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India in the Imagination of 20th and 21st Century Croatian Literature

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The purpose of this paper is to study perceptions of India in three literary works, from the 20th and 21st century. The first part looks into the tenets of postcolonial theory and literary imagology as a possible methodological framework. Subsequently, premodern perceptions of India in the Croatian literary and cultural space are summarised. The central analysis focuses on the historical novel *Jaša Dalmatin* (Jaša Dalmatin, Viceroy of Gujarat) by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, the travelogue *U potrazi za staklenim gradom* (In Search of the Glass City) by Željko Malnar and Borna Bebek, and the short story *Indija* (India) by Bekim Sejranović. The analysis demonstrates that each of these writings reconstructs premodern perceptions to some extent, but primarily introduces new perceptions that are linked to the specific social, cultural and ideological context in which these works were written. This indicates that literary perceptions are at the same time always acts of literary fiction as well as a socially and culturally construed production of meaning.

KEYWORDS: India; Croatian literature; historical novel; travel; counterculture

Introduction

Each reference to India in literary imagination inevitably raises the issue of a theoretical articulation of the problem. Beyond any doubt, European perceptions of India are part of a much broader conglomerate of Western perceptions of the East. The East-West dichotomy is one of the oldest and most resilient dichotomies in Western civilisation that can be traced back to antiquity. When talking about the perceptions of India, it is impossible to neglect the tradition of the orientalist discourse, which Edward Said wrote about so convincingly.

Said's magisterial text *Orientalism* (1978) is considered the beginning of postcolonial theory as a body of theory "dealing with the history and culture of former colonies or re-reading colonising cultures from their perspective" (Biti, 2000, 389–390). An essential foothold of postcolonial theory is the awareness of the uneven distribution of power between the colonisers and the colonised. Thus, postcolonial theory does not simply analyse perceptions in different discourses, but rather touches upon complex aspects of historical, political, economic and ethical relations. As emphasised by Spivak and Bhabha, in the process the colonised is split from within and develops their own strategies of resistance to the coloniser, turning thus the observer into the observed; the model is destabilised, hybridised and turned into a grotesque of its original (cf. Biti, 2000, 392).

To some extent, my paper will certainly include Said's insights into orientalism. However, they alone will not suffice since I will give emphasis on cases which cannot be interpreted only within the framework of stereotypical orientalism (however, I would say that they partly rely on it). Much attention will be paid to the relation of perceptions of India which, as it appears, are shared by the entire European tradition and/or modernity, and specificities that can be attributed to the perspective of the Croatian cultural area, and the relation between India as a semantically loaded *topos* and the Croatian cultural area from which the author and narrator speak.

Since the Croatian cultural area has never been closely connected and has had no complex and mutually conditioned connection to the colonised area of India, it is necessary to approach the analysis of Croatian

literary imaginations about India with care, paying attention not to literally apply postcolonial theoretical tenets. In doing so, I do not call into question the certainty of transfer and reproduction of mental structures and cultural patterns that are close to the colonial view, but I rather refer to the conditions in which such cultural perceptions have been formed, which simply do not kindle the author's individual imagination, but are a set of tangible practices of an entire life in the colonial/colonised chronotope: economic, political, ideological.

