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Orientalism, otherness, and the Soviet empire: travelogues by Latvian writers of the Soviet period

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ABSTRACT
The development of travel writing in a national literature is closely related to the geographical and mental cartography that characterizes that territory. This article investigates Latvian travelogues of the Soviet era as encounters with other nations within the Soviet empire in order to analyze the role of Latvian travel writings in shaping a feeling of belonging to the empire. In addition to fostering obedience and a sense of belonging to the Soviet empire during the first 15 oppressive years of the Soviet regime, Latvian travelogues of the later years represented the Soviet empire as a conflictual site of the destruction of traditional values and landscapes.

KEYWORDS Latvian literature; travel writing; postcolonialism; Soviet colonialism; orientalism

Travelogue is a hybrid genre developed between documentary literature and fiction; it incorporates both the testimonies of the sociocultural phenomena of the time of their production and the specific artistic expressions of its contemporary literary canon. The development of the travelogue genre in a national literature is closely related to the geographical and psychological cartography that characterizes the particular territory. Moreover, the strategies for perceiving, mapping, and describing the lands, countries, and regions that the writer has become familiar with while traveling are usually informed by the historical tradition and the ideological context of one's epoch.

Travel writing has been an important part of narrative identity making in colonial empires. "To colonize something was to pile writing, a grammar, a structure, upon it," argues Boehmer (2005, 92); travel writing offered a way to sketch "imaginative and spatial contours" of the foreign territories (ibid., 16). Mary Louise Pratt has argued that travel writing was a key instrument in making ordinary citizens of the empire feel themselves part of a colonial project: "Travel writing made imperial expansion meaningful and desirable to the citizenries of the imperial countries, even though the material benefits of empire accrued mainly to the few" (Pratt 1992, 3). Through romantic tones of the exotic and through popular narrative tropes of an adventure into the unknown, an engaged reader came to feel the ideological expanse of the empire and acquired a new sense of belonging:

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a belonging to an imperial homeland. This way a domestic subject of empire was created (ibid., 3), a subject with perhaps no actual contact with the colonies of the empire who nevertheless came to identify him/herself with the vast territories of unknown lands, which had become parts of the empire.

The colonial model offers interesting possibilities for analyzing travelogues by Soviet-era Baltic writers. The position of the Baltic states within the Soviet empire was that of the colonized (Kelertas 2006; Annus 2012): the Baltic states were annexed, whereas colonial economic, cultural, and social models started to organize the Baltic societies. According to Epp Annus,

> The new regime acquired typical features of colonialism: foreign supremacy and military control over the annexed territory, reconstruction of the economy of the territory in order to serve the interests of the colonizers, appropriation of goods and products from the colonized territories into the centre of the empire. Local historical and cultural heritage was devalued, local history rewritten, and significant cultural artifacts destroyed or moved to closed sections of the libraries and museums. The military was omnipresent, especially in the border regions. In addition a massive influx of mostly Russian settlers resulted in dramatic demographic change. (Annus 2014, 374)

After the annexation of the Baltic states by the Soviet Union, the Baltic states were supposed to become a part of the imperial narrative of the Soviet empire. The Baltic states, just recently independent states with strong links to western and northern Europe, were now to be rethought as parts of the Soviet sphere. Baltic writers were sent to visit other parts of the Soviet Union with an expectation of producing empire-friendly accounts of their travels, to encourage the Baltic nations with identification with the Soviet state. The Soviet Union employed a rich arsenal of colonial strategies in relation to its borderlands, yet this article is interested in the role of Latvian travelogues in forming an obedient Latvian subject, who would perceive the Soviet empire as its home place. The article investigates Latvian travelogues of the Soviet era as encounters with other nations within the Soviet empire in order to analyze the role of Latvian travel writings in shaping a feeling of belonging to the empire. We will see that even though travelogues did provide knowledge about other cultures within the Soviet empire, the result was not exactly a sense of belonging to the family of brotherly nations within the Soviet Union.

