

**Whose West is it Anyway?
The Core, Margins, Outsiders and the Construction of a Geopolitical
Subjectivity**

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A Death Foretold

Since the end of the Cold War, and especially following the declaration of the 'War on Terror' proclamations of the end of the West or of a fundamental rift in the Western security community have abounded. Of course, ideas of a crisis of the West, and in the transatlantic relationship, are not new. Assertions of the end of the West have been a recurrent theme ever since the concept gained popularity at the end of the nineteenth century and are not least evident in the title of Oswald Spengler's magnum opus, *The Decline of the West* (1926).¹ Indeed, whilst there is a tendency to think we are always living through historically defining moments, it is worth noting Gillespie's observation that proclamations and claims about the West have always been entangled with the anticipation that the West will soon end.²

Death through Decline

Debates about the end of the West have taken two forms. First, proclamations of endism have been driven by claims that the West is in *decline*. This idea of decline has had various manifestations, but most notably has focused on disputes in the transatlantic relationship and where the tendency is to assume that during the Cold War transatlantic relations were relatively unproblematic. Whilst this neatly plays down disputes that arose over Korea and Vietnam and France's distancing from NATO under De Gaulle, these disputes are seen to have been contained by the disciplining influence of the looming Soviet enemy in the East. With this enemy now vanquished the implicit claim is that tensions and disputes, which had previously been of only secondary concern, have now taken centre stage and are tearing the transatlantic community apart.

The list of disagreements is well known, but is also worth highlighting in order to emphasise that when people speak of the *decline of the West* the focus on exactly what accounts for this decline and what this decline relates to can vary. One approach has been to focus on the 'political West' and to locate decline at the institutional level. Thus, already in 1993 Owen Harries argued that it was only the presence of the Eastern enemy that had forged the political West into existence. This political West, though, was as such an artificial construct whose days were therefore numbered with the end of this binding external force.³ The implication here is that the ties binding Europe and the US together were rather thin and driven by instrumental security concerns. A similar way of telling the story has therefore been to argue that whilst during the Cold War Europe was prepared to accede to American leadership of the West, now this is no longer the case. A resurgent and institutionally integrating Europe has become more self assertive and increasingly is questioning America's predominant leadership role, whether within the transatlantic relationship or globally. As Kupchan has argued, the rising challenger to the US

"is not China or the Islamic world but the European Union... Europe is strengthening its collective consciousness and character and forging a clearer sense of interests and values that are quite distinct from those of the United States."⁴

¹ The title of this book can be translated in different ways.....

² Gillespie cited in Heller, p.41.

³ Owen Harries (1993) 'The Collapse of "The West"', *Foreign Affairs* 72(4), p.42.

⁴ Charles Kupchan (2002) 'The End of the West', *Atlantic Monthly* (November), p.42.

The consequence, Kupchan argues, is that the West is splitting into two, just as the Roman Empire became irreconcilably divided between Rome and Byzantium. In other words, just as Byzantium began to question the predominance of Rome, now Europe has begun to make similar claims. This has been evident in French and German visions that the EU needs to develop to become a balancer of the US in world politics, and which became notably evident in German suggestions that a new Transatlantic Council be convened that would sit above NATO and in which all the partners would have an equal voice – in contrast to US-dominated NATO structures. The fact that in consequence of such demands the US government has paid increasingly less attention to its traditional alliance partners has been notable. Indeed, the preference for ‘coalitions of the willing’ over an alliance-based approach has been seen by some as an indictment of the broken state of transatlantic relations.⁵ The United States’ sidelining of NATO during the Iraq conflict is a case in point. As Risse notes, when the crisis erupted “the NATO Council never did what it was supposed to do, namely to manage the transatlantic security partnership. It never discussed the conflict over Iraq, largely for fear that such an open dispute might lead to the collapse of NATO”.⁶ For his part, in 2002 Dominic Lieven warned that an American attack on Iraq could result in the final collapse of the West.⁷ Although this has not as yet materialised, similar statements can frequently be heard regarding a possible future US attack on Iran.⁸

Claims about institutional decline in the ‘political West’ are often supported by claims of ‘cultural and normative disunity’. From this perspective disputes about leadership of the West are merely the tip of the iceberg. Beneath the water, it is claimed lie fundamental normative splits and competing claims about the cultural and normative essence of the West. In terms of international politics this relates to the now well worn litany of claims succinctly expressed in Robert Kagan’s formulation that “Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus”. Thus, whilst the United States views international politics through realist lenses of anarchic Hobbesian power politics, Europe is seen to be turning away from power to embrace more Kantian legalistic perspectives that prioritise the role of international norms, laws, institutions and multilateral diplomatic approaches to mediating and pursuing state interests.⁹ Such distinctions can, for example, be seen in the various comparisons that have been made of the United States’ National Security Strategy of 2002 and the EU’s European Security Strategy of 2003.¹⁰

At the domestic level it is often opined that European and American cultures hold fundamentally different interpretations of what is meant by core concepts such as freedom and democracy, with European ‘social democratic egalitarianism’

⁵ David P. Calleo (2004) ‘The Broken West’, *Survival* 46(3), p.31.

⁶ Thomas Risse (forthcoming) ‘The End of the West? Conclusions’, in Jeffrey Anderson, John Ikenberry and Thomas Risse (eds.) *The End of the West? Exploring the Deep Structure of the Transatlantic Order*

⁷ Lieven cited in Jacinta O’Hagan (2006) ‘Changing Concepts of the West in the 21st Century’, presented at the NORFACE seminar *Towards a Post-Western West? The Changing Heritage of ‘Europe’ and the ‘West’*, Tampere Peace Research Institute, Finland 2-3 February 2006.

⁸ E.g. this was a concern noted by various participants at the NORFACE conference at University College Dublin in August 2007.

