

NATIONAL IMAGINARY AS A DECOLONIZATION MODALITY IN IMANTS ZIEDONIS' KOLKHOZ NARRATIVES

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Abstract

In 1940, the Baltic States were occupied as a result of an armed seizure by the USSR, followed by annexation. Prior to the occupation, the Baltic region had a strong agricultural sector. After the occupation, private farms (homesteads) and small farmers' cooperatives were forcibly merged into collective farms (kolkhozes) and state farms (sovkhozes), which were forms of collective farming in the countryside of the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc satellite states in Europe. Situated on the periphery and comprising the ethnic Baltic populations where they were the numerical majority, the kolkhozes became enclaves where, despite numerous repressive reforms and the utopian management of collective farming, the connection with the pre-occupation national sentiment, commemoration of the cultural and historical code of independent Latvia, remained unbroken throughout the decades of occupation. A significant role in the transmission of these codes and the formation of a decolonial atmosphere was played by nonfiction texts, or documentary prose, devoted to the life (and critique) of kolkhozes and sovkhozes by several important Latvian writers, published in the 1970s and 1980s. These texts coexisted with (1) the national imaginary - ethnographic and cultural-historical images, facts, personalities, and events that highlighted the social and cultural life of kolkhozes and sovkhozes before the occupation, and (2) the mimicry of the Soviet occupation era, or ideological tributes - references to Soviet ideological attributes and political doctrines. One of the most prominent writers who skilfully integrated the national imaginary into the texts dedicated to kolkhozes, or kolkhoz narratives, was Imants Ziedonis (1933–2013).

The article will analyse Imants Ziedonis' documentary prose book "Tik un tā" (Regardless) (1985) within the context of the national imaginary and its role in preparing the ground for the perestroika processes, which culminated in the Baltic Way event. This occurred on August 23, 1989, when approximately two million people joined hands to form a living chain about 670 km long, connecting the capitals of the Baltic states (Tallinn, Rīga, and Vilnius) for at least 15 minutes. This demonstration was organised to draw the world's attention to the historical events that had affected the Baltic states. The Baltic Way took place exactly 50 years after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The rural population played a significant role in the Baltic Way demonstration, carrying through the decades of occupation the memory of the independent Baltic states and the aspiration to restore the independence of the Baltic countries and Latvia, which was declared in 1990.

The article examines several structures of the national imaginary that highlight the infiltration of the era of independent Latvia into the present of the occupied state. It reveals the principles of Imants Ziedonis' "kolkhoz narrative" modelling in a situation where freedom of speech was prohibited, thereby preparing an atmosphere for decolonization in Latvia.

Keywords: national imaginary, kolkhoz narrative, Imants Ziedonis, cultural nostalgia, ethnographical and mythological metonymy, decolonization

1. INTRODUCTION

Interpreting the concepts of nation and imagination, postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has noted that "Nationalism is produced by tapping the most private attachment to ground for the purposes of the most public statecraft" [Spivak 2009]. In the Baltic states before the Soviet occupation, nationalism had been one of the ideological foundations forming the state. However, after the occupation, it was replaced by Soviet ideology, and nationalism was declared a dangerous phenomenon. It became encapsulated in national memory, yet several codification systems of national identity

remained in official circulation: the use of the Latvian language, ethnographic and mythological narratives and rituals not banned by Soviet power. Spivak refers to these processes as “reclaiming of the past” [Spivak 2009]. In the Soviet-occupied Baltic states, the reclaiming of the past manifested in practical forms such as the study and reproduction of folklore texts and national cultural rituals at both amateur and professional levels, as well as the commemoration of national heroes, memorial sites, and events. In the social memory space controlled by totalitarian power, references to the pre-occupation period formed a temporizing narrative that enabled individual and collective life. Dipesh Chakrabarty posits a thesis about the ties between historical heritability and national imaginary: “My point is that the moment of vision that effected a ‘cessation of the historical world’ included plural and heterogeneous ways of seeing, not all of which may be captured by the mentalist category ‘imagination’” (Chakrabarty 1999). In the context of the Baltic states’ occupation, special emphasis should be placed on Chakrabarty’s identified “cessation of the historical world”, which deconstructs the paradigm of the national state, replacing it with the construct of the oppressive power. In this construct, former national elements become simulacra, hybrids, with only a few remaining intact in their original form. In the Soviet totalitarian era, nationalism was replaced by national mode, which projected itself as the national imaginary.

