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THE REPRESENTATION OF THE OTHER IN FOREIGN TOURIST GUIDEBOOKS OF BELARUS*

The current article aims at analyzing foreign tourist guides of Belarus published during 1994–2016 through the lens of postcolonial theory. It presents ideological predispositions of the colonial discourse; demonstrates that in the analyzed guides cultural colonialism is represented by the motifs of (1) victimity, (2) backwardness, (3) isolation and marginality, (4) inability of the colonial Other for self-representation (or the motif of imperceptibility). The article also demonstrates the narrative modes of representing the colonial Other that contribute to the abovementioned motifs – the passive voice of verbs, iterative repetition of words and phrases with a negative connotation, different types of tropes, the trope of humour.

Key words: Belarus, representation, tourist guide, cultural colonialism, the Other.

The theoretical framework of the current paper is formed by the cornerstones that become the methodological landmarks of the analysis. First, it is a constructivist approach to the discourse of tourist guides implying that in the linguistic representation of people, places, or events discursive choice not only depicts reality but creates its ideologically preferable version. It is obvious that such concepts as representation and the Other are key to the postcolonial studies that investigate the interaction between different sociocultural powers in society, and the mechanism of Western cultural dominance over the East.

A starting point for this paper became the work “*Orientalism*” of Edward Said [20]. The most influential aspect of his legacy is understanding orientalism as a particular discursive field where social macrostructures (the ideology of colonialism and Western hegemony) are coded into textual microstructures as a result of strategic linguistic choice. The fundamental idea of every discourse being a reflection of ideology was borrowed by E. Said from M. Foucault – the fact that he mentioned repeatedly in his *Introduction* [1, p. 1–30]. Furthermore, methodologically this work is based on the theory of representation by Stuart Hall according to which each representation is social, permanently being constructed and reconstructed in the process of meaning production in language, and instantaneously reflecting its sociocultural context, allowing the access to reality [2, p. 28].

It is important to mention that the current paper does not aim to prove (or show) the validity of the images of Belarus as appearing on the pages of foreign tourist guides. The focus on the mechanisms of creating representations and meanings assigned to them is grounded in the constructivist understanding of representation according to which, as A. Usmanova puts it, representation appears to be “a key cultural practice – whatever its negative entity could be – a practice of translation from one language into another, or including pre- or extra semiotic phenomena into cultural world; nothing exists behind representation. The reality of representation is the only reality that is available to us” (here and below translation is mine – V.B.) [3, p. 51].

This article explores British, French, and Russian experience of touristic cognizance of Belarus that is documented in the texts of tourist guides published in 1994–2016. In 1994–1995 a

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small guidebook on Minsk "*Minsk in your pocket: The survival guide*" is published [4]. It represents a new format of a guidebook characterized by informal style, humor, containing practical instructions for travellers and an explicit list of problems in the touristic sphere of the city of that period, such as lack of infrastructure and low service level, bad roads, etc. Later one of the largest tourist publishers Lonely planet presents a guidebook in French "*Russie et Biélorussie*" which dedicates around 60 pages to Belarus [5]. Afterwards several guidebooks are published one by one: "*Belarus: the Bradt Travel Guide*" written by Nagel Roberts (in English, currently available in three editions – 2008, 2011, 2015 – and translated to several European languages) [6]; "*Petit Futé Biélorussie*" (in French, currently available in two editions – 2014, 2017) [7]; translated from English into Russian "*Vostochnaya Evropa*" ("*Eastern Europe*") [8], as well as Russian guidebooks "*Belaruś. Putevoditelj*" ("*Belarus: A guidebook*", currently available in two editions – 2012, 2014, 2016) [9] and "*Belaruś: putevoditelj*" ("*Belarus: A guidebook*") [10], published as a part of series "Poliglot", "Russkij gid" and "Oranzevyj gid" accordingly.