Therefore, one should bear in mind that Croatian literary representations of India are quite rare, and often two-dimensional and stereotypical. This remark presents a second danger whereby these images are seen as exclusively textual creations, i.e. they are understood as perceptions appearing in a text and are reproduced in other texts as echoes or reminiscences (Dukić, 2009, 15). Such understanding comes from literary imagology, a branch of comparative literature largely developed in the 1960s that came to prominence in the late 1980s (Dukić, 2009, 9–10). This approach primarily developed in the Eurocentric analysis of the perceptions of national characters in literary texts, maintaining, despite a careful inclusion of elements of contextual reading, the conviction that national perceptions have a textual nature, which consequently neglects the social and historical context (cf. Dukić, 2009, 15). Therefore, the application of such a theoretical approach seems to be problematic in our case, in spite of the initial indication that it could still be used due to the specific static and stereotypical quality of perceptions and its echoes across multiple texts. The analysis of the literary works in this paper focuses on the view of the non-European, oriental Other within a relatively broad time span, which includes different socio-economic, political and cultural constellations. Therefore, a more dynamic theoretical model is needed, one that includes the perceptions of India in oral or Old Croatian literature, a genre analysis of the historical young adult novel *Jaša Dalmatin, potkralj Gudžerata* (Jaša Dalmatin, Viceroy of Gujarat) by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, then the already mentioned post-colonial theory, and a reflection on cultural history since the 1960s up to the present day, with a special emphasis on counterculture, sub-cultures and youth and popular culture, that can be found in the analysis of travel writing *U potrazi za staklenim gradom* (In Search of the Glass

City) by Željko Malnar and Borna Bebek, as well as the short story *Indija* (India) by Bekim Sejranović.

Premodern literary representations of India

Ever since antiquity, India has been both familiar and foreign to Europe: “God Dionysus returns from this country each year in the spring and awakens Europe to a new life, he pulls it into the vortex of his divine rapture” (Katičić, 2008, 223). Alexander the Great’s campaign to this country at the end of the world, as it was then believed, was the first strong basis for the European collective memory of India. Alexander did not manage to subjugate and conquer it militarily like many others before it (Katičić, 2008). As Željko Malnar, one of the authors analysed in this paper, writes: “Alexander destroyed the walls of the old world so that a new world could appear” (1987, 42). This “master of the two worlds” (Malnar, Bebek, 1987, 42), of the East and West, and his campaign resulted in at least a short-lived boom of hybrid, Hellenistic cultures (Wickramasinghe, 2021). In spite of that and in spite of the fact that Indian cultural influences for centuries reached Europe via Persia, the Arabs and Byzantium, the dominant European perception of India until the period of colonialism was “as something distant, inaccessible and foreign, as a country in which even the most unusual things are possible and probable” (Katičić, 2008, 223). As Katičić writes, one can notice the influence of Greek and Old-Slavic translations of stories from Panchatantra in Croatian and Serbian folk literature, however this body of literature is yet to be researched (2008, 226). In 1767 Matija Antun Reljković used these contents of a French translation of Panchatantra, which appeared with the help of many Arabic and New Persian translations, fitting them into his Enlightenment endeavours.

Traces of references to and themes on India can be found in the Croatian literary and cultural area since the Middle Ages. In this period, the literary traces are connected with the common European Greek and Latin heritage. The first one is the legend of Buddha clad in Christian attire, which arrived via a Greek translation and under the Latin title *Barlaam and Josaphat*. This story of a carefree and protected prince

who rejects his comfortable life to become a hermit after experiencing human misfortune and suffering found its prominent place in medieval Christian Europe. It was subsequently reinterpreted by Old Croatian writers Marko Marulić, Juraj Habelić, as well as writers who wrote in the Čakavian and Kajkavian dialects (Katičić, 2008, 230). The second important source of medieval perceptions of India is *Aleksandrida* (*Alexandrida*), a novel about the life of Alexander of Macedon, which, inter alia, includes a story of the priest John, the ruler of rich and miraculous India, who sends a message to the envoys of Emperor Manuilo of Byzantium saying that he would live a better life if he were to leave his empire and become John's servant (Katičić, 2008, 231). The legend of the priest John was translated into Old Slavic from a West European source entitled *A Letter on the Indian Empire*. This perception was then taken over by Renaissance playwright Marin Držić in the prologue to his most famous play *Dundo Maroje* (*Uncle Maroje*), where the character of Necromancer Long Nose speaks of India, relying on *A Letter on the Indian Empire* (Katičić, 2008, 232). With this perception, *Aleksandrida* exerted a strong influence on oral literature, as we can see in its transcriptions, through references to the faraway and rich country of India. The second perception, in contrast to that of a miraculous and rich land, is of India as a cursed country of idols, a chaotic and immoral country. A text where such a vision appears, later recreated in oral literature as well, is a medieval apocryphal writing on St. Thomas' life, his apostolic activities and martyrdom in India. This legend was published in a Dubrovnik collection written in the Croatian Cyrillic script (*bosančica*) entitled *Libro od mnogijeh razloga* (A Book with Many Reasons) (Katičić, 2008, 238).

