magyars, Bulgars, Mongols and Turks from Asia; German colonists, Venetian traders and Catholic crusaders from the West. Indeed the battle lines between Roman Catholicism and Byzantine Orthodoxy and, to a lesser degree, between Christianity and Islam shuttled back and forth across the Balkans and East Central Europe. Viewed in an even longer perspective, the peoples of Zwischeneuropa acts as “a buffer between the West and Asia, allowing the Western nations to develop in comparative security their own civilisation while the fury of the Asiatic whirlwinds spent itself on their backs. And throughout these centuries their powerful neighbours in the West exploited their weakness to encroach on their territory and ruin their economic life” (Seton-Watson 1945: 21-2)’ (Bideleux and Jeffries 1998, p. 1).
the notion of the raped Europe, in his struggle for the re-signification and for the legitimisation of Central Europe.

To sum up:

The post-Cold War order of a new integrated idea of Europe in making, as exemplified by the accession of the ‘Central European’ group out of the Eastern European countries to western Nato, which bombed in turn the negatively connoted South-East European Balkans, not only lays itself bare to the insights of semiotics, to the ‘poetics’ of signification, but offers also a telling example of Foucauldian power/knowledge discursive practices. In the Central European project the imaginary, the post-Berlin-Wall Iron Curtain, as the signifier of othering practices, was not annihilated but shifted further east and south, as testified tellingly by Timothy Garton Ash, in his text of 1999, mentioned at the beginning.

And yet, although Garton Ash, expressing his reservations against Central European politics of exclusion, records the birth of (East) Central Europe as a separate cultural and political entity, while at the same time ascribing the agency in the process of wresting the ‘East Central/Central’ from the ‘East’ to western politicians and journalists, including also himself, from the ‘global’ point of view all those subtleties of distinguishing between Central or Eastern Europe appear insignificant. If we look at the cartoon-like maps, accompanying the current articles in the press on global matters, such as those on the ageing of the world’s population, or on the world-wide spreading of HIV (RIGHT), we will find that it is solely the old iron boundary between Western and Eastern Europe which firmly belongs to the dominating regime of truth, to the ‘fundamental laws of cartographic generalisation’. Moreover, it appears that, in some cases, as in the map illustrating, published by the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (10 July 2000), Eastern Europe is not only permanently and irrevocably distinguished from Western Europe, but, further, it appears to be semi-detached from the body of Europe altogether and paired instead with Asia, thus reproducing the hierarchy of the old continent and the essential ‘in-betweenness’ ascribed to the east peripheries of Europe by the Enlightenment, and shown in the French map in the Voyage en Siberie.

19 ‘In the 1990s, Central Europe has become part of the regular political language. […] If the Queen and Henry Kissinger say it exist, it exists. […] I have made the case for Central Europe over two decades. I believe it has been a good cause, which has helped to transform the central region of Europe for the better’ (Garton Ash 2000, pp. 383, 396).