



ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN ART AND VISUAL STUDIES

CRITICAL APPROACHES TO ART, RACE AND COLONIALITY IN EASTERN EUROPE

Edited by
**DOROTA JAGODA MICHALSKA
AND MARTA ZBORALSKA**

ROUTLEDGE



Critical Approaches to Art, Race and Coloniality in Eastern Europe

Building on recent scholarship that challenges the supposed historical isolation of Eastern European art from the colonial matrix of power, this book responds to the sometimes uncritical application of established Western postcolonial and decolonial theories to the region's visual production.

Instead, it advocates for more nuanced, historically grounded methodologies sensitive to Eastern Europe's specific circumstances as a capitalist (semi)periphery and an area shaped by multiple competing empires. Moving beyond Cold War binaries, the essays collectively argue that the region's volatile historical positionalities destabilize rigid theoretical divides between colonizer and colonized, challenge normative understandings of whiteness and indigeneity, and highlight the divergent political trajectories of postsocialism and postcolonialism in artistic practice. Conceptualized as a critical intervention, the volume amplifies voices from the (semi)periphery to make a significant methodological contribution to debates in the global history of art, foregrounding the variegated nature of colonialism itself.

The book will be of interest to scholars working in art history, colonialism and post-colonialism studies, and Eastern European studies.

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Introduction

Dorota Jagoda Michalska and Marta Zboralska

Introduction

In 2011, artist Paweł Althamer embarked on a journey to Brazil and Mali in a handmade costume resembling *Koziółek Matolek* (Silly the Billy Goat), an iconic children's book character from the interwar period in Poland. The book's narrative features the anthropomorphic figure of a moderately intelligent yet intrepid white goat during his global peregrinations from Africa to South America, in a quixotic quest for the legendary town of Pacanów, where goats are supposedly given "goat shoes." Confronted with the vastness of an unfamiliar world, which unwittingly reflects the fears and stereotypes of interwar Poland, *Matolek* manages to survive thanks to a mixture of resourcefulness and sheer luck. Almost a century later, Althamer reenacted some of these expeditions, recasting *Silly the Billy Goat* as the alter ego of the artist himself, poised between his local postsocialist reality and the global domain. Althamer's performative visit to the Global South created an alternative cartography where Eastern Europe and other non-Western peripheries become interconnected, acknowledging their shared present within global capitalism.

In one particularly poignant photograph, the artist as *Koziółek Matolek* sits in a contemplative pose in present-day São Paulo, perhaps ruminating on some of the questions central to this edited collection: what is Eastern Europe's geopolitical location on the map of global relations? How might this agrarian and (semi)peripheral region compare to other "non-Western" settings within the world-system? Pursuing these lines of interrogation, *Silly the Billy Goat* might even start to reflect on the meanings of his own whiteness, a trait he had not questioned in the Polish countryside.¹ Decontextualized from its Eastern European location and re-situated within the complexities of the Global South, this "whiteness" emerges not as self-evident or universal, but a marked and historically contingent geopolitical attribute. Regarded from the perspective of Brazil or Mali, Eastern Europe is stripped of any claims to exceptionalism, and instead becomes part of a global reality whose structure was formed by modern capitalism's imperial and colonial projects of accumulation from the 15th century onward. Thus, *Koziółek Matolek's* errancy opens up a new set of questions. Where is Eastern Europe positioned within global relations of exploitation and subservience, and how do we account for the mutable character of these ties? What conditions determine the proximity of "Eastern Europeans"—in actuality a populace of heterogeneous cultural identities, always subject to redefinition under changing political circumstances—to whiteness?

Althamer's performative action serves as an entry point for our exploration of critical approaches to art, coloniality, and race in Eastern Europe.² Recent years have witnessed

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a rapid growth of interest in and research on this subject, challenging previous claims of Eastern Europe's outsider status as a region historically untouched by the colonial matrix of power.³ However, branches of this scholarship are marked by a pervasive, and sometimes uncritical, embrace of the established canon of postcolonial and decolonial theory from Western academia.⁴ This has led to a precipitous introduction of categories such as "indigeneity" or "settler colonialism" into discussions on art, modernity, and imperialism in Eastern Europe. A recent "second wave" of scholarship by such authors as Manuela Boatcă, James Mark, Catherine Baker, or Piro Rexhepi has complicated this adoption of existing theoretical paradigms by putting forward more nuanced analytical models, reflective of the region's historical and socioeconomic complexities.⁵ Their research closely tracks the genealogies of modernity in the region, shaped by relations of labor, land and resource exploitation, as well as the enslavement of peasant communities and Romani people in a drive toward accumulation by both imperial powers and the native bourgeoisie. Crucially, such scholarship acknowledges the multiple lines of domination that complicate the absolute divide between colonized and colonizers postulated by recent decolonial theory. In fact, in Eastern Europe these positions have been in turn occupied by different ethnic, religious, and class groups, making the region's experience of coloniality and racialization context-specific.

Crucial to this methodological turn is the resituating of Eastern Europe beyond the political ideologies and polarities of the Cold War. Here, the work of Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă, influenced by Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory, is a crucial reference point, which reframes Eastern Europe as a mostly agrarian (semi)periphery within capitalist circuits, an economically dependent condition characterized by the export of labor and raw resources.⁶ This perspective situates the region not only in relation to Western centers or Russia, but also other (semi)peripheral locations across Latin America or Africa. Another recent intervention comes from Laura Doyle, who defines Eastern Europe as an inter-imperial "shatterzone," similar to the Caribbean or the Andes, which has seen multiple powers competing for its land, resources, and people.⁷ Doyle understands the inter-imperial condition as both exemplifying and necessitating a multilateral stance, tracing the region's development in relation to numerous centers of colonial power whose spatial vectors have spanned from German Prussia, the Habsburg Empire, Imperial (and later Soviet) Russia, and the Ottoman Empire. The many layers of conquest and domination raise key methodological questions—but also, perhaps most crucially, alert us to the instability of colonialism itself, a catch-all term that in fact encompasses diverse and distinct processes. At the same time, they reveal the historical divergence between postcolonialism and postsocialism as political orientations.