Croatian-Indian cultural connections can be traced in the long period from the Middle Ages to the present day: the history of the study of Indian languages and literature, Croatian translations of Indian works, the influence on Croatian authors and politicians, the journeys of Croatian researchers, seafarers and missionaries.¹ All these aspects have contributed to creating a cultural image of India in Croatian culture.

1 Ivan Andrijanić, 2018, provides a good overview and a lot of information.

Further on, I will demonstrate how modern and contemporary perceptions of India reoccur and to what extent they deviate from the stories that were created for centuries based on two ancient European and Croatian images – as a wealthy and magnificent land, or a cursed and frightening place. To do so, I will use selected texts from 20th-century Croatian literature and one example from the 21st century. I have selected Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's historical novel for young adults *Jaša Dalmatin, potkralj Gudžerata* (Jaša Dalmatin, Viceroy of Gujarat) from 1937, Željko Malnar's and Borna Bebek's travel writing *U potrazi za staklenim gradom* (In Search of the Glass City) from 1986, and a short story *Indija* (India) by Bekim Sejranović (2013).

Slavic India

In 1937, Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić published her historical novel for young adults *Jaša Dalmatin, potkralj Gudžerata*. From Šenoa's² time to the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, the historical novel occupied a prominent position in the genre system of Croatian literature. This was due to the major task assumed by the historical novel pertaining to the development of national identity and national self-confidence. Therefore, the content of the novels most frequently focused on major and memorable events from Croatia's past, thus educating the readers. Relying on historical sources, Brlić-Mažuranić continued, somewhat belatedly, the Šenoinian type of historical novel.³ However, she introduced some novelties into the genre by dedicating the novel to young readers. This is, inter alia, visible in her use of the model of an adventure novel, which has always been popular and read among the younger readership. One of the reasons for it lies in the fact that these are, as Margery Hourihan highlights in her influential study *Deconstructing*

2 August Šenoa (1838–1881), Croatian author who popularised the novel as a genre in Croatian literature. He was the first prominent author of historical novels in Croatian literature.

3 A historical novel that relies on the tradition of Walter Scott's novels. Šenoa based his novels on historiographic sources, but added strong romance elements.

the Hero. *Literary Theory and Children's Literature*, almost mythical stories that go back to the ancient history of world literature (*Epic of Gilgamesh, Odyssey*) and are reproduced with minor modifications to this day (1997, 10–11). They feature a hero who leaves the safety of his home and takes mysterious ways to discover and bring wild and exotic regions under his control in the pursuit of his goal (Hourihan, 1997, 9–10). It is clear that the exotic and unknown region Jaša Dalmatin heads for is India. On the other hand, Brlić-Mažuranić refers to a 1925 historical study written by her father Vladimir Mažuranić entitled *Melek Jaša of Dubrovnik in India from 1480 to 1528*. (Melek Jaša of Dubrovnik in India from 1480 to 1528). In the study, Vladimir Mažuranić tries to prove that the historical figure of the Islamised Slav Az, who ruled in Gujarat in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, was a Slav from Dalmatia, Dubrovnik, i.e. a Croat. Some 16th century Portuguese and Croatian chroniclers also report on Az, however, there is no definite confirmation that he was a Slav from the Adriatic coast. The Portuguese mostly refer to him as a Russian who ended up as a captive in Constantinople from where he headed for India. There is no doubt that seafarers and merchants from the Republic of Dubrovnik (Ragusa) were present in the Indian merchant colonies of Goa and Diu in the 16th and 17th centuries. However, it is difficult to conclude from the sources how much truth there is in the statement that the colony of S. Braz (St. Blaise) next to Goa was founded by the inhabitants of Dubrovnik (Krnjic, 2012). Whatever the case may be, Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić is inclined to her father Vladimir's assumption that the ruler of Gujarat was the Slav Jaša from Dalmatia, who had been of the Bogomil faith of his fathers and then Islamised. The novel describes his life story. He started as a slave in Constantinople where he was redeemed by a Turkish merchant. His intention was to go to India to obtain merchant privileges in Gujarat from Sultan Mehmud. Jaša distinguished himself by his ability, wisdom and desire to succeed and soon won the favour of Sultan Mehmud. First, the Sultan granted him his freedom, then made him a captain and finally appointed him viceroy.