⁹ Robert Kagan (2003) *Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (London: Atlantic Books), p.3.

¹⁰ REFERENCES e.g. Bailes

increasingly seen as standing at odds with American 'neo-liberal individualism'. Tied with this, of course, are claims that whilst American political culture is influenced by religious worldviews, Europe is a realm of secularism where distinctions between 'good and evil' are viewed as simplistic and to be avoided. Taken together, this international and domestic cultural framing of difference was largely behind Habermas and Derrida's joint letter of 31 May 2003 promoting a rejuvenated European identity constituted through drawing a difference with America and by which to position Europe as a counter-balance to the hegemonic unilateralism of the US in world affairs.¹¹ Thus, whereas during the Cold War it was common to depict Western Europe and the US as sharing a deep sense of cultural commonality, today there is an increasing tendency to define Europe, not by differentiating it from its traditional primary constitutive other, Russia, but by constituting European identity in opposition to America instead.¹²

Death through Triumph

If the first set of proclamations concerning the end of the West have cast this endism as a result of decline, the second set in contrast celebrate this endism as deriving from the *triumph of the West*. Again, several claims have been made in this context. The most well known is paraphrased in Fukuyama's thesis that the end of the Cold War also signalled the *end of history* to the extent that it confirmed Western approaches to modernity and development had defeated all other ideological competitors.¹³ To the extent that the 'Western way' becomes the 'only way' then the argument goes that it stops being Western but becomes universal instead. Or as Heller puts it, "The West is coming to the point where it can no longer be 'the West': Westernisation has occurred everywhere, and there is nothing therefore to distinguish the West from anywhere else".¹⁴ Such a view of the triumph and consequent decline of the West defines the West in largely economic terms and where globalisation is defined as a distinctly Western phenomenon gradually encompassing the globe. This also resonates with Hardt and Negri's understanding of Empire.¹⁵

A similar economic argument for endism through triumph has been made by Kurth, but in more instrumental terms. Kurth argues that whereas during the Cold War the idea of the West "meshed well with the scope of American business interests", this is no longer the case.¹⁶ As American business interests expanded into Asia and the Middle East the West became a constrictive and ill-fitting slogan, and has instead been replaced by 'globalisation' as a foundation for American cultural identity and the promotion of American business interests. Similarly, Kurth also notes that this development happened during a period of demographic change in America with immigration shifting its historical point of origin from Europe to Latin America, East Asia, the Middle East and Africa. In this context, he argues that from the point of view of American business "globalization and multiculturalism were two sides of the

¹¹ Jacinta O'Hagan (2006) 'Changing Concepts of the West in the 21st Century', presented at the NORFACE seminar *Towards a Post-Western West? The Changing Heritage of 'Europe' and the 'West'*, Tampere Peace Research Institute, Finland 2-3 February 2006.

¹² Volker Heins (2005) 'Orientalising America? Continental Intellectuals and the Search for Europe's Identity', *Millennium* 34(2), pp.433-48.

¹³ Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?' *The National Interest* 16, pp.3-18.

¹⁴ Heller, p.93.

¹⁵ Hardt and Negri.

¹⁶ James Kurth (2001) 'America and the West: Global Triumph or Western Twilight?' *Orbis* (Summer) p.338.

same coin, whereas Westernization and Americanization had become obsolete and constrictive”.¹⁷ Whilst the values American business wanted to promote around the world remained the same as those of ‘Western civilisation’ it was noted that “These elements are more likely to be adopted if a host country can interpret them not as Western or American, but rather as global concepts reflecting ‘universal’ economic rationality and human rights”.¹⁸

A Layered Concept

All this talk of endism and death concerning the concept of the West raises an obvious question: should we believe it or not? Is the West really coming to an end as an historic community or is there still life in the concept? More to the point, all this talk also raises the question of what we mean by the West in any case? What are its constitutive elements? What should be clear from the above discussion is that the West is a slippery concept. In referring to its death the above analyses variously characterise the essence of the West as a particular political community (though agreement as to who is a member is hard to come by), a particular culture (though frequently defined differently at different times by different people – e.g. is it Christian or secular), or as a particular economic system and set of relationships between the private and public sphere (though again note the differences between neoliberal, social democratic and even communist claims to represent the essence of the West).

This makes the question of whether the West is dying difficult to answer since it begs the question of which West we are talking about. At the same time, however, it also illustrates an important point that although attempts are frequently made to define the essence of the West and to fill it with cultural, social, political, spiritual, philosophical, economic etc., content, at root the West is a discursive and intersubjectively framed concept that has transformed across time. In this respect, following Marko Lehti and Pertti Joenniemi it is useful to view the West as a layered concept.¹⁹ Lehti and Joenniemi argue that historically the West has been framed around three sets of narratives, within each of which there has been considerable diversity. These narratives they label *civilisation West*, *modern West* and *political West*.²⁰

Civilisation West is a narrative that views the West as a unique civilisational community that has possessed unity and common identity across time. The civilisational discourse implies that the West has been only minimally influenced by its outside. Instead, the emphasis is on asserting the West’s organic purity and the originality and distinctiveness of its culture. The classical approach to the civilisational narrative of the West locates its origins in ancient Greece, though others

¹⁷ James Kurth (2001) ‘America and the West: Global Triumph or Western Twilight?’ *Orbis* (Summer) p.339.

¹⁸ James Kurth (2001) ‘America and the West: Global Triumph or Western Twilight?’ *Orbis* (Summer) p.339.

¹⁹ Marko Lehti and Pertti Joenniemi (2007) ‘The Broken West as a Discourse: On the Politics of Scholarly Statements’, presented at the 48th Annual ISA Convention, Chicago, 28 February – 3 March 2007.