Imants Ziedonis wrote several publicistic books on the theme of kolkhozes, including “*Kurzemīte. Pirmā grāmata*” (*Kurzemīte. First Book*) (1970), “*Kurzemīte. Otrā grāmata*” (*Kurzemīte. Second Book*) (1974), and a children’s book titled “*Kas tas ir – kolhozs?*” (*What Is a Kolkhoz?*) (1984).

Books about kolkhozes were also written by journalists Ēriks Hānbergs and Andrejs Dripe, thereby creating a strong kolkhoz narrative in Latvian Soviet-era literature. This narrative continued into the re-established independent Latvia after the collapse of the USSR, as rural life reportage within the nonfiction genre niche. The Soviet-era kolkhoz narrative had a profound impact on readers, who identified themselves with the characters in these books – leaders of kolkhozes or sovkhoses, and other workers. The testimonies, problems, and contradictions within the Soviet planning and implementation systems presented in the texts were relatable to readers, as were the subtly encoded decolonial hints. At that time, writers were at the forefront of public attention, trusted and respected, especially those who mastered the writing technique that balanced obligatory tributes to Soviet ideology with daring criticisms of the falsity of the Soviet system, which permeated all aspects of life.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Materials

Imants Ziedonis’ nonfiction text “Tik un tā” (Regardless) was published in the series “Rakstnieka soļi Dzimtenē” (Writer’s Steps in the Homeland). The purpose of this series was to publish books by Soviet authors (both Latvian authors and authors from other Soviet republics) in Latvian translations. Examples include Georg Emin’s “Seven Songs About Armenia”, Justinas Marcinkevičius’ “Diary Without Dates”, Vasily Belov’s “Harmony”, Vladimir Chivilikhin’s “Memory”, and Rasul Gamzatov’s “My Dagestan”. Uldis Norietis, co-author of Ziedonis’ book and the entire series, describes the transversal themes of the books published in the series. He notes that “Attitudes towards work, life and death, family and homeland find emotionally concrete expression. We view individuals and society, the native homestead and the wide world, the present and history in a deeply philosophical context. Such books are difficult to translate, and their circulation may sometimes not be the most impressive, but they are immensely necessary for the cultivation of citizenship and spiritual culture” (Norietis 1985, 313).

In 1985, when the book was published, the confines of Soviet ideology were narrowing. Through the use of “Aesopian language”, hints, subtext, allusions, and reminiscences, many of Norietis’ formulations can be imbued with a double meaning. These can be read both as a collection of Soviet ideological clichés and as a declaration of intent to establish a connection with the memory of the pre-occupation national state and its codes, which were preserved among the population, particularly among rural inhabitants, through the decades of Soviet occupation. Norietis applies this reading strategy in his epilogue “To Live is to Work”, quoting Vasily Belov: “Without memory, without tradition, history, and culture, there is no personality. [...] Memory forms the fortress of the human spirit” (Norietis 1985, 313).