Consequently, the novel tells an exciting adventure story, which to some extent relies on historical sources, affirmation of Slavdom, as well as on interesting examples of encounters with different cultures, their coexistence, even their mutual permeation or hybridity.

Since India encompasses a huge and culturally extremely diverse area, one should note that the novel provides perceptions primarily about the state of Gujarat, which was ruled by an Islamic leadership at the time. Due to the fact that the Islamic area closest to Croatian regions was the Ottoman Empire, one can enquire about the extent to which the perceptions of Islamic India follow up on or overlap with the perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in the novel. A first example would be to underline the numerical strength of Slavic peoples in the state and the military establishment of both states. Moreover, the Ottoman ruler Mehmed II is described as “spiritually relentless and persistent, but also prudent, always a master of his desires and therefore of his actions,”⁴ (Brlić-Mažuranić, 2010, 271) which coincides with the characterisation of the ruler of Gujarat Mahmud Beger as “a high figure of dignity,” “prominent head,” with “the deep wrinkles of a statesman and even deeper wrinkles of a thinker” (Brlić-Mažuranić, 2010, 404). These two perceptions logically lead to a third: Slavs can make great strides in the social hierarchy and assume high-ranking positions thanks to their abilities and their wise rulers who recognise these abilities. Whereby, naturally, most attention is paid to Jaša’s steep rise in Gujarat. Both states are presented as meritocracies where the inevitable precondition is the acceptance of the Islamic faith. It is interesting that Jaša’s deception of the Islamic rulers by his external demonstration of loyalty to Islam, while deep down actually being loyal to Bogomilism, is not characterised as a morally problematic act.

Before the plot shifts to Gujarat, the characters imagine India, a land they have never seen before. These perceptions are reinterpretations of the two aforementioned dominant perceptions in European culture.

Early on in the novel, Jaša hears about India’s wonders and abundance and, given his adventurous soul, daydreams about all of these splendours. Somewhat later, he fantasises about mysterious and magnificent India as a symbol of freedom. The narrator refers to Indian spices as “a sick dream of rulers, rich misers and merchants-adventurers” (Brlić-Mažuranić, 2010, 269).

4 All of the English translations of the quoted texts have been provided only for the purposes of this article.

Oral tradition recounted fantastic and hyperbolised stories about India's wonders that are never free from dangers, which is communicated in the novel by a metaphor of the snake and its venom: "Since his earliest age, he [Sultan of Gujarat] was fed on snake's meat and poison. Therefore, no poison or arrow can hurt him" (Brlić-Mažuranić, 2010, 308). The Queen's beautiful daughter is described in similar words. She grew up in a snake's egg and her body and breath are so poisonous that anyone who kisses her dies instantly (Brlić-Mažuranić, 2010, 309).