²⁰ Lehti and Joenniemi develop these categories from a slightly different scheme presented in Jan Ifversen (2006) ‘Who Are the Westerners?’ Unpublished paper.

have instead argued Rome should be seen as its birthplace.²¹ However, whether Greece or Rome the claim is that this ancient civilisation and various cultural practices associated with it (e.g. the art of reasoning, democracy etc) have been passed down from generation to generation, from Greece to Rome, to Christendom, to Europe, to the West such that we in the West can only understand who we are today with recourse to this unique civilisational heritage. Interestingly, it is this civilisational understanding of the West which underlies Samuel Huntington's argument about the clash of civilisations: his view being the world is divided into distinct and largely incompatible civilisational and cultural blocs.²²

In contrast, *modern West* is a narrative which instead locates the essence of the West as lying in the legacy of the enlightenment, industrialisation, capitalism and colonialism. As Lehti and Joenniemi note, this narrative draws on these elements to assert the West's superiority over other cultures and also links in with those renderings of the West above that tie the concept to processes of globalisation and westernisation.²³ This, for example, is the implied narrative of the West utilised by Fukuyama in his claim that at the end of history there is only one 'Western' road to modernity.

Finally, there is the *political West*, which is usually taken to refer to the Cold War transatlantic community and in particular its institutional grounding in the NATO security community. In this context, the West is seen as a community forged around an ideological dispute with the Communist East and is thus a concept heavily indebted for its existence to the defining presence of a radicalised other. At the same time, it is also perceived as a unique community of international security between its members, but also a community where the United States was charged with a special responsibility to guarantee its continued existence, a responsibility that therefore also granted America a privileged position within the West.²⁴

Locating the West as a layered concept comprised of various narratives and structures therefore enables Lehti and Joenniemi to problematise claims about the concept's death in that often such claims are targeted at only one layer of a much more complex narrative structure. Moreover, they note that some layers may be more grounded at any time than others, meaning that whilst change and transformation in the surface layers/narratives might appear quite easy, with the West therefore appearing quite fragile as a concept, deeper layers/narratives may be more sedimented and resilient to change, implying the West has more durability than it may first seem. However, what

²¹ This is the argument of David Gress (???) *From Plato to NATO (???)*. Check this claim. In contrast, Martin Bernal has criticised the very basis of this classical reading of the West as grounded in ancient Greek culture. As he notes, the assumption of such a reading is that Western culture somehow sprang organically out of Athens. In contrast, Bernal demonstrates how in reality ancient Greek culture was infused with borrowings from Africa, Egypt and Persia. Rather than an organic unity, ancient Greek culture was a meeting place of other cultural influences. Such a story of course fundamentally undermines claims to any sense of a unique Western tradition. Martin Bernal (1995) 'Greece: Aryan or Mediterranean? Two Contending Historiographical Models', in Silvia Federici (ed.) *Enduring Western Civilization: The Construction of the Concept of Western Civilization and Its 'Others'* (Westport CT: Praeger) pp.3-11.

²² Samuel Huntington....

²³ Marko Lehti and Pertti Joenniemi (2007) 'The Broken West as a Discourse: On the Politics of Scholarly Statements', presented at the 48th Annual ISA Convention, Chicago, 28 February – 3 March 2007.

²⁴ Jan Ifversen (2006) 'Who Are the Westerners?' Unpublished paper.

Lehti and Joenniemi refrain from doing is to actually suggest what this layered narrative structure might currently look like. That is to say they do not take the extra step of postulating which narratives of the West are more sedimented than others and whether we are currently seeing change and transformation across the whole discursive field. Arguably, according to this framework only if the deeper tectonic plates of the West are in transformation would it make sense to speak of an overall death of West – as opposed to the death of only some of its aspects.

Death through Silence or Who’s Doing the Talking?

However, in this paper I want to argue something different. Whilst the layered discursive framework presented by Lehti and Joenniemi gets us beyond narrow essentialised debates about the true content of the West, presenting the West as an element of discourse can also enable us to ask other questions about it. If the West is a layered and discursively framed concept what matters if we are thinking about its death is not so much whether a particular idea of its essence is being challenged or transformed, but rather whether the concept is any longer seen to hold any usefulness and utility as a concept of discourse.

Following the argument of Wouter Werner and Jaap de Wilde the very fact that there has been so much academic and popular debate about the West and its imminent demise might rather be seen as a sign of its enduring health. As they put it, it is precisely when concepts are contested that their existence is reaffirmed.²⁵ Such debates generally reassert the importance of particular concepts in framing social reality, and indeed might also be seen as constitutive of a social reality framed in those terms. Thus, various attempts to ‘save’ the West from destruction by highlighting its unique characteristics do play a role in doing just that. Not because they remind us of some essential aspect of ourselves, but because in instantiating the category they also bring it into being as a way of framing and orienting oneself in social reality. Moreover, even treaties gleefully proclaiming the death of the West or trying to deconstruct the concept end up arguing within a semantic field precisely framed by the West and related concepts.²⁶

All this then would seem to indicate that the West is here to stay, that though contested and variously championed or much maligned it will remain a central element of our experience of social reality. Arguably, therefore, instead of worrying about whether the West is dying or not the increasingly important political question is instead becoming that of who is currently speaking for the West and who has the power and capacity to define it. It is at this level that I will suggest ‘the West’ (as a community) has a problem.

This ‘problem’ and where the idea of ‘death’ may hold some credence for the West, lies in the fact that whilst there has been considerable academic and popular debate about the fate of the West within the West, in the traditional Euro-Atlantic core of the Western community the political elite has to a considerable extent viewed the concept as something to be avoided. As Kurth notes, “the idea of the West is largely absent

²⁵ Wouter Werner and Jaap de Wilde (2001) ‘The Endurance of Sovereignty’, *European Journal of International Relations* 7(3), p.?????????