Imants Ziedonis' book "Tik un tā" (Regardless) is subtitled "Grāmata par Madlienu" (A Book about Madliena). Madliena is a locality in the Madliena parish of Ogre municipality. In 1957, a Soviet state farm (sovkhoz) named Madliena was established there. The central figure of the book is Jūlijs Beļavnieks (born in 1932). In 1957, Beļavnieks arrived in the Ogre district and began working as the chief agronomist at the newly established "Madliena", later becoming the sovkhoz director in 1959. Beļavnieks was instrumental in the development of the Madliena parish, then a village. During his tenure, residential houses, a kindergarten, a cultural centre, and many other buildings were constructed, and the fields were cultivated. "At that time, the main task was to ensure production and sectoral development; however, we also worked to provide the farm workers and other village residents with proper living and cultural conditions. We allocated 40% of the capital investments to the construction of residential and cultural buildings and 60% to the construction of production facilities. Everything was developed systematically and according to the plan. The first public building, a cultural centre, was put into operation in 1965. Two years later, the construction of a kindergarten was completed, which was later expanded from 90 to 180 places. Soon, a secondary school and its sports complex were also built. With funds from other sources, we constructed a retail centre, a service pavilion, and many other buildings" (Beļavnieks 2021), recalls Beļavnieks, who spent 54 years working in Madliena.

Describing the process of creating Imants Ziedonis' book "Tik un tā" (Regardless), Beļavnieks shares his recollections: "Before submitting the chapters of his recently completed book to the publisher, Imants Ziedonis gave me a draft to read, asking not only to verify numbers, surnames, and facts but also to evaluate the text as a whole. When I occasionally objected to some rather unflattering paragraphs and pages, Imants insisted: 'But that's how it was, that's how I saw it!' He was right, of course" (Hānbergs 2011). Hānbergs acknowledges that "The Soviet farm director and the poet understood each other very well. This collaboration facilitated the inclusion of contentious topics in the major work. Both speakers were close to dangerous topics that were then avoided in conversation" (Hānbergs 2011).

Reflecting on his achievements and the twists and turns of his life, including his meeting with Imants Ziedonis while the latter was staying in Madliena to write his book "Tik un tā" (Regardless), Beļavnieks published a book in 2011 titled "... bet tā bija" (but that's how it was) (Beļavnieks 2011). In this book, he offers his perspective on both the (Soviet) era in which he worked and how his encounter with Ziedonis introduced new dimensions to his activities and views on the Soviet framework.

In the book "Tik un tā" (Regardless), Ziedonis describes Beļavnieks' character strength as a decisive factor in resisting the inefficiencies of Soviet management: "Beļavnieks is strong in his participatory capacity. He knows how and what to say to the authorities and elsewhere about what needs to be done. So far, we have not had any trouble in following his advice. He seems to operate on two levels: with 'small production', that is, at the district, republic, and national levels. He has a high capacity for participation, for sharing. One might even say he is a proponent of democracy" (Ziedonis 1985, 18).

Beļavnieks' progressive management and his ability to boldly and convincingly stand against the utopian and corrupt Soviet planning intrigued Ziedonis. The book "Tik un tā" (Regardless) also portrays many other individuals, placing a major emphasis on the "aesthetics of work" (Norietis 1985), which is one of the central themes in Latvian folklore texts, particularly in folk songs. Most Latvian folk songs are dedicated to the cycle of human life. They narrate daily life - family relations, interactions between young men and women, married couples' coexistence, and so forth, as well as the three major life events: christening, weddings, and funerals. Another significant category is work songs, which describe specific tasks, their performers, and the working environment in agriculture, livestock farming, fishing, clothing production, etc., as well as the ethics and aesthetics of work. Since the first national awakening in the 19th century, folk songs have played a crucial role as a symbol of national identity. They are a key foundation of the national imaginary. The reception of Latvian folklore is among central transversal element in Ziedonis' literary work. The ethics and aesthetics of work represented in folk songs serve as the philosophical focus of the book "Tik un tā" (Regardless).

2.2. Methods

The decolonization modality in Imants Ziedonis' kolkhoz narratives is realized as a reconstruction of the national imaginary. The analysis focuses on Ziedonis' publicist text "Tik un tā" (Regardless). Three

epistemes have been selected, which, in the text published during the Soviet occupation, function as potential sources of knowledge and justified belief, such as perception, reason, memory, and testimony.

