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**Travelogues by Latvian Writers of the Soviet Period
in a Postcolonial Perspective**

Abstract

The development of the travel sketch genre in a national literature is closely related to the geographical and mental cartography that characterizes that territory. Moreover, the strategies for perceiving, mapping and describing the lands, countries and regions with which one has become familiar while traveling are usually informed by the historical tradition and the ideological context of one's epoch.

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 travel sketches changed as well, becoming limited to diverse territories of the Soviet Union or its satellite states. The Western world was almost never depicted in travel sketches, 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 unified whole which, in its regional, ethnographic and other features, stood out against the backdrop of the other Soviet republics. 'Process of colonization meant that clear distinctions began to dissolve: transculturation, miscegenation, the barbarism necessary to impose rule [...] Identities, either of self or other, were no longer stable.' (Carr, Helen. *Modernism and travel. Travel writing*, 2010: 73). In the period of Soviet occupation, the dominant ideology developed a concept of *homo sovieticus* that entailed such components as reduced awareness of the ethnic and national belonging, knowledge of the Russian language, knowledge and observance of the Soviet attributes, rituals, laws.

To integrate the Baltic States in the territory of the USSR and form the sense of belonging to *homo sovieticus* here, Soviet ideologists carried out a number of events to introduce the Baltic people to the territories of the USSR practically unknown to them. One of the events was culture delegation exchange visits to Soviet Republics, other socialist countries and the states loyal to the Soviet regime, e.g. Cuba or India. In these delegations, literary figures were included and they after the visits described their impressions by means of various strategies. It was possible to travel around the USSR for practically all residents of the country, yet only selected people were allowed to join the culture delegations. These selected writers were mostly the authors of the travelogues of the Soviet period. They depicted not only landscape particularities and anthropological accounts but also by the presence of the opposition "one's own – alien". While "one's own" is related to what is common to the Baltic people, the "alien" refers to that which was introduced by the Soviet occupation or to the national characteristics of different lands. Travelogues show that the writers basically created their narratives so that they could avoid depictions of *homo sovieticus*. Possibly, travelogues by professional literati (except for journalists) were the group of texts least affected by the Soviet ideology because they were regarded as a secondary genre and the censorship did not transform them as aggressively as other genres. Travelogues were published in the Soviet times mostly by very skilled writers who managed to depict the exotic regions of the USSR (Tajikistan, the Caucasus, etc.), their lifestyle, landscape, so foreign and unknown to the Baltic readership, but also by means of the Aesopian language conveyed the *homo sovieticus* and many peculiarities of the Soviet life as absurd and inconsistent.