²⁶ Jan Ifversen (2006) ‘Who Are the Westerners?’ Unpublished paper.

from American discourse about world affairs”²⁷ and has, for example, simply not featured in Bush’s recent State of the Nation addresses. Whereas previously the West was part of a powerful constitutive narrative frequently invoked in the discourses of the Western core (comprised of Western Europe and the US) in recent years the concept has begun to disappear from the political lexicon. Instead of the West, the point of reference (especially for President Bush and former Prime Minister Blair) has become the more universal marker of ‘civilisation’, with the need to hold together a coherent Western core no longer so clearly prioritised on both sides of the Atlantic. It is this silence that threatens the West much more than proclamations of its death.

The Power of Margins

However, if the West has dropped out of the speeches of the Western political elite, in contrast, it remains a core concept in the discourses of the traditional margins or semi-insiders of the West (e.g. Eastern Europe, Turkey, Russia, Latin America), as well as in its outside (e.g. Africa, Asia, the Islamic world). Indeed, today it is arguably the case that the most vociferous spokespersons for a united West are to be found in ‘new Europe’, but also in different ways in the unifying images of the West that are frequently produced in the rhetoric of radical Islam, in the outside. Theoretically, I want to suggest this raises interesting questions concerning the ability of the ‘other’ to speak back to the core and define its identity.

Before elaborating this though it is worth noting one further point about the various claims and debates made about the West above. The point here is that in each case these are all narratives of the West told from the inside. In all the above claims the implication made is that it is the West that defines itself, that speaks and that brings itself into being. Thus, even self-avowedly constructivist scholars keen to deconstruct essentialising claims made about the West, to highlight its contingency and not least aware that identities are intersubjectively constructed, have tended to focus on the West’s own readings and debates about itself, rather than looking to analyse how the West as a category may in fact be produced precisely in interaction with its outside.²⁸ In other words, in much scholarship on the ‘West’, and even in much critical scholarship, the non-West is simply absent and seen as silent.

Interestingly, such tendencies have also been evident in the critical scholarship on Western constructions of its outside, in particular in the fields of orientalism and post-colonial studies. Thus, whilst authors such as Edward Said have been keen to deconstruct Western homogenising constructions of the ‘East/orient’ and to highlight the legitimating consequences of such constructions as justifications for Western imperialism and colonialism, in turn such analyses have tended to reify this Western subject.²⁹ As Heller notes, “While accusing the West of essentializing the East, he [Said] equally essentializes the West”.³⁰ More importantly, however, not only is the

²⁷ James Kurth (2001) ‘America and the West: Global Triumph or Western Twilight?’ *Orbis* (Summer) p.333.

²⁸ For such an example see Jacinta O’Hagan (2002) *Conceptions of the West in International Relations Thought: From Oswald Spengler to Edward Said* (Houndmills: Macmillan).

²⁹ Edward Said (1978) *Orientalism: Western Representations of the Orient* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul)

³⁰ Heller, p.21.

West essentialised but it is also presented as possessing the hegemonic power to define the other. Thus, whilst the West is constructed as an unproblematic unified acting subject, the outside (the Orient) is presented as largely passive and reactive, as unable to in turn act back and assert constitutive power of its own. As Heller notes citing Lazarus:

Although postcolonial writers intend to critique the West... the result of their approach is that they end up treating one particular civilization, the Western, and one small group of actors, the Europeans, as the central agents of history.³¹

Similarly, much postmodernist scholarship suffers from this tendency. In criticising the insidious hegemonic cultural practices of the West the outside loses its subjectivity and instead becomes represented as simply being a reactive object of Western desires. As indicated the argument of this paper is that this blindness to the outside is problematic. What will be shown below is that it is problematic because it results in a distorted view of the history of the concept of the West, and which in turn colours our vision of ongoing political processes. In this respect, this paper builds on work by people like Alastair Bonnett, Chris GoGwilt and Margaret Heller, who have not been content to simply deconstruct the West from its inside, but also to show how the concept of the West to a large extent has its origins precisely in its margins/outside.³²

Whilst there is no space for grand theorising, pointing to the constitutive role of the outside in defining the identity of the core has become a widely accepted analytical point in much critical scholarship. For example, poststructuralist scholars like David Campbell and Lene Hansen have clearly demonstrated how the construction of identity is always drawn through a dialogue of demarcating the self from its outside. This provides the other with agency in that the other's recognition of the self is required in order for the self to be. As Hansen puts it: "The Other is on the one hand constituted through discourses (of the Self), but it is also one whose agency is established as important".³³ Similarly, in recent years there has been a developing literature on the constitutive role of margins in being able to 'bite back' to impact on the nature of the whole/core. As Parker has argued, being on the edge and in the margins furnishes the margin with constitutive resources in regard to the core. For example, margins can grant or withhold recognition of particular narratives of the core's identity, whilst margins, being to some extent both inside and outside an entity, may also exert power through the possibility of threatening exit if its demands are not met. Thus, given the variety of connections that exist across borders in the margins the very definition of the centre to some extent becomes dependent upon what

³¹ Heller, p.48.

³² Alastair Bonnett (2004) *The Idea of the West: Culture, Politics and History* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan); Chris GoGwilt (1995) 'True West: The Changing Idea of the West from the 1880s to the 1920s', in Silvia Federici (ed.) *Enduring Western Civilization: The Construction of the Concept of Western Civilization and Its 'Others'* (Westport CT: Praeger) pp.37-61; Margaret Heller.....