Outlines and contexts for Latvian travel writing

In the years following the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states and the descent of the Iron Curtain, travel routes for writers from these countries were radically altered. Consequently, the range of places depicted in travelogues changed as well, becoming limited to the various territories of the Soviet Union or its satellite states. The Western world was almost never depicted in Latvian travelogues, as to do so would have contradicted Soviet ideology. At the time when these countries were annexed to the Soviet Union, in the mental maps of the people living in the Baltic region, as well as those living in other parts of the Soviet Union, they continued to be seen as a united whole that, in its regional, ethnographic, and other features, stood out against the backdrop of the other Soviet republics.

To integrate the Baltic states in the territory of the USSR and to form a sense of belonging, Soviet ideologists carried out a number of events to introduce the Baltic people to the territories of the USSR hitherto practically unknown to them. This entailed cultural delegation exchange visits to other Soviet Republics, to other socialist

countries and to states loyal to the Soviet regime, for example, Cuba or India. These delegations included both party functionaries and writers loyal to the Soviet regime. Writers invited to participate in cultural exchanges and other delegations were the main authors of travelogues. Travel impressions were turned into publications through different means: as travelogues published in separate editions, in periodicals, or as impressions depicted in poetry, essays, short stories, and other genres.

In the Soviet period, four thematic groups of travelogues emerged: (1) travels around Latvia, (2) travels around the Baltic, (3) travels around the USSR, and (4) travels outside the USSR to socialist states and other countries around the world (Burima 2011). Latvian travelogues of the 1940s and 1950s accentuated the idea of the friendship among nations united within the USSR and the significance of Russian as the official language of the USSR. These writings stressed the importance of economic and social reforms executed by the USSR, mythologized the development of the USSR, erasing the pre-Soviet past and emphasizing the future of the country. The Latvian Soviet writer Mirdza Ķempe, who was committed to consolidating cultural contacts between the USSR and India as well as other "friendly" foreign countries, became actively engaged in the formation of a literary contact network in the territory of the USSR. On October 1947, 19, she wrote to the Mongolian writer and scientist Byambyn Rinchen:

> I returned to Riga only yesterday. I had visited Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, and Abkhazia. I descended underground in Pechersk Lavra, stood on the Dneprostroi dam, looked at Dneprodzerzhinsk open-hearth and blast furnaces, walked over the oil fields in Baku, saw Shirvanshah crypts, mosques and khan palaces, visited a vineyard at the foot of Ararat, enjoyed the ancient Armenian temples in Echmiadzin, respectfully touched the ruins of Zwartnots, mounted the holy mount of Tbilisi where the Pantheon is located with the burial places of outstanding Georgian writers and the Russian writer Griboyedov, saw gold and silver mines in Laketi, listened to Azerbaijan, Armenian, and Georgian songs and music. And the main thing: I sensed the beauty of the Caucasus uplands, the beauty of the Soviet Caucasian peoples. (Ķempe 1984, 116–17)

The significance of peripheral cultural contacts, unspoken identification with other nations of a similar fate within the empire, the exchange of mutual signals – these were the major elements of writers' experiences in other Soviet republics.

Latvian travelogues developed within the general context of Latvian Soviet-era literature. Already since the early years of the Soviet occupation Soviet Latvian writers started to be integrated into the united space of Soviet literature that permitted writing in national languages but according to strict Soviet principles. Benedikts Kalnačs summarizes this situation: "Baltic literatures, that in the process of self-realization in the first half of the twentieth century had been striving for relations with the Western traditions, now faced a situation with two global opposites: capitalism and socialism, or the Western and Eastern society. A situation was created in which they had to submit to the principles of the new, Eastern colonial empire; and there was no escape from this situation" (Kalnačs 2011, 122). Kalnačs (2010, 93) points out that a new interpretation of history appeared as a dominant theme of the Soviet literary canon in the 1940s–1950s. The new canon mythologized the Soviet regime, claiming it as the only logical end point in the development of every nation. In the mid-1950s, the principles of the Soviet realism were scrutinized by many authors; in prose fiction the new critique led to a replacement of epic novels with the psychological novel genre: "Gradually the

depiction of historical events grew more subtle and individualism of the human action got rehabilitated. Growing interest in the fates of the peoples within the USSR became a characteristic regularity of this process. The essential role in this respect was played by the enforced distancing of the cultures within the Soviet Union from the surrounding world" (Kalnačs 2010, 93).