The study employs postcolonial criticism, and the key points of postcolonial reading strategies allow for the identification of “the author’s inadvertently left clues, revealing the background of the ongoing action and the historical situation” (Assereckova 2016). By performing a close reading of Ziedonis’ book and excerpting the structures of the national imaginary, insights are gained into the coexistence of two paradigms encoded in the text - the historically inherited national and the imposed totalitarian. The decolonial mode of Ziedonis’ text is represented through the actualization of cultural memory. Astrid Erll approaches “memory in culture” through a semiotic lens, i.e. analysing the use of signs, symbols, genres, and other modes of communication to construct personal and collective memory (Erll 2011, 11). Ziedonis employs a secure, challenging, and even risky decolonial strategy, expressed through signs of the national imaginary. This can also be described as a form of juggling between ideological frameworks, weaving a network of epistemic relations between words and objects in the text. This network builds the perception, practices, and knowledge codes characteristic of two contradictory eras, as well as their associated ideas and concepts.

3. RESULTS

Ziedonis’ narrative in “Tik un tā” (Regardless) offers a multi-layered reading, signalled by the key words, hints, and allusions related to the national imaginary used in the text. A crucial technique in constructing the epistemic paradigm of the national imaginary is metonymy - the representation or transfer of a part with the whole, where personal names, events, concepts, and symbols represent the narrative of the national imaginary. Metonymy, which is not a self-similar reduction (like a fractal), involves a productive transfer. To identify the diverse strategies of Ziedonis’ decolonial mode, three examples will be examined where decolonization turn can be interpreted as memory in culture.

3.1. *Mention of pre-Soviet canonical Latvian writers*

The chapter “Problēmas un rīts” (Problems and the Morning) in the book “Tik un tā” (Regardless) includes references to significant writers of the Latvian national imaginary and national cultural canon, whose works were incorporated into the Soviet literary canon with significant reservations during the Soviet era. This inclusion involved the omission of several books by these authors that mentioned texts condemned by Soviet ideology due to their religious components, as well as texts representing national, ethnic, and philosophical concepts not accepted by Soviet ideology. Epp Annus has noted that “Cultural nostalgia for the lost pre-Soviet era formed one of the cornerstones for everyday nationalism during Soviet times” (Annus 2018, 207). The expression of cultural nostalgia can be exemplified by the vivid mentions of early 20th-century Latvian writers in the following passage: “My small cupboard is full of poetry books; I should have a bookshelf for books, but there is no place to put it. Elksne - she is my poet. Antons Bārda. [...] Fricis Bārda. I used to have Akuraters’ books, “Pasaules vēsture” (World History), but I could not afford it; books were expensive” (Ziedonis 1985, 189). Antons Bārda, Fricis Bārda, and Jānis Akuraters are poets from the early 20th- century whose lyrics reflect a pantheistic worldview and the modern individual’s subjective perception of the world - poetic images that do not align with the socialist realism paradigm. The mention of these poets establishes an associative link to the closeness of the Latvian rural person to nature and the divinization of nature, characterizing isolation, individuality, but at the same time a profound inner experience that resonates with the beauty, grandeur, and trials of nature.

The compromise strategy with Soviet rhetoric is exemplified in the mentioned quote by the name of Soviet-era poet Ārija Elksne, which demonstrates Ziedonis’ “juggling strategy,” balancing between the permitted and the forbidden. On one hand, Elksne was favoured among Soviet-era readers for her focus on individual subjectivity, portraying emotions and inner experiences. On the other hand, in the Soviet literary canon, she was marked as a representative of Soviet women’s literature.