The analysis of tourist guides of Belarus as a discursive practice of representing the Other exposed the traits of cultural colonialism and imperial superiority that are manifest, in the first instance, in the ideological interpretation of Belarus as a *non-independent passive object and permanent victim*. Already in a guidebook "*Handbook for travellers in Russia, Poland, and Finland: including the Crimea, Caucasus, Siberia and Central Asia*" [11], published in 1875 by John Murray (that, together with Karl Baedeker, is a founder of a guidebook genre) we for the first time acknowledge *the use of verbs in passive voice* that contributes to this motif and will be widely used in future editions. Thus, while describing the route "Warsaw – Moscow", Belarusian territory (*Northwestern Krai* of the Russian Empire at that time) is characterized as "an uninteresting country" [11, p. 487]. The author also mentions that: "**In the early part of the 14th cent. the principality of Minsk was incorporated** with Lithuania and in the 15th cent. it became a prov. of Poland. The t. *was devastated* by the Tartars in 1505, and *occupied* by the Muscovite troops in 1508. In the beginning of the 17th cent. heavy contribution *were laid upon* alternately by the Sweden and Russians and in 1793 it *was finally united* to Russia" [11, p. 491]. (here and throughout italics is mine – V.B.)

These lines, devoted to Belarusian history, emphasize attributive traits of a victim, namely, its passivity, that is manifest through passive voice of verbs – *was incorporated, was devastated, was united*.

Victimization motif is most eloquent in the guidebook *Petit Futé Biélorussie* where Belarus is explicitly labelled as a "victime de discrimination" [7, p. 46] and is presented through past participle – a form that reinforces verbal attributes of an object – while the verbs describe violent and aggressive actions: "War-torn country, its humiliated and destroyed population <...> [7, p. 34]. This small country *clutched* between Poland and Russia remains a mystery for most Europeans. ... *Often ignored* by mass media and pushed back from other countries, behind the stereotypes of Lukashenko and Chernobyl, Belarus conceals an image of a hospitable and captivating country" [7, p. 1]. <...> Over the past 150 years Belarus *has been a victim* of constant Russification aiming to make Belarusians the 'little brothers' of Russians. ... *Stifled* by its own President, Belarus suffers not only from political but also from cultural isolation [7, p. 52].

Below one may find a fragment on Belarusian history where the afore-mentioned motif is also evident: "Belarus is a *victim* of a sad historical paradox. While the country never declared war to anyone, over the centuries, it has been systematically *attacked, crossed and ravaged* by the armies of neighboring states fighting against each other, until the World War II. This tragic and particularly painful period has left an indelible mark on the country's memory. The country was completely *destroyed* and its population decimated with 3 million victims, more than a third of the whole population" [7, p. 18].

The Russian guidebook also describes Belarus using passive voice, which, as is well-known, shows that a person or a thing that functions as a subject in a sentence does not perform actions (is not an agent of action) but experiences agentive action, as, for instance, in "1945 – Belarus *is admitted* to the Founding Member States of the UN" [10, p. 24]. **According to these texts, Belarus is represented as being incapable of independent development and any active operations, being a passive object of influence (not a subject of interaction) while permanent foreign intrusion is seen as its natural state. This motif of victimity is a constant theme that is evident also in**

further examples and complemented by the motif of *isolation from a civilized world and marginality* manifested in a narrative device of *multiple enumerations of words and phrases with a negative connotation*. In a francophone guidebook *“Russie et Biélorussie”* an introductory chapter begins with the following words: “Those who are beware of Belarus, probably have always heard nothing but negative reviews: last dictatorship of Europe, a bulwark of tyranny, time capsule of the USSR, radiation and Chernobyl catastrophe, political repressions, rusty tractors, outdated fashion, and bad taste” [5, p. 672]. Below the authors infer that precisely these peculiarities of Belarus form the basis of its touristic attractiveness and its political isolation from a civilized world [5, p. 676].