³³ Lene Hansen (2007) 'The Clash of Cartoons? The Clash of Civilizations? Visual Securitization and the Danish 2006 Cartoon Crisis', presented at the 48th Annual ISA Convention, Chicago, 38 February – 3 March 2007; David Campbell (1992) *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

happens at the margins.³⁴ In the following this constitutive power of the margins and the outside in the construction of the West is highlighted.

The Historical Construction of the West at the Margin/Outside

The central argument accepted by all Bonnett, GoGwilt and Heller is that the concept of the 'West' only became employed in European discourse towards the end of the nineteenth century. In contrast, however, it was a concept that was already being used outside the West and which was then imported into the West. For his part Bonnett is less concerned about this aspect of importation, but rather focuses on how the concept of the West was used in framing national discourses in countries like Japan, Turkey and India. Bonnett's key point is that rather than simply taking on board Western conceptions of the West, in these countries ideas of the West were developed to suit the countries' own ends independently of 'the West'.³⁵

In contrast, however, Heller and GoGwilt are concerned with the process of importation. In the following I will outline Heller's argument, which focuses on how the concept of the West emerged in Russian debates in the early nineteenth century. These debates concerned Russia's relation to Europe and in the context of which the 'West' became a key term in internal national identity debates. These ideas about the West then influenced European thought as Russian conceptions of a Western community were internalised and ironically re-projected in a process that served to exclude Russia from this West.

Importantly, though, although both Heller and GoGwilt argue that the West's conception of itself as Western was actually in large part a product of Russian discourse, they also argue that its genesis in Russian national identity debates also did not emerge in some unique form of materialisation from Russian soil. Instead, pointing to the intersubjective nature of identity debates they note that the concepts that various Russian nationalists (whether Slavophiles or pan-Slavists) "used to define their nation as essentially non-Western were themselves Western in origin".³⁶ Thus, the characterisations of Russian nationalists that posited the existence of distinct principles existing between Western and Russian/Slavophile civilisations in fact drew on concepts developed in European thought: concepts such as nation, culture, civilisation and ethnicity. Indeed, the thinkers behind these European concepts in turn also often acknowledged a debt to 'Eastern' thought in developing their ideas. Thus, the prominent theorist of nationalism, Herder, was notably influenced by Indian ideas.³⁷ In turn, it should be noted, both Heller and GoGwilt claim that Russian

³⁴ For a variety of arguments about the constitutive role of margins see, Christopher S. Browning (2005) 'Introduction', in Christopher S. Browning (ed.) *Remaking Europe in the Margins: Northern Europe after the Enlargements* (Aldershot: Ashgate) pp.1-10; Christopher S. Browning and Pertti Joenniemi (2004) 'Contending Discourses of Marginality: The Case of Kaliningrad', *Geopolitics* 9(3), pp.699-730; Noel Parker (2000) 'Integrated Europe and its "Margins": Action and Reaction', in Noel Parker and Bill Armstrong (eds.) *Margins in European Integration* (Houndmills: Macmillan) pp.3-27; Rob Shields (1991) *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge).

³⁵ Alastair Bonnett (2006) 'Occidentalism: The Uses of the West', presented at the NORFACE seminar *Towards a Post-Western West? The Changing Heritage of 'Europe' and the 'West'*, Tampere Peace Research Institute, Finland 2-3 February 2006.

³⁶ Heller, p.152. This whole section relies on Heller chapters 5 and 6.

³⁷ Heller, p.154.

characterisations and critiques of the West as a distinct civilisation were then not just exported back to Europe through the writings of Russian intellectuals, but were also exported and were influential in non-European countries such as China, Japan, India and Turkey. In part these processes of exportation were the result of “the dissemination of political writings by Russian socialists and anarchists, usually in exile, and through the growing popularity of the Russian novel by the end of the nineteenth century”.³⁸ However, it was also the result of a growing awareness and concern in Europe at Russia’s increasingly powerful position in Europe from the Napoleonic Wars (where Russia emerged as one of the victors) onwards.

However, whilst in Europe fear of growing Russian power and concern at its autocratic style of government and its seeming imperviousness to modernisation resulted in views of Russia as a backward, Asiatic and alien land that still somehow threatened to overrun Europe, Russia itself held much more positive views of Europe. Indeed, in constructing their own identity nationalists of all stripes maintained that Russia was a part of Europe. Whilst the rest of Europe were concerned at possible Russian expansionism and were therefore prone to depict the Russians as Asiatic barbarians, for their part Russian history was often understood as one of centuries long conflict and struggle against the Mongol hordes, which the Russians only finally suppressed in the eighteenth century with the use of ‘European’ knowledge. This resulted in an image of the Russians as superior and good European imperialists bringing civilisation to the areas of Russian expansion in the East. As Heller notes “From this point of view, Russia deeply identified with Europe”.³⁹

It is this identification with Europe, Heller argues, which accounts for the invention of ‘the West’ in Russia as a way to distinguish Russia from Europe without giving up its Europeanness. In turn, whilst Western Europe generally accepted that Russia was European, utilising Russian discourses of the West and inverting the positive/negative imagery also became a way of distancing from Russia and asserting that although Russia was *in* Europe, it was not necessarily viewed as being *of* it.⁴⁰

So what was Russian discourse on the West? In brief the concept of the West emerged and became solidified in competing nationalist debates between what soon became termed as the Westernisers and the Slavophiles in Russia. Importantly these were contemporary labels originally coined as insults.

The Slavophiles called those who wanted Russia to learn from Europe “Westernizers” because they regarded the latter as Russians who had alienated themselves from their national roots by adopting foreign values. The Westernizers called those who wanted to recover the distinctive culture of ancient Russia “Slavophiles” because they regarded the latter as Russians who privileged ethnic roots over progress, sometimes accusing them of wanting to turn Russians into Asians.⁴¹

Without going into the details it is important to highlight one aspect of the evolution of this debate. This concerns the issue of how the Westernisers and Slavophilies related themselves to the concept of ‘civilisation’. From the side of the Westernisers

³⁸ Heller, p.151.