The characters' first actual encounter with India occurs when they arrive in an anonymous Indian village, which is "miserable, squalid and poorer than anything else in the world" (Brlić-Mažuranić, 2010, 312). In this episode, material hardship, filth, and ugliness are juxtaposed with an incredible and inexplicable spiritual strength with which the overall atmosphere affects those present. This is presented through the character of a witch, an old woman sitting on a pile of old rags, who is celebrated by the entire village. Jaša wonders about it, but the narrator describes her spiritual strength as follows:

Two large, perfectly regular and bright, so to say unscathed eyes. Two lights carrying a serious profoundness of thought within spilt their treasure upon everything that was here, and suddenly everything was given a meaning, importance and a place in the creation of the world. The village remained a miserable backwater as it was before this look, but its misery flashed under this look as a divine feature (Brlić-Mažuranić, 2010, 317–318).

Some are more susceptible to the impact of this unusual woman than others. Jaša's travel companion, a Libyan dwarf, who remains powerless and captured by this woman's hypnotic look, decides to stay in her lap, mesmerised and in bliss. This episode recalls a scene from the *Odyssey* when Odysseus's sailors cannot resist the call of the Sirens. Jaša cannot understand the Libyan who "twenty miles before the capital stays on a pile of rags in a village" (Brlić-Mažuranić, 2010, 319). There-with, Jaša draws closer to Odysseus in Adorno's and Horkheimer's interpretation as a rational individual who can overcome his desire to indulge

in sensual impulses and pleasures (Adorno, Horkheimer, 1972, 59–60). As a whole, this episode is close to Orientalist perceptions of the mysterious, magical, sensual, anti-rational, irrational East. Only rare rational individuals who have the ability to exert strong self-control can resist. Other episodes of the novel also contribute to building such Orientalist perceptions. One deals with the superstition of Jaša's wife Mirjam, which the narrator explains as influence of the environment in which she grew up, the Ottoman Empire, and which intensified after her arrival in Gujarat. Another similar Orientalist motif is the one about the squalor, the noise and the confusion of the East.

With Jaša's arrival in Gujarat, his social affirmation begins in its full sense. As the narrator suggests, this affirmation is predestined on account of his extraordinary abilities as ruler, warrior and builder. However, Jaša would not attain such social affirmation had he not enjoyed the favour of Sultan Mahmud. At the same time, through Jaša's and Mehmud's meeting and the development of their relationship and Jaša's rise, a new and idiosyncratic perception of the area of India is created that can no longer be subsumed by those inherited from the common Western and European source.

This is a view of India in the Western eyes, however, not those of the coloniser, but of the colonised. Jaša is initially colonised by the Turks, he is an Islamised slave. Then, freed from slavery, he is under the supreme colonial power of Sultan Mehmud and experiences an inner conflict between his external adaptation to his environment and his inner devotion to the Bogomil faith of his ancestors. Jaša's inner conflict and the asymmetry of social and political power between him and Mehmud are called into question later in the novel when analogies, parallels, permeations and mutual recognition of the Slavic South—Jaša on the one, and India—Mehmud on the other hand, are established. Beyond any doubt, Jaša possesses a strong characteristic of his South Slavic origin, which governs his conduct. In a Slavophilic manner, the narrator attributes a major part of his grandeur and nobility to this factor. In Gujarat, Jaša finds many members of Slavic and Balkan people who, in their own way, contribute to the strength and glory of the country. Consequently, the Slavs partly take credit for the Gujarat's success.

The permeation of the culture of the Slavic south and the culture of the Indian Gujarat, i.e. a hybridisation of sorts of two seemingly distant and different cultures, can perhaps best be illustrated by two examples.

First, one evening, Jaša recites oral folk songs of his native country to the Sultan, accompanied by the *gusle*.⁵ The Sultan, deeply moved, and recognising in them his own past experience, begins to cry. This is the moment when not only two cultures, but also two personalities are recognised: “Their eyes met, and in their essence, they were equal” (Brlić-Mažuranić, 2010, 393).

Consequently, in spite of cultural, social and religious differences, people can reach understanding and recognise themselves in others, in that which is universally human. However, perhaps even more importantly, this episode speaks of the importance of narration for the process of shaping a human being as a social, cultural and psychological being, of a profound need for telling stories which, as the narrator guesses, have a common primordial source. Therefore, all the cultures, at least in some of their aspects, are mutually linked, and literature is the bridge of understanding between entities that seemingly cannot be connected.