Among the pre-Soviet writers mentioned in Ziedonis’ book is also Anna Brigadere and her canonical autobiographical text “Dievs. Daba. Darbs.” (God. Nature. Work) (1926), which examines the life of

Latvian peasants through the narrative of a young daughter of rural servants. Ziedonis writes: “Latvians have this agricultural writer, Anna Brigadere. And she wrote a grand agricultural trilogy “Dievs. Daba. Darbs.” (God. Nature. Work). Well, OK, let’s not call it exactly that; let’s say ‘the Higher Idea’, as Rainis said. The Higher Idea, Nature, Man, Ideal, Environment, Man’s Work. In any case, the fundamental triangle must remain” (Ziedonis 1985, 17-18). In this excerpt, Ziedonis’ proposed decolonial mode is expressed through the mention of God, but at the same time, an alternative is offered by substituting it with the philosophical concept of the “Higher Idea” by the canonical Latvian writer Rainis (born Jānis Pliekšāns), which represents the subjectivity of another canonical individual. Metonymic networks are one of the strategies employed by Ziedonis to integrate the decolonial mode into the narrative of “Tik un tā” (Regardless).

3.2. *Diary fragment as a text within a text*

In the book “Tik un tā” (Regardless), there is a diary written by an unnamed housewife from a household called “Jaunzēžas”, representing a core element of Latvian folklore - the work ethic that is a characteristic value of peasant society. The diary’s author states: “I have never had anything without work” (Ziedonis 1985, 183). The diary’s perspective is on rural work within the seasonal cycle: the farmhouse, farm buildings, livestock, and communication within the rural family. The notes in the diary fragments published in Ziedonis’ book begin on January 4, 1980, and they last up to December 31, 1982. The entries are laconic - one or a few short sentences. However, it is this succinctness that demonstrates the diary author’s microcosm with her (non-kolkhoz) household at its centre. The most significant events in the diary relate to the work of the housewife and her household members, where important aspects are well and responsibly performed work, the attitude towards livestock, and the care of fields as if they were fellow human beings, rather than principles characteristic of a kolkhoz (such as adherence to unfounded plans, neglect of work quality and efficiency, and mechanical labour).

During the Soviet era, individuals were allowed to maintain small private farms and keep a very limited number of livestock. By including the fragments of the diary of an eighty-year-old woman written over two years in his book, Ziedonis demonstrates that while the individual and private aspects had been eradicated for decades, they were not completely destroyed. Soviet economic planners “left only so-called private farms for collective farmers’ personal use, i.e. a small half-hectare garden, and also limited the number of livestock, while collecting annual contributions from them. In addition to regular wage work, there were also mandatory ‘public order’ tasks - completely unpaid. The kolkhozes only managed to reach pre-war productivity levels after several decades - milk production in the 1970s, grain in the 1980s, and never potato production” (Ķibilds, 2018).

The diary of the housewife from “Jaunzēžas,” as presented in Ziedonis’ book, narrates a story of a family consisting of three people united by their care for their small farm, where each piece of livestock and every plant is treated with the same attention as a family member. Although the farm is very small and the family lives economically, even in poverty, and struggles for its existence, the laconic entries hint at mutual care and joy in small events that align with rituals defined by Latvian mythology, folklore, and Christianity: “April 10. I dyed the yarn with onion skins. Beautiful. I saw two wagtails on the barn roof.” The rural woman’s diary resonates with Ziedonis’ work ethic, inherited from previous Latvian generations, and serves as a foundation for the national imaginary during the Soviet era, preventing them from becoming “people without history,” as Eric Wolf termed it (Wolf 1982).

The values of the rural environment identified in Ziedonis’ book “Tik un tā” (Regardless) correspond to the pre-Soviet Latvian peasantry: “The Environment and Work [Ziedonis capitalizes the word ‘work’] without an Idea [Ziedonis capitalizes the word ‘idea’] is nonsense, chaos, shoddy work. Work and Idea without Environment, without one’s own people, without society, are like a developed but unfixed photograph [...], there is no one to take it up, no one to solidify it. Therefore, what remains is that which embodies three principles and knows how to unite one’s own people around them.” (Ziedonis 1985, 18). Through the use of rich tropes and masterful expressions, as well as by blurring the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, Ziedonis portrays the value system of Latvian rural inhabitants. He successfully avoids the socialist realism mode and the Soviet paradigm’s markers, embedding in his text a decolonial mode expressed through the national imaginary.