After the twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in February 1956, when Khrushchev portrayed Stalin's genocide, "Latvian literature, like every non-Russian Soviet literature, became an arena for the struggle over national self-preservation and against censorship and victimization. A number of writers and critics made idealistic demands for sincerity in literature, which often led them to the expression of skeptical, iconoclastic, non-conformist, anti-authoritarian and democratic ideas" (Ekmanis 1978, 293). The expansion of literary possibilities is evident also in literatures of other areas of the Soviet Union; the renascence of documentary prose in the 1960s–1970s in Azerbaijan literature is indicated by Sahib Gafarov (2010, 93) who mentions travelogues by Azerbaijan writers describing places outside the socialist bloc, for instance, Western countries (France), Japan, etc.

The geography of the travelogues by Latvian writers of the Soviet period is wide. If at first the texts were ideologically toned, in later decades the author's personality and experience became dominant. According to Māris Čaklais, "In travels and trips there is a need for certain independence, solitude; excessive attention and kindness depresses and binds" (Čaklais 1969c, 70–71). The major Latvian authors who wrote travelogues in the Soviet period are Imants Ziedonis, Māris Čaklais, and Daina Avotiņa. Travelogues or travel descriptions included in other genres also belong to texts by Ojārs Vācietis, Monta Kroma, Imants Auziņš, Andris Vējāns, Olga Lisovska, Arvīds Skalbe, Uldis Bērziņš, Pēteris Zirnītis, Irīna Cigaļska, Jānis Sirmbārdis, Alberts Bels, Ārija Elksne, Lija Brīdaka, Mirdza Bendrupe, and Vladimirs Kaijaks.

To illustrate dominant tendencies in Soviet Latvian travelogues, we will consider Monta Kroma's travelogue *Neskarto zemju plašumos* (*The Vast Virgin Lands*, 1956) as a characteristic sample of travelogue in the first decades after the occupation. Then, to exemplify the trends of the 1940s and 1950s when the ideological material was replaced by dense characteristics of culture landmarks of other nations, we will take a look at travelogues by Māris Čaklais depicting impressions of Ukraine and Armenia (Māris Čaklais wrote travelogues also about his impressions in the Democratic Republic of Germany, Canarias, Senegal, and India). Imants Ziedonis is selected as the author of the most colorful travelogues in Latvian literature. As Zeile comments:

> Ziedonis has not been guided by any ready-made canons but proceeded from the concrete life material and himself, striving to depict both very directly and associatively, without any formal limitations, everything deserving attention that he had seen in the beautiful Altai mountains, blue green Karelia, far-away Tajikistan and our Kurzeme, at the same time expressing himself, his subjective attitude, his judgments. This led to creating works that may be called lyrical essays, associative description with the dominant of a distinct subjective element or – more precisely – imprint of the writer's personality saturated with philosophical, ethic and aesthetic reflections. (Zeile 1972)

We will also take a look at the book about Tajikistan by Imants Ziedonis, the Ukrainian writer Vitalii Korotych, and the photographer Gunārs Janaitis, *Perpendicular Spoon* (Ziedonis, Korotičs, and Janaitis 1972). Ziedonis wrote also other travelogues

about Karelia (Ziedonis 1967), about Altai (Ziedonis 1965) and many travelogues depicting regions of Latvia and its border areas.