This volume pays close attention to these contentious issues, highlighting the work of scholars who critically engage with current postcolonial and decolonial perspectives in modern and contemporary art to emphasize both their potentialities and analytical blind spots. As such, the collection is conceptualized not as a simple addendum to the ever-developing field of decolonial and postcolonial studies within art history, but as a critical intervention and methodological contribution to this burgeoning field. By amplifying distinct voices from Eastern Europe as a global (semi)periphery, it actively questions some of the foundational tenets and assumptions that have attained dominant status in the context of Western academia. Thus, while deeply sensitive to the specific artistic and historical contexts of their case studies, the authors collectively pose broader theoretical questions: what constitutes the variegated nature of colonialism itself, beyond its paradigmatic Western manifestations? In what ways are the historical positions of colonizers

and colonized liable to shifting power dynamics? How do we confront the categories of indigeneity and whiteness in a region where multiple social groups have historically claimed them for competing nationalist, ethnocentric politics?

A Materialist Critique

The essays gathered in the first section advocate for a more rigorous historical-materialist methodology designed to examine the entanglements of artistic production, enduring structures of coloniality, and racial formations within Eastern Europe. Critically engaging with established postcolonial and decolonial art-historical and visual studies scholarship, the contributions remain grounded within a materialist standpoint, deeply informed by Marxist analytical frameworks. This theoretical orientation consciously positions itself in contrast to, and indeed as a trenchant critique of, the intellectual trends that characterized much of the post-Soviet Eastern European milieu, particularly during the transformative period of the 1990s. This era frequently witnessed a wholesale, often indiscriminate repudiation of Marxist intellectual legacies, concomitant with a widespread embrace of Western poststructuralist theories.⁸

The section develops the incisive critique advanced by Marxist literary scholar Benita Parry, who argued for a materialist corrective to the field of postcolonial studies.⁹ Parry's most pointed criticism is directed at the discursive textualism that has, in her view, pervaded much of postcolonial discourse. She observes that as the field emerged, notably from English and Cultural Studies departments, it became predicated on "the priority of signifying processes."¹⁰ This profound intellectual shift, often referred to as the linguistic turn in literary and cultural theory, consequently led to textualist interpretations.¹¹ The result was a marked detachment of this analysis from the examination of concrete social and material conditions. Critics, influenced by this textual idealism, began to uncouple colonialism from its intrinsic historical capitalist underpinnings, situating it instead as primarily "a cultural event."¹² For Parry, a comprehensive understanding of colonialism and its enduring legacies necessitates engagement with the "capitalist world-system, uneven development, exploitation, inequality, [...] conflict, class relationships [and] resistance."¹³ These structures are more than supplementary analytical tools; they are foundational to comprehending the dynamics of colonial power and its enduring effects.

Building upon Parry's critique, the authors in this section assert that capitalism is an inherently imperialist and colonialist mode of production. By integrating diverse cores and (semi)peripheries into its expansive global logic, capitalism has historically developed and expanded through the systematic subsumption of populations and lands into diverse forms of dependency and violence. Consequently, the materialist perspective insists that any substantive engagement with postcolonial or decolonial dynamics must be based on analyzing global capitalism as the primary historical engine of colonialism. Within this comprehensive framework, ideologies of domination—including, but not limited to, Orientalism and various forms of racism—are viewed as forces functioning to legitimize and sustain the underlying processes of capitalist expansion and economic exploitation on a global scale. Departing from poststructuralist emphases on irreducible difference, culturalism, and discursive fragmentation, authors in this section argue that a materialist framework proves indispensable for understanding the interconnected trajectories forged by colonial capitalism.

Bojana Videkanić's opening essay, "Between Empires: Uneven and Combined Development in the Context of Yugoslav Art," is situated at the intersection between art,

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capitalist accumulation, and the historical effects of multiple vying empires in the Balkans. Interrogating the late 19th-century Austro-Hungarian annexation and subsequent administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Videkanić undertakes an iconographic and contextual study of Alois Schönn's state-commissioned painting *At the Latin Bridge in Sarajevo* (1883). She reflects on how the artwork operates as an instrument of imperial propaganda, deploying a calculated Orientalist aesthetic saturated with conventional, racialized representational tropes of exoticism, fabricated timelessness, and ascribed local passivity—visual strategies Schönn had developed during his travels in North Africa. This process of aestheticization, with its emphasis on picturesque stasis and cultural alterity, served to strategically obfuscate the violent material realities underpinning the Habsburg presence: military occupation, the imposition of new administrative structures and extractivist policies, and the placement of the Balkans between the declining Ottoman Empire and the expansionist Habsburg Monarchy. Videkanić conceptualizes the region as a contested geopolitical space subjected to intensifying processes of resource extraction, administrative control, and strategic maneuvering characteristic of expanding imperialist and capitalist formations fighting for regional hegemony.

The following chapters investigate the legacies and disputed historiographies of the region's communist pasts, a focal point for art scholars interested in materialist frameworks. A theoretical interlocutor for these discussions, whether explicit or implicit, is Madina Tlostanova's *What Does It Mean to Be Post-Soviet? Decolonial Art from the Ruins of the Soviet Empire*.¹⁴ Significantly indebted to the Latin American modernity/coloniality/decoloniality scholarship, Tlostanova considers the Soviet system as an empire embodying a corresponding—albeit “second-rate”—colonizing force, which subjected its diverse constituent republics, peripheral regions, and satellite states to forms of violent political subordination, resource extraction, and cultural assimilation. Tlostanova writes: “Russia strove to fit into the logic of catching up and tried to build a separate Socialist modernity, with its own coloniality sharing the main premises of modernity at large, such as racism, Orientalism, progressivism, the rhetoric of salvation, a fixation on newness, asymmetrical divisions of labour—that is, generally the coloniality of being, gender, knowledge, and sensibility.”¹⁵ This specific conceptualization, positioning the Soviet Union as an imperial power, resonates with Walter Mignolo's contention that “the Russian Revolution was a family feud, a struggle within modernity,” with decoloniality offering a third way out, outside of both capitalism and communism.¹⁶ It is worth noting that Mignolo's stance is reflective of a more general tendency within some postcolonial and decolonial scholarship that sees Marxism as a solely Eurocentric doctrine, unable to grasp non-Western realities.¹⁷