In the first lines of the English guidebook *“Belarus: the Bradt Travel Guide”* Nigel Roberts states that: “**There is one theme in particular that spans the centuries: that of suffering and privation.** Whether *subjugated* to the yoke of Lithuanian, Pole, Tsar, Frenchman, Bolshevik, Communist, Nazi, Communist again or latterly oligarch, heroism and tragedy can be found on most of the pages of the country’s history, as drama and melodrama unfold in the never-ending struggle to resist pain, anguish, grief and suffering. For generation after generation, there seems to have been no sanctuary from constant oppression, with the identity of the oppressor being largely irrelevant. Further, the media of oppression are many and varied: fear, dogma, hunger, poverty, lack of education, geography, climate and, in recent times, Chernobyl” [6].

Explicit textual references to continuous privation (“whether subjugated to the yoke”, (always under the power), “pain, anguish, grief and suffering”, “suffering and privation” (*Belarus: the Bradt Travel Guide*), “often ignored”, “clutched”, “ravaged”, “humiliated and decimated”, “stifled” (*“Russie et Biélorussie”*) creates the impression of hopelessness of the Belarusian plight that lasts for ages.

A reference to a such kind of representation of a colonial Other is found in *“Orientalism”* by Said: “Such “object” of study will be, as is customary, passive, non-participating, endowed with a “historical” subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regard to itself: the only Orient or Oriental or “subject” which could be admitted, at the extreme limit, is the alienated being, philosophically, that is, other than itself in relationship to itself, posed, understood, defined – and acted – by others” [1, p. 97].

One more device that unites all the texts under consideration is *the use of different kinds of literary tropes* that, as Umberto Eco puts it, “are often used as a means of persuasion and emotional influence, drawing attention and refreshing perception, making argumentation more “informative”, which otherwise would be blank and inexpressive” [12, p. 226–227]. **The most common metaphor associated with Belarus is related to a crossroad and its semantically close synonyms.** In the *Petit Futé Biélorussie* guidebook Belarus is repeatedly called “a crossroads between East and West”, “buffer state”: “A *crossroad* of histories and cultures. ... A *buffer-state* between the East, represented by Russia, and the West, embodied by Poland [7, p. 8]. A *crossroad* between the West and the East, European culture and the Slavic world, Belarus is a synthesis of the two” [7, p. 1].

The same metaphor can be found in the Russian guidebook *“Belarusj: Putevoditelj”* (*“Belarus: A Guidebook”*): “Belarus is often and rightly called the *crossroads* of Europe” [9, p. 4]. It is worth mentioning, that according to the French guidebook Belarus belongs neither to the West (Europe), nor to the East (Russia), while the Russian guidebook considers Belarus to be a crossroads of Europe, thus presenting Russia as a European country as well.

N. Roberts also uses a metaphor “a country at a crossroads” as the title of subsection, explaining in detail its relevance to the contemporary Belarus: “Today Belarus finds itself with an interesting conundrum. Historically, culturally and economically, there are strong ties with Russia, the neighbor that dwarfs it in every way. The rose-tinted spectacles of those who hark back to the Soviet Union and would welcome the idea of integration or strong federation at the least are a real feature of life here. And the markets of Russia, especially oil and gas, are hugely important to the economy of Belarus. Yet the pull of the West’s own huge markets is also strong. For its part, Russia needs a strong ally on its western border, but it also needs to regularly show that ally who is boss. Meanwhile, the European Union and NATO would doubtless welcome the opportunity to push the borders of their sphere of influence ever closer to Russia but will offer few inducements to Belarus until such time as there is movement in accommodating the need they

perceive for significant political and human rights reform. President Lukashenko finds himself right in the middle of two giant markets run by opposing principles of governance, both of which are prepared to offer significant inducements, but only in return for favours" [6].

A characterization of Russia, which may be found in the same section, is complemented by Roberts' own statements that reveal his attitude towards Russia: "Neighbouring Russia *gleefully seized* the opportunity to capitalise on these domestic difficulties within the state of Rzeczpospolita and launched a new war on its territory, which endured from 1654 to 1667. A large portion of modern-day Belarus was occupied, and severe economic and demographic crises ensued. The population was reduced by half, whole towns fell into decay ..." [6].