Changes produced by the Soviet regime

Latvian travelogues provide us with a kaleidoscope of different views on the impact of the Soviet regime in the landscapes of Sovietized areas and in people's identities. The travelogues of the 1950s are faithful to the Soviet discourse, reproducing Soviet commonplaces about brotherhood of all nations in the Soviet Union, about the glory of cultivating virgin lands, and about the importance of Russian language. The more relaxed cultural atmosphere of the 1960s allows for an emergence of a critical tone: the travel writing becomes a site of comparative critique; travelogues make Latvian readers familiar with the destructive force of the Soviet regime in other parts of the Soviet empire.

Among the first travelogues written by a Latvian writer and published in a separate edition in the Soviet period was Monta Kroma's *Pie Eiropas un Āzijas robežām* (*Near the Borders of Europe and Asia*, 1956). Until the 1960s, Monta Kroma, like a number of other Latvian authors, strictly held to the principles of socialist realism. Benedikts Kalnacs explains the cultural situation of the era: "The special distinction of Soviet colonialism in throwing up additional obstacles and barriers to culture was the fact that the ideological discourse that had been consolidated after seizing political power was expressed in an extremely open and dogmatic form" (Kalnačs 2011, 121). It comes as no surprise, then, that the pathos of Kroma's travelogue differs much from historical testimonies that had been preserved about cultivating virgin lands. The Soviet canon did not allow the truly realistic portrayals of youth people leaving Latvia, it being well known that people were generally reluctant to go to the virgin lands and were typically ordered to go there. Yet, at the beginning of the travelogue, Kroma writes, "I went to Orenburg steppe to visit the young people from Latvia and other places who had responded to the summons of the party and the government to set to plow the fruitful virgin steppes of our native land" (Kroma 1956, 3).

Kroma shows how life in Soviet communes restructures an essential component of people's identity: "Previously when meeting youths they answered to the question 'Where are you from?' with haste 'We are from Latvia, from Moscow, from Odessa'. But now they all reply, 'We are from Irklin Soviet farm, we are from Tanalik Soviet farm.' People have found new homes" (Kroma 1956, 5). Kroma also describes how in many villages in these regions there was Riga Street for the sake of people's easier identification with Latvia.

The writer acknowledges Latvians belonging to Latvia, yet in her narrative, their sharing the status of a Soviet person is more important: "…We all know just one great, good feeling – love for the Soviet homeland. For the sake of this love we will stand everything and turn the bare steppe into a fruitful land for growing wheat" (Kroma 1956, 13). The author tells how, in the virgin lands, youths of different ethnicities have become united and how important the Russian language become for them: "Half a year ago, while still living in Džūkste,[1] I did not know any Russian. In the train, on my way here, I was in a car with a Russian girl – we communicated with gestures. But now it already seems quite good, isn't it so, uncle Vanya?" (Kroma 1956, 18). The portrait gallery of the travelogue entails, along with men, many women who are DT-54 tractor drivers. It is significant that there are usually no mention of the local population and

no indication of their lifestyle or traditions. Only once is the steppe horse, the Bactrian camel mentioned, the heat of the steppe and burning of the steppe grass caused by the heat that endangers tractor drivers' lodgings.

The cultivators of virgin lands are depicted as Soviet patriots who fit into the hierarchy of the Soviet regime: "Kuņica never forgets that he is not just a constructor but also a communist, a political figure… On 25 April 1954 when snow started melting around the village, the first ten youths arrived from Novo-Orsk to the new Iriklin Soviet farm. I was among them, the old komsomol member, keeping the komsomol appointment warrant given by the Central Committee of Latvian Komsomol beside the party membership card near my heart" (Kroma 1956, 22–23). Kroma's travelogues read as a faithful copy of Soviet Russian literature, Kroma covers the necessary topics – the importance of Russian language, the unified Soviet culture as a source of pride – with correct ideological emphases, thus diligently following the expectations of the Soviet regime.