Angela Harutyunyan's critical review “Decolonial Erasures: Undoing Soviet Modernity” challenges what she perceives as Tlostanova's uncritical transposition of the decolonial modernity/coloniality matrix onto the historical course of communist experience in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Harutyunyan cautions against what she diagnoses as a form of “regressive historical revisionism” that risks effacing the deeply contradictory processes of political and cultural modernization experienced within the diverse Soviet republics and satellite states, which functioned not just as passive objects of external domination but also, crucially, as active, albeit constrained and often co-opted, historical subjects navigating and shaping Sovietization in varied ways. Harutyunyan maintains that such formulations neglect the dialectical reality of the Soviet experience, a reality which, while undeniably imposing elements of Russian ethnic and cultural hegemony alongside violent political repression and bureaucratic control, simultaneously

facilitated—however unevenly or instrumentally—certain forms of political subjectivation, mass literacy, industrial development, secularization, and cultural modernization for numerous non-Russian peoples within its vast borders. She concludes that the straightforward and unqualified designation of the USSR as a colonial empire becomes analytically untenable or, at the very minimum, necessitates significant qualification and contextualization to avoid the dangers of false equivalence between historically distinct forms of imperial power and exploitation.

Harutyunyan extends her criticism to specific examples of decolonial art practices from Central Asia examined by Tlostanova, arguing that her writing recapitulates reductive narratives pitting monolithic Soviet repression against ostensibly authentic artistic expression. She contends these analyses are often deficient in historical granularity and risk marginalizing or disregarding the nuanced body of existing scholarship dedicated to Soviet art, culture, and society authored by figures such as Sheila Fitzpatrick, Christina Kiaer, Katerina Clark, and Evgeny Dobrenko, whose work reveals far more complex negotiations of power, ideology, and aesthetics. She concludes: “Such [a decolonial] retrospection is blind to the great differences in the re-articulations of the national and the socialist, the ethnic and the cosmopolitan, nation and class, as well as often painful and contradictory dialectics between tradition and modernity in the USSR from Lenin up to Gorbachev, that is from the 1920s through perestroika.” Devoid of grounding in concrete material history and specific socio-political contexts, “decolonial art” from the post-Soviet sphere risks turning into mere ethnographic particularism, or worse, uncritically embracing allegedly autochthonous notions such as the inherent vitality of matter or animism—as was the case, Harutyunyan argues, in the 2023 Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) exhibition *As Though We Hid the Sun in a Sea of Stories: Fragments for a Geopoetics of North Eurasia*. Does such an approach to indigeneity not disturbingly echo the colonial trope of a non-Western Other as absolutely different?¹⁸

Situated in opposition to scholarship that frames Soviet modernity through the lens of the colonizer/colonized binary, an emergent body of revisionist research foregrounds socialist anti-colonialism as a crucial, albeit profoundly ambivalent, geopolitical and cultural conduit, connecting the so-called Second and Third Worlds during the Cold War era via extensive political, economic, educational, and cultural exchanges.¹⁹ Central to this dynamic was the ostensible socialist mission to export its specific model of accelerated, state-led modernity, often manifested through urban planning, industrial infrastructure, and collaborative projects within art, film, and design. Eastern European architects, engineers, artists, and academics participated in diverse developmental projects across Africa, Asia, and the so-called “Middle East,” while specific cultural forms, mostly folk music and dance ensembles, were internationally promoted as expressions of socialist multinationalism and “unity in diversity.” Nevertheless, such transnational interactions were invariably fraught with contradictions and latent power asymmetries: ideological hierarchies often persisted beneath the official rhetoric of fraternal equality, socialist developmentalism frequently clashed with emergent national aspirations and natural environments, and a persistent Russo-centric paternalism permeated these encounters. To what extent do these features undermine Soviet anti-Western anti-colonialism? And how did these tensions manifest in the different national contexts within the Eastern Bloc, including those subservient to but outside the Soviet Union, and thus fraught with their own internal contradictions?

In her contribution, Zhivka Valiavicharska focuses on Plovdiv’s Bratska Mogila (Fraternal Mound), an anti-fascist public monument unveiled in 1974, analyzing it as a

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microcosm reflecting the cultural dynamics and ideological orientations of socialist Bulgaria. She perceives the Bratska Mogila as epitomizing socialist modernity's ambition to forge a unified, forward-looking revolutionary narrative—one strategically linking Bulgaria's national liberation struggles to global decolonial movements and the anti-capitalist alternatives offered by the socialist bloc. Valiavicharska argues that the monument's aesthetic and symbolic undertones synthesize the era's political orientations, blending Bulgarian ethnonationalist tendencies with apparently universalist, anti-imperialist aspirations. In her investigation, artistic production thus emerges as a site for mediating, condensing, and ultimately revealing the profound contradictions inherent in Soviet-style modernity as it actually existed, capturing these tensions within its very form and iconography. Valiavicharska concludes by underscoring the monument's capacity to encompass divergent political energies and ideological vectors, stating: "On the one hand, it contains subaltern and revolutionary elements, which played a crucial role in repositioning socialist Bulgaria in political solidarity with the newly independent nations of the Global South and in shaping the socialist people's political identifications with the Global South. On the other hand, the nationalist elements present in the humanist and universalist imaginaries of the post-Stalinist era opened the road to monistic visions of peoplehood and projects with ethno-assimilationist agendas."

Closing the section is Octavian Esanu's chapter "Does the 'Post' in Postcolonial Mean the Same as the 'Post' in Postsocialist Art?"—a comparative examination of postsocialism and postcolonialism, here claimed as fundamentally *diverging* methodologies. The author probes the extent to which the shared prefix "post" maintains historical and conceptual coherence across these distinct analytical frameworks, underscoring the persistent theoretical and ideological challenges that preclude a synthesis of these critical paradigms. Esanu argues that the discourses are characterized by incompatible political orientations and genealogies, and in particular contrasting historical relationships to, and evaluations of, 20th-century socialism as both ideology and state project. Postcolonial theory and practice, often rooted in anti-colonial liberation movements, frequently drew upon or engaged constructively with socialist ideologies and programs (Marxist or otherwise) as resources for anti-imperialist struggle, national liberation, and projects of post-independence state-building. In contrast, postsocialist critique has predominantly oriented itself toward anti-socialist standpoints, prioritizing critique and deconstruction of the state socialist past while often aligning itself with the teleology of Western liberal-democratic triumphalism that characterized the immediate post-Cold War moment. Esanu suggests that this reflects a conflicting "political unconscious" concerning the legacy and perceived potentiality of socialism operating within the intellectual and political foundations of the two fields.

