

CfP: The Eastern Gaze. Eastern European Conceptualizations of the Non-European World (Edited Volume)

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The Eastern Gaze. Eastern European Conceptualizations of the Non-European World

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Call for Contributions

Modern Eastern Europe has been traditionally perceived as a terrain of external domination, be it in the strict sense of territorial expansion or softer forms of cultural influence. The region has been approached as an arena of imperial rivalries and complex ethnic diversity that have often manifested in violent ethnic conflicts. Eastern European nations such as Poland, Ukraine, Romania and Lithuania have long been perceived as subjects of the imperial policies of Russia/Soviet Union, Prussia/Germany and Austro-Hungary and not as independent agents that took part in shaping European perceptions of Asia, Africa or Latin America. From the Western European perspective, Eastern Europe was often imagined as non-cultured, unchanging, backward, exotic and “Oriental.” Eastern European Jews, in particular, have long been analyzed as a discriminated minority which conceptualized internally focused visions of national transformation (Zionism, Jewish socialism) but did not interact to a greater extent with the non-European political or cultural realm.

Whereas scholars have signaled the links between Eastern European travel writing and the conceptualization of the “West,” as well analyzed accounts of Western travelers

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visiting Eastern Europe, traditionally the region has rarely been examined as a developer of ideas concerning the non-European world. In recent years, however, researchers have suggested that Eastern Europeans, despite their less favorable status than that of representatives of advanced Western European nation-states, engaged in diverse ways of imagining and construing the Orient. This has been a particularly fruitful field concerning aspects such as “internal colonialism” or the exoticization of spaces on the borders of Eastern Europe, such as the Caucasus, Central Asia or Crimea. As Tomasz Zarycki, Vera Tolz, Wolfgang Kissel, Kerstin Jobst, Robert Born and others have argued, the Eastern European intelligentsia also created their own Orientalist visions of “Eastness,” often in order to underline supremacies within the region, or, as in the case of Poland, to mark its *mission civilisatrice* in the East. Scholars have also identified a history of self-Orientalization in a number of Eastern European nations, which served to define Eastern Europe as a “bridge” between East and West.

Despite a significant source base developed thanks to travel and migration, the “Orient” lying further away (such as Africa, the Middle East, Oceania, Asia or Latin America, which we tentatively define as “the non-European world”) have attracted less attention from students of Eastern European Orientalism. *The Eastern Gaze* encourages researchers to extend the study of Eastern European Orientalism to lands traditionally not associated with Eastern Europe, but which through travel and migration were included in the Eastern European debates. For instance, travel writing at the beginning of the 20th century emerged as one of the most popular literary genres in Polish and Yiddish literature. Eastern European men of letters explored Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America and imagined themselves as powerful and enlightened explorers, an attitude at times neutralized by expressions of empathy and solidarity towards “backward” non-Europeans. Both before and after World War II, notions of race and ethnicity were equally as central for Eastern Europeans as for Westerners. Complex representations of racial and ethnic diversity were incorporated into classic works of fiction, such as *W pustyni i w puszczy* by Polish author Henryk Sienkiewicz, as well as lesser-known writings such as the Palestinian stories of Henryk Adler and Bernard Zimmerman.

Moreover, Eastern European migrants in Latin America, the Middle East and, to a lesser extent, Africa and Australasia reported from their new places of residence and thereby contributed to a diversification of the imaginaries circulating in Eastern Europe. Traveling archeologists and anthropologists also left behind accounts of Eastern European encounters with racial diversity and formulations of race-based social and cultural hierarchies. In the post-1945 communist era, hundreds of Eastern

European professionals traveled and worked in allied countries in North Africa, Central Asia and the Middle East. Some of them, such as Bohdan Łyp and Adam Linsenbarth, documented their Polish-Arab encounters, thus adding another layer for constructing Eastern European perceptions of the non-European world.

The Eastern Gaze aims to fill the lacuna of knowledge about the Eastern European perception of the non-European world. The volume will gather scholars working in the fields of history, Jewish Studies, literary studies, cultural studies and neighboring disciplines and will explore the formation of cultural hierarchies that allowed Eastern Europeans to exoticize the peoples and territories of Africa and the Middle East, Asia, Latin America and Oceania. To what extent and in what ways did Eastern European travelers and migrants adopt a “Western” persona when they arrived in non-European territories? What exactly was the Eastern European perception of “exotic” lands? Who were the actors shaping the Eastern European understanding of the non-European world, and what strategies and reference points did they use? How was the “exotic lands” motif used in Eastern European popular and avant-garde cultures? As a whole, the volume intends to critically examine how the non-European world was discussed in Eastern Europe, explore the evolution of public discourses concerning Asia, Africa and Latin America, and locate the mechanisms and strategies that diverse Eastern European actors adopted when talking about the non-European world.

The temporal framework of the volume starts in the second half of the 19th century and extends into the contemporary era. We are seeking fully-documented scholarly chapters with a maximum of 10,000 words. We invite contributions that include but are not limited to the following subjects:

- Eastern Europe and constructing popular images of the non-European world
- Eastern European travel writing and the construction of “selfhood”
- East European identifications of “Otherness”
- Eastern European migrants’ and immigrants’ perception of their new “exotic” places of residence
- the Eastern European Jewish gaze on the Mizrahi Jews
- Gender aspects of the Eastern European perception of the non-European world
- Race and Eastern European visions of the non-European world

Please send to the editors Magdalena Kozłowska m.kozłowska41@uw.edu.pl and

Mariusz Kalczewiak kalczewiak@uni-potsdam.de a 300-word abstract of your proposed papers by June 23, 2019. Decisions will be made by July 7, 2019. Selected authors will be invited to send their papers by December 31, 2019. We are negotiating a book publication with Academic Studies Press and Brill, and the volume is scheduled to appear at the end of 2020.

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