

CfP: Settling and Unsettling: Towards a “Settler Turn” in the Study of the East of Europe (18th to 21st Century)

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Call for Papers for the Annual Conference of the Institute for Danube Swabian History and Regional Studies

12-14 October 2023, Tübingen

Conveners:

Dr. Cristian Cercel (Institute for Danube Swabian History and Regional Studies, Tübingen),

PD Dr. Dietmar Müller (Institute of Political Science, Leipzig University)

Keynote Speaker:

Prof. Robert Nelson (Department of History, Windsor University)

Deadline for abstract submission: 12 March 2023

Studies on the east of Europe have not entered into a distinct conversation with settler colonial studies, a field that has been significantly growing over the past decades. Initially preoccupied with the specificities of settler societies, and predicated on a quest to theoretically distinguish settler colonialism from other forms of colonialism, settler colonial studies moved towards an interrogation of spaces and periods beyond the “Anglo” world of the “settler revolution” (Belich 2009). Elaborating on settler colonialism as a structure and a relationship, a particular form of domination, and a political idea with ramifications in the present, scholars made the case for breaking with the customary spatializations and periodizations of settler colonialism (Veracini 2010; 2015; 2017; 2021; Cavanagh and Veracini 2017; Dahl 2018).

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<https://networks.h-net.org/node/8382/discussions/12318618/cfp-settling-and-unsettling-towards-%E2%80%9Csettler-turn%E2%80%9D-study-east>

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Analyses of the Nazi *Lebensraum* ideology and politics of occupation as well as scholarship on German-Polish relations in a broader timeframe implicitly or explicitly address settler colonialism (Lower 2005; Madley 2005; Zimmerer 2005; Bernhard 2016; Nelson 2009; Kopp 2012). However, it is worth expanding the view and explicitly bringing into dialogue settler colonial studies and studies on the east of Europe in a broader framework and in broader timeframes. In the Middle Ages, “Europe” – and its east – was made through processes of conquest, colonization, and land settlement (Higounet 1989; Bartlett 1994). (Such processes would be frequently framed within German nationalist and imperialist discourses as settler colonialism *avant la lettre*). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Europeans looking for land to settle went not only to transatlantic destinations in the colonies of European empires, but also to locales in the Habsburg, Prussian, Russian, and Ottoman Empires (Beer and Dahlmann 2004). These empires set in motion their own processes of land-centred “internal colonization” and frontier settlement, frequently by means of (external) immigration (Fata 2014; Sunderland 2016; Fratantuono 2019). The parallels to overseas colonial settlements did not escape contemporary observers (Varga 2022).

Post-imperial states in the east of Europe resorted to internal colonization projects that could also be entangled with ambitions about settling in transatlantic locales (Iordachi 2001; Puchalski 2021; Herza 2022). The links between internal colonization, external colonization, and transatlantic settler experiences are illustrated by individuals such as Max Sering (1857-1939). The economist and proponent of internal colonization in the German Empire’s eastern territories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, or in occupied and ‘empty’ Lithuania and Latvia during the First World War, modelled his visions on North American settler colonization (Nelson 2021).

Ideas of voluntary displacement to a new locale where to start anew based on sovereign entitlements informed visions about a Jewish homeland as a way to escape the anti-Semitism in the east of Europe. At the same time, the quest to escape anti-Semitism, yet without settling in faraway locales, undergirded projects of agricultural colonization in the east of Europe, such as the establishment of Jewish agricultural settlements in Crimea and southern Ukraine (Dekel-Chen 2005). This experience would then provide the blueprint for projects such as the resettlement of Jewish refugees from Nazism to the Dominican Republic, in which humanitarianism and settlerness were entangled (Wells 2009)

In the Second World War, settler colonization plans were part and parcel of the Romanian occupation of Transnistria or of the Italian occupation of Albania. In the latter case, they were intrinsically linked with Italian settler colonial plans in Northern Africa, but also with the internal colonization of the Pontine Marshes (Veracini 2018). The flight and expulsion of Germans from Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the war was read as a de-colonization migration, on a par with the “return migration” of the imperial settlers from Algeria to France (Borutta and Jansen 2016). The expelled were replaced by “local” populations, frequently described as “colonists”/“settlers”, while also claiming some degree of indigeneity (and so did the German expellees as well). In the aftermath of the Second World War, Germans from the east of Europe were frequently considered as ideal candidates for land settlement projects in Latin American countries (Cercel 2022).

Tensions between settlerness and indigeneity went on to play an important role in societies in the east of Europe after the end of the Second World War. In conflicts over Transylvania or Kosovo, constructions of indigeneity and settlerness were used to legitimize or delegitimize territorial claims. Currently, one can see colonial anxieties at play, for example in right-wing discourses about depopulation and an alleged Muslim ‘colonization’. Strikingly deployed for example by Hungary’s Viktor Orbán, such assertions appear to interpret contemporary population movements as mirroring the past European transatlantic settler migration.

Considering this admittedly broad array of diverse examples, the conference has two goals: 1) by employing frameworks and critical perspectives from the field of settler colonial studies, it aims to contribute to a better understanding of the wide range of processes of settling and unsetting in the east of Europe as well as to a better understanding of the place of the east of Europe within the global history of settler colonialism; and 2) by placing the east of Europe on the map of settler colonial studies, it aims to question, refine, expand, and enrich the theorizations on settler colonialism.

The conference aims to cover the period between the 18th to the 21st centuries. Papers with a contemporary focus are welcome. The organizers hope to receive submissions from a broad range of disciplines (e.g. history, political science, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, migration studies).

Amongst the topics that the conveners expect to cover are the following:

- ‘settlerness’ as a category of practice and as a category of analysis;

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- settling, migrating, colonizing: varieties, distinctions and interconnections
- influences, entanglements and transfer between discourses and practices of (internal) colonization in the east of Europe, visions of external colonization, and transatlantic settler colonialism; parallels, comparisons, interconnections between the east of Europe and transatlantic settler societies
- land settlement and property rights; appropriations and dispossessions of land
- ideologies and politics of settlerness and of settler entitlements; constructing settlerness and settler collectives; settler utopias and settler dystopias
- colonial anxieties and settler ambitions
- (uses of) 'settlerness' and 'indigeneity': tensions and overlaps
- the logics of settling, resettling and unsettling; settlerness and displacement
- settling and urban and rural planning
- settlerness: identity and memory

Please send your abstracts in English to cristian.cercel@idgl.bwl.de by 12 March 2023. The conveners will make a prompt selection of the papers. The selected participants will be asked to send their (draft) papers by 15 September 2023. A publication of the papers in a collective volume is envisaged and relevant publishing houses will be approached after the selection of the papers. Where this is an option, we kindly ask the participants to apply for travel and accommodation funding at their home institutions. Where there is no such possibility, the organizers will strive to cover travel and two nights' accommodation in Tübingen. In exceptional cases, online presentations and online attendance can be considered.