These contradictory perspectives, Esanu argues, manifest within the realm of artistic practice. In many postcolonial contexts, exemplified in the chapter by developments in the Arab world during the mid-20th century, art often actively participated in state-sponsored projects of nation-building, directly contesting colonial iconographies and self-consciously developing distinct aesthetic idioms intended to articulate cultural sovereignty—also in dialogue with international modernism. Within such contexts, socialist models of cultural organization or political alliance could sometimes function as enabling frameworks. Conversely, artistic practices in Eastern Europe after 1989 frequently focused on recovering avant-garde and modernist styles that were seen as opposed to state socialism. This occurred alongside efforts to reassert distinct national cultural identities, often conceived in direct opposition to Soviet cultural dominance or the homogenizing

effects of the socialist bloc. Consequently, much postsocialist art adopted a critical or deconstructive orientation toward the socialist artistic and political legacy, viewing it primarily as a burden to be overcome or critically dismantled, rather than a resource to be selectively redeployed. This had far-reaching repercussions: while most art framed as “postcolonial” aligned itself explicitly against Western capitalist economies and expansionist practices, art from the post-Soviet sphere maintained a more ambivalent stance toward the neoliberal order.²⁰

Collectively, the essays in this section encourage a more in-depth, critical reflection on the methodologies that are employed to research and write histories of art and capitalism in Eastern Europe. Operating within the lingering intellectual paradigms and geopolitical divisions of the Cold War era, art scholarship from the region tends to exhibit the characteristic limitations of area studies, conceptually isolating the region and detaching its histories from broader global narratives. While these tendencies are often obscured by rhetorical assertions of regional “uniqueness” or cultural “idiomaticity,” Eastern European art history tends to remain discursively self-referential, even in its transposition of Western decolonial methodologies into local contexts—a condition that limits opportunities to place material experiences of race and colonialism in juxtaposition. Here, the authors suggest that the universal underpinnings of Marxist-based frameworks can offer a powerful counter-narrative. Within this materialist paradigm, Eastern European art’s entanglement in longer histories of colonial socio-economic systems should be framed in a comparative perspective, sensitive simultaneously to the differences between and shared realities across the global (semi)peripheries.

A Transcultural Critique

In a counterpoint to the materialist thrust of the first section, the second part of this volume argues that artistic formations in Eastern Europe are animated by a transcultural impetus irreducible to purely socioeconomic conditions. While fully acknowledging the radical unevenness and violence embedded within the global world-system, our authors contend that art from Eastern Europe has emerged and developed through intensive exchange within a network of artistic centers, metropolitan as well as peripheral. These encounters transcend conventional state boundaries as well as lines of colonial domination. Reflecting both the affinities and frictions present in these cross-cultural confrontations, the dynamics of art in the region are marked by a transversal character that resists encapsulation into rigid categories of Western/non-Western or colonizers/colonized. Such an approach, in the words of Monica Juneja, “is premised on viewing both centres and peripheries through a transcultural lens,” positing that each is in fact a dynamic nexus of interaction and transformation.²¹ Building upon already rich scholarship on cultural transfers in the history of art, Juneja has recently advanced a “global art history, conceived as transcultural process, [that] intensifies the discipline’s focus on objects and practices by reading them not as discrete phenomena, but themselves as a bundle of multiple interlinked processes that unfold at varying speeds and intensities.”²² From this vantage point, art from Eastern Europe emerges as a field actively shaped by contact and reciprocal transformation that occurs across divisions of geopolitical conflict, colonial projects, or local particularities.

The section draws on Juneja’s framework that critiques certain tendencies within decolonial scholarship. Juneja argues against perspectives that simplify the mutable character of colonialism and fluidity of global interactions, stating: “No doubt all colonialisms

are exploitative by nature, marked by civilising missions and varying degrees of brutality; at the same time, processes of producing knowledge and art in different colonial contexts across the world play out in ways more complex and less reductive than those posited by the advocates of decolonial theory.²³ Juneja contends that a turn toward transculturality enables a more comprehensive analysis of the multidirectional and transformational character of art. Her model for art history thus advances a critical globality, understood as the study of long-term encounters between cultures. Challenging the binaries characteristic of some decolonial theory, Juneja asserts: “Paying greater attention to multiple relationalities that unfold in any context, including overtly asymmetrical constellations as in the coloniser–colony divide, involves finding ways of remapping experiences and experiments of the art world. This in turn means attending to scale and to multiple sites of knowledge and to shifting perspectives within a generative agonism between power and resistance.”²⁴ She notes that these relationships have manifested in various guises, including appropriation, translation, willful misinterpretation, but also outright rejection or determined resistance.

Further developing a transcultural history of art, Christian Kravagna proposes an important methodological shift: to reject the notion of influence, often seen as defining the relationship between Western and non-Western art, and instead work with the concept of contact.²⁵ This approach aims to circumnavigate the reifying antagonism between originality and imitation, which privileges centers of presumed innovation. In contrast to the construction of pure identities on either side of the colonial divide (or, indeed, modernist pure form as such), contact, by its very nature, implies artistic processes of intermingling and contamination, challenging essentialist categorizations.²⁶ The aim is to dismantle the sense of segregated homogeneity, whether this homogeneity is ideologically implemented by colonial racist powers to maintain hierarchy, or, in a disturbing symmetry, pursued by a decolonial push to rigidly differentiate the “Western” from the “indigenous.” Juneja articulates these concerns in a question directed at our disciplinary field: “Does the investigation of art history from a perspective outside of the West, though shaped through interaction with travelling Western concepts, challenge us to rethink some of the discipline’s premises in a way as to grow beyond both claims of universality as well as radical cultural relativism, and instead privilege an approach that historicises difference and locates it in a field of forces?”²⁷