³⁹ Heller, p.159.

⁴⁰ Heller, p.162.

⁴¹ Heller, pp.163-64.

civilisation was initially viewed in the singular. In this context the concept of Western civilisation was viewed as universal in meaning. Essentially what the Westernisers were arguing was that whilst the Europeans were ahead along the road to civilisation, the Russians were lagging behind. Their critique of the Slavophiles was that they seemed happy to be left behind. In contrast, the Westernisers called for the embracing of Western modernisation and values of universal reason so that Russia might catch up and one day actually get ahead of the West and even become a teacher of Europe.⁴² As such, the Westernisers did not pose Russian and Western spirit and culture as polar opposites, but rather reserved their criticisms to aspects of Russian culture and society they saw as holding the country back and which they therefore labelled as being 'Eastern, Oriental or Tatar'.⁴³

In contrast, over time Slavophile views developed along a different course. Rather than embracing the 'West', Slavophiles tended to criticise European modernisation and industrialisation as undermining the European soul. As such the West was depicted as sterile and perishing and as the counter of everything Russia is and should be. Instead of viewing civilisation in the singular, Slavophiles began to argue there is more than one way of being civilised and that in fact Russia and Europe belonged to two distinct and competing civilisations. Thus, for the Slavophiles Western truths were not universal truths, whilst Westernisers who tried to import the principles of Western civilisation into Russia were guilty of buying "into a false ideology of 'Westernism', one which would turn Russians and their brother Slavs into mere imitators of the West, depriving them of their 'cultural significance' and 'a great historic future'".⁴⁴ This Slavophile discourse is notably close to Huntington's more recent claims concerning the incommensurable nature of civilisations.

As stated, however, Heller and GoGwilt's key point is that whilst these internal discourses served to construct Russian national identity, they were also disseminated into Europe and picked up by European intellectuals and leaders and in turn used to fashion an idea of a Western civilisation in opposition to Russia. As GoGwilt argues, a deciding factor in this process appears to have been the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

[W]hat the reaction to the Bolshevik Revolution crystallized was an idea of the West that had already begun to emerge from responses to Russian ideas since the 1880s. The extreme conservative reaction against communist Russia consolidated a process whereby an evolving Russian debate about Europe helped redefine European culture and history in terms of an opposition between "Western" Civilization and the Russian, or Slavic peoples.⁴⁵

The Contemporary Construction of the West at the Margin/Outside

This brings us, therefore, to the crux of this paper. If the West has begun to drop out of the discourses of key leaders of the West, and if it is accepted that in fact the

⁴² Heller, p.184. This paragraph and what follows summarises Heller chapter 6.

⁴³ Heller, p.207.

⁴⁴ Heller, p.216. The quotes are from the Slavophile, Nicholai Danilevsky

⁴⁵ Chris GoGwilt (1995) 'True West: The Changing Idea of the West from the 1880s to the 1920s', in Silvia Federici (ed.) *Enduring Western Civilization: The Construction of the Concept of Western Civilization and Its 'Others'* (Westport CT: Praeger) p.44.

outside and margins of the West historically have played important roles in actually constituting what that 'West' has been understood to be in any case, this begs the question of what constitutive role the margins and outside might also be playing today. In short, whilst the silence in the Western core could be read as a possible sign of the concept's death, in reality the West is alive and well in the discourses of its margins and in the non-West where it in fact continues to play an important function in identity formation, and by extension also in how world order is unfolding. One result of this is that whilst within the West there is a growing sense of fragmentation, in its outside and margins the West remains constituted as an homogenised and unitary community of values.⁴⁶

Radical Islam

These constitutive discourses can be identified in several places. The most obvious place to look is in the discourses of radicalised Islam in the non-West. As Kurth notes, whilst the War on Terror was never supposed to be viewed as a clash of civilisations, this is precisely how Osama bin Laden presented it as a war between Islam and the Christian West.⁴⁷ The power of the outside to disrupt the West's desire to avoid a civilisational discourse has been notable in this respect. One particular example of this can be seen in the Danish cartoon crisis of 2006 following the publication of 12 cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed by the newspaper *Jyllandsposten* in 2005. As Hansen notes, whilst the cartoons could be depicted quite broadly, with some seemingly critical of Islam, whilst others parodied Danish attitudes to Islam and nationalist right figures in Denmark, in the Islamic world this diversity was overlooked. Instead, the cartoons were presented as yet one further example of Danish/European xenophobia towards Muslims.⁴⁸ In other words, whilst taken as a whole the cartoons could be seen as presenting a rather diverse view of Western opinion towards Islam, their reception in the Islamic world was arguably actively intended to instead frame the West in rather narrow anti-Islamic terms.

A similar phenomenon can be seen in the recent outpouring of literature on Occidentalism in the West. One of the best known works is that of Buruma and Margalit who argue that Occidentalism is characterised by sets of generalised and simplified images and ideas about the West in the minds of those who hate the West.⁴⁹ For them Occidentalism is characteristic of those who actually know little about the West and who equate it negatively with secularism and rationalism and who as such are anti-modernist in orientation. As they put it in an article in *The New York Times Review of Books*: "Occidentalists extol soul or spirit but despise intellectuals and intellectual life".⁵⁰ However, whilst this lack of knowledge and generalising of the other in occidentalist rhetoric is lamented and seen as paralleling Western orientalism, it should be kept in mind that this narrowing down and stereotyping is precisely the

⁴⁶ Viatcheslav Morozov (2007) 'Global Democracy, Western Hegemony and the Russian Challenge', presented at the NORFACE Conference, *The Transatlantic Relationship and the Struggle for Europe*, University College, Dublin, Ireland, 30-31 August 2007.

