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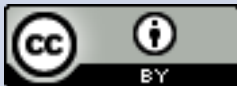
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Book Review: Europe and the East: Historical Ideas of Eastern and Southeast Europe, 1789- 1989

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*Europe and the East: Historical Ideas of Eastern and
Southeast Europe, 1789-1989*

Edited by Mark Hewitson and Jan Vermeiren

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In *Europe and the East: Historical Ideas of Eastern and Southeast Europe, 1789-1989*, editors Mark Hewitson and Jan Vermeiren explore the shifting and imaginary borders between ‘East’ and ‘West’ in European intellectual history. The processes by which largely Western European observers imagined eastern and southeastern Europe have been the subject of historical scrutiny since the end of the Cold War division of the continent in 1989. Taking inspiration from Edward Said’s foundational postcolonial critique *Orientalism* (1978), works such as Larry

Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994) and Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (1997) established a scholarly field examining the practices by which these regions have been historically 'othered' to assert Western European cultural superiority. Hewitson and Vermeiren's collection makes a significant contribution to this literature. *Europe and the East* examines concrete historical circumstances in which instances of inclusion and exclusion from the idea of Europe occur, an approach which breaks with the postcolonial methodologies of previous studies that favoured outlining the parameters of denigrating discourses over analysing the significance images of eastern and southeastern Europe had at specific times and places.

The thirteen contributions are based on papers presented at the conference of the Research Network on the History of the Idea of Europe at the University of East Anglia in 2017. *Europe and the East* has none of the typical flaws associated with conference proceedings, with contributions thematically corresponding to the three sections of the book: 'Conceptualizing the East', 'National Identity and the Eastern Borders of Europe, 1789-1914', and 'The New East in an Age of Geopolitics, 1914-89'. The introduction about self and other in the history of the European idea by Hewitson and Vermeiren provides an overview of the ambiguity associated with the division of Europe. Ranging from judgments about 'oriental despotism' made by Enlightenment era *philosophes* to Milan Kundera's reaffirmation of a central European identity in the 1980s, Hewitson and Vermeiren's introduction reminds readers that the location, definition, and character of the 'East' (and the 'West') were uncertain across historical periods.

The first chapter of the collection by Patrick Pasture continues to focus on the historical contingency of the east-west dichotomy that influenced European identity formation. Adopting a non-Eurocentric perspective, Pasture highlights the variety of 'others' against which Europe defined itself, such as the Islamic 'Orient' and 'the yellow peril' of China. Crucially, he introduces how these 'others' perceived Europe to shatter deep-rooted mythologies about Europe's unique values and practices. The following two chapters by Gavin Murray-Miller and Rolf Petri examine the epistemology and practice of orientalism and 'balkanism' in the nineteenth century. Both chapters challenge preconceived ideas of Europe by demonstrating how east-west dichotomies blurred in what were considered Europe's peripheral zones: the Iberian Peninsula, with its Moorish cultural heritage; Hungary, because of its Ural-Altai linguistic origins; and southeast European cultures influenced by the Ottoman Empire. Murray-Miller shows that in the Iberian and Hungarian contexts these 'Oriental' attributes were

celebrated and framed nationalist agendas, thus destabilising notions of difference believed central to orientalist discourses.

The second section of *Europe and the East* considers the interplay between national and transnational European identity through specific case studies highlighting the demarcation of Europe's eastern borders during the nineteenth century. Certain chapters distinguish themselves for bringing novel approaches and topics to the field of European intellectual history. Fernanda Gallo's comparative exploration of Giuseppe Mazzini, Carlo Cattaneo, and Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso's understandings of European identity is exemplary for bringing attention to the role practices of exile and accompanying transnational exchanges of ideas with nationalist movements in eastern and southeastern Europe played in Europeanising Italian republican elites. Extending Murray-Miller's earlier discussion of Hungarian nationalism, Philip Baker and Thomas Lorman's chapter considers debates about whether Hungary possessed an 'Eastern' or 'Western' character through the prism of the 1896 Millennial Celebrations in Budapest. They astutely note that, although emphasising Hungary's 'oriental' legacy, historical portrayals of the arrival of Magyar tribes into the Carpathian Basin served to marginalise minority populations in the Kingdom of Hungary by representing the Magyars as a superior ethnic group with a right to power through ancient conquest. Another bold counterpoint to the conceptual hypothesis of Western Europe as a fixed standard against which all other cultural spheres are judged is Samuel Foster's chapter on representations of the South Slavic Balkans in *fin-de-siècle* Europe. Arguing that romantic invocations of southeastern Europe's largely agrarian societies articulated a sense of disaffection with ideas of Europe predicated on industrial and commercial progress, Foster suggests that the moral virtues associated with South Slavic cultures paved the way for Anglo-French support for the creation of Yugoslavia in 1918.

The final section of *Europe and the East* focuses on the effect the geopolitical shifts of the twentieth century had on European identity. Richard Deswarte examines representations in published political writings from the 1920s in which America and the Soviet Union functioned as metaphors for alternative futures for European development, either to be embraced as a path to further modernisation or perceived as threats to the cultural traditions of 'the old continent'. Returning the focus to what were considered to be Europe's eastern borders, Estelle Bunout's contribution demonstrates that in twentieth century German and Polish society tension and ambiguity prevailed around the question of eastern Europe: was the region a familiar space because of national history and culture, a potential place of national expansion, or a space

embodying frightening notions of otherness? Concluding *Europe and the East*, Marzia Maccaferri argues that the British left wing periodical *Marxism Today* and its interest in eastern European politics during the 1980s created an intellectually Europhile substrate that laid the foundations for New Labour's pro-European agenda. Maccaferri's contribution does not, however, discuss how the neoliberal economic agenda pursued by New Labour arguably laid the foundations for the scapegoating of minority groups that prevails in British political and media discourse today.

The timeliness of *Europe and the East* is instead most directly addressed by Hewitson and Vermeiren in the introduction. Many eastern Europeans, they note, 'still feel like second-class members [of the European Union]'. This is particularly acute when Western commentators highlight populist xenophobia and anti-liberal tendencies as features of eastern European societies, specifically regarding Fidesz in Hungary, the recently deposed from office Law and Justice Party in Poland, and Alternative für Deutschland in the former states of East Germany, while downplaying comparable developments in Western Europe, such as Brexit and the continued popularity of Faragist parties in the United Kingdom, Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy, and the normalisation of Marine Le Pen's National Rally as a political force in France. An effective antidote to such persistently clichéd attitudes is exposing their basis in Western European self-representation rather than any social or cultural realities of eastern and southeastern Europe – an understanding which *Europe and the East* makes a valuable contribution towards.

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