In the contribution opening this section, Katia Denysova explores the multidirectional engagements of Ukrainian modernist painter Mykhailo Boichuk (1882–1937) and his collaborators, credited with developing a syncretic artistic language in dialogue with Ukraine’s struggles for independence. Using the Boichukists as a case study, Denysova unpacks the different vectors of Ukrainian modernity in the context of its evolving relationship with both Western art and Soviet cultural identities after the fall of the Russian Empire. Situating the development of Boichuk’s artistic subjectivity across multiple contexts—socialist politics, national liberation, and cosmopolitan aspirations—Denysova undermines the binary between “indigenous” and “international” art, and thus between domestic artistic traditions and modernism. Boichuk’s transcultural and transhistorical marrying of local visual vernacular, including religious icons, Byzantine mosaics, and folklore, with an interest in socially engaged forms of socialist realism is revealed not as contradictory, but foundational to his politics: a juncture of historical developments and personal agency. It was the complexity of this orientation toward (inter)nationalism that would make Boichukist artistic production unintelligible to Stalinist dogma. The Boichukists tragically fell victim to the purges of the 1930s

and belong to the generation known as the “Executed Renaissance”—a contested term currently undergoing revision due to the omissions, dichotomies, and preconceptions it has historically entailed.²⁸

Central to this section is a recognition of indigeneity as a historically and geographically contingent category in the heterogeneous context of Eastern Europe. Within the field of art, claims to indigeneity operate at many different levels: from critiques of Western modernism’s appropriation and exoticization of “non-white” cultures to reparative attempts at epistemological justice within contemporary museums and ethnographic collections. As art historians Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips observe: “Discourses of indigeneity [...] continue to be informed by a tension between an essentializing tendency, which attaches pure and unchanged qualities to indigenous status, and diasporic, mestizo, and cosmopolitan historical realities.”²⁹ Eastern Europe proves to be a particularly apposite example of this tension, with the category of the native often serving as an excuse for homogenizing, nationalist claims of superiority and land ownership. This is also true of the current political moment: Chenchen Zhang notes that “[c]onditioned by a semi-alterity to the hegemonic West, conservatives in Central and Eastern Europe present themselves as simultaneously victims to ideologies of the “Western liberal elites” and defenders of “true” European values.”³⁰ We must therefore remain wary of the way Eastern Europe’s shifting historical positioning between the East and West can be weaponized to proclaim colonial innocence while fueling nationalist tropes—also in what purports to be “anti-colonial” scholarship.³¹ As the texts in this section demonstrate, indigeneity—for all its potential within decolonial theory and practice—can be a treacherous methodological tool in relation to Eastern Europe unless adapted to its contexts.

Piotr Słodkowski’s chapter, “Who Owns Modernism? Indigenous Agents Among Polish, Jewish, and Ukrainian Entanglements in Interwar Lviv,” demonstrates how national art histories have largely failed to account for both the overlaps and tensions between various groups in borderland regions. Using interwar Lwów/Lviv (then part—though not uncontested—of the Second Polish Republic, 1918–1939) as a case study, Słodkowski investigates how the city functioned as a volatile meeting place of diverse and sometimes competing artistic circles, each claiming its own right to indigeneity as a discourse of cultural legitimacy and sovereignty. His reading of Lviv from divergent perspectives—Polish, Jewish, and Ukrainian, and their intersections—demonstrates how “the local” serves as a dynamic space where concepts such as modernism are continuously renegotiated and adapted for specific political aims. Here, autobiographical detail comes to serve an anti-essentializing purpose in challenging facile assumptions about distinct cultural formations. As a triangulation of identities, cultural practices, and political standpoints, Słodkowski argues that modernism, a malleable term filtered through distinct artistic commitments, belonged equally to everyone and no one, its history an inherently polycentric one. Thus, the chapter proposes a multidirectional and historically contingent understanding of “indigeneity” as a constructed category, actively navigated and shaped by local artistic practices.

Recent scholarship has increasingly focused on the construction of race and identity in Eastern Europe, a region conventionally viewed as “beyond” the racial legacies of global modernity. This historical omission might be partially traced to the dominance of the black–white binary within Western de/postcolonial studies, modelled on paradigmatic cases of Spanish, British, and French imperialisms and settler colonialisms. However, within Eastern Europe racial categories prove to be far more malleable. The transcultural

approach is particularly conducive to tracing these unstable racial positionalities, recently conceptualized as “off white” by Catherine Baker, Bogdan C. Iacob, Anikó Imre, and James Mark. They note that within Wallerstein’s model, “[...] semi-peripheries sit between the world-system’s true core and the furthest periphery, producing numerous racialised identities which sit ambiguously between the imagined hierarchical poles of white and black.”³² Recent scholarship on Romani art, itself contested as a distinct category, has greatly contributed to highlighting the complexities of the way that racialization operates in the region, particularly the dangers of representation based on the same essentializing, stereotyping hyper-visibility and ethnographic taxonomies that had historically occluded the diversity of Romani communities, identities, and practices.³³ The interwar period is especially productive as a case study of coexisting ethnic positionalities, with newly independent countries such as Poland eager to confirm their sovereignty and belonging to “white” Western civilization by undertaking their own colonial endeavors. As part of the nation-building project, racial categories were perceived as a means of strengthening and protecting contingent collective identities.

Lukasz Zaremba’s essay, “Like Ghosts and Phantoms: Colonialism, Racialized Vision and the Status of Blackness in Interwar Poland,” analyzes anxieties of Polish interwar writers about their position vis-à-vis Western Europe through the lens of racialized representations. In the Second Polish Republic, Blackness often functioned as an “empty signifier” or rhetorical device employed in attempts to define an elusive “Polishness.” In this register, race, to borrow Stuart Hall’s formulation, “is more like a language, than it is like the way in which we are biologically constituted. [...] *race works like a language.*”³⁴ Even though the country did not possess overseas colonies, Zaremba argues that visual and literary constructions of racialized Otherness were, in fact, central to the production of a modern aesthetic regime in post-1918 Poland. As a discursive and visual construct, Blackness remained a highly unstable category, taking on a number of contradictory roles as a descriptor of modernity and backwardness, novelty and emulation. Zaremba notes how this process manifested in ways both congruent with Western imperial tropes and specific to the Polish context. Here, the racialized figure of the cannibal was used to navigate the country’s own peripheral status and migratory history—and, in a popular children’s storybook about the vagabond goat *Koziołek Matołek*, to confront class-based fear of the local lumpenproletariat. Thus, the author argues, in the absence of direct engagement with a Black population, Blackness itself acquired a “spectral” quality, present everywhere and nowhere, assuming highly contingent meanings and discursive functions.