3.3. *Ethnographic and mythological metonymy*

In the chapter “Viņam nepatīk pilsētā” (He doesn’t Like Being in the City) from the book “Tik un tā” (Regardless), Ziedonis writes: “Valija, together with her friend, the tractor driver, will bring firewood from the forest today, but – will they manage? The roads are terribly torn up. Over there, beyond that newly drained field, is Vērmeles”. That’s where Arvīds Saulriets lives with his wife, the teacher. They have a mosaic painted on the ceiling around the lamp, with designs by Madernieks. There was such an artist, Madernieks. And there was a book with his designs. During the war, we spent about ten days in the countryside - and in that time, all the books were gone! Including Madernieks’.” (Ziedonis 1985, 233). This episode, written during the Soviet occupation, demonstrates metonymic strategies for constructing a national imaginary through ethnographic epistemes in Ziedonis’ text. The mention, but lack of further elaboration, of the name of Jūlijs Madernieks (1870 – 1955), an outstanding figure in Latvian design and applied arts, highlights this. J. Madernieks was the most prominent Latvian master of ornamentation. Since 1903, Madernieks actively studied ethnographic heritage. His creative explorations in the field of contemporary Latvian ornamentation were compiled in his original drawing collection “Ornaments” (The Ornament) in 1913, followed by “Raksti” (Writings) in 1930, another collection of original designs compiled by Madernieks. His artistic contribution is viewed within the context of national romanticism. This aligns with the artist’s interest and ambition to establish Latvian national art as a strong and independent direction, one that is equally relevant within the broader European artistic disposition. The reflection of national self-awareness in art during Latvia’s period of independence is particularly significant, as it impacts society as a whole. “Jūlijs Madernieks is the first Latvian artist to successfully establish his own individual national style, which embodies the idea of the all-encompassing nature of art and the pursuit of form through studying the nature” (Petre 2020). The French government awarded J. Madernieks the title “Officier d’Académie” and an honorary insignia in 1926. During Latvia’s first period of independence, Madernieks received the Order of the Three Stars (1927) and the Latvian Cultural Foundation Award (1927). Many Latvian artists with such profiles could not survive the Soviet era, but Madernieks adapted to the new regime during the early years of Soviet occupation and received the honorary title of Merited Artist of the Soviet Socialist Republic in 1945. It is precisely this phase of Madernieks’ biography that explains why Ziedonis mentions his name. If Madernieks’ creative work had ceased with the Soviet repressions, the mention of his name in Ziedonis’ work, in the context of his significant contribution to strengthening the Latvian national cultural code, would not have been possible. In Ziedonis’ text, Madernieks’ name essentially represents the segments of Latvian ornament research, systematization, usage, and heritage, serving as “memory in culture,” which, in the reader’s perception, is meant to form a link to the national imaginary narrative.

Ziedonis applies “memory in culture” as a principle of generational cultural code continuity, weaving it into the narrative of the national imaginary. This approach is also employed by integrating mentions of Latvian folklore figures and the renowned folklorist Krišjānis Barons in the book: “At Uģis’ place, you can warm up as if by a bonfire; he’s that kind of person. He and his brother are like they’ve stepped straight out of the dainas. Nothing material, just the essentials: a bookshelf, a couch, art. The chain of good people continues. Uģis has just published a book on decorative lawns. [...] Uģis has very original tapestries on his walls - knot weavings, the kind even art academy graduates wouldn’t make. Because strong genes speak here: some great-grandmothers. The ornaments of the Mother of the Forest, Mother of the Wind, and Mother of the Sluggish. Does anyone still remember them? Uģis remembers. And his brother Indulis remembers - he’s been given an entire hill in Turaida for his giant stone sculptures (like Thorvaldsen, like Villain!) in memory of the Dainu Tēvs (The Father of Dainas), Krišjānis Barons. But that’s another story. Although it’s really the same one: about a generation.” (Ziedonis 1985, 25) In this quote, the personality of the folklorist and publicist Krišjānis Barons is used to construct a shared generational historical and cultural memory. Barons, one of the most prominent Latvian folklorists and cultural figures, is also known as the “Dainu Tēvs” (The Father of Dainas).