How else do songs travel from one nation to another? How is it possible that, in nations that are divided by everything that can divide nations, the very same adventures about the same heroes are sung? Has Cinderella with her tiny feet climbed so many mountains and crossed so many rivers and borders and found her way to so many nations by herself? Or have we brought her from our ancient centre into our divided countries? Or has a certain narrator, like Jaša, during desert nights given her another name, reshaped and transferred her—and surrendered her as such to be, God knows when, on a new border, and in a new century given another name again and reshaped for new distances? (Brlić-Mažuranić, 2010, 389–390).

Another example of hybridisation of South-Slavic and Indian-Gujarati cultures is the construction and subsequently the rise of

5 The *gusle* is a one-stringed Balkan folk fiddle (translator's note).

Jaša's merchant city-fortress Diu. Even before Jaša's arrival, many Slavs were in the Sultan's service. With Jaša's rising power, his advancement from captain to viceroy, the number of Slavs in the military and state services rises as well. Diu's geopolitical position, its fortresses and the way it is administered strongly resemble Dubrovnik. Jaša's words clearly indicate that Dubrovnik is set as a model and ideal for Diu:

I saw it far away in the west, farther west of Constantinople, farther east of Venice. Everything to the left and to the right, everything in the hinterland of this city belonged to this or that enemy. However, this fortified port has preserved its freedom, administration and trade for centuries. It has preserved them by its wisdom—and its fortresses (Brlić-Mažuranić, 2010, 412).

The final sentences of the novel confirm the importance of Slavism for the achievement of glory and the major success of the Viceroy of Gujarat. The narrator calls upon the folk singer to tune the gusle made of maple and sing about “the life and work of Jaša Dalmatin, who ‘in India, in the faraway country’ demonstrated an example of knighthood, strength and justice of our people” and who, on account of it, can stand next to the other greatest South Slavic heroes, “Prince Marko, Ban Zrinski (Nikola Zrinski) and with the bright characters of our knights” (Brlić-Mažuranić, 2010, 435).

Counterculture India

The hippie counterculture that wanted to change the world around and in itself gained momentum in the 1960s. One of the major forms that manifested such aspirations was travel, both physical and spiritual. Often, both aspects of travel overlapped, the so-called hippie trail being the best example. It was the itinerary of a journey undertaken by members of the counterculture movement from the early 1960s to 1979, when this became difficult due to the complex political situation. A starting point of sorts was Istanbul, and the journey continued via the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan to India and Nepal, frequently

further on to Indochina. This kind of journey included a small budget, away from established tourist routes and ways, so as to restore the feeling of authenticity of a travel experience, and the use of psychoactive substances as a means to overcome one's own ego and deepen the transformative experience of physical and spiritual travel. Moving away from the materialist values of Western capitalist societies through an immersion into the Asian East denoted to these travellers a solution to the spiritual emptiness of Western societies according to some authors (Gemie, Ireland, 2017, 151; D'Andrea, 2007, 175), thereby comparing them to pilgrims. The hippie generation also undid the centuries-old awareness of the West's cultural superiority (Gemie and Ireland, 2017, 142), however, at the same time and probably completely unknowingly, it restored some orientalist perceptions, e.g., the East as a synonym of passivity, sensitivity, irrationality, emotionality and spirituality. The Beat and hippie authors such as Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs and Timothy Leary left testimonies about their physical and spiritual travels in literature.

In spite of his vast travelling experience, Željko Malnar, Croatian journalist, travel writer, filmmaker, adventurer, wrote just one book, *U potrazi za staklenim gradom* (1986), together with his physical and spiritual travel companion, Borna Bebek. The basic pattern of the book overlaps with the so-called hippie trail in many aspects. There is, however, one major difference: Željko Malnar does not speak from the position of a society burdened by its colonial and imperial past and consequent guilt, which partially conditioned the collective experience of the hippie traveller from Western Europe in the sense of resistance to authoritarian and parental culture. Admittedly, at the beginning of his book, he emphasises that he does not fit into the trendy atmosphere of the progressive, new-wave Zagreb created by the conceited children of the socialist elite who were well provided for by their rich parents.