Thus, the author leads the readers to conclude that the main reason for Belarus' misfortune is aggressive politics of Russia – not only in historical retrospective, but also in perspective.

In the context of the cognitive paradigm of G. Lakoff and M. Johnson metaphor "always involves understanding" [13, p. 208] and has an impact on reality perception. In Lakoff's term Belarus («the target domain» [14, p. 28]) – crossroad ("the source domain" [14, p. 28]) that is repeatedly reproduced in the discourse of guidebooks, draws addressee's attention to a peripheral position of the country not only in space but also in time. It is obvious that the interpretation of the metaphorical projection "crossroads" has political connotations. Its semantic context reminds of marginality and is indicative of the unstable position of Belarus, which is an object of a deal where the result depends on the favorability of competitors' terms. Thus, a crossroads is not a place, a state, or a destination. A crossroad is a space in-between, which becomes meaningful and significant only as related to the main state or states that, according to the authors of guidebooks, can be East or West.

Battleground metaphor is semantically close to the metaphor of a crossroads and is also manifesting a colonial discourse: "However, it is not always convenient to be a crossroads: not only trade routes but also multiple military roads crossed the country, and Belarus itself often turned into a *battleground*. Each time another war came to an end the country healed the wounds and rose from the ashes as a legendary bird Phoenix" [10, p. 4].

I believe, using literary devices ("a crossroad", "battlefield", comparison to Phoenix) instead of facts is, on the one hand, a conscious authors' position that allows for skipping a coverage of uncomfortable complex topics so that an image of a victim is glorified, acquiring a romantic halo, while its sufferings are poetized. On the other hand, it reflects a colonial perspective on Belarus, which, as A. Kazakevich sees it, is always considered as a "battlefield" between West and East (always equated with Russia) and has been an object of exchange between conflicting mother countries [15, p. 24].

When N. Roberts describes events of the beginning of the 20th century he again stresses the repeatability of the situation and emotionally charges it when stating that: "*As had been the case on countless occasions in the past*, Belarusian territory was again a *battleground* when hostilities broke out in 1914, with bloody and brutal clashes between opposing armies of the German and Russian empires" [6].

Let us compare the way the Russian guidebook describes the same events: "In 1914–1918 Belarus became the battlefield of the First world war in the course of which 1,200 Belarusians died and hundreds did not have a chance to come back from evacuation" [9, p. 9]. A comparison of two interpretations of the same historical event highlights different meaning emphases in the English and Russian guidebooks. While both do use a metaphor 'battlefield', in the former it is reinforced by mentioning 'bloody clashes' and their initiators – "opposing armies of the German and Russian empires". In the latter, in its turn, the opponents are not specified but the author employs dry statistical data on the number of casualties.

It is worth mentioning that in Roberts' guidebook one may see the attempts to escape from the colonial discourse scheme and describe Belarus as an acting subject. Thus, for instance, he writes: "Political activity in Belarus intensified and the first independent Belarusian democratic republic was established on 25 March 1918, despite the continuing German occupation. ... As a result, the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) came into existence in Smolensk on 1 January 1919" [6, *Belarus: the Bradt Travel Guide*, part 1, chap.1 Background information, section History].

Let us compare the interpretation of the same events presented in the Russian guidebook: "March 25, 1918. *Proclamation* of independence of the Belarusian People's Republic (BPR) under

German occupation” [9, p. 9]. The difference in interpretation is obvious: the English guidebook stresses that “despite” and even against difficult historical conditions of German occupation, the first independent Belarusian democratic republic was established.