How can art historians account for the coexistence of imperial subjugation with artistic exchange and multidirectional cross-pollination? This question provides the entry point for Harsha Ram’s essay “The Spatial Practice of the Avant-Garde: Ilia Zdanevich 1912-1919.” Ram focuses on early 20th-century Georgia at the intersection of imperialism, nationalism, and internationalism. Tracing the ethos of the local avant-garde, he attempts to reconcile the center-periphery model, focused on the unequal socioeconomic relations that structure the terms of transcultural dialogue, with the network model, which acknowledges the emergence of relational and multidirectional modernisms. Ram introduces the concept of “scalar dexterity” to show how avant-garde artist and writer Zdanevich operated at the nexus of the metropolitan (Paris), the national (Georgia and Russia), and the local-regional (Tiflis-Caucasian). This was not a passive positioning; the artist played an active role in reconstructing these spaces and negotiating the tensions between them. While the term “Eurocentrism” tends to be accepted as self-evident, once participants in the historical avant-garde are seen through the lens of their orientation

toward the metropole, with that orientation itself recognized as a site of both active polemical involvement and divergent socioeconomic realities, we might find artists pulled in more than one direction: at once vertically (hierarchically) and horizontally (rhizomatically). Zdanevich's parallel engagement with the avant-garde at different scales—futurism, neoprimitivism, and the transtemporal approach of “everythingism”—was facilitated by the mediating vantage point of (semi)peripherality, where the East and West are put into temporal as well as spatial interaction that cannot be explained by either the network or center-periphery model alone.

Investigating the relationship between inter-imperial socioeconomic conditions and local art forms, chapters in this section scrutinize artistic practices developing on one hand in a radically uneven world-system, and on the other in relation to multiple centers and artistic traditions. Thus, the authors turn toward dialectical thinking to capture the process of emergence of new formations in modern art from broadly understood Eastern Europe. Art in the region is redefined as developing through intercultural dynamics, which might include acts of decolonial disavowal but also national colonial aspirations. Here, it might be worth returning to the much discussed concept of horizontal art history, developed by Piotr Piotrowski.³⁵ Itself understood in dialectical terms, horizontal art history can act simultaneously as a *methodological* perspective, to the extent that it is a contemporary demand to displace art history's hegemonic disciplinary narratives, and a meticulous *historical* investigation of center-periphery relationships—including the fact that centers too are necessarily filtered through the provinces, not despite but because of the asymmetries between them. Art history's global turn can then take place from a point of view that deems artists to be active agents, but ones operating within specific material conditions, therefore avoiding both methodological anachronism and historical determinism.

Postscript: Art and Liberation

The volume concludes with an interview with art researcher and curator Jessica Zychowicz, whose work focuses on feminist art practices and initiatives within the Ukrainian art scene in the aftermath of the 2004 Orange Revolution. The conversation offers a poignant snapshot of the current historical moment and a critical reflection on the future trajectories of decoloniality in Eastern Europe. An advocate for forging internationalist bridges between dispossessed communities, Zychowicz dissects the pervasive dichotomies that govern popular media discourse about Ukraine—some a clear legacy of the Cold War, others intrinsic to contemporary disinformation warfare. As a means of countering these structures, she seeks the foundations of enduring solidarity in an honest reckoning with experiences of both resistance and complicity within the multilayered histories of global coloniality. Paying close attention to the context-dependent interplay of class, gender, and racialization, Zychowicz critically reflects on the persistent occlusions within mainstream decolonial discourse, evident in both Western and Eastern European contexts.

Crucially, Zychowicz's intervention injects a vital feminist perspective where it is often neglected. While contemporary decolonial theory frequently assumes a feminist positionality, the historical relationship between feminism and postcolonialism has been fraught with tension. Scholars such as Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks and Julietta Singh have discussed the tacitly masculine subject at the center of much canonical anticolonial thought.³⁶ Singh, for instance, critiques anticolonial logics where “bodies marked

as feminine are abjured in the recuperation and transformation of masculine bodies in the act of liberation.”³⁷ Critically reading anticolonial writings by Mahatma Gandhi and Frantz Fanon, she argues that both, in their distinct ways, relied on a logic of mastery to forge a decolonized subject. This reliance produced “sacrificial figures” or “remainders”—which Singh identifies as women, animals, the disabled, outcasts—in the service of liberating a new, implicitly masculine subject.³⁸ She terms such discourses a form of “anticolonial masteries”—power structures paradoxically replicated within critiques of colonialism—and warns against identifying with the masterful subject as a viable mode of resistance.³⁹

Her remarks resonate in the current Ukrainian context, where gendered identities come into friction with collective ethnic, religious, or national priorities. Alina Kleytman’s 2025 exhibition *The Greatest Show!* offers a grim tableau of this condition. As described by Zychowicz, in Kleytman’s installation Western journalists and politicians are cast as predatory vultures, Ukrainian officials as the skeletal remains of their prey, and dying soldiers as dehumanized composites of fur, nerves, and metal. Above this scene is a contorted black palm tree made from melted plastic body bags—a monstrous centerpiece for a wartime horror show. From the cacophony of voices whispering into the visitor’s headphones emerges the figure of “Fat Emmy,” an unstoppable, ever-desiring force. Fat Emmy can be understood as an embodiment of what Singh calls “other humanities”—a queer figure refusing the mastery of discourse, navigating a posthuman world transformed by the intersections of technology, materiality, and colonial power.⁴⁰ Traversing a landscape of “palaces, halls, and dressing rooms,” Fat Emmy “[pulls] behind her a cart with bleach, handmade soap, and a spare spine (just in case)” to wash a pair of underwear—or “a flag soaked in human ambition”: “Inside—boiling water./Salt./Chlorine./Tears of the opposition./And a single magnolia petal—because after all, she is a lady.”⁴¹