The readers of Māris Čaklais' travelogue *Cilvēki zem kalna* (*People under the Mountain*, 1980) testify to significant changes in the Soviet literary canon. Instead of the "sincere" communist pathos of Kroma's writings, we now witness a pointed critique of Soviet regime: the signs of the regime have now attained a destructive tonality. The travelogue is dedicated to a journey around the Soviet Union and it depicts the landscape and people of Soviet Armenia, but is mostly concerned with the harm inflicted by Soviet electrification projects around the largest lake in Armenia, Sevan, the level of which had begun to fall dramatically by the end of the 1960s. A plan was worked out for the preservation of the level of lake water with the participation of mountain borers. They become the center of gravity in Čaklais' text:

> Twenty-eight rivers and rivulets run into Sevan, only one – the Razdan – runs out of it. So the Razdan took the load of rapid industrialization upon it – the load of seven electric stations imposed on it by the need caused by the pre-war shortage of energy. As usual in such cases, not everything is considered carefully enough, and Sevan was drying out irretrievably. (Čaklais 1980, 155)

In *Dzied gaiļi Koktebelē* (*Roosters are Singing in Koktebel* 1969a), Čaklais depicts his first impression of the Crimean resort Koktebel. Čaklais writes about the incongruousness of the Soviet period architecture in the traditional landscape here: "…The first impression marks the mixture of the suburbs seen in Italian neorealist movies with the posh architecture of the 1940–50s, all the flower pots and other decorations along with the modern buildings around which gaudiness creeps out with some small detail, some glass ball" (Čaklais 1969a, 29). In travelogue *Ukrainas vasara* (*Ukrainian Summer* 1969b), Čaklais indirectly demonstrates the impact of Soviet electrification on the Ukrainian landscape: "The Dnieper cuts the steppe in two. Since the construction of the great electric stations, the river has become so obedient and slow that from Kiev to its mouth in Chersonese it takes you three days" (ibid., 42).

In Čaklais writings, the "Soviet motifs" are signs of Soviet ideology, economic intrusions that have a destructive influence over the previous order of life. Our next author Imants Ziedonis fluctuated in his early travelogues between the demands of Soviet ideology and the content of the travel, and he continues to pay dues to Soviet norms with statements such as: "If we could endow each modest, commonplace work with a Marxist idea and communist intensity of feeling, then it would be the intelligence of Lenin, Nikolai Ostrovsky, and Maxim Gorky" (Ziedonis, Korotičs, and Janaitis

1965, 47). At the same time his travelogue demonstrates the destructive impact of the Soviet economic system upon the previous hunting peoples or highlanders. The Soviet motive is, for example, the dead Sarihorosa village depicted in Imants Ziedonis' travelogue *Perpendicular Spoon*. It does not exist any longer because all the inhabitants of the village were obliged to join the collective farm (kolkhoz). The evacuation of the mountain population to the valleys took place because it was demanded by the Soviet economy and its need for labor. Once a real village, Sarihorosa became "a village–phantom" that lives only in the memories of its former inhabitants.

Travelogues as sites of otherness

Formations of mental maps and their projections in literature are closely connected with the universal opposition of "one's own people" and "aliens." Soviet Latvian travelogues depicting the areas of the Soviet Union most often manifest (1) objects, traditions, and attitudes that one cannot observe in Latvia and that are contrasted with a Latvian mentality and cultural landscape; and (2) cultural signs related to Latvia, for example, places of battles of Latvian riflemen in 1920 in Ukraine (in Čaklais' travelogue) as well as names of writers of other republics that were well known to Latvian readers. Against the Soviet ideal of forming a sense of togetherness, Latvian travelogues strengthened Latvian identity in relation to exotic cultures at the other side of the Soviet empire.

In Māris Čaklais' travelogue *Zeme, kur cilvēks vistuvāk savam liktenim* (*Land where One is Closest to One's Destiny*, 1969c), the author's observations in Armenia foreground the unfamiliar and alien image, aiming at a sense of awe, fear, mystery, and obscurity: "Armenians' inclinations and drives are different – they don't like being alone, they love company, willingly linger in a café, roam about streets, stick around the street corner or near a hotel, watching passers-by and guests" (ibid., 71).