⁴⁷ James Kurth (2002) 'The New Protracted Conflict: The War and the West', *Orbis* (Spring), p.321.

⁴⁸ Lene Hansen (2007) 'The Clash of Cartoons? The Clash of Civilizations? Visual Securitization and the Danish 2006 Cartoon Crisis', presented at the 48th Annual ISA Convention, Chicago, 38 February – 3 March 2007.

⁴⁹ Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit (2004) *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (New York: Penguin Books).

⁵⁰ Quoted in Alastair Bonnett (2004) *The Idea of the West: Culture, Politics and History* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan) p.3.

point. It is precisely what the outsiders in this case are intending and is, of course a central element of how they seek to constitute their own identities in opposition to the West.⁵¹

The constitutive power of such discourse can perhaps be seen in how much recent Western debate about the future of the West has been concerned with trying to outline exactly what features are central to 'the West'. Notable here, have been various texts that highlight different cultural and religious traits that mark out the West from the Rest. One particularly notable example has been Roger Scruton's, *The West and the Rest*, in which Scruton highlights how whilst secularism is central to any understanding of the West, this secularism has deep roots in Christianity. Ultimately this leads Scruton to question more multicultural understandings of Western identity and to take a pessimistic view as to the ability to integrate Muslims into Western society.⁵² In other words, whether wittingly or otherwise, the frameworks of radical Islam that depict the West as a particular type of Christian, neo-liberal, modernist civilisation in turn appear to set the frames around which many in the West have begun to construct Western identity as well – notably in opposition to particular radicalised constructions of Islamic identity. The issue here is not to discover which representation came first, but rather to point out how they each feed off each other in intersubjective debate.

Eastern Europe

Whilst radical Islam concerns the power of the outside to set the contours of the contemporary West those in the margins of the West also possess constitutive power. One example of this can be seen in the case of Eastern Europe and the recent dispute which arose following Donald Rumsfeld's off the cuff remark in January 2003 in which he divided Europe into New and Old spheres. Old Europe, he indicated, referred to awkward partners and potential rivals of the US (by which he was referring to obstructionist countries like France and Germany). New Europe, in contrast, referred to those countries supportive of the United States (by which he meant Eastern Europe). Rumsfeld's view was that ultimately power was likely to shift increasingly towards New Europe.⁵³

This has created a rather interesting situation. On the one hand, Joenniemi has argued the fact that America could simply ride in with a re-categorisation of European geopolitics in which it set out to make claims regarding who should lead the West and regarding what the 'real' values of Europe should be seen to be, was indicative of America's continued power to set the European agenda.⁵⁴ On the other hand, however, for America to achieve this rather forceful act it required that the East European countries actually sign up to this new vision of European geopolitics and Western values. The fact that they largely refused to do this arguably goes quite a long way to explaining why this discourse of New and Old Europe soon dropped off

⁵¹ Alastair Bonnett (2004) *The Idea of the West: Culture, Politics and History* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan) pp.150-51.

⁵² Roger Scruton (2003) *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat* (Continuum Books).

⁵³ BBC News (2003) "Outrage at 'old Europe' remarks", 23 January 2003. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2687403.stm>

⁵⁴ Pertti Joenniemi (2005) 'The challenges of "New" and "Old": The Case of Europe's North', in David J. Smith (ed.) *The Baltic States and their Region: New Europe or Old?* (Amsterdam: Rodopi) pp.67-85.

the agenda. As a counterfactual it is perhaps worth considering what the impact would have been for Europe and the West had these states actually fully endorsed Rumsfeld's division. Furthermore, in related fashion it is also worth noting how the tendency of East European countries to view Russia as a traditional enemy has also caused a considerable thorn in the side of NATO/EU/West-Russia relations, such that since their accession to the EU and NATO Russia has frequently complained about the changed atmosphere.

Putin's Russia

Finally, it is also worth returning to Russian discourse concerning the West since the end of the Cold War. In this respect, it has become common to argue that during the 1990s Russia was gripped by a renewal of the debates between Westernisers and Slavophiles, whilst in the early 1990s the Westernisers gained the upper hand, seeing Russia's future as dependent upon its full integration into the Western community and its full absorption of what were perceived as distinctly Western values.⁵⁵

Today, however, things are quite different with much of Putin's political legitimacy driven by a strong critique of the Westernising policies of the 1990s, which are now characterised as having been a period of chaos and destruction.⁵⁶ However, this does not mean Putin has given up on the West. As Hopf notes, the idea of Europe as central to Russian identity remains. Indeed, Putin has argued Russia has a 'European calling', though notably, whilst he speaks of Russian relations with Europe in terms of shared identity, culture and spiritual legacy, when it comes to drawing links with the United States Putin's rhetoric extends no further than noting shared interests.⁵⁷ Moreover, though, Putin's vision of Europe has also proved somewhat troubling to his other European partners. Whereas in the rest of Europe values of democracy and freedom have been tied to the process of European integration, the downplaying of borders and the dispersal of sovereignty, for Putin enhancing Russian sovereignty has been a core value and goal. Putin's argument is that the failures of the 1990s resulted from the disintegration of the state and its appropriation by oligarchs, all of which undermined the state's capacity for autonomous action. As such, Putin argues that enhancing sovereignty and reclaiming modernist state power is central to enhancing democracy in Russia.⁵⁸

In this context, Morozov argues Putin (and Russia) are posing a very particular challenge to the West. Invoking Derrida, Morozov argues Russia is functioning as an 'irreducible signifier', meaning that as a country proclaiming its Europeanness and asserting the importance of values of democracy held so dear in the West, Russia has developed an identity which cannot be described by the West as an enemy and driven into outright otherness. Instead, Russia exists in the margins, in-between, "neither a member nor a complete alien in the family of liberal democracies". This, he notes, "produces dislocation in the structure of meaning which underlies the entire

⁵⁵ Nikolas K. Gvosdev (2007) 'Russia: European But Not Western?' *Orbis* (Winter), p.138.

