

Výzkumné semináře

Masarykova ústavu a
Archivu AV ČR, v. v. i.

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Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR srdečně zve na přednášku

Longing for the White Man's Burden: Images of Civilization, Race, and the Colonial World Order in East-Central Europe, 1878–1939

Bálint Varga (Universität Graz)

In 1886, the Bohemian medical doctor and traveler Emil Holub tried to Europeanize female fashion in Pandamatenga, a trading station near the Zambezi River, by distributing European-tailored skirts to local women. Holub's attempt was deeply rooted in the conviction of the superiority of European-Christian-White lifestyle and norms. The feeling of being superior to people stuck at an earlier stage of development came along with a sense of duty to lead the backward toward progress. This sense of duty – the White Man's Burden, as British poet Rudyard Kipling powerfully put it in his famous, homonymous poem – was widespread among colonizer societies, especially in the 19th century. This talk will argue that the discourse of the White Man's Burden can also be found in a Habsburg and post-Habsburg setting, indeed, among Czech, Hungarian, and Polish actors traditionally less associated with global interests. The talk will identify three different geographical areas where these actors imagined carrying the White Man's Burden: in the Habsburg-ruled Bosnia; in Southeast Europe and the Ottoman Empire among the (imagined) Slavic and Turkic kin peoples; and in South America via settler-colonists. A fourth special group that thematized the White Man's Burden consisted of missionaries who worked mostly in Africa and Asia. The talk will argue that this discourse was fragmented and often served as a narrative tool to argue for belonging to an imagined and idealized Europe.