> With awe, maybe even fear do I approach the strange ceremony, the mourning women have stone faces, the piercing sun, stretched singing, burnt-out cemetery with high tombstones cause dejection… The cruelty of Armenian cemeteries does not leave room for sentimental illusion, the same as their mountains… The meanness of the packed life in cities and valleys loses sense here, one becomes closed to the cruel sky, the universe, eternity, one's own destiny. (Čaklais 1969c, 56)

Descriptions of the culture of everyday life emphasize the difference from Latvian traditions. Hence, visiting Kurdish home: "We are drinking tan, something like our buttermilk, only Kurds have learnt to preserve it for winter as dry powder that is diluted in water when needed… Burnt out by the sun of the Armenian slope, grass appears higher up, grass, trees, flowers, huge diversity of wild flowers, meadows like those in mid-summer Latvia, with herbs plucked on St. John's Eve only even thicker, more colorful, brighter" (Čaklais 1969c, 67).

"As usual, having got into the sunlight, I undress. The northerner's nature: the sunny days must be accumulated; there will be much fog and clouds… I take off my shirt, well, no reaction, but taking off my trousers cause in Armenian women rather nervous joking…this action shocks the public…In Armenia people are shocked by women's desire to get tan; many local women here are paler than our office workers in

early spring" (Čaklais 1969c, 68). Latvian writers seem "strange" to the local Armenian people, guests that must be treated with kindness. After the first shock, Kurdish women soften, get even kinder, one of them even follows the travelers with a vessel of water, explaining to her countrywomen who these guests are and trying to serve them in any possible way.

Čaklais also notes that Armenian kids are different from Latvian counterparts – they are active, vital, without the shyness typical to Latvian children in the countryside.

Enumeration of different features becomes the cornerstone of the collective work by Imants Ziedonis, the Ukrainian writer Vitalii Korotych, and the photographer Gunārs Janaitis *Perpendicular Spoon* (1972). In prewar Latvian literature, the semantics of the East was mainly connected with the religious world of Buddhism. On the map of the USSR, the East, first of all, is connected with the USSR republics that represent the Islamic world: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The title of the travel description uses a bright impression of the travel: the authors have used an ethnically specific spoon (twisted aslant, handle at the side, not at the end) characteristic of some Tajik region as a metaphor of otherness (difference) and as the sign of Tajik ancient national and ethnographic heritage.

In *Perpendicular Spoon, "*Otherness" is, first of all, connected with the perception of the landscape. The steppe unknown to the Latvian reader is colorfully described as the attribute of spatial openness. Similar semantics are attached to the description of the beauty of the Pamir Mountains. Ziedonis writes about the peculiarity of Tajikistan: "Tajikistan is even a more remote land – steppes and mountains, and a big sun, and completely different rhythms" (Ziedonis, Korotics and Janaitis 1971, 9). The mountainous relief is very important for a Latvian and Ukrainian perspective in Tajikistan's panorama; one constantly admires "how far the eye can see" (Vilsons 1971, 25). The opposition between one's own people and "aliens" is widely used also in the portrayal of Tajik everyday culture, for example, depicting "the hospitality law," or also depicting the sense of not fitting in the Tajik environment: "we were alien men" (Ziedonis, Korotics, and Janaitis 1971, 11), "we were as untaught singers" (Ziedonis, Korotičs, and Janaitis 1971, 11). The most difficult thing to acquire for travelers was the Eastern rhythm of eating and drinking, yet also communication difficulties between different national characters are stressed several times in the travelogue. The differences of cultural codes are described as determined by religious canons (which under Soviet circumstances are not directly mentioned). A hat as an element of national dress has a special semantics: Santa Claus with "Chalma" on his head depicted by Ziedonis does not fit in the Tajik cultural environment; also, Tajiks do not accept impersonal hats of the Soviet dress code.