In the Russian edition one can feel a doubt in the historical significance of this event; the authors describe it as a “*proclamation of independence*” that emphasizes its de-jure status while not being de-facto as soon as “*proclamation of independence...under German occupation*” is an oxymoron. Commenting the 1921 Treaty of Riga that resulted in “the annexation by Poland of the western territories” N. Roberts reports: “Unfortunately for the new state, however, the 1921 Treaty of Riga resulted in the annexation by Poland of the western territories and the *flickering flame* of the emerging Belarusian identity was extinguished” [6]. The author also provides interpretation of the 1939 events: “Following the *notorious and shameful* 1939 pact of mutual non-aggression, German and Soviet tanks rolled simultaneously across Poland from the west and the east respectively. The state boundary that had existed immediately prior to the 1921 Treaty of Riga was quickly restored as the western territories and their communities were forcibly snatched back from Polish control and sovereignty” [6]. The Russian guidebook describes the 1939 events as “Western Belarus entry into the BSSR” [9, p. 9] with no further explanation of the abbreviation (probably the author considers it unnecessary) and the circumstances of the “entry”, which Roberts calls “shameful”.

As it is obvious from the above-cited citations the analysis of a political situation in contemporary Belarus plays a considerable role in the Western guidebooks. In the French guidebooks an overall tone of presenting political issues is a bit sarcastic. Thus, a word ‘president’ is followed by a predicate “*former director of a sovkhوزه*”, while the characteristics “*last dictatorship of Europe*” and “*an autocratic state where freedom of expressions is systematically violated*” [7, p. 39] are presented as axiom. I assume that a pretext for the guides of this publishing house is the work by Andrew Wilson “*Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship*” [16].

The local exoticism of Belarus is seen through the prism of *ethnographism* that is equated with *provinciality*, *backwardness* and *premodernity*, which are one more motif of a cultural colonialism. Thus, the French guidebook stresses the so called authenticity that is reinterpreted as a bucolicity and wilderness of nature, which is described as untouched, unsullied, virgin, wild: “... an idyllic scenery: green countryside strewn with stork nests, forests as far as the eye can see, lakes with crystal clear water – all its beautiful landscapes, wild and picturesque” [7, p. 1]. Such description of Belarusians echoes the representation of the Other described by E. Said in his “*Orientalism*”: “... the Orient and Orientals [are considered by Orientalism] as an ‘object’ of study, stamped with an otherness” [1, p. 97].

The historical backwardness of Belarus is represented through an appeal to the Soviet, which is also interpreted in a satirical way. For the first time this is stressed in “*Minsk in your pocket: The survival guide*” that extensively lists the signs of the Soviet past: “At a first glance Minsk might look out of time to foreign visitors who can feel that they are still in the Soviet Union [4, p. 3]. <...> **One communist tradition which has been preserved in every restaurant is the ubiquitous door-man, who in nearly all cases have been invested with mysterious power of determining the character of potential customers. If he does not like the way you look ... he will turn you away**” [4, p. 12].

The guidebook “*Russie et Biélorussie*” echoes with “*Minsk in your pocket*”: “This is an official trip to the Soviet epoch ... This is a communism with cappuccino. The pleasures are considerably reduced here: it is allowed to twitch in clubs and meet interesting attractive people – in the shadow of KGB” [5, p. 700].

The later texts link the Soviet with a motif of isolation and victimity: “This country, isolated by its own will, is situated on the edge of the Eastern Europe and it seems that it strives at all costs to avoid a merger with the remaining part of the continent. A small authoritarian country that has adopted the policy of the USSR rather than European Union may seem a strange choice for a trip, but it is exactly this isolation that attracts visitors” [8, p. 75]. **I believe this helps to emphasize “absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior”** [1, p. 300].

Theo Van Leeuwen states that advertisers have a considerable pool of grammatical and lexical devices for describing the locals [17, p. 35]. And the choice of these devices is never neutral:

defining and describing social subjects, advertisers choose certain aspects of reality that propagate their point of view according to their ideological position. Bringing to the fore such characteristic of locals as friendliness, Western tourism industry promotes a homogenized image of hosts as non-problematic and obedient. Any individual traits or signs of diversity, modernity or dynamicity are obliterated. Moreover, through frequent links to low professional status and services the hosts 'function' as servants for Western tourists. They are not only positioned as agreeable, but it seems that their existence is justified only through serving tourists to correspond to a stereotype of an exotic destination – virgin and non-civilized.