There are no more wars, there is no more revolution, everything has already been obtained for us, we were given everything on a platter so what are we complaining about? (Malnar, Bebek, 1987, 4)

U potrazi za staklenim gradom marks the fusion of the internal and the external, the physical and the spiritual, a journey into visible and

invisible cities, at the crossroads of many mythological and philosophical traditions.

India is not the true theme of this travel book, although it might have been Malnar's major preoccupation for him personally. Malnar's biography indicates that he spent a whole decade in India, studying it, recording features and films, but primarily embarking on adventures to discover this entirely unfamiliar world to him. The narrative on India is only peripheral, referred to as a tunnel that needs to be passed in order to reach the final destination of the journey, the Glass City on the Himalayas. The heterotopic experience of a three-day train passage through India is compared to the tunnel of nonsense through which Alice fell into Wonderland. This simultaneously demonstrates the extent of Malnar's and Bebek's fatal attraction to India. Malnar compares this to a scene of the enchanting call of the Sirens known in the *Odyssey*, which can only be resisted when having one's ears plugged with beeswax or, even better, being tied to a mast (Malnar, Bebek, 1987, 121). This emphasises, just as in *Jaša Dalmatin*, the irresistible but also destructive attractiveness of India these adventurous men must learn to resist in order to reach their goal. Malnar calls India an insane country, where two and two do not equal four. Its anti-logic is female, therefore it can be neither trusted nor loved, but it is like a beautiful naked woman ripe for love. In other words, it is seductive, but it tells lies too and therefore seeks resistance and dialectics rather than indulgence (Malnar, Bebek, 1987, 121). These perceptions clearly reveal an emphatically patriarchal view on gender roles that ascribes an irrational, irresistible and destructive attraction to women, which is then projected on the perception of the cultural and geographical area. As Malnar writes, India "would turn the strongest and most creative men into drug addicts, mystics and lunatics" (Malnar, Bebek, 1987, 121). This seductive danger and insanity of India, of the East, is a typical orientalist perception. However, more is told about India by what has not been told than by what has. Just as India threatens to completely take over the traveller's life, so it threatens to take over the narration. Even when it becomes the focal point of the narration, as is the case with many of Malnar's features and lectures, witnesses claim that it is difficult to say what is the truth and what is just a figment of the adventurer's vivid imagination (Bubalo, 2013; Jergović, 2013). Malnar

deliberately toyed with this fine line in order to communicate the fact that each perception of the other is construed and fictional.

Trance India

Malnar's exploits in India were not documented accurately enough in the printed media. His first wife, Indian studies scholar Karmen Bašić, writes that he spent some time in Goa (2006). In the late 1960s, Goa became one of the popular destinations of the hippies, who almost accidentally discovered this former Portuguese enclave on the Indian coast during their travels to the East. Goa soon became famous for its New Year's Eve celebrations as some sort of point of assembly of the large countercultural diaspora (D'Andrea, 2007, 176).

Over the following decades, the alternative countercultural experience of the journey to the East was co-modified and backpackers became part of the tourism industry, as some form of resistance to the commercial tourist industry. Contemporary Croatian writer Bekim Sejranović, who passed away prematurely in 2020, in his works addresses his own physical and spiritual displacement, seeks the renewal of the ancient magic practice of journey and gives a critical review of the backpacker industry. At the same time, he understands that in the age of global capitalism it is impossible to avoid its impact on travel. The experience of India in his works refers to Goa, a former haven for hippies. In the early 1990s, Goa took part in restoring the psychedelic counterculture through its electronic trance scene. Electronic counterculture was the first one questioning the link of modern neoliberal capitalism, technology and reflexive and fluid identities. Therefore, it built a different construct of subjectivity, based on the concepts of neomadism (D'Andrea, 2007, 176–177). Trance was that direction of electronic music that aspired to an introspective, spiritual experience, often inspired by Eastern philosophy. In Goa, this was demonstrated at the so-called full moon parties where psychedelic drugs were used. After a while, Goa nevertheless became a tourist destination which adapted its offer to the specific taste of its guests, undermining thus the experimental and marginal nature of the genuine trance movement (D'Andrea, 2007, 176–178). In Sejranović's short story *Indija* (India),