⁵⁶ Viatcheslav Morozov (2007) 'Russia and the West: Dividing Europe, Constructing Each Other', presented at the 48th Annual ISA Convention, Chicago, 28 February – 3 March 2007.

⁵⁷ Ted Hopf (2007) 'Russia's Identity Relations with Europe, the EU and the United States: 1991-2007', presented at the NORFACE Conference, *The Transatlantic Relationship and the Struggle for Europe*, University College, Dublin, Ireland, 30-31 August 2007.

⁵⁸ Viatcheslav Morozov (2007) 'Russia and the West: Dividing Europe, Constructing Each Other', presented at the 48th Annual ISA Convention, Chicago, 28 February – 3 March 2007.

(neo)liberal world order” and which causes considerable irritation to Western leaders because “it hampers liberal universalist efforts to construct a world neatly divided into the ‘well-ordered peoples’ and the ‘outlaw states’”.⁵⁹

To put the point more succinctly, whilst Putin claims a European identity for Russia he also claims that Russia’s emphasis on sovereignty represents the ‘True Europe’ in contrast to the ‘False Europe’ of the postmodernising, debordering EU. Similarly, whilst Putin readily proclaims the value of democracy he importantly refuses to let the West assert ownership over the concept and to set itself up as the guardians of civilisation. In this respect, Putin is not a Slavophile or Eurasianist, but rather represents a return to the initial period of debates about civilisation and the West in Russia, where civilisation was understood in the singular and where the issue was simply how best to get there. As Morozov expresses it, for Putin and his team democracy is a universal term and as such “exists, above all, as an abstract principle...and this principle can be put into practice in many different ways”.⁶⁰

Thus, what Putin objects to is not the West’s emphasis on values like democracy, but its presumption that these are in some sense uniquely ‘Western’ values and as such that the West has an ordained right to pronounce of the democratic development of others. This was the tenor behind Putin’s controversial speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in February 2007 in which he criticised the ‘unipolar world’ promoted by the West as “a world of one master, one sovereign”, where “nearly the entire legal system of one state, first of all, of course, of the United States, has transgressed its national boundaries and... is being imposed on other states”.⁶¹ Putin’s point is that whilst democracy is not perfect in Russia, but is a work in progress, so too is it in the West. The problem with the West is its habit of lecturing to others without ever listening to their criticisms in turn, a habit which smacks of arrogance.⁶² As Putin expressed it in Portugal in May 2007: “let’s not see the situation as one side being white, clean, and pure, while the other side is some kind of ‘monster’ that has only just crawled out of the forest, with hoofs and horns instead of a normal human appearance”.⁶³

Thus, in proclaiming values of democracy to be universal Putin follows the discourse of Western leaders in rejecting the clash of civilisations thesis in favour of viewing civilisation in the singular. However, to the extent that the West uncritically presents its narrow version of (neo)liberal democracy as the fulfilment of a utopian vision (a la Fukuyama’s end of history), this is problematic in that it is blind to its own

⁵⁹ Viatcheslav Morozov (2007) ‘Russia and the West: Dividing Europe, Constructing Each Other’, presented at the 48th Annual ISA Convention, Chicago, 28 February – 3 March 2007.

⁶⁰ Viatcheslav Morozov (2007) ‘Global Democracy, Western Hegemony and the Russian Challenge’, presented at the NORFACE Conference, *The Transatlantic Relationship and the Struggle for Europe*, University College, Dublin, Ireland, 30-31 August 2007.

⁶¹ Putin quoted in Viatcheslav Morozov (2007) ‘Global Democracy, Western Hegemony and the Russian Challenge’, presented at the NORFACE Conference, *The Transatlantic Relationship and the Struggle for Europe*, University College, Dublin, Ireland, 30-31 August 2007.

⁶² For example, following the 2005 riots in France Russian political and intellectual leaders have argued that the West might like to learn from how Russia has tried “to develop a workable synthesis between European and non-European cultures” as a model of ‘inter-civilisational’ tolerance. Nikolas K. Gvosdev (2007) ‘Russia: European But Not Western?’ *Orbis* (Winter), p.135.

⁶³ Putin quoted in Ted Hopf (2007) ‘Russia’s Identity Relations with Europe, the EU and the United States: 1991-2007’, presented at the NORFACE Conference, *The Transatlantic Relationship and the Struggle for Europe*, University College, Dublin, Ireland, 30-31 August 2007.

narrowness, its own shortcomings, demonstrates significant arrogance in claiming 'Western' ownership over universal values, and fails to recognise the unique situations which confront different societies in the world and which may mean that the Western path to civilisation may not be the most appropriate elsewhere (the lesson of 1990s neo-liberalism in Russia).⁶⁴ Russia's continued constitutive influence over the concept of the West in this respect is that it resists disciplining by resisting inclusion into the Western inside. In insisting values like democracy need to be seen as idealised abstracts Putin also deprives the West of its claim to ownership over them and re-opens space for thinking about their attainment in a more diverse range of ways.

In practical terms, however, the paper argues that to ignore these dynamics is to fundamentally miss some of the key developments currently underway in international politics. If the unitary image of the West is now produced in the margins and in its outside what influence might that have on the core? Arguably, these dynamics will not only impact on the nature of transatlantic relations, but also on the emerging nature of world order itself, by framing what categories come to appear 'natural' in the future.

⁶⁴ Nikolas K. Gvosdev (2007) 'Russia: European But Not Western?' *Orbis* (Winter), p.134.