Krišjānis Barons’ contribution to the revival of Latvian culture and national consciousness extends from the Soviet era to the present day. Through his work as a folklorist, publicist, and writer, he continued the Young Latvian ideals of the mid-19th century, which advocated for Latvian national independence, education, equality, and economic and cultural development. These principles were crucial for the survival of the Latvian people among larger nations during the early years of the new Latvian state,

establishing an unbreakable generational link that provided the spiritual foundation for Latvia's future. His work in collecting, organising, and editing Latvian folk songs, compiled and published in six volumes as "Latvju dainas" (Latvia's Dainas) (1894–1915), holds fundamental importance in Latvian culture and folklore studies. The cited passage highlights the cult of divine mothers, a significant aspect of ancient Latvian religion and mythology, distinguishing it from other ancient Baltic religious beliefs. Additionally, the importance of Latvian ornamentation is emphasized. Latvian ornaments are mythological symbols that represent the structure of the mythological world, where natural attributes are connected to individual human characteristics. This worldview prevails in rural communities. By combining various elements symbolizing natural forces and attributes, ornaments could create models of desired life conditions and qualities. These models were woven into fabrics, engraved on jewellery, and incorporated into other household items, ensuring the wearers or users' favour from natural forces. This characteristic is typical of Latvian ancestral culture as a whole: Latvian folklore does not offer a closed, systematized, or dogmatic belief system that encompasses everything and provides unequivocal answers. Instead, it represents an intuitive engagement with the world, adapting to its changing situations and depicting this through metaphorical reflections and symbols. Due to these traits, Latvian mythological concepts seamlessly "integrate" into the Soviet-era national imaginary narrative.

4. DISCUSSION

Ziedonis' book has multiple levels. Horizontally, it addresses the consequences of Soviet rural collectivization. Vertically, it explores the cultural-historical dimension. By employing hints, allusions, and metonymy, Ziedonis weaves significant pre-Soviet Latvian national cultural-historical and ethnographic images into his text. These images might remain unrecognized by the Soviet-era generation, as the legacies of many cultural figures were revised, with some works (partially) removed from cultural circulation and biographies adapted to fit Soviet ideology. Conversely, the pre-occupation generation, when reading Ziedonis' text, decodes his references, continues to identify with them, and passes this knowledge to their descendants. The pre-occupation codes embedded in Ziedonis' book "Tik un tā" (Regardless) stimulate the continuity of the national imaginary during the Soviet decades. Following M. Gorbachev's initiated reforms, these elements contributed to the development of a decolonization modality and the society's identification with it.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In his book, Ziedonis is not only a master of the nonfiction genre, skilfully hybridizing the features of prose and journalism to create a poetically and socially impactful narrative. His work represents a decolonial mode of writing typical of Soviet-era literature, articulated through symbols of the national imaginary. This can also be described as social mediation, juggling between pre-Soviet and Soviet-era ideological frameworks. The pre-Soviet national imaginary maintains a connection for Soviet-era readers to the Latvian national imaginary through hints and allusions, linking Soviet-era individuals to Latvian historical, mythological, and ethnographic heritage. A crucial technique in the creation of the national imaginary's epistemic paradigms is metonymy, which in the Soviet-controlled cultural space expresses pre-Soviet national imaginary elements through person names, events, concepts, and symbols encapsulated in cultural memory. Metonymic networks are one of the strategies Ziedonis employs to integrate a decolonial mode in his publicist writing, including in the narrative of his book "Regardless".

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