The strategy of representing Belarus and Belarusians by Eastern guidebooks contains a "classical" trait of a colonial discourse – the inability of the colonial Other for self-representation, or *a motif of invisibility*. In these guidebooks Belarusians are not heard and seen, they are literally the "silent Other" [18, p. 93]. Here again we find a situation explored by Said to refer to the representational relationship between the West and the Middle Eastern Orient through which the former "orientalises" and stereotypes the latter. Using a well-known sentence by Karl Marx, "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented", as an epigraph to "Orientalism" [1, p. 8], E. Said also comments that "The exterior of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would" [1, p. 29]. Rephrasing (and slightly exaggerating) a radical question by G. Ch. Spivak "Can the subaltern speak?" [19], one could ask "Can the subaltern speak in travel guidebooks about Belarus?". Finally, we'll get the same transparent answer as Spivak has: Belarusians are unable to speak because "they have no possibility to get through and raise their voice to the level of representation" [20, p. 598].

The current research resulted in qualitative evidence on the modes of representation of Belarus and Belarusians in foreign guidebooks. The main idea the texts under consideration produce is that Belarus is a passive object characterized by the lack of development (backwardness), permanent dependence, and victimity. Such representational strategy fits into the logics of a colonial discourse the object of which is the Other represented in the categories of the local, ethnographic, backward (ahistoric or premodern), dependent, and static. And in this, generally positive and innocent images reinforce the ideological asymmetry and fixate the colonial image of primitive and obedient citizens. To a large extent, it proves the patterns discovered and substantiated by Gałasinski & Jaworski [21], who demonstrated local people tend to be represented as homogeneous ethnic or social group; observed bearers of the 'national' or 'community' characteristics that create a colonial image of locals as obedient and benign and contribute to the romanticization of an image of a fearless and a bit naïve savage. Such representational strategy of Belarus and Belarusians is directly connected with the main motifs of colonialism: (1) representing Belarusians, the guidebooks portray them as static, underdeveloped, and permanently dependent; (2) Belarus is perceived as a non-country incapable of independent development, where victimity and alien intrusion appears to be a natural state of things; (3) a motif of isolation from a civilized world, and (4) the inability of the colonial Other for self-representation. These motifs are incorporated by the following devices: passive voice of verbs; abundant use of words with negative connotation; employing different literary devices and humour. These characteristics allow considering foreign guidebooks on Belarus as texts that reproduce an ideological colonial asymmetry conditioned by power relations between West and Belarus, Russia and Belarus, that ground the necessity for the relations of "domination – obedience" to be applied to the latter.

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Досліджуються іноземні туристські путеводители по Білорусі, опубліковані у 1994–2014 рр., з позицій постколоніальної теорії. Описуються ідеологічні установки колоніального дискурсу; демонструється, що в розглянутих путеводних текстах культурний колоніалізм представлений мотивом (1) виктимізації, (2) відсталості; (3) ізольованості, маргіальності; (4) неможливості колоніального Іншого до саморепрезентації або мотиву незабутності. Виявляються прийоми репрезентації колоніального Іншого, що працюють на розкритті вказаних мотивів: словесність в пасивному закладі, багаторазове перекладання слів і висловів з негативною конотацією, різні види художніх тропів, прийом комічного.

Ключові слова: Білорусь, репрезентація, путеводитель, культурний колоніалізм, Інший.

Рассматриваются иностранные туристские путеводители по Беларуси, изданные в 1994–2014 гг., с позиции постколониальной теории. Описываются идеологические установки колониального дискурса; демонстрируется, что в рассмотренных путеводных текстах культурный колониализм представлен мотивами (1) виктимности, (2) отсталости; (3) изолированности, маргинальности; (4) неспособности колониального Другого к саморепрезентации или мотивом незамеченности. Выявляются повествовательные приемы репрезентации колониального Другого, работающих на раскрытие указанных мотивов: глагольность в пассивном залого, многократное перечисление слов и выражений с негативной коннотацией, различные виды художественного тропа, прием комического.

Ключевые слова: Беларусь, репрезентация, путеводитель, культурный колониализм, Другой, мотив виктимности.

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