Book Review

Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, Mark Kirchner, Markus Koller, and Monika Wingender, eds. 2018. *Identitätsentwürfe im östlichen Europa – im Spannungsfeld von Selbst- und Fremdwahrnehmung*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (Interdisziplinäre Studien zum östlichen Europa). 262 pp., ISBN: 978-3-447-10469-2 (Hardcover), ISBN: 978-3-447-19774-8 (eBook), € 54.00

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The volume of 13 chapters is part of a series of publications that resulted from a large-scale project funded by the German Research Association (DFG) at the Centre for Eastern Europe (GiZo) at Gießen University on “Cultural Processes and Identity Discourses in Eastern Europe” between 2010 and 2013. The mixture of contributions dealing with different historical epochs and also very different cultural landscapes proves successful. The temporal spectrum ranges from the early Middle Ages to the present day.

The first section of chapters, which complement the preliminary remarks by *Paul Srodecki* (11–34), begins with a contribution by *Nora Berend* who outlines the gradual adaptation of a Christian identity in medieval Hungary from an internal and external perspective (35–53). She sees the end of this development in the adoption of Antemurale Christianitatis ideas in Hungary aimed against an external enemy, be it the Golden Horde or the expanding Ottoman Empire. *Endre Sashalmi* (54–72) sheds light on the origin of Antemurale Christianitatis ideas in the Muscovite Empire. In contrast to the Latin Christian world, here no such concepts existed until the seventeenth century. Only under the impression of the devastating wars and civil wars in the context of Smuta and the temporary Polish conquest of Moscow were such ideas developed, propagated, and, in a further step—from the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries—expanded to encompass the protection of all orthodox Christians outside the Russian Empire. *Hans Jürgen Bömelburg* (73–87) dedicates his contribution to the distinctive “Origo” ideas among the aristocracy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which can also be gathered under the term “Sarmatism”. Among the Polish kings of the House of Wasa, particular emphasis is placed on models and borrowings from Sweden. Finally, *Stefan Rohdewald* (89–105) explores identity, group, and travel images from the Anatolian provinces in Evliya Celebi’s travel accounts.

The second section contains three contributions: *Markus Koller* and *Arifa Ramovic* (109–28) examine processes of identity formation through the camera lens by selecting photographs from the “Archives de la Planète” on the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 as a case study. Many of these records and attributions at the time shaped imaginations of the Balkans in Europe, but also self-images in Southeastern Europe. *Ulrich Hofmeister* (129–45) describes the construction of ethnic identities in Russian Turkestan between 1856 and 1917. Far too seldom—is Russian colonial policy examined in the context of the other colonial powers of the time in Africa and Asia. Russian politicians, administrative officials, scientists, and the military constructed—like others at the same time in Africa, for example—according to their own criteria and world views, the modern nations that exist there today, such as the Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyzs, and others. Following on from this, *Walter Sperling* (147–68) uses the example of the Chechen capital, Grozny, to analyse memory of the Soviet era there and today’s postimperial identities. He rightly calls for clearly tangible phenomena such as Soviet nostalgia to be taken seriously, and for the causes of these attitudes to be traced without ideology. On the other hand, he ignores the aspects of mass violence that had a decisive influence on the history of the Caucasus from 1914 to 1953/1957 in his otherwise very accessible considerations.

The third section combines five chapters on the drafting of identity in language-related and language-political discourses. *Ruth Bartholomä* (171–95) pursues debates about the introduction of a Latin script for Kazan Tatars in Tatarstan since the 1980s. This movement, understood as a process of emancipation from Russia and an opening towards Turkey and the West, has largely come to a standstill due to pressure from Moscow. *Zaur Gasimov* (197–212) traces the gradual but unstoppable decline of Russian as a lingua franca in all areas of life, which in the medium term will likely lead to its disappearance. *Aksana Brun* and *Monika Wingender* explore this issue in the case of Kazakhstan (213–27), and come to almost analogous conclusions.

Based on field research, *Christian Voß* in his chapter on Pomak identities in Western Thrace since the political changes in 1989 (229–40) concludes that through oscillation between transnationalism and re-ethnicisation both the Pomak language and regional Pomak forms of identity are doomed to extinction. He sees the cause, on the one hand, in the Turkicisation of Muslims in Western Thrace, which is significantly controlled by Ankara, the Turkish minority organisations, and religious institutions, leaving no room for non-Turkish Muslim identity concepts. On the other hand, contacts on the ground between the Pomak communities in Bulgaria and Greece, spatially directly adjacent but divided by the state borders of 1919, have not been revived since the end of communism.

A remarkable concluding chapter by *Dirk Uffelmann* (241–62) examines the use of the Russian-language Internet in Central Asia. He comes to the conclusion that quantitatively small and educated milieus use it consistently and intensively as a common platform and mode of communication between people with different mother tongues. The relative silence on political issues does not automatically imply approval of the policies of Moscow or the Central Asian governments.

All in all, this is a very valuable volume that encourages further research. A few comments are called for on the introductory remarks by *Paul Srodecki* about what he calls the “fear of Eastern Europe” and religiously motivated constructions of identity, alterity, and alienity in the Middle Ages and the early modern period. Deconstructivist works based on Niklas Luhmann, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida are legion. Srodecki correctly points out that images of the enemy and of the “other” were constructed, as were new forms of Latin Christian identity and that of the secular elites of Europe. This also included the idea of *Antemural Christianitatis* and notions of crusades and holy war—the so-called “fear of the East”. However, the limits of deconstructivism become apparent when confronted with verifiable facts. The author himself suggests them, but without assigning them the same relevance as those ideas in Europe that he describes as “constructed”, and with latent negative connotations.

Srodecki thereby neglects the fact that all peasant societies, from China to India and Iran, were regularly threatened and massively affected by mobile and militarily extremely effective equestrian nomads. These societies harboured very similar fears. Contrary to the remarks made by the author, the Koran and Sunna contain an abundance of direct calls for holy war. The idea of jihad is found frequently in the long formation phase of Islam between the seventh and ninth centuries, as works by at-Tabari and other authors reveal. Recent studies have shown that the idea of “holy war” played just as important a role in the Arab conquest of Sicily in the ninth century as it did in the Turkish conquest of Asia Minor on the eve of the First Crusade. The deconstruction of images of Europe in the medieval and modern Islamic world would merit the same attention as the deconstruction of images of the Muslim world in medieval and modern Europe, conducted since the 1970s in particular. The flight from history into the domain of theory and illusion could thus be countered.