The contrast is one of the most widely used principles used by the authors in the examined works for the characterization of the peculiarity of the foreign space. Pēteris Zeile, in a review on Ziedonis' travelogues, notes:

> Imants Ziedonis compares what he has seen in other republics with what we have here in our own home. He compares what has been carried out in actuality with the unused opportunities. He compares the town of the Altai that lies in a valley with Palanga, Salacgrīva, Tukums… Writing about Karelia and Tajikistan, Imants Ziedonis is striving to reveal the unique brightness in the life of these far-away geographical regions. Everyone gets more familiar with and develops brighter notions of the northern rivers full of rapids, the peculiar northern architecture, Middle Asian dwelling *kishlaks* and their inhabitants… Yet Ziedonis singles out not only

> the unique for every people but is also looking for the shared signs that unite peoples and bring them closer to one another. (Zeile 1972, 4)

Conclusions

The Soviet occupation in Latvia is associated with violent annexation of its territory to the USSR, inclusion of its territory in the map of the USSR, and with major changes that these changes caused on the mental map of the inhabitants of Latvia. This article has considered nonviolent strategies related to the establishment of Soviet colonial rule. Enhancing writers' literary contacts through travels to unfamiliar and exotic territories of the USSR helped readers to familiarize themselves with unfamiliar territories of their "new great homeland."

Soviet Latvian travelogues make use of traditional strategies of this genre: they register the unfamiliar, strange, exotic, comparing it to the familiar and one's own place. Their small, pocket-size format created an impression of reader-friendly literature. Writers depict in them traditions, rituals, mentalities, landscapes, and characteristic traits of people of various ethnicities. Their characteristics are emotionally expressive but they lack any evaluation determined by the ethnic equality proclaimed in the USSR Constitution. Citizens of the Baltic republics, who had been the last to get incorporated in the Soviet Union and were marked as the "West" of the USSR, had an unfavorable attitude to the nonpragmatic economy model in the USSR, excessive abuse of alcohol, slapdash or evasive attitude to work. If, in the travelogues produced in the early Soviet decades, assimilation of the Soviet lifestyle was praised, then travelogues produced in the later decades manifest an ironic attitude to its individual details.

The poor planning consequences of Sovietization and their impact both on people and the landscape constitute the common junction of travelogue narratives. In texts this crystallizes as the common "alien" for the peoples living in the territory of the USSR. The semantic marking of the motifs of Sovietization in Latvian authors' travelogues of the 1960s–1980s depicting the Soviet territory underwent radical changes. In the travelogues produced in the 1950s, one sees enthusiasm about the vast scope of Soviet economy, those of the 1960s–1970s demonstrate a neutral or disguised critical attitude toward the forced change of people's lifestyles and toward huge construction projects of the epoch, and in the 1970s–1980s a more directly critical attitude appeared (Imants Ziedonis being the most typical writer of this period). From the perspective of creating a new Latvian subject, who would feel at home in the Soviet empire, the results were complex. Travelogues did indeed acquaint Latvian readers with other parts of the Soviet Union, which had not previously been part of the Latvian national imagination. In some sense, one could even talk about a common ground found between the different cultures within the Soviet empire. However, especially in the 1960s, the common ground was found through a joint opposition to the regime and through an understanding of the shared negative experience of the destructive nature of the Soviet regime. Thus, the result was not exactly the one aimed by the Soviet ideology.

From another perspective, the travelogues fostered Latvian national identification as opposed to its exotic others. Travelogues to Tajik, Armenia, and Georgia republics carried a typical orientalist discourse, so pointedly criticized by Edward Said (1979). It would seem that orientalism, a typical companion of colonialism, can easily

flourish also in colonized cultures. As Epp Annus has argued: "One doesn't have to be a colonizer to produce orientalist discourse and to 'exoticize' the other culture; the same patterns can also be found in the encounter of culturally different colonized cultures" (Annus, forthcoming). In addition to fostering obedience and a sense of belonging to the Soviet empire during the first 15 oppressive years of the Soviet regime, Latvian travelogues of the later years represented the Soviet empire as a conflictual site of the destruction of traditional values and landscapes, and, at the same time, developed an orientalist discourse of other, "exotic" nations of the Soviet empire.

Note

1. Džūkste – a civil parish in Latvia.

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Notes on contributor

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