During the ongoing Russian invasion, Ukrainian artists find themselves navigating the simultaneous conditions of restricted mobility and unprecedented global exposure. This amplified visibility within the art world, however, can come at a price. All too often, it manifests through the imposition of predetermined categories and scholarly orthodoxies onto artworks that have emerged from distinct historical and social exigencies. Thus, paradoxically, while proclaiming to “decolonize,” the art world’s attention toward Ukrainian modern and contemporary art inadvertently risks becoming a new form of silencing, as local realities are flattened to fit existing canons, methodologies, and market conditions. On the contrary, Zychowicz suggests that to consider Ukrainian art on its own terms is to be mindful of the challenges and pitfalls inherent in its uncritical absorption into the ever-expanding, yet sometimes theoretically homogeneous, field of global art histories. This might mean, perhaps, taking seriously the queer figure of Fat Emmy as she hangs the underwear-flag “on a cornice shaped like an American eagle” and, with a fanfare, leaves it to dry.⁴²

Notes

- 1 See Łukasz Zaremba’s chapter in this volume for an exploration of Koziółek Matolek’s relationship to race in interwar Poland.
- 2 Much discussion has been devoted to the definition of “Eastern Europe.” We recognize the term as itself a sociopolitical construct, subject to evolving historical definition. The case studies in this volume concern the regional legacies of the Russian, Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, as well as the Soviet Union and Cold War, in relation to the global repercussions of European colonialism. In the introduction to *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern*

- and *Central European Art since the 1950s*, Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszył note that “[t]he various countries and nations of this broadly defined Eastern Europe do not relate to one another; instead, they tend to relate to other cultures and regions: parts of former Yugoslavia to Mediterranean culture; the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary to the history of the Austrian Empire; the Baltic countries to Scandinavia; and the southern Balkans to the Near East.” They remark that “[t]he concept of ‘Eastern Europe,’ as it has been understood in the past several decades, [...] is neither geographic nor social; it is economic and political” and trace its current usage to the homogenizing legacies of the Yalta Conference. As a consequence, projects concerning post-1989 Europe such as *Former West* (2008–2016) sought to reverse the spotlight on the region’s secondary status as a latecomer to neoliberal capitalism. However, Larry Wolff has shown that the idea of Eastern Europe, both underdeveloped and located somewhere between civilization and barbarism, predates the Cold War, having its roots in the Enlightenment. It is the intention of this edited collection to demonstrate the diversity of colonial forces that have taken part in positioning the region as the negative of Europe’s west from the late 19th century to the present. Eastern Europe, then, is what has been defined at specific historical moments, and by various political forces, as not-Western-Europe. See: Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszył, “Introduction,” in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*, eds. Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszył (New York: The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), 2002), 9. “About,” *Former West*, accessed July 7, 2025, <https://formerwest.org/About>. Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994). See also: Manuela Boatcă, “Multiple Europes and the Politics of Difference Within,” in *The Study of Europe*, eds. Hauke Brunkhorst and Gerd Grözinger (Wiesbaden: Nomos, 2010), 51–66.
- 3 See: Bolaji Balogun, *Race and the Colour-Line: The Boundaries of Europeaness in Poland* (London: Routledge, 2024); Catherine Baker, *Race and the Yugoslav Region: Postsocialist, Post-Conflict, Postcolonial?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); Siegfried Huijgen and Dorota Kołodziejczyk, eds., *East Central Europe Between the Colonial and the Postcolonial in the Twentieth Century* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023); Kathryn Ciancia, *On Civilization’s Edge: A Polish Borderland in the Interwar World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Piotr Puchalski, *Poland in a Colonial World Order. Adjustments and Aspirations, 1918–1939* (London: Routledge, 2022); Sanja S. Petkovska, ed., *Decolonial Politics in European Peripheries. Redefining Progressiveness, Coloniality and Transition Efforts* (London: Routledge, 2024); Svitlana Biedarieva, *Ambicoloniality and War. The Ukrainian-Russian Case* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024).
 - 4 For more on the difference between post- and decoloniality, and the history thereof, see Octavian Esanu’s chapter in this volume.
 - 5 For example, see: James Mark and Paul Betts, eds., *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Catherine Baker, Bogdan C. Iacob, Anikó Imre and James Mark, eds., *Off White. Central and Eastern Europe and the Global History of Race* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024); Piro Rexhepi, *White Enclosures: Racial Capitalism and Coloniality along the Balkan Route* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).
 - 6 Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania across Empires* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022), 1–24.
 - 7 Laura Doyle, *Inter-imperiality: Vying Empires, Gendered Labor, and the Literary Arts of Alliance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 1–35. Doyle borrows the term “shatterzone” from Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).
 - 8 See: Katarzyna Chmielewska, Agnieszka Mrozik, and Grzegorz Wołowicz, eds., *Reassessing Communism: Concepts, Culture, and Society in Poland, 1944–1989* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2021); Alex Callinicos, Stathis Kouvelakis, Lucia Pradella, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Marxism and Post-Marxism* (London: Routledge, 2021); David Ost, *Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Piotr Kuligowski, Łukasz Moll, Krystian Szadkowski, eds., “Anti-Communisms: Discourses of Exclusion,” *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 31, no. 1 (2019).

