

Ideological Dilemmas: A Social Psychology Of Everyday Thinking

Everyday cosmopolitanism in representations of Europe among young Romanians in Britain

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Abstract

The paper presents an analysis of everyday cosmopolitanism in constructions of Europe among young Romanian nationals living in Britain. Adopting a social representations approach, cosmopolitanism is understood as a cultural symbolic resource that is part of everyday knowledge. Through a discursively-oriented analysis of focus group data, we explore the ways in which notions of cosmopolitanism intersect with images of Europeaness in the accounts of participants. We show that, for our participants, representations of Europe are anchored in an Orientalist schema of West-vs.-East, whereby the West is seen as epitomising European values of modernity and progress, while the East is seen as backward and traditional. Our findings further show that representations of cosmopolitanism reinforce this East/West dichotomy, within a discourse of 'Occidental cosmopolitanism'. The paper concludes with a critical discussion of the diverse and complex ideological foundations of these constructions of European cosmopolitanism and their implications.

Keywords

Cosmopolitanism, Eastern Europe, Europe, immigration, Orientalism, Occidentalism, Romanian migrants, social representations, UK

Introduction

One of the thorny issues in the UK's relationship with the European Union has been the principle of free movement, particularly concerning immigration from Eastern Europe. This paper asks what Europe means for young Romanians living in Britain, who, on the one hand, can be said to epitomise Europeaness (by enacting their EU citizenship), but, on the other hand, they are often stigmatised. Through an analysis of focus groups with young Romanians, the paper explores the complexities of constructions of Europe in this highly politicised context. We focus particularly on the interconnections between discourses of Europeaness and discourses of cosmopolitanism, both of which were salient in our data. Before presenting our study and findings, we first outline our approach on everyday cosmopolitanism and then we discuss the East/West polarisation that is central in Orientalist constructions of Europe.

Everyday cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism is generally associated with the moral ideal of global democracy (Calhoun, 2002). It is primarily a prescriptive concept: it describes how things should be rather than engaging directly with how things are in people's everyday realities. The conceptual distinction between cosmopolitanism as an ideal and as a practice (Nowicka and Rovisco, 2009) is useful for extending the meaning of the term. The latter approach focuses on the ways in which people develop post-national loyalties and cross boundaries between 'us' and 'them'.

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