from his collection *Sandale* (Sandals), the trance party in Goa offers the narrator a temporary escape and oblivion, drowning in the oceanic experience of joint indulgence in an ecstatic mixture of music and drugs, followed by the inevitable sobering up, fall, crisis, depression. The narrator has no sense of belonging to the trance community or being in solidarity with it, to the nomadic spirituality as its type of subjectivity emerging from the complex processes of globalisation (D'Andrea, 2007, 178) or any other collective body for that matter, and rejects the possibility of a long-term transformative spiritual experience. This is suggested by a number of realistic pictures revealing the backside of the Full Moon Party: economic transactions, the corrupt police, the local community scandalised by the participants, feeling low after being high on drugs etc. The Goa party goes on for three consecutive days and nights and one does not know whether it is heaven or hell or both at the same time: "Pictures of Disneyland, Sodom, Gomorrah and the Never-Never Land mixed together" (Sejranović, 2013, 161). In India, there is no transcendence, or making dreams of glory and riches come true, there is no reaching deeper meanings about oneself and the world. To the narrator, India is just a temporary station of oblivion in his permanent state of non-belonging.

Conclusion

This paper analyses the perceptions of India in three literary works belonging to different periods of literary history, genres and poetics, which were written in out-of-literature contextual conditions—social, political, ideological and cultural—that drastically differed from one another. Regardless of that, in all three texts one can recognise a set of shared images, which most probably stem from pre-modern perceptions of India that are common to the entire West European civilisation, and which can, in some aspects, be attributed to the orientalist practice of denotation. Such a set of perceptions includes a presentation of India as a rich, lavish, mystical, mysterious country that attracts Westerners by its material existence, but even more so by its spirituality. It is at the same time squalid, chaotic, full of inexplicable customs and cultural norms, and radiates a dangerous appeal that can corrupt,

hinder and make miserable those that indulge too much. Another set of perceptions of India refers to representations and descriptions written under the influence of specific historical, social and cultural conditions, which are also visible in the poetics of individual authors, as well as in a broader cultural community in which a particular piece of writing was created. The first two analysed works, *Jaša Dalmatin* and *U potrazi za staklenim gradom* rely on the pattern of an adventure story, with the main character who is an extraordinary individual, his dangerous exploits, challenges and obstacles, as well as his assumed triumphal success. Both principal characters are focused on the city. However, while Jaša is focused on success in the material sphere of existence by establishing the city of Diu, Malnar and Bebek view the Glass City as a metaphor, and their journey both as a physical and spiritual one. Being grounded in the Slavenophilic concept, the novel *Jaša Dalmatin* presents the perception of Slavic-Gujarati hybridisation. Malnar fascinates his readers with his writing the same way India fascinated him, blurring thus the fine line between fiction and reality, between truth and illusion, demonstrating that every literary or cultural representation is always fiction. The last analysed work by Bekim Sejranović, in terms of its spiritual matrix, is a logical follow-up to Malnar's prose that rejects tourism and craves restoring the mysterious nature of travelling as some kind of pilgrimage. Just like Malnar's work partly finds its foundation in the hippies' countercultural structure of feeling, so does Sejranović's work in trance counterculture. However, both works demonstrate an aspiration to break away from the framework of a spiritual travel set by their generation, betraying the patterns of the genre (especially Malnar), and the idea of transcendence through a spiritual journey through India and the East.

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