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- 9 Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies. A Materialist Critique* (London: Routledge, 2004). See also: Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Neil Lazarus and Crystal Bartolovich, eds., *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For a more recent overview: Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Morgan Ndlovu, eds., *Marxism and Decolonization in the 21st Century. Living Theories and True Ideas* (London, New York: Routledge, 2022).
- 10 Parry, *Postcolonial Studies*, 3–4.
- 11 Parry, *Postcolonial Studies*, 3–4.
- 12 Parry, *Postcolonial Studies*, 4.
- 13 Parry, *Postcolonial Studies*, ix.
- 14 Madina Tlostanova, *What Does It Mean to Be Post-Soviet? Decolonial Art from the Ruins of the Soviet Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).
- 15 Tlostanova, *What Does It Mean to Be Post-Soviet?*, 6.
- 16 Walter Mignolo, “DELINKING: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 473; Christopher Mattison and Walter Mignolo, “Neither Capitalism nor Communism, but Decolonization,” *Critical Legal Thinking* (March 21, 2012), accessed July 11, 2025, <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2012/03/21/neither-capitalism-nor-communism-but-decolonization-an-interview-with-walter-mignolo/>.
- 17 For a concise overview of the issue, see: Michael Nassen Smith, “The Limits of Postcolonial Critique of Marxism: A Defence of Radical Universalism,” in *Marxism and Decolonization in the 21st Century*, 49–67. See also: Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2010); Abigail B. Bakan and Enakshi Dua, eds., *Theorizing Anti-Racism: Linkages in Marxism and Critical Race Theories* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2014).
- 18 See: Neil Larsen, “The Jargon of Decoloniality,” *Catalyst* 6, no. 2 (2022); Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch’ixinakax utxiwa: On Decolonising Practices and Discourses*, trans. Molly Geidel (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020); Charlene V. Black and Tim Barringer, “Decolonizing Art and Empire,” *The Art Bulletin* 104, no. 1 (2022): 6–20.
- 19 Mark and Betts, eds., *Socialism Goes Global*; Łukasz Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020); Magda Lipska and Monika Talarczyk, eds., *Hope is of a Different Color. From the Global South to the Łódź Film School* (Warsaw: Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej (MSN Warsaw), 2020). See also: the special issue *Southeast European socialism and the Global South*, guest-edited by Rossen Djagalov and Nikolay Karkov, *Slavic and East European Journal* 66, no. 2 (2022).
- 20 For reflections on reconciling post-communism and decolonial thought, see: Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, “Decolonizing Eastern Europe: Beyond Internal Critique,” in *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Ana Janevski and Roxana Marcoci with Ksenia Nouril (New York: The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), 2018), 193–199.
- 21 Monica Juneja, *Can Art History be Made Global? Meditations from the Periphery* (Berlin: De Gruyter Brill, 2023), 34.
- 22 Juneja, *Can Art History be Made Global?*, 28–29. For examples of recent scholarship on cultural transfers in art history, see: Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Naissance de l’art contemporain 1945–1970. Une histoire mondiale* (Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2021); Edward S. Cooke, Jr., *Global Objects: Toward a Connected Art History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022); James Elkins, *The End of Diversity in Art Historical Writing: North Atlantic Art History and its Alternatives* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021); Anne Ring Petersen, *Migration into Art: Transcultural Identities and Art-Making in a Globalised World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017). See also: Piotr Ślodkowski, *Polish Modernism and Jewish Identity. The Art of Henryk Streng, 1924–1960*, trans. Eliza Rose (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2025); Tomasz Grusiecki, *Transcultural Things and the Spectre of Orientalism in Early Modern Poland-Lithuania* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023).
- 23 Juneja, *Can Art History be Made Global?*, 32, footnote 57.
- 24 Juneja, *Can Art History be Made Global?*, 29. See also: Monica Juneja and Christian Kravagna, “Understanding Transculturalism,” in *Transcultural Modernisms*, ed. Model House Research Group (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 22–33.

- 25 Christian Kravagna, *Transmodern: An Art History of Contact, 1920–1960*, trans. Jennifer Taylor (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 53–57.
- 26 Kravagna, *Transmodern: An Art History of Contact*, 182–189.
- 27 Juneja, *Can Art History be Made Global?*, 34.
- 28 Recent scholarship has problematized the paradigm of the Executed Renaissance. See: Halyna Hryn, “The Executed Renaissance Paradigm Revisited,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 27, no. 1 (2004–2005): 67–96; Paweł Krupa, “Arguments Against ‘The Executed Renaissance’: Iurii Lavrinenko’s Anthology and the Problem of Representation of the Ukrainian Literature 1917–1933,” *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 62, no. 2 (2017): 268–296; Bohdan Tokarsky, “The Un/Executed Renaissance: Ukrainian Soviet Modernism and Its Legacies,” *Essays of the Forum Transregionale Studien* 8 (2021).
- 29 “Introduction. Inside Modernity: Indigeneity, Coloniality, Modernisms,” in *Mapping Modernisms. Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism*, eds. Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 16.
- 30 Chenchen Zhang, “Postcolonial nationalism and the global right,” *Geoforum* 144 (2023): 103824. See also: Miri Davidson, “On the Concept of the Pluriverse in Walter Mignolo and the European New Right,” *Contemporary Political Theory* 24 (2025): 469–489; Miri Davidson, “Decolonialism of the Far Right,” *e-flux* (May 24, 2024). For Walter Mignolo on the Ukrainian-Russian war, see: Walter Mignolo, “It is a Change of Era, No Longer the Era of Changes,” *Postcolonial Politics* (January 29, 2023).
- 31 For example, see: Ewa Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000). For criticisms, see: Stanley Bill, “Seeking the Authentic: Polish Culture and the Nature of Postcolonial Theory,” *nonsite.org* 12 (2014), accessed July 11, 2025, <https://nonsite.org/seeking-the-authentic-polish-culture-and-the-nature-of-post-colonial-theory>; Katya Hokanson, “*Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (review),” *Comparative Literature Studies* 38, no. 3 (2001): 264–266.
- 32 James Mark, Anikó Imre, Bogdan C. Iacob, and Catherine Baker, “Introduction: Racial Disavowals – Historicising Whiteness in Central and Eastern Europe,” in *Off White*, 3.
- 33 For a brief overview of approaches to the topic, see: ROMAMOMA Blog, accessed July 20, 2025, <https://eriac.org/blog-authors/>.
- 34 Stuart Hall, “Race, the Floating Signifier. What More Is There to Say about ‘Race’?,” in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, eds. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021), 362.
- 35 See: Beáta Hock, “Introduction—Globalizing East European Art Histories. The Legacy of Piotr Piotrowski and a Conference,” in *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present*, eds. Beáta Hock and Anu Allas (New York: Routledge, 2018), 1–22.
- 36 Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, “‘I Am a Master’: Terrorism, Masculinity, and Political Violence in Frantz Fanon,” *Parallax* 8, no. 2 (2002): 84–98. Importantly, Seshadri-Crooks does not see Fanon’s masculinism as necessarily anti-feminist. See: Julietta Singh, *Unthinking Mastery. Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018).
- 37 Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*, 33.
- 38 Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*, 24.
- 39 Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*, 41.
- 40 Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*, 4.
- 41 Transcript of text recording from “Fat Emmy” by Alina Kleytman, 2025. Shared with permission of the artist.
- 42 Transcript of text recording from “Fat Emmy” by Alina Kleytman, 2025.