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Introduction

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Introduction

Anlam FILIZ[1] *and Oksana ERMOLAEVA*[2]

Echoing historical interpretations that reveal how human mobility entails gradual transition from "Europeanness" to non-European worlds, the chapters in Part I analyze shifting symbolic constructions of "Europe" and their imprints on human materiality and landscapes. Anlam Filiz and Oksana Ermolaeva position themselves at opposing geographic standpoints, at the margins of Europe's Southern and Northern borders, thus contributing to the building of multiple and contested conceptualizations of European liminal, transitory spaces.

Part I starts with an analysis of understudied historical processes of border-making in Northern Eurasia. Focusing on persistent factors of state-building inherited from the Russian Empire by the Soviet Union, but also on regional geography, Oksana Ermolaeva's chapter uptakes an environmental historical approach to reconstruct the evolution of the Russian/Soviet imperial border in the Northern European region of Karelia. From an early-modern abstract entity defined by treaties to a heavily militarized barbed-wire fence that eliminated most possibilities of movement for people and commodities, the border is shown to embody the political and ideological divide between "East" and "West." From this historical account of border crossing in the northern regions, the analysis shifts to the European Union's southeastern borders in the contemporary era. Analyzing how a certain image of Europe has been shaped from a place that has historically been excluded from the European project, Anlam Filiz draws from the Turkish written press to demonstrate that an agreement between Turkey and the European Union regarding the refugee flow to European countries from Turkey has been a major conduit for emerging imaginations of Europe grounded in the North-South divide.

In support of the main theme of the book, these two chapters decenter Europe by revealing an array of processes by which different notions of Europe have been defined through human mobility and circulated in and out of Europe. Methodologically, Ermolaeva's and Filiz's respective chapters are further tied as they rely on non-European primary sources: rare administrative archival records and accounts by eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth century officials, as well as contemporary media articles.

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Where the two chapters contrast is through the time-periods they address, together providing a temporal depth to an understanding of the continuities and ruptures between past and present in the emergence of imaginings of Europe and "Europeanness."