

Abstract

This dissertation's subject is the participation of 19th-century Polish exiles in the Russian Empire's colonial expansion in Central Asia's Kazakh steppes. Postcolonial studies as well as the theory of orality and literacy constitute the fundamental analytical perspective for me.

The agents of colonialism were not only entrepreneurs, civil or army officials, but also missionaries, modernists, humanists, liberals, and agents of science and progress. Travel literature that came out of the scientific expeditions or private voyages played a fundamental role in creating European coherent, "objective" image of the rest of the world. I look at the literature, literacy, and writing practices as an instrument of the Other's discursive subjugation in space and time, as the Western archives became a field of fierce battles of Memory and Identity rise. There are four principal domains: bureaucratisation, hybridisation, orientalisation and historicisation, in which literacy and writing practices played an essential role in Western empires' colonial expansion. To paraphrase Edward Said, we can state that the strategies of the conquest of Central Asia directly impacted its perceptions, narrative constructions, and later reconstructions of its realities.

Three case studies of Polish political prisoners in Siberia serve me as illustrative material: Adolf Januszkiewicz, Bronisław Zaleski, and Seweryn Gross. Their texts that were written during the scientific or diplomatic expeditions, describing the life and traditions of nomads, were of great importance for the Kazakh historiography and remain essential sources of (re)construction of the national identity of the Kazakhs today. Political prisoners' status and the forced conditions of their stay and service for the Russian Empire were the overriding traits that characterised their relations with the authorities and steppe inhabitants. Therefore, the main questions I look at are: how did the practices of taking private notes by Polish exiles become a part of the orientalist discourse and foster its dissemination? Did the texts of the Polish exiles present an "alternative" view among various imperial studies? To what extent was this type of documents marked by the imperialism and correlated with other documents collected in the imperial archives, and to what extent did they go beyond the limits of the discourse imposed by the imperial power?

Keywords: Siberia, Central Asia, Polish exiles to Siberia, Polish “Siberian triangle”, Russian imperialism, orality, literacy, (post)colonialism

Słowa kluczowe: Syberia, Azja Środkowa, zesłańcy polscy, polski „trójkąt syberyjski”, rosyjski imperializm, oralność, piśmienność, (post)kolonializm