



VILNIUS UNIVERSITY
Centre of Oriental Studies

Call for abstracts / call for panels

ORIENTALISM, COLONIAL THINKING AND THE FORMER SOVIET PERIPHERY

*Exploring Bias and Stereotype Representations of Eastern
and Central Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.*

Vilnius University

August 27-29, 2015

Deadlines

- *Individual abstract proposals* should be submitted by **March 25th**.
- *Panel proposals* (inclusive of abstracts) should be submitted by **April 10th**.

Academic fields

The conference is organized along a distinctively multi-disciplinary line, with the purpose of opening a new field for interdisciplinary research and dialogue. The main areas expected to contribute to the conference are:

- Post-Colonial Studies and Subaltern Studies;
- Post-Soviet/Post-communist Studies;
- Oriental Studies;



VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

Centre of Oriental Studies

- Central Asian Studies;
- Ukrainian Studies and Slavonic Studies in general;
- Baltic Studies;
- History of Eastern and Central Europe;
- International relations and Security Studies;
- Media Studies;
- International Law.

Conference purpose and concept

The Ukrainian crisis has placed the entire post-communist world back at the very centre of global debates in the media, politics and academia. Concepts such as sovereignty of post-Soviet and post-communist states have been brought into question once again, alongside the historical development, international alignment and aspirations of state actors in the region.

In this context, a narrative of “Russian interests versus Western interests/values” seems to have gained currency in Western media and political discourses. Smaller actors of Eastern and Central Europe, Central Asia, the Baltics and the Caucasus see their perspectives ignored or put on a secondary level. This has led some scholars to suggest the existence among Western commentators of a “colonial”, “Orientalist” bias that favours the former imperial “centre” and sees formerly subaltern actors as passive entities in a greater game, giving a stereotypical and demeaning image of such countries and their people. This in turn leaves countries of the former Czarist and Soviet peripheries unable to influence the mainstream debate and to present a self-centred approach in a world in which perceptions and narratives more and more legitimize actions in international relations.



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Centre of Oriental Studies

The purpose of the conference is to provide an academic framework for the discussion of these ideas and put them to the test of peer debate. The goal is to discuss the relevance of Post-Colonial Studies to Post-Communist Studies and hopefully open an innovative chapter in the academic understanding of the Post-Communist World.

Conference research questions and structure

The conference will be structured in three sections, each with distinctive but interrelated research questions.

(When submitting your proposal, please indicate the section you would be applying for)

- I. **Section one** will debate the impact of colonial and Orientalist thinking on policy-making processes about former subjects of the Russian and Soviet power, both in the international arena and in internal affairs. Examples of research questions are: how do existing prejudices in media, politics and academia contribute to consolidating the idea of post-communist countries as “passive” actors with “limited sovereignty”, “subordinated”, limited in their possibility to freely choose an international alignment, and of common people in Eastern European countries as “backward”, or “second-class Europeans”? How does this affect decisions taken at a European level concerning security crises of the post-Soviet world? What are the recurrent (and competing) images and via what tools are they routinized?

- II. **Section two** will approach the issue from a historical perspective. The purpose is to discuss whether colonial thinking and the possible understanding of



VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

Centre of Oriental Studies

Eastern Europe as a subaltern, passive entity biases Western views of history in the region. Asking whether there exists a “hierarchy of historical narratives” in the way the history of countries of the former Soviet bloc are perceived by scholars, media and politicians, the section aims to explore if and how these prejudices impact Western receptiveness of historical interpretations and discourses coming from former imperial subjects, making them less effective than competing narratives coming from Russia or the West itself, and how does this impact regional and international relations.

- III. **Section three** will be specifically dedicated to the applicability of the concept of Orientalism and Post-Colonial studies to the study of the context in which Russian/Soviet colonial thinking was first developed, i.e. the early Czarist imperial “frontier”: the North Caucasus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Central Asia, broadly understood to include the five “Stans” as well as regions that experienced significant Russian/Soviet influence at different points in their history, such as Mongolia and Xinjiang. To what extent, in what forms, and why do Orientalist stereotypes still bias our understanding of the Asian part of the former Czarist and Soviet sphere, and what is the impact of this on political and academic agendas?

Keynote speakers

Confirmed keynote speakers so far include:

- **Dr. Andreas Umland**, Kyiv-Mohyla Academy
- **Prof. Alexander J. Motyl**, Rutgers University



VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

Centre of Oriental Studies

- **Mykola Ryabchuk**, Ukrainian Centre for Cultural Studies
- **Dr. John Heathershaw**, Exeter University
- **Dr. Nick Megoran**, Newcastle University

Conference fee

- No conference fee will be applied to presenters.
- Non-presenters can register upon payment of a EUR 20 fee.

Language of communication

English

Submission of paper/panel proposals

Proposals are to be submitted via email to: fabio.belafatti@oc.vu.lt in .pdf or .doc format using the subject line "Paper/panel proposal – Orientalism 2015"

- *Abstract* proposals should include:
 - Name of candidate;
 - Institutional affiliation;
 - A link to or a short academic bio (Max. 100 words);
 - Email address;
 - Which of the three thematic sections the paper is eligible for;
 - Title of the proposed paper;



VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

Centre of Oriental Studies

- Abstract of the proposed paper (between 200-250 words)

- *Panel* proposals should include:
 - Title of the panel;
 - A panel description (between 180 and 300 words);
 - Which of the three thematic sections the panel is eligible for;
 - Name of the panel convenor;
 - Name of the panel members (**at least three + convenor**);
 - Institutional affiliation of the panel members and convenor;
 - A link to or a short academic bio (Max. 100 words) of each panel member and convenor;
 - Email addresses of the panel members and convenor;
 - Titles of the papers proposed within the panel (**at least three + convenor**);
 - Abstracts of the proposed papers (between 200-250 words)

Information

For any questions, clarifications, or for visa-support invitation letters, please contact the conference's administrative secretary Fabio Belafatti at fabio.belafatti@oc.vu.lt